

There is No Pill for Deliberation. Explaining Discourse Quality in Postconflict
Communities¹

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ABSTRACT

Recent experimental research suggests that ordinary citizens are capable of behaving in a democratic and deliberative way in controversial political debates, when given the right instructions. In this study, we test the potential of such instructions in contexts where levels of polarization, conflict and social marginalization are high. Using a randomized controlled experimental design, we test the effect of encouraging members of marginalized and conflict-affected communities in Colombia to live up to the deliberative ideal, including free participation, mutual respect, justification of arguments, and contributing to the common good. Results indicate that deliberative instructions have a positive effect on intervention levels, but fail to increase discourse quality. We also find that socio-economic differences (especially education and gender), as well as inter-group trust dynamics, explain much of the variation in discourse quality. Promoting deliberative democracy under unfavorable conditions might therefore require a combination of short-term policy measures aimed at increasing communal trust, long-term efforts to improve schooling levels, and ensuring constraint-free participation. There is, however, no treatment yet that can ensure deliberation success.

KEYWORDS: deliberation, democracy, experiment, post-conflict, discourse, reintegration, reconciliation, Colombia.

INTRODUCTION

Proponents of deliberative theory claim that, given the conceptual maturity of the debate about deliberation, it is no longer possible to think of democracy in the twenty-first century without considering the deliberative component (Bohman 1998; Dryzek 2000). However, whether deliberation is either feasible or desirable is still an unresolved controversy (Popkin 1992; Posner 2004; Przeworski 1998; Raz 1998; Shapiro 1999; Stokes 1998).

Deeply divided societies are faced with the challenge of accommodating opposing factions within a democratic framework strong enough to contain conflict. Democratic deliberation has been proposed as a suitable candidate for meeting this challenge. There are at least two literatures that reflect on the possibilities of transforming divided and conflictive societies into deliberative ones. One group of authors focuses on deliberation as a tool for transforming violent societies culturally. Works here emphasize how a deliberative democracy might, in theory, accommodate conflictual differences in a non-violent manner by fostering inclusion and recognition of the other (Azmanova 2010; Erman 2009; Schwarzmantel 2010). Another group places greater emphasis on deliberation as an institutional design solution that would be useful for improving consociational models (Drake and McCulloch 2011; O'Flynn 2010), or that could even be used as an alternative to them (Dryzek 2005).

In view of these findings, might deliberative democracy be capable of transforming beliefs and behavior in even the most inhospitable of contexts, i.e. among those who, only a few months earlier, were on opposite sides of a violent conflict? If evidence were furnished in favor of deliberation in such a “tough” case,

how can we create spaces for deliberation in such contexts, as when there are high levels of polarization, social grievances and a history of violence? Where there is violence and divisiveness, as explored in this article, the acid test lies in seeing whether the more optimistic or pessimistic predictions about participants' discourse quality hold, and which factors determine discourse quality under unfavorable conditions.²

An important strand of empirical work in deliberation has attempted to outline favorable conditions under which deliberative behavior can effectively be encouraged, usually in contexts of non-violent political antagonism (O'Flynn 2006, Steiner 2012, Ugarriza and Caluwaerts 2014). Rules of discussion, as well as environmental conditions and conditions within the interchange itself, seem to produce the desired positive outcomes. But there appears to be a more direct way to do this, namely to explicitly ask participants to comply with deliberative criteria. While this type of intervention has been shown to have an effect on levels of participation, trust, and coherence (Strandberg 2014), it remains to be seen whether it also affects discourse quality.

Capitalizing on a recent government effort to create opportunities for former antagonists in the still-ongoing Colombian civil war, including demobilized ex-combatants, communities receiving displaced persons, and war victims to come together, we formed a series of discussion groups using a randomized, controlled experimental design. We organized discussion sessions in small groups (usually 8

² See previous accounts of possibilities for deliberation in Northern Ireland in Luskin et al. (2014), and in countries such as Belgium, Colombia, Spain, Ukraine, Nigeria, Turkey, Israel and South Africa in Ugarriza and Caluwaerts (2014).

to 10 people), with a balance between ex-combatants in non-state armed groups and members of conflict-affected communities. Participants were asked about their proposals for peace in Colombia and were randomly assigned either to a deliberation treatment or to one of two different control conditions. The deliberation treatment consisted of classic deliberative instructions, and was intended to produce a higher discourse quality among discussion group participants.

In order to expand our experimental results, we also examined how psychological (Arceneaux 2012, Mackuen et al. 2010), socio-demographic (Karpowitz, Mendelberg and Shaker 2012, Karpowitz Raphael and Hammond 2009) and ecological factors (Barisione 2012, Hess and Todd 2009, Landa and Meirowitz 2009) might help to activate people's deliberative potential beyond institutional settings, as identified in existing literature. Indicators for these factors were constructed with the help of pre- and post-test surveys of our experimental intervention.

In the remainder of this article, we first build normative and empirical expectations about the factors most commonly used to explain deliberation. We then go on to describe the intertwined nature of democratization and peace efforts in Colombia before introducing our empirical strategy, which includes a deliberation experiment and an observational analysis of key factors explaining discourse quality. Next, we present results of our participants' deliberative performance with respect to both the experimental treatment of deliberative instructions and the analysis of explanatory factors. Finally, we discuss what our results mean in promoting a more deliberative democracy in post-conflict settings.

ACTIVATING POTENTIAL FOR DELIBERATION

There are at least two types of ideal deliberation models. Classic models focus on rational communication processes aimed at reaching rational consensus. More flexible accounts are also open to different forms of communication, including rhetoric and emotional discourse and story-telling, and are aimed at preference structuring and meta-consensus (Bächtiger et al. 2010). In the former case, there is a stricter demand for achieving constraint-free participation, respect, orientation towards the common good, a focus on argumentation, and willingness to yield to the force of the better argument, while in the latter, such elements are left aside, in favor of a wide repertoire of communicative forms. This article focuses on the more classical deliberation model, where high quality deliberation is defined by free participation, respect, argumentation, orientation towards the common good, and openness to others' interventions.

