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Public Deliberation as the Organizing Principle of Political Communication Research

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Abstract

During the past fifteen years, public deliberation has become an important focus of research, theory, and public practice. This has sometimes led to a variety of narrow conceptualizations that limit deliberation to particular forms of interaction, such as small group discussion, or to divergent conceptualizations deployed in different contexts, such as for media systems versus face-to-face discussions. To address this problem, we advance a flexible yet precise definition of deliberation that has the power to organize not only deliberation theory and research but also much of the larger body of work in political communication. As defined herein, deliberation includes both analytic and social processes and provides a unifying conceptual and critical framework for studying nearly the full range of political communication topics, including informal conversation, media and public opinion, elections, government institutional behavior, jury decision making, public meetings, and civic and community life. Using our flexible conceptualization, each of these research contexts amounts to a kind of deliberative critique and empirical analysis of public life.

KEYWORDS: community, democracy, deliberation, discussion, elections, jury decision making, media system, political communication, public opinion, public meetings

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*The argument presented in this essay is being developed in greater detail in the first author's forthcoming book, Political Communication and Deliberation. Whether or not they know it, the ideas presented herein have benefited greatly from conversations and correspondence with Stephanie Burkhalter and Todd Kelshaw, as well as Ted Becker, Lance Bennett, Michael Briand, Ned Crosby, John Dedrick, Perry Deess, Jim Fishkin, Lew Friedland, Sue John, Bill Keith, Robert Kraig (the younger one), Peter Levine, Bob Luskin, Jay Leighter, Matt Leighninger, Stephen Littlejohn, Carolyn Lukensmeyer, Patricia Moy, Gerry Phillipsen, Hank Jenkins-Smith, Jenny Mansbridge, David Mathews, Walter Parker, David Ryfe, Pat Scully, Mark Smith, Rebecca Townsend, Phil Weiser, Mark West, and Mike Xenos.

The core mission of the *Journal of Public Deliberation* is to advance scholarship on deliberation, as well as the public practice of deliberation. This aim is complicated by the fact that there exist varied theoretical conceptions of public deliberation and no clear—let alone widely-adopted—conceptual definition of the term. The pool of conceptions include participation in public forums (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; McLeod et al., 1999), careful weighing of alternatives (Mathews, 1994), focused discussion on public issues (Fishkin & Luskin, 1999; Mendelberg & Oleske, 2000), contrasting media messages produced by opinion leaders (Page, 1996), or even two candidates discussing the same subject in campaign discourse (Simon, 2002).

Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw (2002) one of the most elaborate definition of deliberation to date, and we believe that their conception of face-to-face deliberation extends well to a wider variety of contexts, once it is amended and modestly reconceptualized. Providing such a broadened conception of deliberation is the first task of this essay.

We also aim, however, to also argue that a broadened conception of deliberation can organize a larger body of research—the interdisciplinary study of political communication.[*] In turn, we demonstrate how the deliberative perspective frames and organizes political communication research in the context of discussion and conversation, mass media and public opinion, elections, government and jury decision making, public meetings, and community life. At the present time, research in these varied contexts is disconnected or, in the case of juries and government decision making, all too rare. The deliberative framework pulls together research across these contexts from a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to conventional political communication scholarship within the discipline of communication and related fields, including political science, public affairs, sociology, and social psychology.

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[*] This argument is extended and carried throughout the forthcoming book by John Gastil, *Political Communication and Deliberation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008). Portions of this essay are adapted from that larger work with permission.

In the end, we aim to demonstrate that the deliberative critique of existing communication practices motivates research across all of these contexts. Seeing scholarship in that light reveals that the study of deliberation is not so much a subfield within the larger body of political communication research, but, rather, can serve as a means of organizing and making sense of the political communication enterprise, as well as a means of revealing those spots that the field has overlooked. Once again, that journey begins with a general definition of deliberation, and that is the task to which we now turn.

A General Conceptualization of Deliberation

Democratic deliberation is a form of communication that is based on principles of democracy, such as those proposed by Dahl (1989). Theorists view deliberation as an ideal, a way of communicating that groups strive toward, but achieve only in degrees (Gastil, 2000). Traditional conceptions of deliberation emphasize equality, fairness, analysis of ideas, and a focus on the public good (cf., Cohen, 1996, 1997; Habermas, 1989), and recent theorists highlight the importance of deliberation's social aspects (Asen, 1996; Bohman, 1995; Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997).

Political communication scholarship typically delimits deliberation only to specific contexts, such as small groups of citizens gathered to discuss public issues. However, we argue that deliberation can productively be treated as a critical concept that organizes a wide range of political communication research. In this essay we advance a broad, yet flexible definition of deliberation: *When people deliberate, they carefully examine a problem and arrive at a well-reasoned solution after a period of inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view.* This conceptualization includes distinct analytic and social processes that take on more precise meanings depending on the political communication context. (This juxtaposition of task-oriented

group communication with relational-oriented group process is analogous to the conception of deliberation Mansbridge et. al [2006] discovered in the mindsets of professional facilitators.)

The analytic aspect of deliberation can be traced back to Dewey's (1910) analysis of how people think through problems, which was extended to small groups by Gouran and Hirokawa (1996). First, deliberation begins by *creating a solid information base* to make sure participants understand the nature of the problem at hand. Second, participants identify and *prioritize the key values* at stake in an issue. This prioritizing ought to take a wide range of values into account in order to fully grasp the values and interests of different people affected by the issue being deliberated. Third, participants *identify a broad range of solutions* that might address the problem. Fourth, participants *weigh the pros, cons, and tradeoffs among the solutions* by systematically applying their knowledge and values to each alternative. A group will have deliberated in this respect if it faces the tradeoffs among different alternatives, recognizes that no solution is perfect, and tries to grapple with conflicting values and information. Finally, if deliberation takes place within a decision-making body, it ends by *making the best decision possible*, in light of what has been learned through discussion; otherwise, the deliberation may end with each individual participant arriving at an independent judgment on the matter at hand.

Deliberation, however, is not just about the substance of an exchange. Deliberation also refers to the social process of communicating together. Foremost among these considerations is ensuring an *adequate opportunity to speak* among all participants or points of view. This does not require that each participant speak for an equal amount of time, rather that all have equal and adequate opportunity to contribute. A related social aspect of deliberation is that all participants have *a right to comprehend* what others are saying, albeit within limits. Speakers ought to communicate in a way that other participants can understand so that all parties involved in the deliberation can comprehend the issues at stake.

