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Mini-Public's Statements and Media as Transmitters of Deliberative Judgments: A Field Experiment on a Citizens' Jury on Forest Policy

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ABSTRACT

Deliberative mini-publics have become commonplace in policymaking on complex issues such as climate policies. When assessing the macro-political impacts of deliberative mini-publics, it is important to examine how information about their procedures and outcomes is transmitted to the wider public. We conducted a field experiment to compare the effects of reading a mini-public statement to those of reading mediated information on a mini-public. Our experiment is based on a Citizens' Jury on forest use in Northern Finland, and it makes use of an actual piece from the media as well as an original mini-public statement. Using data collected from a panel of adults living in the region, we analyzed the effects that reading the statement or a newspaper article had on knowledge, policy support, perceived legitimacy, and efficacy in forest and climate change policy. Results show that reading the statement increased factual knowledge. Reading the news story covering the mini-public, in turn, had mixed impacts on factual knowledge. Furthermore, the news story seems to have reduced the perceived legitimacy of forest management, whereas the full statement had no effect on legitimacy beliefs. We conclude that the macro-political impacts of mini-publics depend on the type of media from which citizens receive information.

1 | Introduction

Democratic innovations, such as deliberative mini-publics, can serve a number of different functions in democratic systems. In most cases, deliberative mini-publics are expected to contribute to public policy-making by providing policy recommendations (e.g., Curato et al. 2023). From the perspective of deliberative democracy, mini-publics have been regarded as a potential cure for the lack of informed and reflective reasoning on complex issues among the public at large (Warren and Gastil 2015). A growing body of research suggests that, under certain conditions, deliberative mini-publics indeed have the potential to influence knowledge, opinions, civic attitudes, perspective taking, efficacy, and political trust among the wider public (Boulianne 2018; Germann et al. 2024; Knobloch et al. 2020; Setälä et al. 2021; Sloman et al. 2021).

However, the impacts of mini-publics on the wider public—or the prospects of "scaling up" deliberative mini-publics (Niemeyer 2014)—depend on the ways in which information about mini-publics and their outcomes are communicated to the wider public, and more specifically on the *format* and the *content* of the outcome as well as on the *means* of communication. The information can be transmitted through various means, including statements created by the mini-publics themselves and the media. While some designs of deliberative mini-publics,

most notably the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR), include a formal way of distributing their statements directly to the general public, in most models there are no pre-designed methods of reaching out to a broader audience. In these situations, the potential of a wider impact of a mini-public depends largely on whether and how the media covers it. The guiding principles of mass media outlets are, however, very different from the norms of democratic deliberation (see for example Bächtiger and Goldberg 2020). Therefore, we cannot expect the media to offer balanced or accurate reports on mini-publics and their collective judgments.

Currently, we have little knowledge on whether reading a statement written by a mini-public or a news story about the same mini-public has similar effects on knowledge and attitudes among the general public, and whether these impacts vary depending on how mini-publics and their outcomes are communicated. To answer these questions, we conducted a field experiment to examine both the direct effects of reading a mini-public statement and the effects of reading mediated information about it. Our field experiment was based on a recent regional-level mini-public in the region of Lapland, in Northern Finland, namely the Citizens' Jury on the role of forests in climate change mitigation. Since the topic of the Citizens' Jury was a timely and divisive issue in Lapland, we are interested in the potential effects of the jury on knowledge and attitudes on this policy issue among the wider public. Our data were collected from a panel of adults living in the region. In this study, we compare the impacts of reading a jury statement to those of reading a news story about the jury in terms of the readers' issue knowledge, attitudes, and internal efficacy. We found increases in knowledge when readers had access to the full mini-public statement, whereas the news story about the recommendations by a mini-public had some unexpected consequences on policy attitudes.

The article begins with a literature review on perceptions and impacts of mini-publics as well as their media coverage. Thereafter, we will describe our case, namely the Citizens' Jury on forests in Lapland, the design of the field experiment and the hypotheses, as well as our data and methods. Our analysis focused on the hypothesized effects, but we also conducted exploratory analyses on interaction effects. Based on the results of our analyses, we will discuss the implications of our findings for the design of mini-publics as well as the limitations of our study.

2 | Theory

Even though deliberative mini-publics come in a wide variety of forms (see Setälä and Smith 2018), they share some common features, such as randomly selected participants, moderated small group deliberations, and interaction with experts. Deliberative mini-publics can have various roles and macro impacts on the political system (Goodin and Dryzek 2006). They do not only seek formal influence in political and administrative decisions, but they may also shape discussion, knowledge, and opinion formation in the wider public sphere. Moreover, the impacts on the informal public sphere and on formal policymaking may also be interdependent, meaning that media coverage may be triggered by tangible policy impacts or that policymakers may feel pressure to follow mini-public recommendations after a wide public debate about them (Carrick and Elstub 2023).

From a normative perspective, deliberative mini-publics are expected to serve as facilitative trustees in contemporary democratic systems, where policymaking is complex and the information environment challenges considered judgment (Warren and Gastil 2015). If mini-publics are expected to foster informed and considered judgments in the public sphere and policymaking, it is important to understand how the outcomes of deliberative mini-publics are communicated to the wider public, that is, citizens who did not take part in the deliberative process.

2.1 | Impacts of Mini-Public Statements on the Wider Public

Previous studies give some support for the expectation that mini-publics can impact also nonparticipating citizens. Based on a systematic literature review, van der Does and Jacquet (2021) conclude that mini-publics can influence policy attitudes and willingness to future discursive participation among the wider public. Survey experiments suggest that mini-publics are perceived as legitimate bodies (van Dijk et al. 2023) among many segments of the wider public, holding the qualities that many citizens want from participatory processes (Christensen 2020). In terms of procedural aspects, the feature that mini-publics consist of lay citizens seems to be particularly important for public trust towards these mechanisms (Pow et al. 2020). In a similar vein, a study by Geisler (2022) indicates that trust in the mini-public's competence as well as its composition plays a role in how citizens perceive statements by mini-publics. Experimental studies suggest that mini-publics can increase perceived legitimacy of policymaking among the wider public (Werner and Marien 2022), although dismissing mini-publics' recommendations may undermine perceived legitimacy (Germann et al. 2024).