Scholarly work has paid attention to four main blocs of potential explanatory factors for deliberative performance: institutional, psychological, ecological and socio-demographic.

Institutional theories usually state that the rules of the game can affect discussion dynamics and outcomes either positively or negatively (Mansbridge et al. 2006, Mathis 2011, Steiner et al. 2004). The most positive expectations suggest that a proper institutional design should encourage participants to try to persuade others by means of well-justified, respectful and common-good oriented proposals for action. Evidence collected in relatively favorable contexts shows that discussions under formalized, clear rules lead to unrestricted participation, where

effects of socio-economic differences or power imbalances are minimized (Fishkin and Luskin 2005). In some cases, specific rules or conditions have been shown to favor the promotion of higher standards of deliberative discourse, such as non-publicity (Fearon 1998, Chambers 2004), proper levels of information among participants (Fishkin and Luskin 2005), and enforcement of consensus orientation (Kameda 1991, Mathis 2011, Steiner et al. 2004). Additionally, in the study of organizational dynamics, the presence of clear norms in terms of what is expected from people's behavior and the outputs to be generated in discursive situations has been identified as a concrete incentive for more structured forms of argumentation (Ulbert and Risse 2005, Panke 2006).

Institutional optimism, however, is in contrast to the skepticism commonly found in authors who warn against *psychological* pitfalls. Previously held dispositions and divisiveness can affect the way participants approach discussions. In particular, a major source of concern is the presence of cognitive barriers that prevent certain individuals from performing as normatively demanded (Lupia 2002, Rosenberg 2004). The way individuals conceive their ideas might or might not be conducive to rational argumentation, emotional appeals, narratives, etc. For instance, predispositions toward discussion participants might favor or impede openness to deliberative exchanges (Cacioppo et al. 1996, Steenbergen et al. 2004). Similarly, emotional biases might lead some participants to intervene with greater or lesser frequency and fervor (Dickson et al. 2007). Additionally, dynamics where appeals to group identity are present might activate fear or a sense of marginalization, thus affecting discursive performance (Druckman 2001, Mendelberg 2002). In support of these hypotheses, evidence shows that dialogue between factional groups rarely displays common-good orientations or

cooperation, and polarization is widespread (Mendelberg and Oleske 2000, Rosenberg 2009, Sunstein 2003). The types of emotion evoked during discussion might lead participants to adopt either deliberative or partisan behavior, while conflict itself might put people on the defensive (MacKuen et al. 2010).

Does this body of evidence prove that individual psychological barriers and group antagonism make deliberation unfeasible? Currently, there is no consensus as to how and when these potential psychological barriers appear and affect discursive performance (Ryfe 2005, Rosenberg 2004). The *ecology* of the discussion environment, in fact, has the potential to either lead to biased outcomes or correct for them. Key ecological elements are the characteristics of the setting, in terms of who promotes the exercise, the location, the selection of participants and witnesses, and the informative materials used (Barisione 2012). Depending on how well deliberation promoters control for these conditions, they can lead discussions in different directions, either by reinforcing, enabling or counterbalancing potential biases. It has been suggested that counter-framing and reframing during the course of the communicative exchange, as well as ensuring a heterogeneous group of speakers, might enable participants to approach a topic from different points of view, thereby reducing the effect of biases (Bohman 2009, Slothuus and de Vreese 2010).

Irrespective of the care that is taken in establishing appropriate conditions for deliberation, participants' performance is always affected by a subjective judgment as to whether proper conditions for deliberating are present. These subjective factors can be explored using the swift trust and thin-slice theories. According to this body of literature, temporary groups that are assembled for a

one-time interaction need to quickly assess the environment and decide whether or not to set up temporary systems of trust (Ambady and Rosenthal 1993, Meyerson, Swift and Kramer 1996, Tatham and Kovács 2010). Individuals make a quick assessment of vulnerability, uncertainty, risk and expectation. In the case of discourse exchanges, the impressions an individual forms in the early moments of the interaction, based on linguistic and non-linguistic signals, tend to persist and to determine the way individuals engage in conversation, thus affecting the discussion dynamics as a whole (Curhan and Pentland 2007, Nass and Brave 2005, Bernieri and Petty 2011). As a way of measuring social signals that affect interaction, Pentland (2004) proposes checking activity (participation frequency and length), engagement, emphasis and mirroring.

In addition to institutional, psychological, and ecological issues, there are *socio-demographic* factors that affect participants' performance. In the few cases where citizen deliberation quality has been measured, results show that it tends to be neither too close to, nor too far from, deliberative ideals (Gerber et al. 2014, Himmelroos 2011). But preliminary evidence exists which suggests that socially disadvantaged groups might find it harder to achieve higher levels of deliberation, and that this manifests itself in a lower participation frequency. Women, members of the working class and participants with less education tended to perform worse, in terms of deliberative quality, in the Europolis project (Bächtiger and Gerber 2014, Gerber et al. 2014). Gender inequality, in terms of participation and perceived influence, has also been reported (Karpowitz et al 2012).

If we add a context of marginalization and inter-factional violence, perspectives for high-quality deliberation look dimmer. Previous works have

shown that this type of population tends to underperform, in terms of the ideals of deliberative discourse (Ugarriza 2013). This is especially so as far as unconstrained participation, common-good orientation, and willingness to change positions are concerned. Nevertheless, these populations also show a heightened potential for justification (in the form of basic logical reasoning or narrative), and refrain from disrespectful interventions in the context of discussion groups.

Should we expect that an adequate institutional design will increase the chances of improvement in deliberative quality where the risks of psychological, ecological and demographic pitfalls exist? In semi-formalized discussion forums, enforcing deliberative rules that clearly state the type of behavior expected from participants has positively affected the discursive outcomes (Strandberg 2014). Thus, given the previous experimental evidence, our main hypothesis states that rules that encourage deliberative behavior should improve the discourse quality of participants in a political debate.