Just as a deliberative speaker gives others the chance to understand them, participants have the *obligation to consider* carefully the words that they hear. Consideration begins with careful listening that is attentive both to the content of a speaker's words and the speaker's larger perspective or experience. Finally, the deliberative process requires participants to maintain a degree of *respect* for themselves and their fellow participants. Deliberation embodies respect when participants recognize one another as private individuals with unique hopes and fears and members of the larger group or society. Respect also means treating all others as sincere, competent participants, at least so long as they do not themselves reject these principles.

This broad conceptualization of deliberation can serve as a unifying framework to understand the political communication research across a wide variety of contexts or levels of analysis. To be sure, there are other articulations of deliberation that will run counter to this definition, either in the particular definitional rules adopted or in the more basic conception of the term. To a degree, such definitional uncertainty is unavoidable (Hanna & Harrison, 2004), but we endeavor to demonstrate the value of our particular understanding in the sections that follow.

We now consider a range of these contexts, including many of the most prominent research programs in the field of political communication, as well as a few that have been overlooked but merit attention as important sites of public talk. Although most of this research was not explicitly framed in terms of deliberation, it can all be understood as arising from a deliberative critique of society. Thus, each of the following sections begins with a contextualized definition of deliberation, demonstrated by research in the area, and then considers how deliberative critiques inform political communication practice.

Political Conversation and Discussion

The first theoretical context to which we apply this definition of deliberation is political conversation and discussion. This body of theory and research has deep connections to deliberative democracy. Modern deliberative democratic theory comes directly out of the cultural tradition that Bormann (1996) calls the "public discussion model." This conception of discussion emerged during the earlier part of the twentieth century, and the discipline of speech communication played an important role in promoting the pedagogy of democratic discussion at that time (Gastil & Keith, 2005; Levine, 1990; Mattson, 1998).

Deliberative idealizations of discussion, such as Habermas' (1979, 1989) conceptualization of an ideal speech situation, stress how the reasoned exchange of views can yield enlightened understanding. This constitutes the rigorous analytic aspect of deliberation. At the same time, as Barber (1984) insists, a vital democracy should also celebrate more free-wheeling conversation, rather than focusing exclusively on problem solving. Thus, the analytic processes of deliberative conversation or informal discussion described in Table 1 incorporate both reasoned argument and personal experiences, values, and emotional experiences.

The social process in Table 1 draws on both the Habermasian and Barberic conceptions of talk, and it is compatible with Grice's (1975) conversational maxims. Equal access, comprehension, and consideration have a rationalist side, but the social process of deliberation also speaks directly to Barber's (1984) interest in mutual respect and the consideration of "the other" as a whole person—more than a source of ideas and information that happens to be human. These analytic and social processes can be seen in the more informal interactions of political conversation and the structured discussions that happen in deliberative forums.

Table 1

Key Features of Deliberative Conversation and Discussion

Analytic Process	**Conversation/Discussion Behavior**
Create Information Base	Discuss personal and emotional experiences, as well as facts.
Prioritize Key Values	Reflect on your own values, as well as those of others present.
Identify Solutions	Brainstorm a range of different solutions.
Weigh Solutions	Recognize limitations of your own preferred solution and advantages of others.
Make Best Decision	Update opinion in light of what you have learned. No joint decision need be reached.
Social Process	**Conversation/Discussion Behavior**
Speaking Opportunities	Take turns in conversation or ensure a balanced discussion
Mutual Comprehension	Speak plainly and ask for clarification when confused.
Consideration	Listen carefully to others, especially when you disagree.
Respect	Presume other participants are honest and well-intentioned. Acknowledge their unique experience and perspective.

Research on informal political conversation investigates questions about both the analytic (Gamson, 1992) and social (Huckfelt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Walsh, 2004) components of deliberation. More formalized political discussion forums build on the deliberative power of political conversation to help citizens address pressing community concerns. Since 1990, the number of modern discussion programs has proliferated (Button & Mattson, 1999; Ryfe, 2002), and some of the most widely used and influential are the programs developed by the National Issues Forums Institute (NIF 1990, 1992). Research suggests that NIF does, indeed, have some of the anticipated impacts such as causing forum participants to think beyond their narrowly-defined self-interest to arrive at more well-conceived judgments on public issues (Melville, Willingham, & Dedrick, 2005; see also Gastil, 2004; Gastil & Dillard, 1999).

Increasingly, deliberative forums are occurring online as forum organizers use new technology for participants to interact with one another either to augment or in place of face-to-face meetings (c.f., Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002; Price & Cappella, 2001; Gastil & Levine, 2005).

In its concern with both *who* participates and *how* they reason through problems together, the research on political conversation and discussion concerns itself with both the analytic and social components of democratic deliberation. The research demonstrates that there are, indeed, deliberative *moments* in both forms of talk as practiced in contemporary American society. The purpose of political discussion forums is to create frameworks that promote those moments and yield an experience that is more deliberative overall.

The research also demonstrates how larger discussion frames provided by the media shape conversations and discussion. The ideas and information people receive from the media are much of the meat in their conversations (Gamson, 1992; Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999), and the media can be an important source of contrary viewpoints on political issues (Mutz & Martin, 2001).

Mass Media and Public Opinion

Research on political mass media and public opinion can also be understood through the lens of deliberation. Table 2 explains mediated deliberation in terms of both the media producers, represented in the middle column, and media users, in the right-hand column.

Table 2

Key Features of Mediated Deliberation

Analytic Process	**Media System Function**	**Media User Behavior**
Create Information Base	Presents media users with broad base of background information by reporting extensively on key issues.	Seek opportunities to learn of others' experiences and relevant expert analyses.
Prioritize Key Values	Explores the underlying public concerns behind the surface facts and defining events.	Consider diverse concerns underlying issues and how others prioritize issues.
Identify Solutions	Presents the broadest possible range of solutions, including non-governmental and unpopular ones.	Learn about how people like or unlike yourself think about addressing a problem.
Weigh Solutions	Reports different viewpoints but does more than juxtapose them; subjects them to careful scrutiny.	Reassess your biases toward different solutions by seeing how others weigh pros/cons.
Make Best Decision	Provides recommendations but keeps editorial content distinct from news; leave the decision to the media user.	Take responsibility for making up your own mind after listening to the advice of experts, partisans, and others.
Social Process	**Media System Function**	**Media User Behavior**
Speaking Opportunities	Uses diverse sourcing and reaches beyond conventional debates.	Listen to sources with contrary views. Add your own voice when appropriate.
Mutual Comprehension	Makes news and information understandable for audience.	Seek clarification on confusing issues or arguments.
Consideration	Takes seriously arguments from all perspectives.	When hearing different views, avoid tuning out or ruminating on counterarguments before considering what they say.
Respect	Models respect for different views; treats audience with respect by making news serious but engaging.	Give the benefit of the doubt to sources but demand better behavior from those who violate your trust.

