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Reaching Out to Overcome Political Apathy:

Building Participatory Capacity through Deliberative Engagement

Curato, N. and Niemeyer, S. (2013) Reaching out to overcome political apathy: Building participatory capacity through deliberative engagement. *Politics and Policy*, 41(3): 355-383.

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Abstract: A common objection against deliberative democracy relates to the impression that citizens, in general, are unwilling to participate in democratic politics. We contribute to the growing literature that challenges this impression by analyzing the discursive profile of citizens that participate in deliberation. By discursive profile, we refer to participants' own perceived role in the democratic process and their articulated motivations for joining a deliberative forum. We find that those who turned up in face-to-face deliberation tend to be less cynical toward politics. Moreover, based on their expressed motivations for participating, it can be inferred that linking the deliberative forum to decision makers provided an initial hook to participants. However, this changed as participants completed the process. At the end of deliberations, appreciation for the process itself ended up being the most resonant sentiment. These findings are based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses of data gathered from Australia's First Citizens' Parliament.

Keywords: Political Apathy, Deliberative Democracy, Political Theory, Participation, Citizenship and Democracy, Citizens' Parliament, Discursive Profile, Deliberative Engagement, Australia.

A common practical objection against deliberative democracy relates to the impression that citizens are unwilling to participate in democratic politics in general, and in deliberation in particular. In *Stealth Democracy*, John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse (2002, 3) draw on survey data to explain that participation in politics is low, not due to citizens' lack of access to participatory forums or displeasure with particular policies but because "people do not like politics even in the best of circumstances." They argue that popular participation often leads to neutral or negative outcomes, shifting the research agenda to thinking about limited situations where participation can be constructive rather than conceptualizing it as an inherent political good.

Qualitative studies provide detailed insights as to why citizens might avoid deliberative politics. Based on an ethnographic study with volunteer groups, Nina Eliasoph (1998) explains that there is a widely held belief among everyday Americans that principled and public-spirited conversations make some people "feel dumb" and threatened by political conversation. Political theorist Michael Saward (2000) expresses a similar reservation, suggesting that some citizens' desire to deliberate does not necessarily translate to democratic inclusion. There is also a potential equality dimension here. Critics of deliberation contend that those who participate in deliberative forums are the same educated, articulate, and economically advantaged individuals that have access to traditional sites of political power (Berkowitz 1996; Fraser 1997; Sanders 1997; Young 2001).

More recent empirical research on deliberative democracy is challenging these critiques. Findings by Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini (2009) indicate that while biases based on socioeconomic status exist, deliberative participation by marginalized groups is nevertheless significant. Measures of social capital such as organizational membership counteract or moderate the effects of disparity in education, gender, ethnicity, and income. They conclude, "although discursive participation is certainly not free of the distorting effects of socio-economic status, the dire warnings about the unrepresentativeness of deliberation do not appear to be justified" (Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009, 63). Neblo and others (2010) present similar findings where a large majority of respondents (83 percent) express willingness to participate in deliberative sessions. They argue that the kinds of people attracted to deliberation are precisely those turned off by standard partisan and interest group politics, although reasons for this response rate have yet to be further investigated.

This article is motivated by these developments. We examine the case of the Australia's first Citizens' Parliament (CP) where 150 randomly selected Australians from

each federal electorate deliberated over four days on a broad charge, “how can Australia’s system of government be strengthened to serve us better?” (see Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance 2013; Citizens’ Parliament 2009; Appendix 2). By analyzing this case, we aim to deepen an understanding of citizens’ willingness to deliberate—which may ultimately apply cross-nationally—to which we add analysis of the subsequent impact of the deliberative experience on attitudes to political participation.

While Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini (2009) point to the importance of opportunities for participation and Neblo and others (2010) discover the value of nonpartisan platforms for political engagement, we analyze the *discursive profile* of those citizens that express willingness to deliberate. By discursive profile, we refer to (1) participants’ own subjective beliefs, particularly regarding their perceived role in the democratic process, and (2) their articulated motivations for joining a deliberative forum. We consider this important because these dispositions are precursors to participatory capacity, in the form of willingness to participate.¹ Understanding the political predispositions of participants as well as their explicit reasons for participating generates deeper insight concerning the type of citizens who willingly engage in what seems to be a demanding democratic exercise. We do, however, recognize that there are other contributing factors—ranging from dispositional aspects such as personality (Jennstål 2012), and opportunity-related aspects, including availability of resources such as time and income.

These limitations notwithstanding, we aim to correct the impression that deliberative participation is limited by demographic or ascriptive characteristics. Rather, we suggest that attention should also be given to discursive characterizations to generate a better understanding of—to put it simply—what it is that motivates citizens to deliberate.

Our empirical approach, however, is different to that of Neblo and others (2010). In addition to assessing expressed willingness to participate, we add the analysis of those individuals who actually turn up, compared to those who do not, even after indicating interest and being formally invited. Because of the detailed nature of the data collected, we cannot compare this cohort to those who do not express a willingness to participate, except on a number of broad measures available through population surveys. We then examine the self-

¹ Participatory capacity is becoming commonly used among nongovernmental organizations in a fairly broad sense, inspired by increased focus the World Bank on governance and inclusion, but in many cases the term appears to refer to the capability of a system to provide participation (see e.g., Angeles and Gurstein 2000). Here, we use it as a constituent of what Dryzek (2009) refers to as the “inclusivity” component of deliberative capacity, alongside “deliberativeness and consequentiality.” Participatory capacity within a democratic (or deliberative) system is thus in part a function of its ability to generate interest in participating in deliberation. This approach explicitly recognizes that “inclusivity” is related to how the deliberative system motivates individuals to participate.

proclaimed motivations of those who participate to develop a clearer sense of these participants' subjective reasons (discursive profile). Importantly, we also examine the discursive profile changes with participation in deliberation. This is vital because, where most analyses of willingness to deliberate are grounded in the prevailing political experience of a given setting, we seek to examine the potential impact of a more deliberative and participatory setting on willingness to participate and attitudes toward the democratic process more generally.

Our analysis is made possible by our distinct empirical strategy, which explores both issue-based motivations and analysis of actual dialogue while building a discursive profile. We examine the discursive profile using a set of statements related to Australian democracy and its parliamentary systems that participants responded to at different stages of deliberation. Individuals who provisionally accepted the initial invitation are grouped into four overlapping categories: those who accepted the invitation to participate (Accept); those who participated in the Online Parliament, which was open to all those who accepted the initial invitation (OP Participants); those who were invited to participate in the CP and comprise the 150 individuals who attended (CP Participants); those who were invited to join the CP, but either declined, withdrew, or did not show up (Refuse).

We then contextualize participants' issue-based motivations to their self-declared reasons for participating by comparing their articulated motivations on the first and final days of deliberation. Thus far the literature has largely focused on answering the "systemic or structural dimension of the question 'Why deliberate?'" and relates it to deliberation's contributions in enhancing the legitimacy of political decisions. However, the "first-personal version" of this question—why do I deliberate?—has not received as much attention (Festenstein 2002, 104-5). We offer responses to this question based on a thematic content analysis of deliberation transcripts in the CP. Following Kimberly Neuendorf's (2002; see also Stromer-Galley 2007) content analysis guidebook, discussions were systematically categorized following a coding manual based on (but not limited by) deliberative democratic literature. Analyzing deliberators' expressed reasons for participating is constructive as it lends insight into participants' process of "meaning making" and the ways in which deliberative expectations are articulated, negotiated, and transformed. Through these combined methodological approaches, we are able to offer a narrative that provides a quantitative summation of participants' discursive profile and a qualitative examination of their expressed reasons for participating. Finally, we discuss the results and conclude by

suggesting that many citizens are indeed willing to participate, given the right opportunity. Moreover, this willingness is contingent on the nature of the prevailing politics.