Our experimental design enabled us to create statistically equivalent discussion groups, where psychological, socio-demographic and ecological traits, be they favorable or not for an ideal behavior, were randomly distributed. We randomly introduced three types of protocols (experiment design and protocols are described in detail below): one where classic deliberative instructions were enforced (*main treatment groups*); another where instructions merely encouraged story-telling (control group 1), and a third protocol, where no particular instructions on how to communicate were given (control group 2).

These two latter protocols were regarded here as controls. Besides free talk groups (control group 2), we also tested our deliberative protocol against a story-

telling discussion protocol (control group 1) that explicitly encouraged participants to center their attention on discourses that facilitated mutual empathy and promoted a positive kind of interaction, as previous laboratory experiments showed (Nadler and Liviatan 2006; Bruneau and Saxe 2012). By means of this strategy, we were able to contrast the effect of our classic deliberative instructions against both a standard control and a protocol that focused on producing a clearly different type of discussion dynamic, but is similar to the main treatment since it also uses a discussion protocol.

However, testing the marginal effect of deliberative instructions does not rule out the possibility that psychological, socio-demographic and ecological traits will also have a significant effect, as previous literature suggests. In fact, we expect that a democratic psychological disposition, high levels of trust in the residing community and fellow participants, and low levels of inter-faction biases are positively correlated to highly deliberative behavior. These expectations will be tested using a multivariate regression analysis. A more detailed explanation of our analytical strategy is provided in the empirical section below.

PROMOTING DELIBERATION IN A CONTEXT OF WAR

At first glance, Colombia seems to be an unlikely place to test the demanding conditions for the emergence of genuine deliberation. However, there is a prevailing view that scenarios of protracted violence and democratic deficits are somehow intertwined, and their solutions are therefore intrinsically linked (Hegre, Gates, Gleditsch and Ellingsen 2001).

In the early 1990s, a National Assembly drew up a new constitution. All major political parties were represented at the Assembly, as were recently demobilized representatives of guerrilla groups that had negotiated comprehensive peace agreements in previous years. Inspired by principles of participatory democracy, a series of mechanisms aimed at engaging the citizenry in public affairs was institutionalized, such as people's initiatives, referenda and oversight committees (Vargas, 1994).

In this context of democratization, the following decade saw the emergence of various rounds of public discussions on key issues, typically promoted by academic institutions, the government, and NGOs. Some of these forums explicitly promoted discussions in line with deliberative standards and covered a range of topics, such as education reform, violence reduction strategies, accountability and the fight against corruption, and attention to war victims. About two thousand people, including ordinary citizens, war victims, scholars, students, social leaders and local authorities, attended these deliberative sessions between 1998 and 2000 (Orozco and Ugarriza 2014).

While citizen engagement should have had an impact on the efficiency of public administration (Avritzer, 2002; Barber, 1984; Fung and Wright, 2003; Nylen, 2003), recurring problems such as weak party representation, corruption, civic apathy and a lack of clear guarantees for political opposition persisted (Leal, 1996; Pizarro, 1996; Restrepo, 1994). Even more discouraging was the fact that war continued to rage during the decades to come, in spite of ambitious democratic reforms.

The current peace negotiations between the government and remaining insurgent groups have again gravitated around the idea of improving the quality of democracy as a key component of a deal to bring the armed conflict to an end once and for all. Part of the debate has focused on the question of whether a more consolidated democracy means eradicating the effects of corruption, criminal influence and the actions of illegal armed groups on the political system (UNDP and IDEA, 2009), or rather whether it involves empowering the citizenry to a level where they can demand and promote changes toward a more legitimate democracy (DNP, 2010). The commonly agreed peace negotiation agenda between the government and the two remaining guerrilla groups in the country, FARC and ELN, on the basis of which discussions have been ongoing since 2012, gives prominence to discussions on political reforms. Such reforms should empower social movements and citizen action outside of formal institutions, so that people in general, rather than just elites, have a chance to voice their interests and positions regarding public issues at local and national levels.³

While the context might thus become more favorable for the promotion of institutional citizen deliberation in the future, the effects of decades of war will likely haunt every effort in the longer term. A recent official report estimated that 5.7 million people were internally displaced between 1958 and 2010; 220,000 were killed in the context of the armed conflict, 80% of them civilians; there were 11,000 landmine victims; 27,000 people remained forcibly disappeared; and about 30,000 had been kidnapped (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013).

³ Preliminary agreements between Government and guerillas can be accessed at www.mesadeconversaciones.com.co

One salient consequence of such widespread violence is the loss of social capital and interpersonal trust, as evidenced in different representative surveys. While more than half of Colombian respondents stated that they do not trust their neighbors (World Values Survey, 2005), recent surveys on conflict-affected zones report that about 82% of people in receiving communities distrust the thousands of demobilized ex-combatants now settled there (CNC 2011), not to mention the tens of thousands who will come in future demobilizations (Nussio and Howe, 2012).

Recent attempts to establish deliberative forums involving ex-guerrillas, ex-paramilitaries, community members and victims have corroborated the deep ideological and social divisions that exist among these segments (Ugarriza and Craig 2013), underlining the difficulties inherent in generating a productive dialogue.

Colombian ex-combatants, victims and violence-affected communities are an appropriate choice as study subjects in our discussion of deliberation in contexts of political instability, social grievances and violence. Between 2004 and 2013, about 35,000 former paramilitaries and 15,000 ex-guerrillas demobilized and started an uneasy process of returning to receiving communities. These generally impoverished communities host most of the almost five million victims of forced displacement. Both migrations have created still-unresolved tensions and a dynamic of difficult social re-ordering (Prieto, 2012, Nussio 2012).

An empirical exploration of the deliberation mechanism in Colombia, engaging individuals who live under the most adverse circumstances, will enable

us to establish whether a stronger citizenry, one that can potentially alter negative conditions, can realistically be promoted here and in similar contexts.

EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

The adverse conditions described above may encourage pessimism as to whether deliberative standards can help overcome histories of mistrust to produce better outcomes. Yet because these unfavorable conditions constitute a “tough test” for our theory, if we find support for the transformative power of deliberation, it is likely that this strategy could be effective in a wide variety of additional contexts.

For our study, we took advantage of a novel government initiative. The Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR in Spanish) drew up an innovative program which set out to bring together former combatants who had demobilized from illegal leftist and rightist non-state armed groups and members of receiving communities affected by violence and conflict, in the hope of generating a better understanding between them. In 2013 and 2014, nine municipalities covering every major region in the country were chosen by ACR for this program.

Our discussion groups were part of this larger, state-sponsored program. Between November 2013 and February 2014, our research team visited six of the nine municipalities where inter-segment meetings took place.⁴ We relied on NGO

⁴ The municipalities were Cali, Tierralta, Valencia, Villavicencio, Florencia and Cúcuta. In three additional municipalities where the ACR program was active (Palmira, La Dorada and Pereira), encounters between ex-combatants and community members had not taken place by the time our research was conducted.

field contractors to pass an invitation to join our discussion groups to about 900 people (the target population of the ACR-sponsored program in those places).⁵ This invitation was passed to them about one month after the start of the planned one-year-long community program, and our discussion group sessions, each a one-time meeting, were included in the regular schedule of activities of the overall state-sponsored program, although potential participants could refuse to take part. 429 of the 900 persons invited later attended our discussion group sessions and formed the pool of potential participants in our experiment. In the biggest towns, Cali, Florencia and Cúcuta, ex-combatants comprised slightly less than half of the potential participants, while in the remaining places they constituted less than a third, roughly. Once in the field, we applied a stratified, random assignment to the discussion groups, in order to ensure that the groups were balanced: using attendance lists drawn up and reviewed on-site by the field contractors, we were able to randomly assign a balanced number of ex-combatants and community members to the experimental groups.⁶ The field contractors noted on the attendance lists which of the participants were ex-combatants and which were regular members of the community (participants themselves did not have this information). A total of 174 individuals were randomly drawn from our pool of potential participants (82 ex-combatants and 92 community members), and then

⁵ These NGOs were hired and trained previously by ACR representatives to conduct a one-year long community program aimed at integrating ex-combatants and other community members.

⁶ Underage participants were not assigned to experiment or control groups. The perfect observation assumption was violated when two participants decided to walk away during discussions, resulting in an attrition rate of 1.13 per cent. Thirteen more people decided not to join the discussion groups before discussions commenced, but after completing the pre-test.

randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions in 21 almost perfectly balanced groups. Remaining individuals from the pool of potential participants were assigned to non-experimental discussion groups, which are not included in the present analysis. We then randomly assigned different conditions to each experimental group (an overview of the assignment procedure is provided in the Consort flow diagram in Appendix D). Randomization of treatment and control conditions enabled us to create statistically identical groups with no significant variation between them in terms of observable, as well as non-observable, traits. A comparative description of baseline measures for deliberative and control groups is provided in Appendix B.

Meeting places were rooms in local community centers and schools where participants usually attended integration activities under the ACR-sponsored program. Once the discussion groups had been formed, researchers welcomed participants and asked them to sign a consent form. The purpose of the discussion was then explained, focusing mainly on our interest in their proposals for peace in Colombia. Participants were aware at all times that among them were ex-combatants, and that all of them were part of the same local community. After everyone had finished a pre-test questionnaire, basic rules were explained: there would be audio-only recording, no one would have to identify himself or herself while speaking, and physical or verbal violence would not be tolerated and would lead to termination of the discussion. At this point, the specific treatment instructions were given (see below), and the main discussion question for all groups was re-stated: “What do you propose, so that in the future there can be peace and coexistence in Colombia between those coming from the various armed

groups and people in the community, and so that violence is not repeated?”⁷ Participants were told that all proposals would be anonymously compiled and distributed in an edited document. From then, discussion flowed spontaneously without moderation in any of the treatment conditions.

In no case was any discussion terminated due to violent behavior, and in all cases participants agreed to complete the full experiment and control protocols. After the discussion, participants completed a post-test questionnaire and were invited to a snack.

We randomly assigned either a classic deliberative treatment (7 groups, N= 57), a story-telling control condition (7 groups, N= 59), or a no-treatment control condition (7 groups, N= 58) to the 21 experimental groups. Every group consisted of an average of eight participants, with an average ex-combatant vs. community member ratio of 0.908.⁸ Most participants in the experiment were between the

⁷ All peacebuilding proposals that were put forward during the 45-minute exercises were compiled into a document that would be handed to the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) and the United Nations Development Program. This document has already been drawn up and distributed. Proposals in all the discussion groups referred to fourteen distinct topics: support for vulnerable populations such as ex-combatants, victims, farmers and the elderly; progress on institutional reforms; promoting a culture of peace and reconciliation; fostering human and family values; improving the quality of basic and further education; developing employment strategies; establishing citizen participation forums; drawing up security strategies; providing social welfare services; economic fairness advocacy; preventing recruitment by illegal groups; attention to drug-related health issues; establishing housing programs; and protecting the environment.

⁸ All groups had either a perfectly balanced composition, or a one-person difference between segments. An exception was the set of Cúcuta groups, where field constraints led to a two-person difference between segments.

ages of 18 and 60, with a mean age of 35.28. Their education level typically ranged between a few years of primary school and last year of high school (eight years of schooling on average) with only a few reporting higher education. Interestingly, 64% of all community members in our experiments reported having been victimized in the past by an illegal armed group, the army or the police force. In turn, 63% of ex-combatants reported having demobilized from guerrilla groups, and 37% from paramilitary forces.

