When War Adversaries Talk: The Experimental Effect of Engagement Rules on Postconflict Deliberation

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ABSTRACT

A set of discussion groups including leftist ex-guerrillas and rightist ex-paramilitaries in Colombia shows the limits for democratic deliberation in postconflict societies, but also points to ways that outcomes closer to the deliberative ideal might be obtained. A total of 342 ex-combatants agreed to sit down and talk politics under a number of experimental conditions, using three different protocols of engagement. Results show that consensus rule fosters simultaneously a more reasoned and common-good–oriented, and less self-interested type of discussion when compared to majority rule and unstructured "free talk." Nevertheless, while it might be desirable to promote a better quality of deliberation in divided societies, it does not necessarily prevent antagonists' tendency to polarize.

How can we promote democratic deliberation about a common future among former adversaries of war? Advocates of deliberative theory claim that normative debate has reached such a level of conceptual maturity that it is no longer possible to think of democracy in the twenty-first century without considering the deliberative component (Bohman 1998; Dryzek 2000). But whether deliberation is wholly either feasible or desirable and what effects it has nevertheless are still an unresolved controversy (Popkin 1992; Posner 2004; Przeworski 1998; Raz 1998; Shapiro 1999; Stokes 1998).

Understanding deliberation as a specific type of qualified dialogue, defined by criteria such as free participation, respect, argumentation, common-good orientation, and openness to others' interventions, sets the standard considerably high and raises doubts about its feasibility (Steiner 2012). Can people deliberate? And if so, under what conditions is it possible to promote high-quality exchanges among former antagonists?

Existing literature has identified a series of conditions under which high levels of deliberation might emerge: nonpublicity (Chambers 2003), appropriate levels of information about issues at stake, clarity of norms and expectations for the discussion, and the enforcement of consensus, as compared to other decisionmaking pro-

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cedures. At the empirical level, consensus has been shown to be the most promising condition (Steiner et al. 2004). However, the effect of consensus on deliberative levels has been shown to work only at the institutional level and not so much at the level of individuals.

Furthermore, there is no evidence as to whether consensus rules are actually effective in deeply polarized contexts, such as deliberation among former enemies of war (O'Flynn 2007; Ugarriza and Caluwaerts 2014). The risk of worsening existing divides lingers in such contexts, given that interfactional discussions might stir emotions in an unproductive way, as has been shown in a number of studies (Gastil et al. 2008; Hansen 2007; Hibbing 2002; Mendelberg and Oleske 2000; Wojcieszak and Price 2010).

Colombia represents an ideal case for systematically testing the arguments about the feasibility of promoting deliberation in deeply divided settings, since it has featured protracted political instability and violence yet is transitioning currently toward a postconflict situation.[1]

This article not only describes the limits of real-life deliberation in deeply divided societies but also contributes to specifying conditions under which improvements could be stimulated. In particular, it discusses the promising avenue of consensus rules as a plausible way to achieve the latter. It begins by presenting the relationship between the challenges of overcoming both a violent conflict and democratic deficits, as seen in the Colombian case. Then it outlines an experimental research design and empirical strategy to test specific institutional rules that might be expected to enable deliberative democratic behavior. Results and a discussion of deliberative consequences follow.

PROTRACTED CONFLICT AND DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT: INTERTWINED UNFAVORABLE CONDITIONS

Deliberation experiences in Northern Ireland, Belgium, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are immediate antecedents to this work. A 2007 experience involving debate between Protestant and Catholic parents about school reform in the conflict-affected town of Omagh, Northern Ireland provides some initial clues as to what to expect from deliberation in deeply divided societies. After a full day of debates, there were reports of attitudinal change toward a more positive appreciation of, and trust in, the other side (Fishkin 2009). However, as in similar experiences, it is unknown whether discussions came close to or far from the ideal of deliberation, or whether deliberative quality could be reliably linked to the observed attitude changes.

A second example is provided by a series of debates about the future of Belgium in 2008. Discussions among 83 mainly French- or Dutch-speaking individuals, who were invited from a fairly representative pool, described more clearly what to expect in terms of deliberation quality from conflict antagonists (Caluwaerts 2012). Only a small proportion of interventions constituted interruptions of ongoing debate or

included either foul or disrespectful language. But this sort of neutrality did not prevent a high level of interaction between participants from taking place. In terms of justification, slightly less than half of the interventions contained a rational argument, and almost a quarter more justified positions through examples or narratives. It was interesting that barely 6 percent of the interventions made reference to the common good, and only a few more referred to abstract principles. In virtually no cases did positions change, although about half the interventions acknowledged the value of the arguments heard.

A third example is presented by 12 experimental group discussions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2008. There, 40 voluntary Serb and Bosnjak participants in Srebrenica and 35 Serb and Croatian participants in Stolac accepted an invitation to join a discussion about the future of the country (Steiner 2012). Only about a fifth of the participants remained silent during discussions on the future of their communities, and practically no interruptions were recorded. Within the 6 Srebrenica groups, no justification was given in almost 80 percent of interventions in which an opinion was expressed; in cases in which a justification was put forward, it tended to be a narrative rather than a reason. Only marginally did participants explicitly refer to the common good or express respect or disrespect toward others or their arguments.

These examples suggest that while deliberation is feasible in divided societies, we should not set our expectations high. And the legacy of war and the divisions that it created in Colombia cannot be underestimated.

In the Colombian case, people's detachment from the political system—or relationships forged through illegal and clientelistic networks—coupled with the inability of institutions to promote well-being and physical security have contributed to the protracted nature of the Colombian armed conflict (Leal and Dávila 1991; Martz 1997). But the country's failure to develop as a cohesive political community alongside long-lasting cycles of violence can be seen as two sides of the same problem: while the conflict affects political stability, the lack of a profoundly democratic system generates conditions for violence (Bejarano and Pizarro 2002; Pécaut 1991; Sánchez 1991).