The potential of mini-publics to enhance knowledge gains, opinion formation, and evaluation of political processes and their outcomes among the wider public requires public awareness of mini-publics and their collective judgments. Some models of deliberative mini-publics, most notably, citizens' juries, produce rich written citizens' statements that typically consist of process and method descriptions, key facts, recommendations, and justifications. The description of the jury procedure in the statement can be expected to help the reader situate themselves as a member of the public that has been represented in jury (Drury and Rountree, 2023). A growing body of experimental research indeed suggests that such deliberative mini-publics have the potential to increase knowledge, efficacy, perspective-taking, and political trust, as well as influence opinions and attitudes among the wider public. Suiter et al. (2020) found that reading the justifications given for mini-public recommendations together with a description of the process increases individuals' knowledge on the topic. Richards (2018) found that information produced and distributed by citizens' juries can enhance voters' knowledge and sense-making, especially when containing realistic accounts of policy goals and effects.

Much of the evidence on the effects that mini-publics have on citizens is based on Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR) procedures.

In a CIR procedure, a citizens' jury is organized to provide information for voters before a popular vote. The jury drafts a statement summarizing key facts as well as arguments for and against a proposal, and the statement is sent by mail to all voters. The aim is to provide balanced and fact-based information about an issue to help voters make informed and considered choices. The procedure is unique because there is a mechanism of direct transmission of the jury statement to the wider public. Because the statement reaches such a large number of citizens—all those eligible to vote—it can even be regarded as *deliberative media* by itself (Broghammer and Gastil 2021).

There are several studies showing that reading a statement provided by a CIR jury can enhance factual learning among voters (Gastil et al. 2018; Setälä et al. 2023). Studies also show that reading a CIR statement can affect opinions on issues and, thus, vote choices (e.g., Gastil 2014, 153–154). Through a causal mediation analysis, Christensen et al. (2022) found that changes in vote intention were driven by factual learning. A study by Knobloch et al. (2020) suggests that learning about CIR statements can increase voters' internal efficacy or political self-confidence in the competence to understand and engage in politics (see Niemi et al. 1991, 1407). Similar results have been obtained in a study on a CIR-type procedure in Finland, where reading a citizens' statement concerning municipal merger increased internal efficacy (Setälä et al. 2023). While studies also suggest that reading a jury statement can enhance perspective-taking and counteract the effects of motivated reasoning (Már and Gastil 2019), there are some indications that people seem to seek confirmation for their pre-existing views when reading deliberative media, too (Broghammer and Gastil 2021).

2.2 | Mini-Publics and the Media

Unlike CIR, most deliberative mini-publics are organized as part of representative or administrative decision-making processes. In these situations, the recommendations and citizens' statements drafted by mini-publics are often handed directly to decision-makers. There might not be an effective predetermined "channel" for distributing statements by the mini-public to the wider public. Moreover, the publication of a citizens' statement or other information about the mini-public does not guarantee that people will be motivated to read such information, especially when they do not have a direct say in the actual decision-making, for example, in a referendum. In such cases, if citizens receive any information on the mini-public process and outcomes, it is most likely through media.

In order for these kinds of mini-publics to promote learning and reflection among the wider public, they must receive appropriate media exposure (MacKenzie and Warren, 2012; Carrick and Elstub 2023). Therefore, mass media has a key role in the transmission of arguments and collective judgments of mini-publics to the wider public. However, the logic of media outlets and a mediatized public sphere is different from the principles of democratic deliberation. Because deliberative processes aim at finding common ground and agreement (Carrick and Elstub 2023), mini-publics may not match well with the demands of mediatized societies, and they may run against the conflict-seeking and sensationalizing nature of commercial media (Bächtiger and Goldberg 2020). Indeed, journalistic work is often guided by news criteria such as bad news, drama, surprise, conflict, and entertainment (Harcup and O'Neill 2017), meaning that respectful and careful reasoning on policy topics does not necessarily fall under the category of "what is news".

Furthermore, the media tends to emphasize stories related to the power elite, experts, and their (mis)behavior (Maia 2023), which might explain low media coverage of political processes that engage lay citizens. The pace of contemporary media consumption is also likely to encourage news editors to radically shorten and summarize long reports, such as those produced by mini-publics. Based on recent empirical studies, these assumptions seem to have some support already. Even national-level mini-publics do not necessarily gain extensive media exposure. For example, the UK Climate Assembly that engaged 108 randomly selected citizens in deliberations for over 5 months has been criticized for its modest publicity, whereas the French equivalent Citizens' Convention for Climate received much higher media coverage (Boswell et al. 2023).

Even if media outlets choose to report on deliberative processes, we should not automatically expect them to focus on the outputs of mini-publics, nor should we expect them to report on all aspects related to the deliberative process equally. Involvement of a high-profile politician or public figure may attract the media to report on specific mini-public meetings, as indicated by the example of David Attenborough in the UK Climate Assembly (Carrick and Elstub 2023). In some cases, the media might also report on issues unrelated to actual deliberations. An analysis of the media coverage of G-1000 in Belgium (Jacquet et al. 2016, 59–62) shows that the media reported heavily on the initial phases of the process, with background stories, news pieces about fundraising, and even reports on the "quality of sandwiches" at the event. However, media attention "evaporated" towards the end of the process and "reverted to its usual focus on formal politics" (Jacquet et al. 2016, 62).

As previously stated, we lack studies regarding the effects of media coverage on mini-publics and their statements on knowledge, opinions, and so on among the general public. Previous studies on the internal logic of mass media raise some doubts about their ability to provide coverage of a mini-public in a way that would be helpful in terms of "scaling up" the effects of deliberation among the wider public.