While all 21 experimental groups were presented to participants as a deliberative exercise, only seven of them were subjected to a more detailed explanation of what we understood by deliberation (deliberative treatment – *main treatment groups*). Participants here were instructed not to monopolize the talks, to show respect for their fellow discussants and their arguments, to justify their proposals with arguments, to have an overall common-good orientation rather than a selfish one, and to revise their own opinions in the light of other arguments. These rules were also written on small pieces of paper and handed to the participants in these seven discussion groups. Instructions were repeated aloud at two different points during the session, while paper instructions remained in the hands of participants at all times.

The remaining groups are here considered to be control groups. In seven *story-telling control groups*, deliberative instructions were replaced by a general exhortation for participants to share their personal experiences and views, rather than engage in an argumentative exchange. Instructions were provided in the same way as for the main treatment groups (small pieces of paper, instructions repeated twice, aloud). In the remaining *control groups*, no special rules were given.

Discussion protocols were applied identically in all experimental groups in every respect, apart from the treatment.

Our main dependent variable is deliberation. The operationalization of such a concept was established in an original work by Steiner et al. (2004), in which the main deliberative dimensions were systematized in a Discourse Quality Index (DQI).⁹ This index measures levels of participation, respect, justification, common-good orientation, and disposition to change through a series of indicators.¹⁰

⁹ Versions of the DQI have been used in Caluwaerts (2012); Roger and Schaal (2012); Steiner (2012); Steiner et al. (2004), and Ugarriza (2013). Another, less frequently used, instrument to measure deliberative quality has been proposed in Stromer-Galley (2007).

¹⁰ Our measurement tool, the expanded Discourse Quality Index, consists of fifteen deliberation indicators: *Intervention*: 1= participant spoke, 0= participant remained silent; *No Interruption*: 1= participant refrained from interrupting, 0= participant interrupted; *No Disrespect*: 1= participant did not use foul language; 0= participant made use of foul language; *Respect*: 1= participant made use of explicitly respectful expressions, 0= participants did not made use of respectful expressions; *Reciprocity*: 1= participant referred to what other participants said, 0= participant did not refer to what other participants said; *Position*: 1= participant stated a position in the discussion, 0= participant did not state a clear position; *Justification*: 1= participant justified the stated position, 0= participant did not justify the stated position; *Illustration*: 1= justification took the form of examples or story-telling, 0= justification did not take the form of examples or storytelling; *Reasons*: 1= justification took the form of reasoned justification (e.g. X needs to be done because of Y), 0= justification did not take the form of reason; *Sophisticated reasons*: 1= justification took the form of reasoned justification (e.g. X needs to be done because of Y, and Y is elaborated), 0= justification did not take the form of sophisticated justification; *No own good*: 1= participant did not advance self-interested justifications, 0= participant advanced self-interested justifications; *Good of Others*: 1= participant justified in favor of disadvantaged groups, 0= participant did not justify in term of other people's good; *Common Good*: 1= participant made explicit common-good-oriented justifications, 0= participant did not make common-good-oriented justifications; *Abstract Principles*: 1=

Deliberation differs from any other kind of discussion in terms of the quality of interaction between participants. However, we do not consider that some political discussions are genuinely deliberative while others are not. Instead, we assume that all political interactions may lie closer to or farther from a hypothetical ideal in which all five core elements are perfectly met. Thus, analyses here are performed separately for each indicator, as well as for a composite measurement that captures the extent to which a participant complies with all the strict requirements of an ideal deliberative speech act. Transcripts of the 21 group sessions were made, and two independent coders were given the task of assessing the deliberative quality of each individual's discourse over the course of the session.¹¹

After estimating the expected effect of deliberative instructions as a treatment variable, we also present a multivariate controlled test in order to examine complementary hypotheses related to socio-demographic factors, psychological predispositions and discussion dynamics, as mentioned above. Three blocs of variables are included as potential explanatory factors – these variables are constructed on the basis of pre- and post-test surveys (original survey questions are provided in Appendix C). In the multivariate regression analysis, the first bloc of measures includes socio-demographic variables such as

participant justified in terms of abstract values and ideals, 0= participants did not justify in terms of abstract values and ideals; and *Force of the Better Argument*: 1= participant explicitly expressed a willingness to change a position, 0= participant did not express a willingness to change a position.

¹¹ Independent reviewers coded two transcripts simultaneously, in order to estimate levels of reliability. There is match in 94% of 238 coding decisions corresponding to fourteen different deliberative dimensions. Different reliability tests are presented in Appendix A.

age, gender, education, segment (ex-combatant or not), victimization, and urban/rural origin, all of which are expected to affect the participants' performance.

A second bloc of variables includes five measures of psychological dispositions, in line with existing literature. The first aims to capture the presence or absence of a democratic disposition by reporting the participants' preference with respect to political pluralism. Different types of psychological predisposition towards discussion can affect deliberative performances differently. Empirical research supports the idea that individuals may have clear predispositions to either not change opinions (Petty et al. 1995), or to actually place value on others' arguments (Cacioppo et al. 1996; Shestowsky et al. 1998). Also, conscientious and extrovert personalities seem to be more open to opinion changes, at least measured at group level (Gastil, Black and Moscovitz 2008). Following this line of argument, knowledge-oriented and democratic participants would tend to behave more deliberatively, while dogmatic types would do less so (Steenbergen et al. 2004).¹² The second measure assesses the level of trust in the community where participants reside.¹³ A third measure asks about their level of trust in their fellow

¹² Here, we proxy for presence or absence of a democratic disposition by asking participants, "With which opinion do you agree the most? a. It is good that people differentiate themselves by political tendencies; b. It would be good if there were no big political differences; or c. I cannot choose."