Figures from the Colombian Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica estimate that more than 5 million people were victims of human rights violations related to the armed conflict between 1985 and 2012 (CNMH 2013a). The prolonged conflict has caused one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the world. Between 4.7 and 5.5 million people remained internally displaced in Colombia in 2013; in other words, between 10 and 11 percent of the total population (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center 2013). According to the Colombian government, soldiers and civilians composed the largest number of people in the world killed or hurt by landmines, a weapon of choice for insurgents, with between 6,000 and 10,000 victims recorded between 1990 and 2013. The war economy also encouraged rebels and war spoilers to turn to kidnapping for a major source of income, with 39,000 cases reported between 1970 and 2010 (CNMH 2013b). Latin American Public Opinion Project surveys between 2004 and 2012 steadily show that about a third of Colom-

bians claim to have been severely affected by the armed conflict, such as by losing a relative or being displaced (LAPOP 2012).

Colombia's history of war is accompanied by people's diminished ability to trust others or tolerate opposing views. According to the World Values Survey, only 14 percent of respondents in 2005 believed that most people in the country could be trusted (the figure was 11 percent in 1998), and just 49 percent said they trusted their neighbors either a little or completely (World Values Survey 2005). Since minimal levels of trust are regarded as a favorable condition for deliberative dialogue, Colombia is far from being an ideal context. Furthermore, by the time the experimental groups met, in 2008, the LAPOP political tolerance measure was at a five-year low; about 38 percent of those interviewed revealed themselves to be intolerant of minorities and antagonists. This figure remained practically the same in 2012 (LAPOP 2012).

When studying deliberation in contexts of political instability, social grievances, division, and violence, Colombian ex-combatants represent an appropriate target population. Between 2004 and 2013, about 35,000 former paramilitaries and 22,000 ex-guerrillas demobilized, the former on orders from commanders who negotiated a legal settlement with the Colombian government in 2003, and the latter by deserting individually from groups that were still active.[2] In general terms, authorities treat them all as a special population group that comes under a state-administered assistance program.[3]

AN EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH DESIGN

Deliberation can be generally understood as "debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinion in which participants are willing to revise their preferences in the light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants" (Chambers 2003, 309). Operationalization of this concept has led to the identification of five major conditions that characterize genuine deliberation, and under which opinions should ideally be produced: unconstrained participation, respect, rational justification, common good appeals, and willingness to yield to the force of better arguments (Steiner 2012).[4]

We can set aside the notion that some political discussions are genuinely deliberative while others are not and instead assume that all political interactions may lie closer or farther from a hypothetical ideal in which all five core elements are perfectly met. As a result, the research team was able to detect in our ex-combatant debates both highly deliberative and nondeliberative features occurring in an iterative way. The measurement strategy used by the research team allowed us to describe whether a participant was able to meet high standards at least once during the discussion and also to abstain from showing blatantly nondeliberative features. Deliberative criteria deal not with the content of people's discourses but with the formal way they engage in such discourses. Therefore, the analytical strategy in this project focused on procedures—for example, participant behavior—rather than content.

Skeptical views of such a deliberative model claim that it demands too much from participants and therefore requires seemingly perfect citizens (Michelman 1997; Walzer 1999). Poorly educated people situated at the extremes of violent ideological cleavages, then, would hardly be good candidates for such an ideal performance from a deliberative point of view. Given the normative benchmark and the mixed-bag evaluation of deliberative experiences in other divided societies, we expect participants to deliberate in a way that does not come close to the ideal.

Deliberation should ideally be connected to a decisionmaking process. Consensus orientation in noncompetitive political systems, as opposed to majority rule in competitive systems, seems to have a positive effect on the overall quality of debates (Steiner et al. 2004). Also, consensus rules in citizen deliberation, rather than majority vote, favor participants' levels of respect and information (Setälä et al. 2010). Similarly, psychological work by Kameda (1991) conclude that consensus is a more favorable decisionmaking rule for purposes of argumentative openness than majority rule, as the former demands a greater effort to convince and include others. Moreover, deliberative works suggest that consensus helps to predispose participants to focus on common ground rather than discussing divisive issues, which affects discursive dynamics (Karpowitz and Mansbridge 2005). Two hypotheses might help determine how decision rules affect deliberative behavior.

H_1. *Participants in decision-bound discussions under consensus rule should show higher deliberative levels than those in discussions under majority rule.*

H_2. *Participants in decision-bound discussions should show overall higher levels of deliberation than those instructed to discuss freely.*

The experimental design on which we relied assumes that it is possible to create almost identical worlds in which both the observable and the nonobservable characteristics of individuals are randomly distributed. Once these identical worlds are created, the experimenter manipulates a key variable of interest that should theoretically affect the dependent variable. Since all experimental groups are statistically identical at the beginning of the experiment, any systematic difference in the outcome variable at the end of the experiment can be confidently attributed to the effect of the manipulated variable (Morton and Williams 2010; Shadish et al. 2002).

A two-step random assignment guarantees that every participant and every group has the same probability of being assigned to either experimental condition. As is standard in the field, we first randomly distributed our 342 participants into different discussion groups. This way, we ensured that all possible individual-level differences were randomly distributed and no group was systematically biased in terms of observable or nonobservable characteristics. Then we also randomly assigned different experimental conditions to each of the groups. This means that all groups had the same probability of being assigned to any experimental condition.