3 | Case, Hypotheses, Data, and Methods

3.1 | Case Citizens' Jury on Forests

Our field experiment was conducted among residents of Lapland. It was based on the Citizens' Jury on forests organized in the same region in November 2022. To our knowledge, this is the first study that examines the effects of an actual news article and an actual statement by a mini-public rather than hypothetical ones. By investigating the effects of information regarding an actual mini-public among people

potentially affected by its policy recommendations, we aim to ensure that respondents think carefully about the information they receive, which enhances the external validity of our findings (Druckman et al. 2011). Most of the previous studies are based on hypothetical mini-publics that have been simplified in terms of their recommendations and policy impacts (Boulianne 2018; Sloman et al. 2021) and other conditions (Germann et al. 2024).

Lapland, in the northernmost part of Finland, is a sparsely populated (around 175,000 inhabitants in an area larger than Portugal) region mostly consisting of sub-arctic wilderness. The purpose of the Lapland Forest Jury was to make recommendations on fair and climate change-conscious forest use in Lapland. In recent years, the use of forests has become an increasingly politicized issue in Finland (Valkeapää and Karppinen 2013). Forests have an important role in Finland's ambitious climate policy target of carbon neutrality in 2035. The role of forests as carbon sinks often seems to be in conflict with the interests of the forest industry and forest owners. In Lapland, in particular, where up to 98% of the land area is classified as timberland, there are many contradictory demands by actors promoting the sustainable use of forests and the key industries in the region, such as forestry, mining, and tourism. Moreover, the disagreements on the position of the indigenous Sámi people have further aggravated the conflicts around the use of natural resources in Lapland.

The Lapland Forest Jury was the first deliberative mini-public ever organized in Lapland, and it consisted of 33 randomly selected residents of Lapland who heard from experts on climate change and forestry, and deliberated on the role of forests in Lapland during two weekends. The design of the jury process was, to some extent, influenced by the CIR procedure. The jury wrote a statement including three main sections, namely the state of the art, the key problems, and 10 unique recommendations for forest management in Lapland and for forest policy more generally. The statement and the recommendations were handed to the Green Transition Division coordinated by the Regional Council of Lapland, which promotes and monitors the transition to a sustainable economy in the region.

The statement also included a description of the jury procedure. Overall, the statement emphasized more climate-friendly forms of forest management in Lapland (and elsewhere in Finland), while acknowledging the need to reconcile different interests in forest management and policies. The statement also included some very concrete and even rather controversial proposals for forest management, such as restrictions on logging of young forests and an annual logging quota for Lapland, and provided justifications for these proposals. The English translation of the jury statement can be found in Appendix S1.

The media coverage on the jury emphasized especially the most controversial proposals found in the statement. This was also the case also in the news story by public broadcasting company Yle used in our experiment. The news story with a headline "The Citizens' Jury wants to limit the felling of young forests in Lapland" focused on three concrete proposals of the statement. The story emphasized the jury's concerns about the decline in carbon sinks in Lapland, recommendations for restrictions and quotas for logging, and demands for more up-to-date statistics on the use of forests. The news story also had a short description of the Citizens' Jury method at the end, giving the readers an understanding of who had produced the recommendations and how they had been selected. Two features of the news story, however, were strikingly different from the statement itself: it did not report on "the state of the art" and "key problems" sections of the statement, and it presented only a few of all recommendations. The English translation of the news story can be found in Appendix S1.

3.2 | Experimental Design and Hypotheses

The experimental design was investigated and approved by the Ethical Evaluation Board at the University of Turku, Finland. The experimental design as well as the hypotheses were also preregistered on OSF (Leino et al. 2023) and a description of the small deviation is provided in Appendix S1. The field experiment had two treatment conditions and a control, and the respondents were randomly assigned to groups. Treatment A entailed that the respondents read the statement by the jury before responding to a survey (statement treatment); Treatment B involved the respondents reading a media article about the jury before responding to a survey (media coverage treatment); and the control group only responded to the survey. Based on the literature review and considering the contents of the jury statement and the news story, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H1. *Reading the statement by a Citizens' Jury increases knowledge about the role of forests in climate change.*

H2. *Reading the statement by a Citizens' Jury increases the support for more climate-friendly forest management.*

H3. *Reading the statement by a Citizens' Jury increases satisfaction with forest management and legitimacy of forest policy.*

H4. *Reading the statement by a Citizens' Jury increases internal efficacy in forest policy.*

H5. *Reading a news article on a Citizens' Jury does not give rise to knowledge or attitudinal changes described in hypotheses H1–H4 to the extent that a jury statement does.*

Moreover, we also need to consider that attitudes and pre-existing beliefs mediate information processing among the wider public. In our case, attitudes towards climate change mitigation and political orientation (e.g., Zhou 2016) are likely to affect how people interpret the outcomes of a mini-public. Information transmitted through the jury statement or the news story can, therefore, have different impacts on respondents. People may revise their views on the basis of new arguments, or seek confirmation to their pre-established views and ignore or discard arguments which are against their predispositions. Moreover, there is also a possibility of a backfire effect, which means that people not only resist challenges to their views but they become even firmer in their original opinions. (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). To sum up, we should not anticipate the effects of jury statement or the news story to be uniform across all citizens.

3.3 | Data and Methods

Data collection was conducted by a private polling company, *Taloustutkimus*, over 3 weeks in Spring 2023, approximately 4 months after the Citizens' Jury on forest policy took place. Data collection utilized the polling company's own panel and three commercial online respondent panels in order to reach an adequate number of respondents from one of the least populated regions in Finland. In total, 4700 respondents were contacted, of which 980 responded. The data were weighted on geographical location and age group. Before reading the statement and responding to the survey, there was a short pre-test questionnaire, which gauged respondents' sociodemographic background and initial attitudes on climate and forest policies. The post-test survey itself included a number of questions on issue-specific knowledge and attitudes on forest and climate policy. Dependent variables utilized in the analyses are described in subsequent parts of the manuscript.