Australia's First Citizens' Parliament

On February 6-9, 2009, 150 randomly selected Australians participated in Australia's first CP at the Old Parliament House in Canberra. Over the course of four days, participants deliberated on the charge: "how can Australia's system of government be strengthened to serve us better?" While there have been a number of similar deliberative forums across the world, including the citizens' assembly in British Columbia and Ontario which tackled the issue of electoral reform (see Lang 2007; Warren and Pearse 2008), the CP is a "world's first" because of its scale (Dryzek 2009). It was national rather than regional, selecting representatives from each federal electorate. The CP was structured using the format of the Twenty-First Century Town Meeting (Lukensmeyer and Brigham 2002) where participants were divided to 23 groups with an assigned facilitator. They were instructed to speak respectfully and honestly, listen to what others have to say and stay on task. During small group dialogues and plenary sessions, participants had access to an independent reference group consisting of well-known politicians, academics, and activists who were qualified to give information and clarification on the proposals being considered. On the final day, the proposals that got most support from citizen parliamentarians were presented in the House Chamber and received by the Parliamentary Secretary on behalf of the Prime Minister. These proposals served an advisory purpose to the Government, with government representatives present in the meeting assuring participants that their recommendations would be given due consideration.

Prior to the main event in Canberra, participants were invited to attend one-day regional meetings and engage in online deliberations (Online Parliament [OP]). Online parliamentarians came up with 58 proposals, with the top five proposals presented at the opening of the CP in Canberra. Participants, however, were not limited to deliberating on these proposals but encouraged to table other suggestions they consider to be relevant.

Aside from being an innovative democratic exercise, the CP was also an avenue to take a closer look at citizen involvement in decision making and consider possibilities for institutionalizing micro-deliberative forums. Its scale provides us a window into what a deliberative forum would look like when a randomly selected group of citizens are given substantive responsibilities in coming up with proposals that enhance the political system.

This single event already required substantive commitment and energy from citizen parliamentarians. Some traveled for more than 24 hours and, once in Canberra, immediately participated in sessions at the Old Parliament House. Days two and three lasted for almost ten hours, which, for participants who failed to get enough sleep due to extreme summer weather, was especially challenging. Aside from attending sessions, participants were asked to go over informational packets in preparation for deliberations the following day. They were also asked to complete several questionnaires as part of the CP's research agenda.

In spite of the heavy demands before and during the deliberation in Canberra, participants completed the process, with some even asking for a follow-up CP after a year. These observations deserve further investigation, not only because they go against the literature's depiction of ordinary citizens as unwilling to deliberate, but also because there appears to be a latent demand for more deliberation. Deliberative democrats have more to learn about citizens' motivations for committing more than four days of their lives to a demanding democratic exercise and expressing interest in participation in subsequent forums.

Characteristics of Citizen Parliamentarians

The willingness to participate in the CP was relatively strong from the outset. The selection of citizen parliamentarians began by sending out letters of invitation to 9,000 randomly selected Australians from the electoral roll (Lubensky and Carson 2013). They were asked if they would be interested to participate if they were selected. Just short of 30 percent (2,672 in total) said yes. Set in comparative perspective, this is an "astonishingly high response rate, especially given the demand [made] on their time" (Dryzek 2009, 2).²

² In terms of design and sampling procedure, the CP is most comparable to G1000 Citizens Summit in Belgium. Like the CP, this forum was also held in various stages—from open agenda setting in online forums to face-to-face deliberations among 1,000 citizens in Brussels. The response rate for invitations is 1 percent, which is much lower than the CP (see Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2012). British Columbia's citizens' assembly—another deliberative forum comparable to CP in terms of scale and design—used a similar sampling technique and secured a 7.5 percent response rate (Lang 2007). Another comparable deliberative event in the city of St. John in New Brunswick in Canada obtained .4 percent or 317 responses in an open invitation to the 70,000 population of the city (Culver and Howe 2004). On the other hand, deliberative polls tend to have higher response rates, usually ranging in the 40-60 percent mark. See Luskin, Fishkin, and Plane (1999). Factors accounting for differences in response rate warrant further investigation.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Citizens' Parliament (CP) Accepted Respondents