Twenty-eight discussion groups were organized according to a 2 × 2 factorial design, with 3 different experimental conditions. Fourteen discussion groups were not instructed to reach a decision at the end of their debates; their participants con-

stituted our control group. The other 14 groups were administered two treatment protocols: half of the treatment groups were instructed to reach a collective decision by consensus while the other half were asked to hold a majority vote. Apart from rules of discussion, no other treatment was included, such as booklets, informational materials, further instructions, or moderation.

Sampling Procedures and Validity

From May through June 2008, researchers followed an intense agenda to visit the official Colombian Agency for Reintegration's service centers and other non-ACR facilities where demobilized ex-combatants regularly gathered for their mandatory bimonthly psychosocial sessions. There, participants were encouraged to take part in the upcoming series of deliberative exercises, and their questions about the exercises were answered. Also, we applied a short preliminary test, which collected basic data.[5]

Every group session comprised between 10 and 60 participants. Researchers addressed a total of 40 groups comprising 2,573 ex-combatants. The remaining reintegrating ex-combatants in Bogotá, a total of 507 people, did not attend any of the sessions but were later informed about the project by their respective tutors.[6] Thus, researchers were able to approach personally 84 percent of the total population and indirectly the remaining 16 percent. From August through November, researchers came back to the mandatory psychosocial sessions to recruit all participants who wanted to take part in the discussions. Experiments then took place in nearby rooms in the same facilities.

While participation in the bimonthly sessions with psychologists was mandatory, the ex-combatants were free to choose either to join our discussion groups or remain in their regular sessions. In coordination with the ACR, we offered an incentive for participants to join our exercise: those who participated would have to attend the mandatory sessions for a month only once instead of twice. This incentive translated into reduced transportation expenses, as well as free time to dedicate to other activities. Tutors allowed researchers to go to every session and invite participants with no restriction or vetoes for any given person.

A total of 644 ex-combatants participated in our research project through the preliminary test surveys in Bogotá.[7] Of these, 342 participants—58 percent of whom were ex-guerrillas and 42 percent ex-paramilitaries—agreed to join discussion groups and were distributed to the 28 treatment and control groups. The ones who filled out a preliminary test and later decided not to join a discussion group are treated here as dropouts. Groups were balanced in terms of ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries.

Before discussions started, researchers asked the 342 participants to fill out a pretest that would serve to check attitudes toward the rival faction, as well as level of agreement with the former armed group, as measured right before the experiment began. Then the control groups were given the instruction, "You will discuss freely, with no need to reach any agreement or come up with any concrete proposals." The treatment groups, meanwhile, were told, "You will discuss freely, but at the end of the session you will have to agree on a series of recommendations for the Office of

Table 1. Ex-combatants' Baseline Means and Standard Deviations
by Experimental Group

	No Decision		Vote		Consensus	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Age (in years)	31.340	8.877	29.615	7.164	32.090	7.725
Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)	1.191	0.394	1.169	0.377	1.142	0.353
Education (in years)	6.047	3.382	6.823	3.354	6.733	3.900
Faction (1 = ex-guerrilla, 0 = ex-paramilitary)	0.585	0.494	0.600	0.493	0.464	0.503
Years after demobilization	2.714	1.500	2.625	1.088	2.894	1.268
Agreement with armed group (1–5 scale)[a]	2.928	1.096	2.887	1.102	3.196	1.045
Negative attitudes toward leftists (1–10 scale)[b]	7.132	1.915	7.145	1.754	6.964	1.908
Negative attitudes toward rightists (1–10 scale)[b]	6.201	1.637	6.737	2.024	6.607	1.744
N	160		74		66	

[a] Item included Likert-type response categories 1 = agree strongly, 2 = agree, 3 = neither, I do not know, 4 = disagree, and 5 = disagree strongly.
[b] Scales were built by adding two Likert-type items with response categories 1 = agree strongly, 2 = agree, 3 = neither, I do not know, 4 = disagree, and 5 = disagree strongly. Items asked about perceptions on how leftists and rightists groups affected security and community life in general.
Note: Additional control variable *Zone of birth* included categories corresponding to five macroregions in Colombia. We did not find any significant difference when contrasting frequencies of participants assigned to no decision v. decision groups (Chi^2 = 0.687, ρ = 0.953), or to vote v. consensus groups (Chi^2 = 3.679, ρ = 0.451). Same applies for *Zone of operation* (Chi^2 = 3.280, ρ = 0.512; and Chi^2 = 2.800, ρ = 0.592, respectively).

the High Commissioner for Peace." Seven treatment groups were told, "For each recommendation, a majority vote will be held," and the other seven groups were told, "Each recommendation will have to be agreed on by consensus." The same discussion topic was later stated to all groups: "What are your recommendations for ensuring that Colombia can have a future of peace, where people from the political left and the political right, and guerrillas and paramilitaries, can live together peacefully?" After 45 minutes of discussion, participants were immediately asked to fill in a post-test questionnaire, which measured postdiscussion attitudes.

In order to check that the groups actually constituted identical worlds in statistical terms before the manipulation of the experimental conditions took place, we took baseline measures of observable characteristics and corroborated that they were statistically the same for groups across experimental conditions (see table 1).

How different were participants who agreed to deliberate from dropouts who refused to take part? Only in the case of one variable included in our preliminary test, *Agreement with armed group*, did we find statistical differences (X^2 = 7.791, ρ = 0.020).[8] Dropouts tended to contain a larger proportion of people who agreed or

agreed strongly with their former armed group, while a larger proportion of deliberation participants disagreed or disagreed strongly. In other words, people who agreed with their former group were underrepresented in the sample of participants who took part in our experiments, which may have led us to underestimate the proportion of dogmatic participants. (We discuss procedures to deal with this finding later in this article.) That said, however, we can see that dropouts did not seem to differ from deliberation participants in any other noticeable way.