Before the analyses, we controlled for the respondents who had been exposed to the citizens' statement before answering the survey. Even though the Citizens' Jury received limited publicity, with only a couple of regional news outlets covering it, the statement was published online by the regional authorities. In treatment group B, 7.2% ($n = 20$) had already read the statement. Of the 423 respondents in the control group, 7.3% ($n = 31$) indicated that they had read the citizens' statement before, and an additional 41 respondents answered that they had heard of the Citizens' Jury from somewhere. We excluded these respondents from the analyses.

Responding to the online survey took about 20 min. The experimental treatments A and B took more time than the control since the respondents needed to read either the jury statement or a news story regarding the jury before responding to the survey. We excluded respondents who took less than 5 min ($n = 19$) to respond to the survey as well as those who took more than an hour to answer the survey ($n = 18$) since we could not rule out the possibility of external factors influencing their responses. The final number of respondents included in our analyses was 851.

The group compositions are reported in Table S1. The three groups are similar in their composition. Regarding the mean scores of the groups, calculated using ANOVA, there are no statistically significant differences in any of the observed parameters.

4 | Analysis

Based on the theory and the formulated hypotheses above, our analysis focused on differences between the treatment groups and the control in the levels of issue-specific knowledge, policy support, legitimacy perceptions, and internal efficacy. In addition, in the last part of this section, we explored whether influences generated by our treatment conditions were conditional on respondents' pre-existing views concerning climate change mitigation. We also analyzed whether reading the statement or the news story generated a backfire effect among those initially critical of ambitious climate policies.

4.1 | Knowledge About the Role of Forests in Climate Change and Forest Policy in Lapland

Respondents were asked to evaluate nine statements related to forest policy in Lapland and the role of forests in climate change and indicate whether they were correct or not and how confident they were with their evaluation. The scale used in the evaluations for each item was "definitely true", "probably true", "probably false", "definitely false", or "I don't know the answer" for each of the statement. The correct answers to statements Q6 and Q7 could be deducted using the information provided in the citizens' statement, while the answer to Q9 could be found in both the citizens' statement and the news story.

We are interested in both the correctness of the respondents' answers as well as their certainty about their answer. For each statement, we first coded answers based on whether the respondents' evaluations were correct (1) or not (0). The mean scores in each group are presented in Table 1 below. The difference in means of the treatment group A (statement) and B (news) is compared to the mean score of the control group. We found that reading the statement did increase the factual correctness of the answers. There are statistically significant differences between treatment group A and control group C in three out of nine of the individual items as well as in the sum variable formed by calculating the mean of all the combined nine items. Notably, these differences were not solely caused by the information that was provided in the statement. The mean scores are significantly different in two (Q6 and Q9) out of the three items referring directly to information found in the statement. When it comes to Q9, treatment group B scored better than the control group, indicating that news stories can also induce learning effects.

The answers to the knowledge statements were also examined by simultaneously measuring the correctness of evaluations and the certainty of the answers. A single answer was scored from 0 to 1 in the following way: 0 indicates a wrong answer but certainty of its correctness; 0.25 indicates a wrong answer, but an uncertainty about the correctness of the answer; "I don't know the answer" is given a value of 0.5; a value of 0.75 indicates a correct answer but uncertainty about the correctness of the answer; and 1 indicates a correct answer and certainty of its correctness. By combining the 9 questions and calculating the mean, a sum variable on a scale of 0–1 was formed, where a higher value means a larger proportion of correct answers and greater certainty about the correctness of the answers. Respectively, the lowest values mean a greater share of incorrect answer combined with certainty of the correctness of the answers.

The values of the treatment groups and control group are shown in Table 1 above. A comparison (difference) between the two treatment groups and the control group is also included. Looking at the correctness and certainty scores, the findings remain mostly the same when compared to the differences in mean correctness scores between the three groups. The results confirmed that reading a citizens' statement can produce information gains among the public at large. However, it is noteworthy that in some cases reading a news story can increase the certainty of a false

TABLE 1 | Knowledge about the role of forests in climate change and forest policy in Lapland (one-way analysis of variance ANOVA; all scales normalized to 0–1).

	Group A ($n = 262$)		Group B ($n = 252$)		Group C ($n = 337$)	
	Correctness	Certainty and correctness	Correctness	Certainty and correctness	Correctness	Certainty and correctness
Q1. In Lapland, more than 90% of the land area is forestry land, including protected areas. (TRUE)	0.58	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.63	0.60
Difference	−0.04	−0.03	−0.05	−0.03	—	—
Q2. The state owns about 30% of Lapland's forests. (FALSE)	0.51	0.57	0.24	0.39	0.21	0.38
Difference	0.30***	0.19***	0.03	0.01	—	—
Q3. Approximately 3000 different species live in Finnish forests. (FALSE)	0.16	0.33	0.15	0.31	0.15	0.32
Difference	0.01	0.01	0.00	−0.01	—	—
Q4. Nutrient-rich forests located on mineral soils are significant sources of emissions. (FALSE)	0.49	0.30	0.56	0.29	0.53	0.29
Difference	−0.04	0.01	0.03	0.00	—	—
Q5. In 2020, Finland's forests sequestered a total of just under 30 million tons of carbon. (TRUE)	0.58	0.62	0.54	0.62	0.58	0.62
Difference	0.00	0.00	−0.04	0.00	—	—
Q6. Seventy percent of the national protected areas are located in the home regions of the Sámi people. (TRUE)	0.52	0.30	0.49	0.28	0.42	0.28
Difference	0.10*	0.02	0.07	0.00	—	—
Q7. The Regional Administration Office is responsible for zoning affecting the use of forests. (FALSE)	0.27	0.44	0.25	0.45	0.28	0.47
Difference	−0.02	−0.03	−0.03	−0.02	—	—
Q8. Young, undergrown forests are the best carbon stores. (FALSE)	0.37	0.47	0.23	0.37	0.31	0.46
Difference	0.06	0.01	−0.08	−0.09***	—	—
Q9. An annual maximum logging quota is in use in Lapland. (FALSE)	0.42	0.52	0.40	0.52	0.28	0.46
Difference	0.14**	0.06*	0.12*	0.06*	—	—
Sum	0.43	0.52	0.38	0.49	0.38	0.49
Difference	0.05***	0.14**	0.00	0.00	—	—