¹³ We did not consider levels of trust in community to be affected by individuals' last-minute impulses, but rather assumed they are a relatively stable disposition that is formed in time. In the pre-test questionnaire, we opted for asking participants: "Would you say that people in our community are in general terms...", and then we offered them the following response options: "a. Very trustworthy; b. Somewhat trustworthy; c. Not very trustworthy; d. Not trustworthy; e. I cannot choose."

discussion group participants.¹⁴ The final two measures consist each of six-item Likert scales through which we capture positive, negative or neutral attitudes toward the antagonist groups represented in the discussions. Biases that emerge from motivation loads, stereotyping, or identity traits may affect the discussants' ability to behave in a deliberative way. Those who protect their existing beliefs and attitudes by discounting counter-messages and seeking information that confirms them may be regarded as 'partisan reasoners' (Steenbergen et al. 2004). Strong identities have been linked to the emergence of bias in rational thinking (Huddy 2003), or to more inflexible styles of discussing (Druckman 2001). In contrast, open-minded reasoners are willing to revise new evidence and information, and may display higher levels of deliberation (Lodge and Taber 2005).¹⁵

Our third bloc comprises discussion dynamics measures in terms of individuals' subjective perceptions of other participants' overall levels of

¹⁴ After discussions, we asked participants, "Would you say that the people that took part in the discussion are in general terms...", "a. Very trustworthy; b. Somewhat trustworthy; c. Not very trustworthy; d. Not trustworthy; e. I cannot choose."

¹⁵ We use a general approach to measure the effect of biases on deliberative levels by looking at discussants' attitudes toward rival factions. In the pre-test questionnaire, twelve interspersed Likert-type items were used for measuring attitudes to community members (six items, alpha 0.6) and to ex-combatants (six items, alpha 0.7). In each case, half of the sentences were worded in positive terms and the other half in a more negative tone. Sentences aimed to capture biases in terms of who is to blame for political, economic, social and security problems, and who is contributing to solving them. Items on attitudes to community members, on the one hand, and to ex-combatants, on the other, were aggregated in order to estimate scores on a scale from minus 6 to plus 6.

authenticity, participation, respect, justification, and common-good orientation.¹⁶ Here, we derived a series of indicators from the thin-slice and swift trust theories referred to above, and grouped them in the ‘ecological dynamics’ category.

RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENT

Before discussing our results, we first check how deliberative the groups were. At the top of Table 1, we observe the mean DQI score for participants in each of the experimental conditions. Our score is estimated by aggregating codes for all deliberative indicators reported in footnote 8, except for *intervention*.¹⁷ A difference of means test is also reported in Table 1: no statistical difference is observed. That is, participants in all experimental conditions tended to perform equally in terms of overall deliberative quality.

Under the subheading *deliberative dimension* we see a disaggregated analysis of how participants fared according to each of the DQI indicators. Overall discourse quality was just as low as expected, given the adverse conditions. Table 1 shows, in the first column, the five main deliberative components, and the corresponding indicators provided by the DQI. In the following three columns, we state the proportion of participants who displayed an ideal behavior for each

¹⁶ Respondents could agree strongly, agree, disagree, disagree strongly or neither agree nor disagree with the following five statements: “Some participants monopolized the discussion”, “Some did not provide their opinions in order to avoid problems”, “Some did not show respect to others”, “Participants tried to provide justifications”, “Participants did not take the common good into account.”

¹⁷ We did not code for those participants who did not speak up, as we cannot infer their deliberative quality.

deliberative dimension.¹⁸ Proportions are reported for each experiment condition. The higher the proportion, the closer participants were to the deliberative ideal.

TABLE 1. MEAN OF DELIBERATIVE SPEAKERS PER CONDITION*

	Experimental condition			Deliberation v. controls	
	Deliberation (N=57)	Control 1 (N=59)	Control 2 (N=58)	t-test	
DQI score mean (range 2-11)	4.79	4.71	4.92	t= 0.054, ρ = 0.956**	
DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT	Deliberation	Control 1	Control 2	ATT	ODDS RATIO
Participation					
<i>Intervention</i>	0.929	0.762	0.724	0.157 ρ = 0.040	β = 4.568 ρ = 0.007
<i>No interruption</i>	0.981	0.977	0.952	0.000 ρ = 0.999	β = 1.857 ρ = 0.596
Respect					
<i>No disrespect</i>	0.962	0.977	0.928	0.000 ρ = 0.999	β = 1.228 ρ = 0.816
<i>Respect</i>	0.018	0.022	0.238	-0.150	β = 0.132

¹⁸ We understand 'ideal behavior' to be high levels of participation, respect, justification, common-good orientation, and disposition to change opinions.

				$\rho= 0.042$	$\rho= 0.057$
<i>Reciprocity</i>	0.603	0.666	0.642	-0.094	$\beta= 0.802$
				$\rho= 0.372$	$\rho= 0.540$
Justification					
<i>Position</i>	0.547	0.533	0.547	-0.037	$\beta= 1.028$
				$\rho= 0.742$	$\rho= 0.936$
<i>Justification</i>	0.452	0.466	0.523	-0.094	$\beta= 0.846$
				$\rho= 0.410$	$\rho= 0.634$
<i>Illustration</i>	0.301	0.288	0.404	-0.094	$\beta= 0.821$
				$\rho= 0.388$	$\rho= 0.600$
<i>Reasons</i>	0.245	0.288	0.261	- 0.075	$\beta= 0.853$
				$\rho= 0.456$	$\rho= 0.691$
<i>Sophisticated reasons</i>	0.075	0.000	0.023	0.075	$\beta= 7.020$
				$\rho= 0.044$	$\rho= 0.085$
Common-good orientation					
<i>No own good</i>	0.226	0.088	0.095	0.132	$\beta= 1.466$
				$\rho= 0.303$	$\rho= 0.305$
<i>Good of others</i>	0.226	0.266	0.261	-0.075	$\beta= 0.814$
				$\rho= 0.456$	$\rho= 0.615$
<i>Common good</i>	0.169	0.177	0.190	-0.037	$\beta= 0.907$

				$\rho= 0.676$	$\rho= 0.833$
<i>Abstract principles</i>	0.075	0.044	0.119	0.018	$\beta= 0.779$
				$\rho= 0.757$	$\rho= 0.015$
Disposition to					
change					
<i>Force of better</i>	0.037	0.000	0.023	0.037	$\beta= 3.372$
<i>argument</i>				$\rho= 0.158$	$\rho= 0.326$

* The first column lists the DQI components and indicators. The second to fourth columns report proportions for each item and experimental condition. The fifth column represents the results of a matching analysis (the average effect of our deliberative treatment vs. controls). The last column shows how the probability of displaying an ideal deliberative behavior changes between the treatment and control groups.