Every effort was made to attract a random sample. Since no list was available of all ex-combatants in Bogotá, a sample made up of tutors was invited. But security concerns and low levels of motivation threatened to increase dramatically the numbers of refusals to participate. Facing this risk, we decided to invite as many ex-combatants as possible. Although this method of sampling was not suitable for precise characterization of the ex-combatant population in Bogotá, it served the purposes of our experimental design; namely, to determine what factors are associated with high or low levels of deliberation and whether deliberation is associated with a change in negative attitudes in the short term. While descriptive generalization might be problematic, our sample is suitable enough for our hypothesis-testing effort.

But how much internal and external validity can be claimed on the basis of the results of our collected data? For purposes of increasing internal validity, specifically to reduce the potentially troubling effects of noncompliance, failed randomization, self-selection, unit heterogeneity, and nonrandom assignment, a number of methodological adjustments were made.

Mutz (2006) reminds us that ordinary people in the United States engage more frequently in controversial political discussions with relatives and friends in informal settings than with acquaintances and that for this reason, deliberative minipublics constitute a rather artificial environment, resulting in problems of both internal and external validity. Even more troubling, she adds, is the obscure way that effects on participants are attributed to deliberation. But we do not advocate extrapolating our results to settings other than deliberative minipublics themselves. These forums are the fundamental elements of deliberative democracy that we are putting to the test.

It was necessary, of course, to make them as realistic as they could be. Thus, not only did we establish a compensation incentive, with a view to attracting both political discussion enthusiasts and utilitarian free-riders alike—this diversity, in fact, should better reflect real-life dispositions to political debate—but participants were also fully aware that we would compile and distribute an edited document that included all proposals heard in our round of experiments. Participants not only had the chance to read what others said a few months after the experiments, but also made use of the document to gain visibility for their positions in the ACR.

A key question with respect to validating our analysis relates to differences between discussion groups. In every case, we had mixtures of ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries who were randomly assigned to different treatment or control conditions. Cognitive diversity and a relatively balanced representation of factions in a face-to-face, free interactive setting ensures than minimal conditions for deliberation, and not just another type of communicative exchange, are present in every case

(Anderson 2006; Caluwaerts and Ugarriza 2012). It was crucial that we know whether participants were distributed without bias at the different sessions, and consequently the respective experimental treatments as well. In line with data presented in table 1, by means of regression analysis, we confirmed that there was no significant relationship between the the binary *Decision/No Decision* and *Vote/Consensus* treatment variables, on the one hand, and demographic indicators, on the other, and this led us to assume that the random assignment had been fair. In addition, baseline measures supported our claims of unit homogeneity, which guaranteed that treatment and control groups' observable and unobservable variable distributions did not differ in any significant way.[9]

As far as external validity is concerned, we maintain that our "lab in the field" approach enabled us to provide participants with a very familiar environment for their discussions, thereby increasing the chances of their behaving as they usually do in their ordinary reintegration sessions.[10] Discussion groups ended up consisting of the same people who met regularly under the auspices of the official reintegration program. Results from experimental groups, of course, can be generalized only in the context of similar environments, as they reflect the way we expect other ex-combatants, and perhaps other types of citizens, to behave in a semiformal discussion group.

More potentially troubling to external validity claims is the self-selection problem. Strictly speaking, some researchers may consider it to be an insurmountable problem that taints all potential inferences. However, our sampling procedures complied with minimal monotonicity and salience criteria, and the resulting sample was partially corrected for biases. More crucial, it is reasonable to expect that results might be replicated, as we have not detected any reason to believe that our sample behaved in any significantly different way from what is expected from the overall target population.

The absence of a random sample and the presence of self-selection are unfortunately common problems in experimental deliberative research. Even when actively pursued, random sampling efforts may still fail to meet the most stringent standards. Nevertheless, we claim that our sample does not differ in any significant way from the target population, at least according to key observable variables. Eighteen percent of the total of 3,665 reintegrating ex-combatants in Bogotá in November 2008 joined our research project. At the time, our sample was roughly comparable in terms of demographic characteristics to the total population of ex-combatants, which, in turn, resembled the overall Colombian ex-combatant population. Fifteen percent of our sample were women, compared to 16 percent of the total ex-combatant population of Colombia (the estimate is similar for Bogotá). In our sample, 76 percent of participants were between the ages of 25 and 50, compared to exactly 76 percent of the national ex-combatant population—again, the estimate for Bogotá was similar. A total of 88 percent had studied at primary and secondary school (1 to 11 years of education), compared to 89 percent of the ex-combatant population in Colombia and a figure of 92 percent in Bogotá. Also, 59 percent of our sample were ex-guerrillas and 41 percent ex-paramilitaries, compared to 64 and 36 percent, respectively, of the total ex-combatant population in the Bogotá area.

A major source of differentiation between ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries remains long after demobilization: the effect of their past war life trajectories. In their previous time as members of armed groups, combatants developed contrasting identities, which are reflected in divergent political discourses and behavior. Past experiences seem also to have left imprints on the ex-combatants' ideological stances. In particular, ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries tend to hold opposing views, attitudes, and emotions regarding the left-right political spectrum. These traits persist even years after leaving their former groups and are made evident in their discourses (Ugarriza and Craig 2013).

Despite such faction differentiation, postconflict challenges pull former fighters together across cleavages. Requiring ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries to share the same reintegration process has enabled ex-combatants to naturally develop a cross-cleavage postconflict social identity. This emerging identity is characterized by a dual sense of social pride and shame, in which a vindication of their former role as political and social fighters and a moderate repentance for their violent past mixes to form a single discourse. The common grievances from which a sense of unity emerges became evident in the discussions held by ex-combatants for the purposes of this research. As a consequence, group discussion tended to deal with seven major commonly shared issues: their need for social and political participation in civil life; the uncertainty about their legal status; the impact of resettling in urban areas for individuals of rural origin; their role as intelligence sources for anti-insurgent military operations; their complaints about basic services provided by the official reintegration program in terms of personal security, psychological assistance, seed capital for business plans, health care, housing, education, employment, monthly stipends, and aid to their families; the temptations and threats coming from illegal networks; and the need to promote social reconciliation and their own destigmatization.