Note: We present *p* values, test statistics, and effect sizes in Table S4. Group A: treatment group that read the citizens' statement, Group B: treatment group that read the news story, Group C: control group. The difference row displays the difference between the scores of Group A and B, respectively, and the control Group C. The correct answer to Q6 and Q7 can be found in the statement, while the correct answer to Q9 can be found both in the statement and the news story.

*$p < 0.05$.

**$p < 0.01$.

***$p < 0.001$.

evaluation or decrease the certainty of a correct evaluation. In the case of Q8, it seems that the former was the case. The share of respondents with certainty of their evaluation, when it was actually incorrect, was largest in treatment group B (19.8%; compared to 11.8% and 9.8% in groups A and C, respectively). In the end, looking at the sum variable, no differences were observed between treatment group B and control group C. This leads us to conclude that reading the news story did not result in knowledge gains regarding the role of forests in climate change.

4.2 | Support for Climate-Friendly Forest Policy and Management and Legitimacy of Policymaking

To measure attitudinal effects of reading the statement by the Citizens' Jury or the news story, the survey included statements on the role of forests in climate change mitigation and evaluations of current forest management and policies. We first looked at the respondents' support for climate-friendly forest management and policy. The respondents were asked to evaluate to what extent climate change mitigation and economic values should be considered when planning the use of forests in Lapland. As the two aspects are not necessarily mutually exclusive and do not constitute a zero-sum question, the respondents could answer to both items using a scale between 0 and 1, where a larger value indicated that the aspect should be considered to a greater extent. Lastly, given that reaching the current national goal of carbon neutrality by 2035 requires both emission reductions and increases in carbon sinks, the respondents were to state what they thought of this goal. Answers to these items were given on a three-point scale (1 = the current goal is too ambitious; 2 = Finland's carbon neutrality goal is appropriate; 3 = Finland's carbon neutrality goal is insufficient), but for the purposes of the analysis, the scale was converted into a scale between 0 and 1, where a smaller value indicated a more negative attitude towards mitigation policies.

As Table 2 indicates, there were no statistically significant differences in mean scores between either of the treatment groups and the control group. Therefore, there is no support here for H2. It must be noted that the sample was quite supportive for climate-friendly forest management to begin with, which can explain why reading the statement or the news story did not have a noticeable impact.

Regarding the legitimacy of forest policies (H3), we used a variety of statements that could gauge perceptions of forest policy and management. For each statement, respondents could indicate their view using a five-point scale (strongly agree–strongly disagree). For the purposes of this analysis, all answers to the seven items were recoded to a scale of 0–1, where a larger value denoted a more favorable view of the current forest policy in Lapland. Means and differences in comparison to the control group C are reported in Table 3 below. Looking at Table 3, we can conclude that reading the statement had very little influence on respondents' views; treatment group A's answers did not differ markedly from the answers of those in the control group. In this respect, regarding satisfaction with policy outcomes and perceived fairness of forest policy, H3 does not seem to gain support.

However, there were some notable differences when comparing the treatment group B to the control group. Reading a news story about the Citizens' Jury seems to have made respondents more critical of the current forest management and policy in Lapland. Namely, the respondents in group B were more prone to think that forest protection and the role of forests in climate change mitigation were not being sufficiently considered in forest management in Lapland. In addition, they were less likely to view political decision-making regarding forests as fair and transparent and less likely to think that forests were being utilized well in Lapland.

Instead of looking at each item separately, we can use a sum variable consisting of these items. According to principal component analysis (see Table S2), six of the items loaded into one factor. All of the individual items were coded between 0 and 1, where 1 denotes a more favorable attitude concerning the current status of forest policy in Lapland. The resulting sum variable is formed by averaging the scores of the six original items (mean 0.54, SD 0.21; items marked in bold in Table 3). The sum variable scores reported in Table 3 confirm that reading the news story did result in more negative views concerning current forest policies.

TABLE 2 | Attitudes towards climate-friendly forest management (one-way analysis of variance ANOVA; all scales normalized to 0–1).

	Group A ($n = 262$)		Group B ($n = 252$)		Group C ($n = 337$)	
	Mean	**Diff.**	**Mean**	**Diff.**	**Mean**	**Diff.**
When you consider the use of forests in Lapland, to what extent do you think it is necessary to consider the perspective of climate change mitigation?	0.66	0.03	0.63	0.00	0.0.63	—
When you consider the use of forests in Lapland, to what extent do you think it is necessary to consider the perspective of economic utilization of forests?	0.67	0.02	0.65	0.00	0.65	—
Achieving Finland's carbon neutrality goal (emissions will not be bigger than carbon sinks in 2035) requires both emission reductions and increasing carbon sinks. What do you think about this?	0.50	0.02	0.46	−0.02	0.48	—

Note: We present *p* values, test statistics, and effect sizes in Table S5. Group A: treatment group that read the citizens' statement, Group B: treatment group that read the news story, Group C: control group. Diff. column displays the difference between scores of Group A and B, respectively, and the control Group C.