The middle column of Table 2 conceptualizes the collective responsibility of media producers, which prominently includes television newscasters, newspaper editors, and information website managers. As Page (1996) argues, the sheer size of the mass public and the complexity of modern public problems make it impossible to rely on face-to-face conversation and discussion alone. Page proposes a "division of labor" between the mass public and the "professional communicators," including "reporters, writers, commentators, and television pundits, as well as public officials and selected experts from academia or think tanks" (1996, p. 6). Through the elaborate communication technology and industry of the mass media, these communication professionals convey information, values, and diverse points of view to the mass public, which then deliberates vicariously through the give-and-take and to-and-fro of these various professionals.

The right-hand column of Table 2 shows the criteria by which we can judge whether an individual media user has engaged in mediated deliberation on a public issue. Goodin (2003) draws attention to the deliberation that takes place inside an individual's mind—what he calls "deliberation within." The point in having a deliberative media process is for individuals to hear conflicting considerations and weigh them to arrive at their own judgments. Even when people ultimately choose to attend deliberative forums, they have likely viewed, read, and heard considerable media information and engaged in a process of internal reflection. .

The point of creating a detailed definition of mediated deliberation is to have a critical yardstick against which we can measure the behavior of *actual* media producers and users. The prominent research on media's objectivity and balance (Domke, Watts, & Shah, 1999; Lee, 2005; Page, 1996) find that media practices struggle to provide a broad range of solutions, adequate speaking opportunities, consideration, and respect. Research on media framing and agenda setting (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Scheufele, 1999; Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 2004) and polls (Mutz, 1998; Noelle-Newman, 1991; Scheufele & Moy, 2000) describe a

complex relationship between media coverage and individuals' attitudes, but still point to the important role of the media in influencing public opinion. As a whole, the work on media and public opinion indicates that media practice is far from the deliberative ideal. However, the critiques offered by this research are clearly in line with our concept of deliberation.

Some media practices are evolving out of this deliberative critique such as "public journalism" (Rosen & Merritt, 1994), which "tries to place the journalist within the political community as a responsible member with a full stake in public life" (1994, p. 11). Such movements provide images of a more deliberative media process, whereby the media produces richer content and citizens play a less passive role in consuming it.

Elections

Deliberative theory can also help organize the research on electoral politics. In theory, representative elections ensure accountability through lively competition between incumbents and their challengers and the careful voting decisions of the public, acting like the sober-minded electors envisioned by Hamilton in the *Federalist* (Gastil, 2000). The basic idea is that a modest amount of public deliberation during elections ensures the establishment of a set of public officials who then undertake more detailed deliberation on the full range of public issues that demand their attention. Table 3 shows how deliberation applies to elections from the perspective of the entire electoral system and individual voters.

A deliberative electoral system provides all necessary information to voters about a broad range of candidates. The system highlights the most relevant features of each rival candidate and contrasts each office-seeker in those terms, thereby revealing the pros and cons of supporting one candidate or another. The system also ensures that the analytic process ends with each voter's choice being counted and incorporated into the final decision.

Table 3

Key Features of Deliberative Elections

Analytic Process	**Electoral System Function**	**Individual Voter Behavior**
Create Information Base	Makes vital information on candidates and ballot measures easily available.	Learn what there is to know about the candidates' backgrounds and positions.
Prioritize Key Values	Facilitates the exploration of relevant values and other criteria for selecting candidates. Clarifies what is at stake in the election.	Identify the values and criteria most important to you as a voter.
Identify Solutions	Ensures a pool of diverse and viable candidates in primary and general elections.	Study each viable candidate and party, not just the ones getting the most attention
Weigh Solutions	Provides clear contrasts between candidates with different experiences, values, and objectives.	Consider how parties and candidates embody or subvert your values and assess how well they will do their job.
Make Best Decision	Ensures that every voter's final decision is counted.	Take personal responsibility for your final voting choice.
Social Process	**Electoral System Function**	**Individual Voter Behavior**
Speaking Opportunities	Ensures that all campaigns have an effective public forum in which to discuss and debate their backgrounds and positions.	Make time to listen to people supporting other parties or candidates and add your own voice when appropriate.
Mutual Comprehension	Makes campaign messages clear and understandable, free of deceptive or manipulative prose.	When a party or candidate's record or positions are unclear, seek to learn more.
Consideration	Makes room in the electoral process for minor parties and independent candidates.	Reflect on the experiences and values that shape other party and candidate platforms.
Respect	Parties and candidates show a civil respect for opposition even in debates.	Even when arguing with fellow voters, remain respectful and avoid being antagonistic.

The social process criteria for an election ensure that every candidate's campaign have the opportunity to present its own views of candidate strengths and weaknesses. Allowances must be made for the views of independent and minor-party voices, though a system can understandably emphasize those candidates who make a serious effort to campaign. In addition, the messages produced by all the various communicators in an election should be comprehensible and free of both deceptive devices and disrespectful invective that shows a pointless lack of civility. This is *not* to say that candidates can not clash and make impassioned arguments; rather, these requirements merely stipulate that a deliberative process involves straightforward, honest, and relevant exchanges, many of which involve legitimate criticisms and sharp disagreements.

Within such a deliberative electoral environment, voters have responsibilities similar to those they have when seeking out and processing media. Voters should reflect on their own values, and then consider the full range of candidates by weighing the benefits and disadvantages of electing one over another. In the end, each voter should make a decision according to their best assessment of the rival office-seekers. Though voting may seem like the solitary act of private individuals standing in voting booths with the curtain drawn, deliberative voters recognize that during campaigns, they are part of a social process. Voters should take the time to talk with people who back other parties or candidates. Voters should speak plainly and respectfully to one another and try to reflect on the experiences and values that inform the platforms advocated by the political parties and candidates a voter does not presently endorse.

Research on the electoral system shows that most Americans' experience of elections is far from that ideal (Edelman, 1988). One challenge to the deliberative ideal in the context of elections is that incumbents are typically safe because of their fundraising advantage, popular name recognition, and often a lack of competitors in elections (Alford & Brady, 1993; Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1987; Jacobson, 1993; Jacobson, 1997; Jacobson & Kendall, 1981). Even if

an election is competitive, with two or more candidates having a legitimate chance of winning, the question still remains as to the quality of the candidates' campaign discourse (Gastil, 1992; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Scher, 1997) and media coverage of elections (Baker, 2001; Gulati, Just, & Crigler, 2004; Jamieson, 1992; Nimmo & Combs, 1990; Underwood, 2001). These studies offer sharp critiques and paint a dismal picture of the electoral system's ability to embody deliberative ideals.