Measurement Strategy

We measured deliberation through a series of indicators capturing its multidimensional nature. The operationalization of such a concept was established in an original work by Steiner et al. (2004), in which five main deliberative dimensions were systematized in a Discourse Quality Index (DQI). Although there have been some alternative proposals as to how to measure deliberation (see Stromer-Galley 2007), they have not been used as extensively as the DQI (see Roger and Schaal 2012; Steiner 2012; Steiner et al. 2004), which tightly connects with the five core elements defined in the classical literature: participation, respect, justification, common-good orientation, and disposition to change.[11]

The expanded version of the Discourse Quality Index consists of 11 deliberation indicators:

- *Intervention:* whether the participant spoke or remained silent
- *No interruption:* whether the participant refrained from interrupting
- *No disrespect:* measuring absence of foul language

- *Respect:* measuring presence of explicit respectful expressions
- *Level of justification:* an ordinal scale including categories no opinion, opinion without justification, narrative justification, reasoned justification, sophisticated justification, and multiple justifications
- *Reasons:* a dichotomous measure indicating the use of reasoned justification or above[12]
- *No own good:* absence of self-interested justifications
- *Good of others:* justification in favor of disadvantaged groups
- *Common good:* explicit common-good–oriented justifications
- *Abstract principles:* justification in terms of abstract values and ideals
- *Force of the better argument:* explicit acknowledgement of other participants' interventions. (A detailed description of the coding criteria is provided in online appendix 1.)

Transcripts of the 28 group sessions were made, and two independent coders were given the task of applying the DQI. Coding was made at the speech-act level and then aggregated at the individual level. "Speech-act" was understood here as every utterance delivered by a participant in a given moment during a discussion. In turn, "discourse" was understood as the aggregation of an individual's speech acts during a given discussion.

Two experimental groups were randomly selected and simultaneously coded by the two coders in order to assess the reliability of their coding decisions. A total of 292 speech-act codes and 80 speaker codes, assigned independently by the coders, were submitted to a reliability test, confirming an intercoder reliability of 80 percent (see table 4 in online appendix 1).[13] Silent participants were not assigned DQI codes, and were not part of the analysis of deliberation levels, since their deliberative quality could not be established.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How did the ex-combatants perform according to the high ideals of deliberative democracy? We analyze whether participants were able to meet each of the deliberative standards at least once in the discussion. If a participant did so, then he or she was considered to have been highly deliberative for a given category.

The first column of table 2 shows the 11 deliberative dimensions in the analysis. The following three columns present the proportion of participants who delivered an ideal behavior for each deliberative dimension. Results are broken down by experimental condition. The last two columns present the average experimental effect of applying decisionmaking rules and the effect of applying voting instead of consensus rule.

As reflected in the proportions for *Intervention*, about one-third of the participants decided to remain silent and listen to others.[14] Only four people explicitly complained about being interrupted, and hence the high proportions seen in *No interruption*. Typically, complaints were accompanied by body language showing an

Table 2. Proportion of Deliberative Speakers per Condition

Deliberative dimension	Experimental Condition			No Decision v. Decision	Vote v. Consensus
	No Decision (S.D.)	Vote (S.D.)	Consensus (S.D.)	ATT[b]	ATT[b]
Participation					
Intervention	0.606	0.702	0.696	0.072	0.154
	(0.490)	(0.460)	(0.463)	ρ = 0.826	ρ = 0.661
No interruption	0.979	0.980	0.956	−0.031	−0.020
	(0.142)	(0.138)	(0.206)	ρ = 0.083	ρ = 0.322
Respect					
No disrespect	0.948	0.980	0.999	−0.010	−0.020
	(0.222)	(0.138)	(0.000)	ρ = 0.319	ρ = 0.322
Respect	0.020	0.019	0.043	0.031	−0.020
	(0.142)	(0.138)	(0.206)	ρ = 0.083	ρ = 0.322
Justification					
Level of justification[a]	3.618	2.730	3.413	−1.083	−2.820
	(1.489)	(1.330)	(1.808)	ρ = 0.359	ρ = 0.000
Reasons	0.556	0.288	0.565	−0.281	−0.700
	(0.499)	(0.457)	(0.501)	ρ = 0.408	ρ = 0.000
Common good					
No own good	0.360	0.557	0.456	0.510	0.560
	(0.482)	(0.501)	(0.503)	ρ = 0.000	ρ = 0.000
Good of others	0.309	0.307	0.369	−0.041	−0.260
	(0.464)	(0.466)	(0.488)	ρ = 0.904	ρ = 0.462
Common good	0.350	0.230	0.282	−0.114	−0.780
	(0.479)	(0.425)	(0.455)	ρ = 0.734	ρ = 0.000
Abstract principles	0.195	0.173	0.130	−0.218	0.160
	(0.398)	(0.382)	(0.340)	ρ = 0.517	ρ = 0.003
Disposition to change					
Force of better argument	0.175	0.134	0.239	−0.104	−0.120
	(0.382)	(0.344)	(0.431)	ρ = 0.757	ρ = 0.735
N	160	74	66		

[a] Instead of proportions, *Level of justification* figures represent means on a 1 to 6 scale.
[b] Average treatment effect on the treated (ATT) was estimated by means of matching analysis, including a propensity score controlling for the possible effect of *Agreement with armed group*. P-value reflects significance of T-scores.

urgency to speak. In one group, for instance, a former paramilitary started to talk: "What I see is…. Excuse me…" only to see another participant seize the moment to make his own intervention. The constrained participant decided then to complain: "Pardon, can I talk, too?"