4.3 | Internal Political Efficacy

Next, we were interested in whether reading the jury statement or the news story had an influence on the respondents' beliefs of efficacy (H4). Therefore, the survey included items concerning internal political efficacy, that is, about the perceptions of competence to understand to participate in policymaking on forests. Table 4 below includes six statements presented to the respondents, to which they could respond using a five-point scale (strongly agree–strongly disagree). The answers were then recoded on a scale 0–1, where a larger value indicated higher levels of internal efficacy. Using principal component analysis (see Table S3), we constructed a sum variable using the first four items from Table 4. Averaging the values of the four variables, the sum variable varies between 0 and 1 (mean 0.42, SD 0.26; items marked in bold in Table 4), where a larger value again indicates higher levels of internal political efficacy.

Looking at Table 4, we see very little cross-group differences. While reading the statement seems to have increased interest in forest policy-related political decision-making, the mean scores

TABLE 3 | Legitimacy of forest policies and management (one-way analysis of variance ANOVA; all scales normalized to 0–1).

	Group A ($n = 262$)		Group B ($n = 252$)		Group C ($n = 337$)	
	Mean	**Diff.**	**Mean**	**Diff.**	**Mean**	**Diff.**
Forest conservation is well taken care of in Lapland.	0.68	0.02	0.58	−0.08***	0.66	—
Forests are managed well in Lapland.	0.69	0.00	0.60	−0.09***	0.69	—
In the management of Lapland's forests, sufficient attention is paid to the forests' role in mitigating climate change.	0.58	−0.04	0.54	−0.08**	0.62	—
Political decision-making regarding forests is fair.	0.45	−0.04	0.40	−0.09***	0.49	—
Decisions regarding forests are too often made "behind closed doors".	0.43	0.01	0.35	−0.07*	0.42	—
Citizens in Lapland can influence decision-making regarding forests.	0.41	0.00	0.37	−0.04	0.41	—
Decisions regarding forests are based on up-to-date information.	0.49	−0.02	0.48	−0.03	0.51	—
Sum variable	0.55	−0.01	0.49	−0.07***	0.56	—

Note: We present *p* values, test statistics, and effect sizes in Table S6. Group A: treatment group that read the citizens' statement, Group B: treatment group that read the news story, Group C: control group. The Diff. column displays the difference between scores of Group A and B, respectively, and the control Group C.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

TABLE 4 | Internal political efficacy (one-way analysis of variance ANOVA; all scales normalized to 0–1).

	Group A ($n = 262$)		Group B ($n = 252$)		Group C ($n = 337$)	
	Mean	**Diff.**	**Mean**	**Diff.**	**Mean**	**Diff.**
I am interested in forest policy-related political decision-making.	0.59	0.08*	0.54	0.03	0.51	—
I want to influence forest policy-related political decision-making.	0.49	0.06	0.45	0.02	0.43	—
I am well informed about matters related to the protection of forests.	0.39	0.00	0.35	−0.04	0.39	—
I know a lot about forestry.	0.35	0.04	0.31	0.00	0.31	
I have no say in what the country's government and parliament decide regarding forest policy.[a]	0.30	0.03	0.23	−0.04	0.27	—
Sometimes forest policy seems so complicated that I don't really understand what is going on.	0.33	−0.01	0.31	−0.03	0.34	—
Sum variable	0.45	0.04	0.41	0.00	0.41	—

Note: We present *p* values, test statistics, and effect sizes in Table S7. Group A: treatment group that read the citizens' statement, Group B: treatment group that read the news story, Group C: control group. The Diff. column displays the difference between the scores of Group A and B respectively and the control Group C.
[a]There is a statistically significant ($p = 0.044$) difference between the mean scores of treatment groups A and B.
*$p < 0.05$.

of treatment group A are, in general, higher than the mean scores of the control group, we find little evidence to support H4.

4.4 | Analysis of Interaction Effects

In order to analyze the interaction effects, we ran an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to check whether respondents' pre-existing attitudes concerning climate change mitigation and political identification influenced their reactions to the treatments. We were especially interested in the interactions between respondents' predispositions of climate policies and dependent variables, but also explored possible associations between them and political orientation. To this end, the respondents' pre-experiment attitudes regarding climate policies were measured using a sum variable consisting of responses (on a 5-point scale, strongly agree–strongly disagree) to two statements concerning climate policies in Finland ("What do you think of the following statement about current political issues? Finland must combat climate change much more actively than at present." and "What do you think of the following statement about current political issues? Finland's emissions should be reduced to the level of carbon sinks by 2035."). Using principal component analysis, these two variables loaded onto a single factor (Eigenvalue 1.763, 88.15% of variance explained, Cronbach's alpha 0.795). We recoded the answers for both items on a scale 0–1, with 1 denoting a more favorable attitude towards more ambitious climate policies, and combined them into a sum variable ranging 0–2. Political orientation is measured on a scale between 0 and 10, where lower scores indicate a more leftist political orientation, and higher scores more rightist identification. The reason we utilized political orientation instead of party preferences is to obtain results that are more generalizable to contexts outside Finland.

Regarding interaction effects, inspecting significance tests can only tell us whether an interaction effect exists, not how the effect is conditional on the covariates we are interested in (see for example Kam and Franzese 2009). Therefore, we also provide visual inspections of our explorative analyses. To illustrate our findings, we recoded the sum variable concerning climate change mitigation into a categorical variable with three levels: "low-level support for climate change mitigation policies in Finland" (1) consisting of around a third of the respondents ($N = 246$, sum variable < 0.50); "average-level supporters" (2) consisting of around a third of the respondents ($N = 332$, sum variable 0.50–1.00) and "high-level supporters" (3) ($N = 293$, sum variable > 1.00). For political orientation, the original eleven-point scale was recoded into three categories; "left" ($N = 194$, scores 0–3); centre ($N = 384$, scores 4–6) and "right" ($N = 273$, scores 7–10).