Similarly, the research on campaign discourse and media coverage implies that voters have access to relatively little high-quality information by which to judge candidates competing for public office. If campaigns and media actually made such poor contributions to electoral deliberation, one would expect many voters to struggle to make careful, reflective judgments when filling out their ballots. Unfortunately, this appears to be the case. Research has found that voters routinely respond to such mundane cues as physical attractiveness, music, and the presence of symbols (such as flags) when judging candidates, especially in an information-poor environment or one filled with ambiguity (Isbell & Ottatti, 2002; Ottati & Deiger, 2002). Other work reports that Americans are highly uninformed about political matters (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996) and hold political views that are rather incoherent (see for example, Zaller, 1992; Page & Shapiro, 1992).

Many scholars and reformers have proposed changes to the electoral process that, essentially, aim to make it more deliberative. Some of these proposals include attempting to change rules about voting (Farrell, 2001) or campaign finance (Makinson & Goldstein, 1996) to decrease the some of the advantages of incumbency, personal wealth, and the narrow range of viewpoints that effectively mobilize large donors. More ambitious recommendations such as "deliberation day" (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2004) and citizen electoral panels (Gastil, 2000; see also Burnheim, 1989; Crosby, 2003; Leib, 2004) offer electoral system reform suggestions that are grounded in citizen deliberation.

Government Decision Making

What a deliberative electoral process would yield, theoretically, is a relatively deliberative representative government—one that asks of itself at least as much as it asks of voters when it assigns them the task of choosing its elected leaders. In a governmental context, deliberation ought to include both how legislative bodies consider issues and the agenda-setting process that determines how issues are prioritized.

Table 4 identifies key features of both agenda setting and issue consideration as they ought to be practiced by an ideal legislative body. For example, consider the "Weigh pros and cons" aspect of deliberative analysis. In the agenda setting phase, the charge for a deliberative legislative body is to consider the relative human and ecological cost of setting one issue aside to address another. If it chooses to debate a trivial, symbolic issue and simultaneously dodges an important yet politically contentious issue, the assembly has failed to deliberate adequately on its agenda. Once a given issue is on the legislature's agenda, then this criterion instead requires the legislature to honestly assess the long-term impact of proposed legislation and its alternatives. Now the alternatives are different solutions to the problem under discussion—not alternative issues vying for a slot on the agenda.

Another important difference between Table 4 and descriptions of deliberation in other contexts concerns the unique role of public representatives. Representatives have a specific constituency on whose behalf they speak, but those same constituents often expect them to think and act in terms of larger public good—beyond even the boundaries of a representative's particular district or political base. From a deliberative perspective, the ultimate task of the larger legislative body is to serve the greater public's interest (in this case, that of the nation), but individual legislators will sometimes be torn between representing their state constituents and the nation as a whole.

Table 4

Key Features of Legislative Deliberation

Analytic Process	**Agenda Setting Actions**	**Issue Consideration Actions**
Create Information Base	Maintain a reliable and broad research base that can identify emerging social, economic, and environmental problems.	In committee, carefully study the issue being considered, getting information from reliable sources.
Prioritize Key Values	Identify the public's core values and interests, not merely those that are expressed most often.	Acknowledge the full range of values and considerations relevant to an issue, not just the most obvious ones.
Identify Solutions	Consider the full range of problems that need to be addressed, not just ones that receive the most attention.	Avoid latching onto a single solution. Instead, develop a range of alternative pieces of legislation.
Weigh Solutions	Consider the relative human and ecological cost of setting one issue aside to address another.	Honestly assess the long-term impact of proposed legislation and its alternatives.
Make Best Decision	Prioritize issues on the agenda based on which ones most need to be addressed.	Make the decision that is in the public's best interest, whatever the political cost.
Social Process	**Agenda Setting and/or Issue Consideration Actions**	
Speaking Opportunities	Ensure that every point of view gets expressed clearly during committee hearings and floor debate, including some opportunity for voices outside the legislature.	
Mutual Comprehension	Avoid speaking in coded language or unnecessary abstraction. Make sure all voting members understand one another.	
Consideration	Reflect on the experiences and values of legislators who are undecided or who do not vote the same as you do.	
Respect	Committee sessions and floor debate should maintain a professional decorum. Criticism should be substantive, not personal.	

In the same way, prioritizing key values refers in Table 4 to the broader public—not just one's personal values, or those of one's constituents. In practice, the legislature will be doing its job if individual members bring different and complementary voices into its deliberation. However, the point is to bring to bear the full range of values and concerns and arrive at a deliberative judgment as to how to weigh those in the course of studying an issue under consideration by the legislature. Doing this conscientiously is one of the best ways legislators can *represent* the interests of their varied (and shared) constituencies. Finally, representatives in an ideal model ought to act as role models for deliberation.

Probably as a result of its profound consequences for public life, legislative deliberation differs from day-to-day discussion in the degree to which its process becomes *codified* in rules and procedures (Sturgis, 1988). Formal rules, such as *Robert's Rules of Order* (Robert, 1990), and well-established norms shape both for the analytic and social aspects of deliberation in representative bodies that have endured through many generations of members. In sum, legislative deliberation, as well as executive and judicial deliberation, is a special context because it involves public officials working on behalf of a larger people. These officials have a sacred trust to look beyond their particular perspectives and to consider the larger public good while comporting themselves as models of professional, respectful debate and discussion.

Some research on legislative interaction investigates the social and analytic aspects of deliberation. Uslaner (2000) shows a steady decline of civility in congressional discourse, which has real significance for policymaking by making compromise increasingly difficult. Burkhalter's (1997, 2007) research on congressional floor debates show that both parties' speeches lack substantive content that would further the deliberative ideal. Rather than engaging in the analytic processes of the deliberative model, Burkhalter argues, congressional speakers repeat arguments that fall in line with their pre-established talking points and use symbolic language that serves to narrow the policy options seen as legitimate. Bessette's (1994) case

studies indicate that if there is deliberation in Congress, or other legislatures generally, it is likely to occur in the quieter chambers of the committee rooms.