Similarly, only six participants made use of foul language during the discussions, as reflected in *No disrespect*. Five of them referred to other participants, and the remaining one to their arguments. In one exceptional intervention, an ex-paramilitary rejected an ex-guerrilla's argument in a strong manner: "Don't be stupid! Crap, man! If you work, f——!, you do not f——ing starve! Obviously! Do not wait for the government to give away houses for free. Go work!" Conversely, only six participants made use of explicit respectful language toward other participants or their arguments. Such expressions tended to take the form of "You are absolutely right in what you say," or "What the fellow says is true." In no case was the use of respectful language responded to in the form of respectful words back from another participant. And where present, respectful language was used only once by speakers.

Many interventions contained no proposals; instead, they tended to share a position. A former guerrilla, for instance, expressed in his interventions that "oil extracted and consumed here in Colombia is not exploited by Colombians … but mostly by other countries. That is also why guerrillas fight." In some other cases, proposals were not supported by any form of justification. An ex-paramilitary, for instance, proposed that the government "helps us with five thousand rifles so that we can go and destroy the guerrillas."

Approximately 65 percent of ex-combatants expressed an opinion that was supported by either illustrative or rational forms of justification, or both. Illustrations usually referred to what happened in other countries, or to participants themselves in the past. A former paramilitary asked for

> more security for ourselves…. I have been a victim of three [assassination] attempts here in Bogotá. I have been shot. I have been wounded.… Because I was a commander. [Enemies say,] "that guy was a commander of a troop column, go after him wherever he goes, and grab him. Put him to the ground." That is how it is.

Rational forms of justification could be stated in a simple way, such as "We need more investors in Colombia. It is just that we need the rich people so there is employment." More sophisticated argumentation would try to go deeper into why X should be done. As an ex-guerrilla explained,

> If we want peace in Colombia, first of all we have to look after people in the fields…. To build more schools, more health centers, to send more teachers to the field, to provide a plan so that farmers can draw their products to cities. Because a farmer, if he does not have a way out for his products, cannot grow plantain, yuca.… He cannot grow any of these. He thus has to grow coca, do you understand? It is the most valuable product, and can be easily taken out.

Mean *Level of justification* is comparatively lower under the vote condition, and similar for no decision and consensus groups. Just above half of ex-combatants

in these latter groups appealed to rational argumentation, as shown in the *Reasons* proportions.

Fifty-five percent of those who spoke provided justifications that referred to the good of their own group, with a lower proportion abstaining from doing so under the no decision condition. In a typical example, a participant explained: "In order to achieve peace, the government should start to cooperate, to deliver what was promised to us." Thirty percent made reference to the good of others, usually disadvantaged groups ("State support for people in the countryside: peasants, the poor class, so to speak. Support in terms of study, health services, housing rights"). Twenty-eight percent made explicit references to the common good ("opportunities for everyone, that inequalities are eliminated, and that there is social welfare for all"). Only 16 percent gave justifications in which explicit references were made to abstract principles ("In order to reduce a little the violence figures, it is necessary to count on clear policies aimed to reach social justice, or equity"). And a similar percentage of participants explicitly acknowledged the value of other participants' interventions ("I agree with it, in the sense that at this time the war in Colombia is just a business"), while no one openly changed positions during the discussions.

Did we detect any effect of rules of engagement on deliberative performance? The second column from the right in table 2 estimates the average treatment effect on being treated with an instruction to reach a decision at the end of the discussion. By means of propensity score matching, our estimations reflect a weighted comparison between similar subjects in each condition. The only statistically significant difference we found here reflects a lower proportion of self-interested justifications under decision rules.

The last column estimates the effect of being treated with a voting rule instead of consensus. Clearly, we observe that this latter condition is related to higher levels of justification and reason giving and more frequent common-good–oriented proposals.[15] Voting rules, on the other hand, are related to fewer self-interested references and more appeals to abstract principles. When comparing no decision with consensus groups, we observe no difference in terms of levels of justification (T-score = –0.75, ρ = 0.457) and common good references (T-score = –0.55, ρ = 0.585), but the latter performs better in terms of restraining self-interested justifications (ATT = 0.456, T-score = 6.15, ρ = 0.000).

In no case did free talk groups foster a better deliberative performance than decision groups. Conversely, decision rules seemed to discourage self-interested references. Which rules would then promote a more deliberative performance? Consensus seems a better choice to encourage a more reasoned and explicitly common-good–oriented kind of debate.

Table 3. Mean Negative Attitudes Pre- and Postintervention

	Before		After		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Paired t-test
Negative attitude of ex-guerrillas toward rightists	6.716	1.447	7.022	1.138	t = 2.072 ρ = 0.040
Negative attitude of ex-paramilitaries toward leftists	7.791	1.849	8.114	1.573	t = 2.046 ρ = 0.043

CONSEQUENCES OF DELIBERATION

Besides formal consideration of how institutional rules affect deliberative behavior, we also want to know whether the different deliberation levels observed help us to explain changes in attitudes between the groups. Table 3 presents the mean attitudes of participants toward the former war enemy both before and after the discussions.

The results in table 3 present a slight tendency toward polarization. Among ex-guerrillas, 25 percent of participants improved their attitudes toward rightists, but 41 percent show a worsening. And among ex-paramilitaries, 24 percent of participants decreased their negative attitudes toward leftists and 34 percent increased them.