** We rely on a t-test, rather than ATT or Odds Ratio, to test a difference of means.

An additive composite measure of all deliberative components excluding intervention ($\alpha= 0.7$), called here deliberative score, reflects the overall performance. Within a range of 2 to 11, the mean score is 4.8. Although we expected to see these low deliberative levels, here we are primarily interested in the result of our experimental treatment. We need to make sure we actually contrast individuals who reasonably resemble each other in key observable features, except for the presence or absence of the treatment experience. Hence, instead of calculating simple average differences between the treatment and control groups, propensity score matching estimation allows us to establish pairs of observations that resemble each other most closely, according to our basic

observable control variables: age, gender, education, segment (ex-combatant or not), and victimization. Matching analysis results, presented in the second column from the far right, show that the average effect of our deliberative treatment¹⁹ is only weakly significant for intervention, respect and sophisticated reasons. The column on the far right, in turn, illustrates how the probability of displaying an ideal deliberative behavior changes by being in the treatment instead of the control groups. Here, the effect is strongly related to intervention, and weakly to abstract principles.

As observed in Table 1, the only statistically robust probability change under deliberative conditions refers to intervention. While 75% and 71% of participants intervened in the debates under control conditions, about 91% of participants under the deliberative condition did so.

The highest scores²⁰ observed in Table 1 correspond to the proportions for participants who actually intervened during the discussions, for those who intervened without interrupting others, and for those who refrained from delivering disrespectful utterances. In the rare case of interruptions, participants did not complain verbally but rather expressed their frustration at being interrupted by means of body language and by altering their voice pitch. One example came from a community member who argued that ex-combatants “demobilize and then they expect to be paid a stipend”. All of a sudden, an ex-combatant interrupted by responding that politicians are the real source of problems, “because they make promises and then they forget about people”. A

¹⁹ Average effect of treatment on the treated.

²⁰ See footnote 8 for coding criteria.

couple of times, the said community member attempted to resume the argument, before giving in to the ex-combatant's lengthy response. The few openly disrespectful utterances were directed at third parties not represented in the discussion groups. A community member, for example, argued that rich people like the President tended to ignore the poor's grievances, by saying "that son of a bitch was born with a silver spoon in his mouth". Openly respectful utterances were also scarce. One example came from an ex-combatant referring to another ex-combatant's argument and describing it as "very well-stated".

A small majority engaged with what other participants said, as captured by our reciprocity measure, and stated a clear proposal or position on the issues at stake. Typical references started with the sentence "just as the fellow discussant said...", and were then followed by a longer elaboration.

Slightly less than half the participants actually provided a justification for their proposals or positions, about half of them resorting to narrative illustrations and the other half to reasoned logic. Narratives were generally references to personal experiences, like the ones explained by a community member who said, "We need to promote a peace process within each individual [...] For instance, I was raised in a family, and all I see between my parents is violence, mistreatment. All of that starts brewing inside of me, and at a given moment I explode. My heart is full of conflict". Conversely, a typical example of rational argumentation heard in the discussions came from an ex-combatant who proposed that "in order to reduce violence, small companies should start operating in small towns, creating a source of employment. In most towns young people have nowhere to work, and they just wander around".

Sophisticated reasons were generally scarce. A community member proposed that the Colombian Government should make a bigger effort to “finance agriculture” because “the rural economy is our economic basis. The countryside is where most people live”. Going deeper into his justification, he elaborated by saying that “country people are usually noble and well-intentioned, but they are disappearing, as they come [to the city] to suffer, to grieve, and that is generating violence”.

Few participants refrained from justifying their position in terms of their own good. That was particularly salient among ex-combatants, who typically tended to complain that the government “is not keeping its word. If necessary, you could take up arms again, because here [outside the armed groups] we are not doing anything useful. There is no employment for us, and the financial stipend is not enough to survive”.

A small proportion of participants appealed to the good of others. An ex-combatant argued, “We cannot forget the need for reparation of war victims, people, citizens who have been victims to the armed conflict”. Other participants openly appealed to the common good or abstract principles. An example of the former came from a community member who, after complaining about some unjust laws, said, “We can change that condition. We can speak and we can vote, we can participate in elections, that is democracy [...] if we unite, we Colombians can make the laws”. An example of the latter came from a war victim who said that “if Colombia is to find a road to peace, there has to be dialogue, employment, fairness, honesty and consciousness”.

Explicit recognition of the value of other participants' interventions was also marginal, as seen in the force of the better argument measure. One example came from a community member who distanced himself from the position stated by an ex-combatant, but nevertheless offered a more acceptable revised position. In his words, "I do not share the fellow discussant's opinion of killing [corrupted politicians]. But that does not mean we do not agree with the people who propose that [...] One [alternative] way is to block their possibilities of re-election".

RESULTS OF MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

While the increase in interventions should not be underestimated, there is a clear failure within the institutional channel to use deliberative instructions to activate high quality discursive behavior. But if instructions have such a limited effect, how can we explain the variation observed in discourse quality among participants? In Table 2, we present the results of a series of regressions, in which alternative explanations, namely psychological dispositions and ecological dynamics, are tested along with socio-demographic control variables. Our aggregated DQI measure is the dependent variable in these models.