If it causes one dismay to see such a bleak portrait of deliberation in the legislative branch, one might hope to find deliberative moments and practices within the executive and judicial branches of government. These are understudied by political communication scholars, but past research sheds some insight into these domains.

The executive branch engages in extensive collection and analysis of policy information that can help educate policy makers and advocates as well as mobilize support for a policy (Bessette, 1994). Executive authority may pose a challenge to deliberative ideals, but it is possible that the executive can set aside her authority for the duration of a group discussion and let the group draw on the wisdom and insight of all of those present. Yet, Janis (1982) shows that under the wrong circumstances, group of well-intentioned and highly capable experts, policy advisors, and executives can devolve into a kind of discussion that invariably leads to flawed decisions.

Judicial deliberation is particularly difficult to study because justices do not generally discuss cases with one another, and when they do so, they do not generally share it with the public. Consequently, there is very little research on judicial deliberation. Nonetheless, Woodward and Armstrong's (1979) description of the workings of the Supreme Court from 1969 to 1975 shows that it can reach high-minded judgments that pull together diverse points of view, but it can also become less than deliberative. It seems that the judicial branch is susceptible to the same distortions, distractions, and failures that other deliberative bodies experience.

How can a government become more deliberative? There are surely countless ways, but little has been written in the deliberation literature about how to raise the internal workings of government to a higher standard. One consideration is transparency. Kang (2004) argues that The Supreme Court stands as a "cultural exemplum of everything conducive to critical

interaction" whose private meetings represent "the sort of vibrant and potentially extraordinary deliberation idealized by some advocates of deliberative democracy" (2004, p. 324). However, it is questionable whether using closed, secret meetings in other legislative branches would be appropriate and in-line with the goals of deliberative democracy.

As Chambers (2004) argues, there remains a balance between the need for public scrutiny and "transparent" public institutions and space for more private deliberation. A different recommendation for augmenting deliberation in government is to increase public involvement in governmental decision making (Levine, Fung, & Gastil, 2005). The next three topics discussed in this essay —juries, public meetings, and communities— are largely understudied by political communication researchers, yet hold great promise for understanding public involvement in deliberative democracy.

Juries

Serving on a jury is one of the few—if not *the only*—institutionalized opportunity most citizens ever have to practice deliberation as a representative of the government. As a juror, a citizen not only sees the state up close—through the workings of its judicial branch—but actually *becomes* the state, by virtue of the jury's authority to render verdicts and judgments in criminal and civil cases, respectively. In the context of deliberative democracy, Dryzek (2001) argues that "outcomes are legitimate to the extent they receive reflective assent through participation in authentic deliberation by all those subject to the decision in question" (2001, p. 651). The jury system is legitimated, then, because it represents a randomly selected microcosm of the general public itself.

A broadened conception of political communication has room for examinations of the jury. The jury has been the site of many political struggles, whether making judgments of the guilt or innocence of politicians, declaring activists innocent as an act of defiance, upholding

state-sponsored institutionalized racism, reinforcing misogynistic conceptions of rape, or nearly anything else. From petty crimes to murders and billion-dollar civil litigation, juries play a powerful role in the course of American politics.

Whether these juries deliberate in the stronger sense of that word is a question of great importance. In a vernacular sense, all juries "deliberate" because the term deliberation is used by those in the legal system to describe what jurors' do. However, the label for their work does not necessarily coincide completely with conceptual definition of deliberation posed by deliberative scholars (see Sanders, 1997). In this essay we define the deliberative ideal as high-quality jury deliberation, which is described in Table 5.

The analytic components of jury deliberation are quite distinctive because juries have a special kind of task, much of which is pre-set by the court. Jurors passively receive an information base through the argument, evidence, and testimony that attorneys and witnesses present to them. High-quality jury deliberation does not venture beyond the values of justice and the rule of law when weighing the case (see Dwyer, 2002, p. 61), and the range of solutions a jury can consider are only those provided by the court—often nothing more than a choice between guilty and not guilty or finding for the plaintiff or defendant. The evidence either supports or refutes these alternative verdicts or findings, and the jury ultimately must reach a decision that best upholds the law and justice in relation to the facts of the case.

By contrast, the social process in a jury has few restraints and is therefore much like the discussion process described earlier. In a high-quality deliberative process, jurors take turns speaking, address each other in terms they can understand, and consider carefully what each other has to say about the case. Jurors presume one another's honesty and good intentions, even when honestly disagreeing about the facts of a case or the interpretation or application of the relevant legal statutes. Though these criteria are here within the narrow parameters of a legal proceeding, they are essentially the relational qualities of any deliberative discussion.

Table 5

Key Features of High Quality Jury Deliberation

Analytic Process	**Jury Behavior**
Create Information Base	Consider all of the facts and testimony provided during the trial. Avoid adding personal experiences and biases.
Prioritize Key Values	The paramount values are ensuring justice and the rule of law.
Identify Solutions	The judge specifies a range of verdicts and/or sentences or judgment the jury can give. No others are available.
Weigh Solutions	Consider whether each verdict or sentence upholds the relevant laws and serves the larger cause of justice.
Make Best Decision	Follow standards for reasonable doubt and other guidelines to render the appropriate verdict and/or judgment.
Social Process	**Jury Behavior**
Speaking Opportunities	The foreperson and others should ensure a balanced discussion by encouraging quiet and dissenting jurors.
Mutual Comprehension	Speak plainly, and ask for clarification when confused. Ensure understanding of technical evidence or finer points of law.
Consideration	Listen carefully to other jurors, especially when you disagree. Try to understand their unique perspective on the case.
Respect	Presume that each juror is honest and well-intentioned.

One other feature of jury deliberation makes it special. Paradoxically, jury "deliberation" begins before the jurors even get to speak to one another face-to-face. Evidence suggests that jurors process information as it comes up during trial. Pettus (1990) concludes that most jurors begin making their decisions very early in the trial, and Kalven and Zeisel (1966) confirm that jurors routinely make up their mind about a case before leaving the courtroom.

Even if jurors *could* suspend their processing abilities until face-to-face deliberation began, Goodin (2003) argues that the independent judgments individual jurors reach through individual, internal deliberation, may add up to a more sound judgment than the verdict that

would be reached through discussion. With regard to the definition of high-quality jury deliberation, this suggests that it is *appropriate* for jurors to begin their deliberations by processing and reflecting on information as it comes up during the course of the trial. However, this should not lead them to reach fixed judgments, such that they are unwilling to yield their initial judgment as a result of deliberation

When assessing how well juries engage in high-quality deliberation, it is important to consider both the quality of the verdict and the jury's deliberative processes. One finding that has proven consistent across both studies of real and mock juries is that about 90% of the time, a jury ends up with a verdict that a majority of jurors favored before entering the deliberation room (Kalven and Zeisel, 1966; Sandys & Dillehay, 1995). However, Goodin (2003) implies that it is reasonable to expect the majority is more likely than not to have reached a reasonable preliminary verdict.