Although polarization is a common feature of political discussion among rival factions, can we link it to deliberation levels? Our analyses at the individual level reveal that the use of rational arguments is positively associated with an increase in the negative attitude toward paramilitaries ($r = 0.157$, $\rho = 0.046$). This result is not valid when the sample is split between ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries, and it also declines after controlling for demographics. The relationship between references to the good of others and decreases in the level of negative attitude toward guerrillas ($r = -0.184$, $\rho = 0.018$) also disappears after splitting or controlling. Similarly, the absence of references to one's own good is significantly related to decreases in the level of negative attitude toward paramilitaries at the bivariate level ($r = 0.187$, $\rho = 0.017$). However, this result does not stand in the ex-guerrillas subsample ($r = 0.062$, $\rho = 0.600$). We do not report any relation between speaking in the discussion and showing any trend in attitude change.

At the group level, neither aggregate deliberation levels, demographics, nor institutional rules can explain attitude changes. When we compare the most highly deliberative groups with the least deliberative ones, no recognizable pattern emerges indicating a stronger or weaker tendency toward either an increase or a decrease in overall levels of negative attitude toward the rival faction. Additionally, tables 6 and 7 in online appendix 1 show how demographics or institutional variables also fail to explain attitude changes.

It is interesting that although polarization happens, it cannot be directly linked to the participants' deliberative performance. In other words, the discursive procedures are not responsible for attitude changes. Further analyses focusing on content rather than on deliberative quality might provide better answers.

NOT DELIBERATIVE ENOUGH?
THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL RULES

Can institutional treatments help us explain deliberative behavior? Our data show that participants who were instructed to reach a consensus decision showed a greater tendency to put forward rational arguments than those who were instructed to hold a majority vote. Arguably, no-decision groups did almost as well as consensus groups in terms of justification, but the latter groups performed better in terms of common-good orientation.

The good news is that it is possible to create favorable conditions for deliberation. At an institutional level, it is preferable to choose a consensus rather than a majority rule if we want to hear a reasoned, common-good–oriented debate. Further institutional elements could be controlled in order to foster a more deliberative behavior, such as ensuring that everyone has the chance to speak and giving participants the opportunity to have a plural number of interventions. On the negative side, nevertheless, we must report that our institutional rules failed to promote a higher level of deliberation in terms of respect, common-good orientation, or willingness to yield to the force of the better argument, at least in contexts where these features were scarce in first place.

While the effect of institutional rules, as hypothesized, is significant for some deliberative components, we also reaffirmed our expectation that ex-combatants in Colombia should perform far from the ideal speech-act situation.

Certain indicators would seem to confirm these less-than-optimistic predictions. Were participants close to an ideal of full mutual respect? Evidently, ex-combatants were extremely careful not to refer individually to others or their arguments in either a respectful or a disrespectful way. This speaks of what we might call a cautious interaction, one likely to be the result of a lack of empathy, sense of security, or mutual recognition. It is interesting that these levels of caution were also registered in the Belgian and Bosnian experiments. In support of Mutz's argument, active give-and-take interactions and interchanges of opposing views seem less likely to occur when participants are merely acquaintances and sufficient levels of trust have not been fostered. It also proved to be harder for ex-combatants to refer to the good of other groups than to appeal to their own good, but it was even harder for them to refer to the common good. And the hardest thing of all was to appeal to abstract principles. We must conclude that the selfish tendencies of ex-combatants are far from an ideal situation. Also, explicit common-good orientation was just as scarce as in the Belgian and Bosnian cases.

In addition, the expanded DQI did not detect evidence that arguments had any effect on participants' positions, which remained practically unchanged throughout the exercise. Deliberative levels, understood as how participants behaved regardless of the content of their proposals, did not help to improve attitudes or to prevent polarization. As the more pessimistic views suggest, one-time discussions seemingly tend to polarize rather than bring positions closer.

On the other hand, although deliberation might have been insufficient, some areas for hope appeared. Our expanded DQI coding suggests that participation

flowed in a generally unconstrained manner and free of annoying interruptions. How sophisticated were participants' arguments? Since no instruction was given for participants to provide elaborate arguments in support of proposals, we can confidently say that justifications emerged naturally in political discussion contexts such as our experimental settings. Rational elaboration, even if it is not the way majorities communicate, is far from being scarce. Former fighters' willingness to participate and to exchange arguments represents potentially the most favorable asset for a future deliberative postwar democracy. These are encouraging results for those exploring the possibility of fostering a deliberation culture in difficult contexts.

All in all, was our deliberation experience insufficient due to our research design or to the peculiarities of the Colombian case? Those advocating enclave discussions might find arguments here for expecting little deliberation in the absence of interpersonal trust. Did participants not want to discuss a future of peace? Did they not have enough confidence in these nonviolent, deliberation-oriented instruments of conflict management and peacebuilding? Our design established a number of incentives aimed at attracting both those who were interested merely in easily meeting the obligation to attend mandatory reintegration sessions and those who truly wanted to give political debate a chance. This absence of self-selection brings us closer to real life than cases in which voluntary participation reflects only a predisposition to behave in the ideal and expected manner. And as we discussed earlier, the real-life conflict situation in Colombia is particularly difficult. As in other deeply divided societies, war-affected participants find it hard to think in terms of the common good and might prefer to focus on allegedly deserved, or even promised, material retribution, just as Colombian ex-combatants did. Even so, adverse conditions did not fully impede a democratic interaction.

For divided societies in general, this Colombian experience provides evidence that deliberation, although not an easy goal, is feasible even among those who have grown accustomed to using violence as a mechanism for settling their differences. As our results show, it might be difficult to persuade the most dogmatic people to join a discussion group with their political adversaries. But once in place, postconflict minipublics can generate and reproduce positive feedback for enforcing virtuous cycles that strengthen efforts aimed at political stabilization, reintegration, and reconciliation. Policies aimed to let former antagonists engage in iterative productive exchanges in semiformal, consensus-oriented spaces should help transform the way antagonists customarily manage their differences.