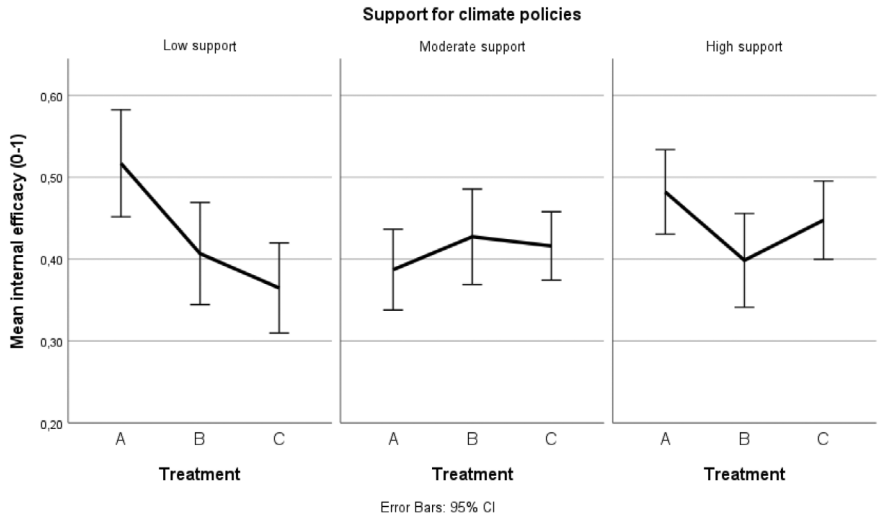
Regarding knowledge gains, there is no indication of potential interaction effects. Results of the ANCOVA are reported in Table S8, where there is no statistically significant interaction between treatment conditions and pre-test attitudes or political orientation. Figure S1 supports this finding, indicating that issue-specific knowledge increased in treatment group A compared to that of control group C, regardless of the pre-existing attitudes of respondents. Similarly, reading the news story concerning the suggestions made by the Citizens' Jury did not have a knowledge-increasing effect, regardless of pre-existing views.

From Tables S9 and S10, we can see that pre-existing attitudes concerning climate change policies are indeed associated with attitudes concerning climate-friendly forest management and with legitimacy evaluations of current forest policies.[1] However, the interaction effects between the treatments and these two variables are insignificant. This indicates that the attitudinal changes caused by treatments were not conditional on pre-test attitudes or political orientation.

The same finding regarding the impact of predispositions can be confirmed by looking at Figures S2–S5. We found that, while especially those initially most supportive of Finland's active role in climate change mitigation did evaluate current forest policies more negatively after reading the news story concerning jury's recommendation, the influence of each treatment condition was parallel across all of the attitudinal groups. In other words, the attitude concerning current forest policies was more negative in treatment B, regardless of the pre-test views of the respondents. What is more, those initially more critical of climate change mitigation were less likely to think that perspectives of climate change mitigation should be considered when planning the use of forests in Lapland, and they were still likely to think that the current goal of carbon neutrality was too ambitious. Because these findings are the same in both treatment groups and in the control group, we find no evidence of the interaction effects. This indicates that reading the less balanced news story did not result in backfire effects among those initially critical of ambitious climate policies.

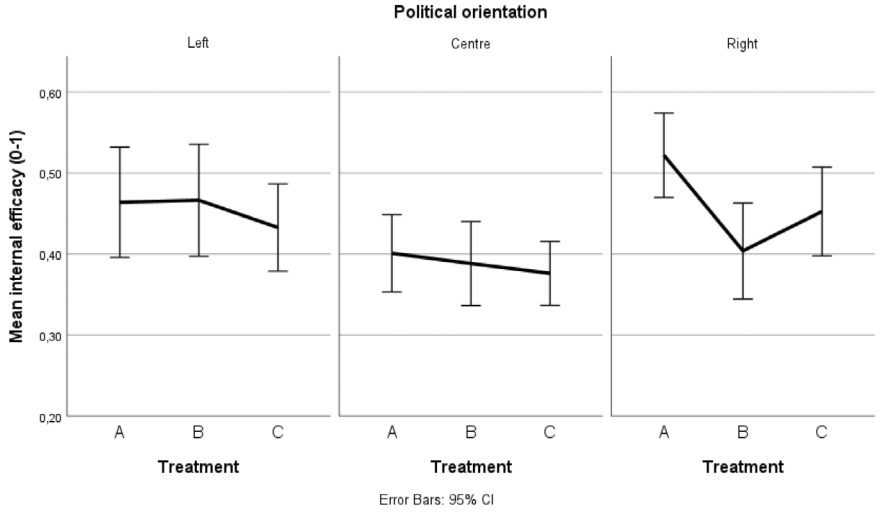
Lastly, we conducted an exploratory analysis to examine whether pre-existing attitudes concerning climate policy or political orientation influenced the observed results regarding internal political efficacy. To this end, we again performed an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The results of the analysis are reported in Table S11. Model 1 further supports our previously stated observation that our treatments were not associated with differences in the means of our dependent variable, that is, the sum variable for internal political efficacy. Predispositions or political orientation were not important determinants either. However, Model 2 indicates that interactions between the control variables and treatment conditions warrant a more careful inspection. Visual observation of interaction effects is provided in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1 shows that, for respondents with lower support for Finland's active role in climate change mitigation, reading the statement increased internal efficacy in comparison to those who read the news story or were not exposed to the suggestion made by the Citizens' Jury at all. This pattern was not that pronounced among those with the most positive outlooks concerning climate change mitigation and not at all among the moderates, which explains why our analyses of cross-treatment means revealed no notable difference. Furthermore, we also witnessed an increase in internal efficacy among respondents identifying with the political right, if they read the statement compared to if they read the news story (see Figure 2). In contrast, levels of internal efficacy remain quite even among respondents identifying with the political left or centre regardless of treatment.



Treatment A: treatment group that read the citizens' statement, Treatment B: treatment group that read the news story, Treatment C: control group.

FIGURE 1 | How support for climate policies conditions impacts on internal efficacy.