Regardless of whether the initial majority's view prevails, we can examine the process juries go through and compare it to the definition presented in Table 5. Because juries deliberate in private sessions, closed to researchers, it is difficult to study the interactive processes and assess their meetings. Very few studies have had access to videotaped recordings of real jury deliberations (but see Diamond, Vidmar, Rose, Ellis, & Murphy, 2003). However, mock jury research and field studies using interviews or questionnaire data from actual jurors find that juries tend to be evidence-driven (Diamond et al, 2003; Hastie, Penrod, & Pennington, 1983; Sandys & Dillehay (1995), which approximates the deliberative ideal because it encourages a more thorough analysis of the law and evidence in the trial and allows more space for considering minority arguments about these subjects.

Hans (2000) finds that both mock jurors and actual jurors tend to rate their deliberative experience very positively. Gastil, Burkhalter, and Black (2007) find similar results with jurors reporting high scores on measures of analytic and social components of deliberation. These

studies provide indirect evidence that juries generally make high-quality decisions, that mock juries more often than not follow rigorous, evidence-driven discussion styles, and that jurors recall their experiences as being deliberative. A recent series of studies (Amar, 1995; Gastil, Deess, & Weiser, 2002; Gastil, Deess, Weiser, & Larner, 2006) find a clear overall connection between serving on a jury that successfully deliberates and subsequent civic participation such as voting. Additionally, jury service is related to changes in jurors' attitudes toward governmental institutions and fellow citizens (Gastil, Black, Deess, & Leighter, 2008).

This is, in the end, a kind of indirect evidence that juries *are engaging in meaningful deliberation* in that jurors not only rate their deliberations favorably but also change their behaviors in a way that shows a lasting impact of this experience. If the jury is recognized as perhaps the most explicitly deliberative public institution in American government, it is likely to be understood as more than a mere choice of how to administer justice in the courts. Though the jury is not often a political body in the cheap sense of partisan political conflict, the deliberative perspective highlights its vital role in a deliberative democratic society, as a school where citizens learn to deliberate and a model for making decisions in public meetings.

Public Meetings

Meetings have long been at the heart of democratic systems, and many current public meetings are based on an archetype from the New England Town Meetings (Mansbridge, 1983; McComas, 2005; Townsend, 2006) where townspeople govern themselves through regular meetings of the full electorate. Table 6 displays the characteristics of an ideal deliberative town meeting, combining the ideals of conversation and discussion with the deliberative legislative and jury models described above.

Table 6

Key Features of Deliberative Public Meetings

Analytic Process	**Meeting Behaviors**
Create Information Base	Combine professional expertise with personal experiences to better understand the problem's nature and impact.
Prioritize Key Values	Integrate the public's articulation of its core values with technical and legal expressions of costs-and-benefits.
Identify Solutions	Identify both conventional and innovative solutions, including governmental and non-governmental means.
Weigh Solutions	Systematically apply the public's priorities to the alternative solutions, emphasizing the most significant tradeoffs.
Make Best Decision	Identify the solution that best addresses the problem, potentially drawing on multiple, reinforcing approaches.
Social Process	**Meeting Behaviors**
Speaking Opportunities	Mix unstructured, informal discussion in smaller groups with more structured discussion in larger groups.
Mutual Comprehension	Ensure that public participants can articulate general technical points. Ensure that experts are hearing the public's voice.
Consideration	Listen with equal care to both officials and the general public. Encourage the public to speak in their authentic voice.
Respect	Presume that the general public is qualified to be present. Presume officials will act in the public's best interest.

The public meeting's analytic process relies both on "professional research" and "personal experiences" to establish its information base. This language stresses that there is a role in this process for both the content expert and lay citizen. Prioritizing the public's central concerns and aspirations requires integrating the public's articulation of its core values with technical and legal expressions social, economic, and environmental costs-and-benefits. A successful public meeting facilitates a back-and-forth between citizen and expert that can move

both the public and policymakers in attendance to a level of values-clarification never before reached. In the same way, this interplay can lead to rigorous, thorough assessment of pros and cons that yields a well-informed and reflective decision.

The other aspects of the deliberative process in public meetings also balance expert, official, and public perspectives. For instance, public meetings often need to identify both conventional and innovative solutions, including governmental and non-governmental means of addressing the problem. Also, a decision that incorporates both official policy and informal social commitments presumes a healthy working relationship between public officials and the larger community, and the social process of a deliberative public meeting should strengthen that relationship. In this sense, mutual comprehension and considering other ideas and experiences refer to communication *between* citizens and public officials.

Public meetings are an important, if understudied, context of public talk (for a review, see Tracy & Dimock, 2004). How a public meeting is designed has great significance for what kind of talk takes place. Different configurations of participants and varied discussion procedures constitute different solutions to the problems posed by public meetings, particularly the challenge of balancing public values and experience with expert insight and the perspectives of public officials. When public agencies or officials seek to interact with the public in formal meetings, the gatherings that take place are often unremarkable in their design and consequences. The most common form of such meetings is the "public hearing."

In practice, public hearings routinely fail to resemble even a crude form of deliberation. Often conducted as a straightforward way of meeting federal, state, or local public meeting requirements, a typical hearing has citizens take turns speaking before a panel of government agency employees and elected officials. Webler and Renn (1995) suggest that public hearings usually fail to produce deliberative and influential public deliberation both because of their timing within the policymaking process and the "structure of discourse within the public hearing

process" (1995, p. 21). McComas (2003a, 2003b) supports this observation by finding that people are more satisfied with public meetings when they believe organizers are genuinely interested in their comments, but overall citizens hold very low expectations of public meetings and officials.

The structure of discourse at public hearings is a more subtle problem. Even when an elected official convenes a hearing before making a decision, the typical public hearing encourages a non-deliberative process by constraining public expression to a series of statements and limiting official response to periodic counter-points. Hearings also tend to have unduly technical issue framings that make it difficult for well-meaning citizens to address officials in their own terms (Checkoway, 1981; Fiorino, 1990).