And what can we say about societies that are not so deeply divided? What could we learn from Colombians who, barely a few months previously, were engaged in a deadly war, before accepting the challenge of participating in an unprecedented forum for exchanging political ideas? Would this serve as an "acid test" for whether deliberation is actually possible, beyond the most naïve expectations? Here it was possible to identify a number of favorable conditions that could help deliberation enthusiasts, and a tangible way in which normative ideals could be grounded in real life. We have also shown the usefulness of applying a comprehensive measurement tool such as DQI in order to discern what goes on inside the black box of political

discussions. Future research should also shed light on how different deliberation factors interrelate, oppose, or complement each other, and should specify the role of storytelling and interactivity.

WAS IT A GOOD IDEA?

We have concluded that deliberation levels had no significant influence on how participants' attitudes evolved during our experimental process. In particular, we observed that attitude change among individuals in both directions, either through polarization or bridging, cannot be explained by the differing quality of performances. Here the key analytical consideration is the distinction between truly deliberative traits and regular features of dialogue. More precisely, we avoid the potential flaw of attributing to deliberation effects that are caused by a different spectrum of human interactions. Both pre- and postdiscussion attitudes between former war antagonists tended to be negative, which rules out a problem of social desirability bias. As dialogical exchanges revealed the already existing ideological distances between the factions, bridging may have become less likely and negative responses more so.

In view of this result, is deliberation between former antagonists a good idea? One possible answer is that political discussions between factions polarize their negative attitudes and should thus be avoided. An alternative answer could be that while political discussions do not create further divisions, they help those involved to clarify and express them more confidently. This latter approach assumes that differences exist but manifest themselves freely only after an opportunity for interaction has been given. Channeling these differences through deliberative procedures is preferable to violence in postconflict settings. In other words, it might be desirable to promote a deliberative democratic behavior in these adverse contexts, but it does not necessarily lead to reconciliation.

Nevertheless, this kind of deliberative experience between hostile factions also represents an opportunity to operationalize ideas like political reconciliation and democracy building after war, which could go hand in hand with or even follow reconciliation efforts. It is to be hoped that future democratic engagements will not be exempt from civilized yet passionate confrontation.

NOTES

1. Colombia faces typical postconflict challenges, such as ex-combatants' reintegration to civil life and reparation to victims. Postconflict windows—for example, time- and space-

bound opportunities during which the conflict remains inactive—have made these peace-building measures possible.

2. Except for members of the Ejército Revolucionario Guevarista and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, whose structures demobilized completely in the early 2000s.

3. Since guerrillas and paramilitaries overwhelmingly tended to have demobilized through the distinctive procedures mentioned, controlling for *faction* in our design takes care of the potential effects of demobilization type on our dependent variables.

4. This last condition demands willingness to change opinions on the subjects at stake, not necessarily attitudes toward groups.

5. Data from this preliminary test enabled us to compare those who joined the discussion groups with those who refused to do so. See discussion below.

6. Tutors are psychologists and professionals in charge of ex-combatants' reintegration.

7. Only in Bogotá would we count on a good proportion of both ex-guerrilla and ex-paramilitary populations simultaneously. In Bogotá, unlike most municipalities in the rest of the country, the majority of ex-combatants who have resettled there are former guerrillas.

8. We systematically compared deliberation participants and dropouts on the basis of the following indicators included in our preliminary test: *Age, Gender, Faction, Education, Zone of birth, Zone of operation, Years since demobilization, Agreement with armed group, Negative attitude toward leftists, Negative attitude toward rightists.*

9. Both pre- and post-test surveys confirmed the ideological animosity between the factions in terms of attitudes, a trait that persists long after demobilization. See Nussio 2012; Ugarriza 2009; Ugarriza and Craig 2013.

10. While these sessions are mandatory for all ex-combatants, discussion of political issues is tacitly forbidden. Our work was the first systematic experience to do so in the ACR environment. For experiences of political discussions among ex-combatants in Africa and Asia, see Söderström 2011; Schiller 2012.

11. Our deliberative dimensions are directly extracted from classic deliberative theory, where there is no consensus as to which components are essential and which ones are complementary.

12. The original DQI coding scheme in use here (Steiner et al. 2004) is based on a classic model of deliberation in which reasons are considered closer to the deliberative ideal than narrative or storytelling. Other approaches have emerged since then.

13. Given the low frequency of interruptions, foul language, respectful language, and acknowledgment of others' interventions, levels of intercoder agreement tended to be high (0.9, 0.9, 0.9, and 0.8, respectively). The remaining indicators underwent additional reliability tests. In the case of the seven-category *Level of justification* variable, we report a moderate Spearman's rho coefficient (0.7) and a higher Cronbach's alpha (0.8). Conversely, Spearman's rho coefficient warns us of the difficulties of interpreting whether a participant is talking on his or her behalf when referring to the good of others (0.2), rendering this the least reliable measure.

14. After conducting bivariate analyses, we identified that being older, having higher levels of formal education, and more than two years after demobilization can be regarded as favorable factors to participants' probabilities to speak. Conversely, nonspeakers tended to be younger, less educated, and more recently demobilized.

15. Table 5 in online appendix 1 disaggregates *Levels of justification* by faction and experimental condition.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting materials may be found with the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

1. Appendix 1: Dqi Coding Criteria
2. Appendix 2: DQI: Examples of Coding Decisions

For replication data, see the author's file on the Harvard Dataverse website: https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/laps

Database 342 LAPS.dta