TABLE 2. DELIBERATION LEVELS OLS REGRESSION ANALYSIS

DV: deliberative score	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Socio-demographic controls				
<i>Age in years</i>	0.021 (0.016)			

	p=0.193		
<i>Gender</i>	-1.157 (0.456)		
<i>(1= female, 0= male)</i>	p=0.012		
<i>Education</i>	0.176 (0.064)		0.180 (0.054)
	p= 0.007		p=0.001
<i>Segment</i>	-0.170 (0.446)		
<i>(1= ex-combatant, 0= community)</i>	p= 0.704		
<i>Victim</i>	-0.039 (0.470)		
<i>(1=victim, 0= non-victim)</i>	p=0.933		
<i>Urban</i>	-0.215 (0.474)		
<i>(1= urban, 0=rural)</i>	p=0.650		
Psychological dispositions			
<i>Pluralism</i>	-0.192 (0.357)		
	p=0.591		
<i>Trust in community</i>	0.139 (0.173)		
	p=0.424		
<i>Trust in participants</i>	0.252 (0.189)		
	p=0.187		
<i>Bias against ex-combatants</i>	0.124 (0.074)		
	p=0.095		
<i>Bias against community</i>	0.036 (0.066)		
	p= 0.585		
Ecological dynamics			
<i>Perceived authenticity</i>		0.258 (0.086)	0.263 (0.080)
		p=0.003	p=0.001

<i>Perceived participation</i>			1.789 (0.430)	1.836 (0.405)
			p=0.000	p=0.000
<i>Perceived respect</i>			-0.739 (0.456)	
			p=0.108	
<i>Perceived justification</i>			0.092 (0.454)	
			p= 0.834	
<i>Perceived common good orient.</i>			0.070 (0.460)	
			p=0.879	
<i>Constant</i>	3.165 (1.095)	4.958 (0.781)	3.418 (0.454)	1.708 (0.589)
	p=0.005	p=0.000	p=0.000	p=0.004
<i>N(valid)</i>	140	139	139	139
<i>F-value</i>	3.32	1.75	5.24	12.08
	p=0.004	p=0.128	p=0.000	p= 0.000
<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>	0.090	0.026	0.133	0.194

Model 1 shows the relevance of gender and education levels for explaining deliberative scores, which tend to be higher in men and the more educated. Interestingly, Model 2 shows that the effect of psychological dispositions, as measured prior to the discussion, is insignificant. Conversely, three measures describing discussion dynamics, included in Model 3, are statistically significant. Scores tend to be higher when participants' perceptions reflect the conviction that

participation was constraint-free and their fellow participants were authentic and honest.²¹

The far right column shows the best-fitting model, which is capable of explaining almost one fifth of the observed variance. Adding our participation length measure, the adjusted explained variance jumps to 0.300.

DISCUSSION

A core finding from our experimental design is how short-term efforts aimed at providing people with a basic understanding of deliberative standards, while also encouraging them to act accordingly, cannot overcome the structural limitations deriving from low levels of formal education within marginalized communities. In other words, there is no silver bullet yet that can provide a remedy for social and cognitive barriers associated with lack of education.

With regard to psychological traits, it is interesting to note that neither levels of pluralism (particularly low among the majority); stated levels of trust, either in the residing community or in participants in the discussion; nor the

²¹ As suggested by Curhan and Pentland (2007), we explore some measurements of speech frequency and length, as they provide information on activity levels in discussions. We have refrained from including them in the models presented, given the risk of an endogenous relationship with the dependent variable. Nevertheless, these two measurements might provide us with information regarding levels of interest or dominance by some participants, and therefore about the discussion dynamics. Both measurements – number of interventions per speaker and total discourse length in words – are significantly related to deliberative scores. Including participation length in Model 3 does not affect the significance of authenticity and participation perceptions, and increases the adjusted explained variance to 0.275.

presence of biases against the major segments represented in the discussion seem to affect discursive performance. Since there are limitations in the measures applied in terms of their sensitivity, it is still possible that more subtle dispositional differences between the most and least deliberative performers could be worth exploring in the future. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that institutional design might render differences in overall dispositions, trust levels, and biases irrelevant.

While the presence of general psychological barriers before discussions did not seem to affect participants, discussion dynamics and perceptions developed *during* the experiment seem to have had a major impact on outcomes. Longer discourses uttered by participants over a series of interventions seem to have enabled them to display a wider range of deliberative qualities. Not being able to speak at ease might, therefore, be affecting many participants' ability to display deliberative qualities. This interpretation is supported by the significant relevance of participation perceptions: those who perceived that conditions existed for everyone to express their opinions are also the ones who tended to have higher deliberative scores. Additionally, perceptions as to the authenticity of fellow participants during the discussions seem to capture a key element discussed in the swift trust and thin-slice theories. Only those who judged others to be honest and transparent were also capable of a higher deliberative performance.

Results suggest that deliberative quality should increase under conditions where participants feel comfortable enough to speak confidently and listen to

others. Paradoxically, evidence also indicates that many participants did not feel those conditions existed in our exercises.²²

The relationship between perceptions of proper conditions and performance can be interpreted in two ways. Either those who did not perceive a constraint-free and honest environment did not fully articulate an ideal discourse, or those who had the chance to speak at ease tended to express a higher appreciation of the forum. In any case, these results provide clear evidence that the way discussions are conducted, and how participants react to social signals in those discussions have a significant impact on discursive behavior, and consequently on deliberative quality.

The fact that everyday conditions are not favorable to high deliberative quality raises an additional question about the artificiality of providing controlled discussion forums. Opportunities in which different segments of a divided community can gather and express their views in a democratic manner have yet to be created. In post-conflict peacebuilding contexts, the challenges of citizen participation, reconciliation, and the community-based political reintegration of ex-combatants should create enough incentives for official and internationally-sponsored programs to be implemented where deliberation could gradually reach higher levels of sophistication. Nevertheless, promoting deliberative democratic ideals under such unfavorable conditions might require policies aimed at increasing communal trust and schooling levels, in addition to institutional spaces to ensure constraint-free participation. While some of these challenges can be

²² Sixty-four percent of participants said they perceived that some people did not express their opinions, in order to avoid problems.

overcome by immediate short-term plans, an ideal citizenry can only emerge after long- and medium-term investments in social capital. A collective commitment to overcoming cycles of violence and conflict once and for all might create the right incentives to do just that.

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