This portrait of public hearings should not be taken to imply that conventional public meetings are always non-deliberative. But who attends, how they interact with officials, and what results are often not worth the considerable expenditure devoted to run-of-the-mill public meetings. Given that many public agencies are *required* to hold public meetings, it is important to understand how one can design more deliberative, productive meetings. This very question has sparked the development of a variety of public meeting processes. Some of these aim to improve the kinds of meetings citizens can have with public officials such as the America Speaks' "21st Century Town Hall Meetings" (Lukensmeyer, Goldman, & Brigham, 2005).

Other processes have tried to elevate the practice of public meetings by making citizens the central focus of the meetings themselves. Some of the most prominent examples of citizen-centered public meetings are Deliberative Polls (Fishkin, 1988; 1991; 1995; Fishkin & Farrar, 2005; Fishkin & Luskin, 1999, Hart & Jarvis, 1999; Merkle, 1996; Smith, 1999) and Citizen Juries (Crosby, 1995; Crosby & Nethercutt, 2005). These meetings bring together a random, demographically representative group of citizens to deliberate about public issues. Both types of forums gather a microcosm of the community, provide high-quality information, and are

designed to minimize staff bias and produce a fair agenda. The results of the meetings, then, "begin to approximate what the public *would think*, given a better opportunity to consider the questions at hand" (Fishkin, 1995, p. 43).

All of these designs aim to create a more deliberative public process that can restore public faith in governmental institutions (see Halverson, 2003; Wiseman, Mooney, Berry, & Tang, 2003). There is considerable momentum at the present time to experiment with deliberative innovations such as these. Within government agencies, there is an interest in holding public meetings that obtain more reflective public input and improve relationships with the general public (Cheng & Fiero, 2005). Moreover, there is considerable public support for the idea of citizen-centered deliberation, which surveys show citizens find an attractive idea (Gastil & Crosby, 2006). Though it is impossible to predict which of the many designs becomes conventional in the years to come, ongoing research will be necessary to assess the changing character of these processes as they move from inspired reforms to normative practice.

Communities

One more subtle factor promoting deliberative approaches to public meetings is the deliberative qualities of the communities in which these practices are emerging. Underlying this claim is a presumption that one can speak of a deliberative community or society. Table 7 defines the ideal analytic and social aspects of deliberation as they exist in the context of communities. Consider how such a community maintains its information base and keeps in touch with its core values. The first requirement is that the community maintains two forms of ongoing self-assessment. It should have semi-formal associations or organizations that periodically assess the community's demographics, infrastructure, and social, economic, environmental, and political challenges. In addition, however, the community should also have dense informal social networks that convey similar information on a continuous basis.

Table 7

Key Features of a Deliberative Community

Analytic Process	**Community Actions**
Create Information Base	Maintain a rigorous self-awareness through formal community assessment and informal feedback channels.
Prioritize Key Values	Ensure an infrastructure of persons, practices, and institutions that articulate a community's values.
Identify Solutions	Look to people with different expertise and perspectives to introduce new ideas for how to address a problem.
Weigh Solutions	Consider how each potential solution would impact different community members, as well as the outside world.
Make Best Decision	Make informed decision that best reflects the community's core values.
Social Process	**Community Actions**
Speaking Opportunities	Maintain both private and open public/quasi-public spaces.
Mutual Comprehension	Cultivate a minimum level of shared language and symbols. Educate members on more complex information and ideas.
Consideration	Promote the creative expression of different perspectives and experiences to help promote perspective taking.
Respect	Encourage a strong sense of community so members see each other as having some shared identity, even when disagreeing.

The community should also ensure an infrastructure of persons, practices, and institutions that articulate a community's values, whether broadly shared or diverse. This includes a mix of different events, processes, and people. A community can honor and reaffirm its core values through civic holidays, through theater and art that conveys moral arguments, and its schools.

A deliberative community's values are sustained by a wealth of democratic leaders, who not only serve as articulate spokespersons for the community but also are capable of empowering their fellow community members to discover and raise their own voice (see Gastil, 1994). A

broad, diverse leadership cadre can allow a community to sustain a rich, ongoing conversation about its core needs, desires, and aspirations. With a solid information base and a lively discussion of values, a community can then work through its common problems.

Finally, the social process of community deliberation also emphasizes community infrastructure. The community must have ways of bringing together public officials, experts, and lay citizens. There must be a strong tradition of innovation and creativity to spur new approaches to longstanding problems and reward, rather than punish, those who challenge conventions. Evans and Boyte (1992) find that "free spaces" have been essential to the success of social movements in the U.S., and these public gathering spaces are essential in a deliberative community. Such spaces allow people to learn how to take responsibility for themselves, work effectively with fellow citizens, and develop the self-confidence and basic communication skills necessary for active participation in public deliberation. To ensure an adequate distribution of speaking opportunities, a community should maintain open public and quasi-public "third places" (Drucker & Gumpert, 1996; Oldenburg, 1993) in which people can congregate, but also ensure private spaces in which like-minded people can caucus.

When defined this broadly, deliberation could encompass an unwieldy stack of studies on the character of community life. However, there are some serious challenges to creating and maintaining deliberative communities. One challenge comes from the community's civic culture and conversational norms (Chikwanha-Dzenga, Masunungure, & Madingira, 2001), which can place subtle constraints on how members talk about political issues. A second set of challenges comes from the institutional infrastructure available for deliberative communities such as schools and civil society. Civil society can draw private citizens into public life and equip them for deliberation through civic education, but these voluntary associations can suppress deliberation by remaining divorced from larger political concerns (Eliasoph, 1996; Skocpol, 2003).

Organizations like the Study Circles Resource Center promote deliberation to help communities transform the way they make decisions about public problems (see Scully & McCoy, 2005). Other communities have made efforts to establish deliberative governance (see Carlson, & Kennedy, 2005) by embedding deliberation into the most important local associations, institutions, and wider network of community norms and attitudes (see Fagotto & Fung , 2006). Although stable, enduring deliberation is currently far from the norm, these communities provide hope that such deliberative communities can thrive.

Conclusion

In touring through a wide range of political communication research, as well as studies from related disciplines, we have endeavored to demonstrate that deliberation has the power to tie together a remarkably broad, disconnected literature on how people discuss issues in the public sphere. From government decision making to informal community conversations, from polarized elections to unified juries, from diffuse mass media to focused public meetings, we hope to have shown that the singular idea of deliberation can weave together a vast array of scholars' empirical research and practical critiques. In this spirit, we aim to demonstrate that the *Journal of Public Deliberation* can be more than a niche serial; rather, it can help to define a larger field of scholarship.