Treatment A: treatment group that read the citizens' statement, Treatment B: treatment group that read the news story, Treatment C: control group.

FIGURE 2 | How political orientation conditions impact on internal efficacy.

4.5 | Robustness of the Results

In the last part of the analysis, we evaluate the robustness of our findings. Sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and education level are commonly included in the study of political attitudes and behavior. Even though randomization of respondents to different treatment conditions is often thought to "control for the influence of factors that are known to affect the outcome" (Stoker, 2010, 304), we performed an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to check whether these could have had an influence on the observed differences between different treatment groups.

The complete results of the analysis are provided in Tables S12–S14, but we discuss them briefly here. Most importantly, the inclusion of age, gender, and education in the analysis did not change the findings reported above. However, we did find two potential interactions between these variables and our treatment conditions. First, it seems that reading the news story made female respondents think about the current forest policy in more negative terms compared to the control group, but the same effect was not as pronounced among men. Second, even though age has a strong positive association with perceived internal efficacy among all respondents, this pattern was especially pronounced among those who read the news story. These findings suggest that effects can vary according to the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondent.

5 | Discussion

Communication regarding deliberative procedures and outcomes—through media exposure, a citizens' statement or other means—to the wider public is the key for the macro-political impact of deliberative mini-publics. The purpose of our study was to examine whether and how the impacts of mini-publics among the public at large depend on the transmission mechanisms. In this study, we focused on knowledge

and attitudes on the policy issue at hand. Our findings suggest that the effects of mini-publics at least partly depend on the type of media from which citizens receive information. In line with our H1, we found learning effects among those who read the full statement by the Citizens' Jury. This result confirms theoretical expectations and previous studies which suggest that reading a written statement by a mini-public can facilitate learning among the wider public (e.g., Warren and Gastil 2015). In contrast to our expectations, however, reading the statement did not lead to attitude changes, nor to increased internal efficacy. One possible explanation here is that the full statement from a well-organized mini-public is so balanced that everyone can find some relatable arguments in it, regardless of their position on forest policy or climate change. In this respect, people may have mostly sought and gained confirmation for their pre-established views when reading the jury statement (cf. Broghammer and Gastil 2021).

Because the news coverage may lack the contextualization, the balance, and the justifications of the statement, its impacts on knowledge and attitudes can be expected to be different from those of the statement itself. We found that, in line with H5, reading a news story about the jury did not result in increased factual knowledge, and it actually strengthened respondents' false beliefs. Our study also shows that reading a news story about the jury had different impacts on policy support and perceived legitimacy in comparison to those of reading the jury statement itself. Most notably, reading the news story made citizens perceive forest policymaking less legitimate and made them less satisfied with current forest management and policies. Although this finding was not in line with H5, it was not entirely unexpected considering the tone and contents of the news story. For example, the news story emphasized that forestry professionals in Lapland have also criticized forest policy legislation on the same grounds as the Citizens' Jury, which may have affected readers' interpretation of the ways forest issues were currently being handled by authorities. This finding suggests that the media logic emphasizing conflict, malpractices, and those arguments that are most controversial made citizens more unfavorable towards the current state of affairs.

Lastly, our analysis detected no backfire effects generated from reading the statement or the news story. However, our exploratory analysis indicated that the impacts of reading about the mini-public's recommendations can still be conditional on pre-existing beliefs or even demographic characteristics of the reader. More specifically, reading the statement increased internal political efficacy, especially among those critical of ambitious climate policies and those on the political right. This may have been because the nuance and the balance of arguments in the statement ensured that these respondents could find relatable views in the statement. In this way, the statement may have given validation for the relevance of their own positions in the context where there were growing pressures on forest management and policies to contribute to the goal of carbon neutrality in 2035. When it comes to the shorter and less balanced news story, such nuances were missing.

As was the case in our study, media framing and coverage can be significantly different from the contents and the tone of a mini-public statement itself. And since media coverage is largely beyond the control of organizers and participants of mini-publics, unpredictable influences can occur, as confirmed by our study. There seems to be a need to ensure more authentic ways of representing mini-publics and their arguments in the wider public sphere. One possible way would be to engage media actors as collaborators in the design of mini-publics to enhance public communication to different audiences (Maia 2023). Another way would be to pay more attention to the ways in which the procedures, the key findings, and judgments are summarized in mini-publics' statements. Especially the descriptions of procedures may help a wider audience imagine themselves in the place of participants of a mini-public. It is also worth putting effort into compressing and articulating the sections summarizing the key arguments, making it easier for the media to digest and to report. Summaries of statements produced by mini-publics themselves and visual elements could help get the key points through in the media.

We must acknowledge that our results should be interpreted with some caution. Our experimental design did not distinguish whether the differences in observed effects were generated by the different sources of information, that is, the Citizens' Jury directly or the media, by the variation in content of this information, or both. The design of our study did not distinguish which parts of the statement or the news story caused the detected effects, either. Our field experiment thus lays a foundation for further empirical research on how arguments and recommendations formulated by deliberative mini-publics can be communicated and how they can have an impact on the wider public and on policymaking more generally. Future studies should also address the question of how citizens' motivation to learn about a policy issue affects the possibility to "scale up" effects of a mini-public; most notably, to what extent it depends on citizens' actual say in the issue at hand, for example, in a referendum.

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Ethics Statement

This research has been investigated and approved by the Ethical Evaluation Board at the University of Turku, Finland.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

All data related to the study is made public and stored in the Finnish National Social Science Data Archive by the end of year 2025. This includes the survey data and a codebook with descriptions of the variables included in the dataset.

Endnotes

[1] This is further confirmed by linear regression, where we find that there is a statistically significant negative association between pre-test

attitudes concerning climate change and attitudes on current forest policy in Lapland, as well as a statistically significant negative association between political orientation and attitudes on current forest policy in Lapland.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.