Theoretical Implications and Concerns

However, the success of our project can not be determined simply by showing that we can arrange the scattered fragments of political communication research to form an aesthetically pleasant mosaic. Rather, this effort will prove worthwhile in the long-run only if it manages to guide future theory, research, and practice.

In theoretical terms, the perspective we advocate underscores the conceptual underpinnings of the wider array of concepts deployed in political communication research.

Thus, framing, persuasion, message perception, candidate debates, legislative maneuvering, industrial regulation, and the multitude of other concepts can be connected back to one or more larger deliberative conceptual frameworks. This is not to say that such concepts are *reducible* to more abstract deliberative ones; rather, the broader deliberative framework can demonstrate how a particular mid-range theory fits into a larger theoretical project concerning the practice of deliberative democracy. Every year, the practice of empirical political communication research in these various theories contributes to an enriched understanding of the degree to which a given political system achieves—or fails to achieve—a deliberative process. More importantly, the empirical work clarifies what structures and practices serve to promote or undermine deliberation.

One might object to this approach on the grounds that empirical researchers would prefer a neutral, objective stance, rather than being harnessed to a normative critique, such as deliberative democratic theory. In this view, those who connect empirical theory with normative critique unnecessarily burden the former with a value-laded critical theoretical project. After all, not every theorist need undertake the kind interlocking normative-empirical projects that Habermas (1979, 1989, 1998) has chosen to pursue.

This concern, however, is misplaced, as one's neutral empirical work commonly has normative significance, even if the researcher had no ethical or moral motive. All that the deliberative perspective does is demonstrate that the normative significance of a field of research is clearer when it is organized in a deliberative democratic framework. This is, in fact, only a small step from the more general concern with a liberal (or undefined) model of democracy that was often viewed as a far more loose umbrella extending over the field (e.g., Bennett & Entman, 2001; Blumer & Gurevitch, 1995; Swanson, 1998). Though democracy is a widely-popular form of self-government, it is still a moral stance to acknowledge that one hopes that one's work helps us understand how to nurture and develop democratic regimes. The focus on *deliberative*

democratic regimes is a more specific concern, but we believe it is one consistent with the attention researchers have given to the development and interchange of public opinion, beyond the participatory democratic emphasis on its expression and deployment in adversarial politics (Hauptmann, 2001; Mutz, 2006).

Another concern might be raised that the deliberative framework altogether ignores other forms of public discourse, such as debate or advocacy. This concern about deliberation has been launched by both theorists (e.g., Sanders, 1997) and activists, as documented by Levine and Nierras (2007). The approach to deliberation that we offer, however, is designed to appreciate the role that many forms of discourse play in a larger democratic process. For example, high-quality candidate debates are an important part of a deliberative election, even though the debates themselves are not built to be a deliberative discussion among the contestants. Similarly, an activist organization's civil disobedience is unlikely to appear a deliberative practice, but when one steps back, it might constructively contribute to a mediated process whereby the public and elites deliberate on what issues should be on the forefront of their agenda. In both cases, whether the action contributes to or detracts from a wider deliberation is important, whether or not it has been the conscious or explicit concern of the researchers studying those phenomena.

Yet another concern might be that we are privileging communicative practices over other political and legal institutions that are vital to democracy. This is not so much an omission as it a conscious decision, which stems from the fact that we endeavor to organize the field of *political communication*, not political science, democratic theory, or public affairs. In fact, the deliberative focus helps foreground *communication* more effectively than does the looser concern about communication and a less-refined conception of liberal democracy. Whereas Barber (1984) once bemoaned the near-absence of "talk" from liberal theories of democracy, we now see a flourishing field that puts communication at the heart of democratic theory, even while appreciating that there is more to democracy than communication, per se.

Implications for Research and Practice

From the researcher's perspective, what we hope to have made clear is that the *impulse* for the bulk of political communication scholarship is to assess and critique contemporary practices in deliberative terms. Whether scrutinizing the bias in conventional media or assessing the quality of discourse in a public meeting, communication scholars measure the approximation of the deliberative ideal in these settings. Often doing so unconsciously, however, research tends to concentrate on particular aspects of deliberation to the neglect of others. Having our theoretical framework in mind can help researchers make more judicious choices about what aspect of any deliberative context merits their future attention.

Along these lines, two candidates for more attention in future research are the identification of underlying values and the maintenance of respect in public interaction. First, too little attention is paid to the evaluative criteria people use to make decisions in public settings. The likely reason is that our values are taken-for-granted—the starting point for a conversation rather than its focus. But Warren (1992) and other political theorists have questioned whether, in fact, deliberative experiences can transform even our sense of priorities among competing values—raising the *public* good, for instance, higher in our estimation than our taken-for-granted self-interest. Second, research would do well to focus more on the role of respect and other relational aspects of political communication. Recent concerns have sparked some research on civility in political discourse (e.g., Mutz & Reeves, 2005), and research along these lines could help us understand the sources of both public cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson's , 1997; Moy & Pfau, 2000) *and* the public trust and mutual respect that contributes to a society's reservoir of social capital (Putnam, 2000).

As for the practice of political communication, the deliberative perspective is an eminently practical stance for critique. So long as one upholds the ideal of deliberation as a critical yardstick and holds no illusions of actual practice fully approaching the ideal, it can

continue to inspire and guide reforms to public meeting designs, elections, and the many other political communication contexts. What our theoretical synthesis does for this critique is make clearer the *scope* of the deliberative project. It is useful for individual projects, such as the National Issues Forums, public journalism, or Deliberation Day, to have a particular focus, but in the long run, it will be helpful to draw out the connections among these different efforts. How can a new form of public meeting help to build a deliberative community? How can media reform improve elections? Could jury deliberation improve the quality of our public conversations about justice? Showing the common threads running through each context makes clearer the importance of asking questions such as these.

In conclusion, we hope that this essay helps the field of political communication to crystallize around a central organizing theme. There are likely some research projects within that larger field that would not fit within the deliberative framework, though we found powerful connections in every corner of the field that we investigated. Also, the deliberative theoretical perspective nudges into the field contexts and topics, such as the jury, that other scholars may continue to believe fall outside the field. In the spirit of deliberation, we welcome such disagreements, and their exploration will help move the field forward. Without a clearer organizing principle, however, we fear that political communication will not realize its potential to be more than a constellation of loosely-related investigations. We see a field that has, sometimes unknowingly, undertaken a critical-empirical project—an effort to advance society toward a more deliberative practice of self-government. In the end, it is our hope that our small theoretical project, carried out through this essay, aids in the realization of that larger political endeavor.

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