	Australia	CP Responses
	% Total	% Total
Age		
18-24	13.4	10.2
25-34	18.7	12.4
35-44	19.0	20.7
45-54	18.2	21.9
55-64	13.1	20.4
65+	17.6	14.4
Gender		
Female	50.2	48.3
Male	49.8	51.6
Education level		
Year 11 or below	30.5	21.8
Form 6/Year 12	20.5	19.8
TAFE qualification	25.7	26.6
Bachelors degree	16.4	21.0
Postgraduate degree	4.1	10.8

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009).

The demographic characteristics of those that responded to the invitation compared to the Australian population are summarized in Table 1. In broad terms, consistent with Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini (2009), we find a general representation of interest in participating across all categories, albeit with a higher proportion of postgraduate educated respondents and the middle aged.

However, this analysis involves assumptions about the need for descriptive (demographic) representation. By contrast, Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) argue for a “discursive” approach to representation, which recognizes explicitly the need for diversity of opinions in the deliberative chamber. A strict version of their recommended approach was not possible for the CP. Yet we can ascertain there are some differences among those who accepted participation but not for the same reasons that public critics of deliberation suppose. There is a higher level of civic participation among accepting membership of political parties but a markedly lower level of membership of community organizations.

Table 2. Political and Participatory Characteristics of Citizens' Parliament (CP) Participants³

	Australia	CP Responses
Political orientation		
Left-right scale (1-10) ^a Member of political party ^b	5.03	5.36
% Population	1.3%	1.8%
Member of organization ^c		
% Population	19.0%	12.2%

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006, 2010).

Notes: ^a Where 0 is Far Left and 10 is Far Right. Australian Figures are sourced from McAllister and Pietsch (2011). The CP figures are converted from a 5-point scale where "1" is "strongly left" and "5" is "strongly right." ^b Based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2006 figure (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010). ^c Includes membership of any nongovernment organization (2006 figure; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).

This contrasts with Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini (2009) who surmise an important role of social capital in facilitating participation. Many participants claimed that they had never been involved or interested in politics prior to the event, but a substantial proportion (37 percent) had expressed their political opinions via letters to the editor of a newspaper, to their local Member of Parliament, or called a radio talk back show.⁴

A common refrain of critics, particularly in Australia, is there is a left-wing bias among those who participate in deliberation (see e.g., Boswell, Niemeyer, and Hendricks forthcoming). However, the findings in Table 2 suggest that the opposite was the case for the CP.

Discursive Profiling of Those Who Turn Up versus Those Who Do Not

In the case of the CP, stratified random sampling of three demographic categories—gender, age, and education, with a quota allocated to indigenous Australians—was applied to the 150 participants, fitting the Australian distribution. These categories are shown in Table 1. All

³ CP figures provided by John Gastil. Although these figures are drawn from CP participants and not the total pool of those who accepted the invitation to participate, given the random selection of participants from that pool, combined with a broad distribution of responses across all demographic categories, we assume that the figures are not significantly different.

⁴ The survey results show that 37.0 percent of participants in the CP have sent a letter to the editor, commented online, or called a radio talkback show. Using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) data, it is not possible to aggregate to provide a comparable measure. The available disaggregated figures suggest that the number may not be particularly high. These include attending community consultation/public meeting (7.8 percent), contacted local council or territory government member (13.8 percent), contacted member of Parliament (5.8 percent), signed petition (22.5 percent), attended protest march/meeting/rally (5.2 percent), wrote letter to the editor of a newspaper (3.5 percent), participated in a political campaign (2.0 percent), boycotted or deliberately bought products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons (24.6 percent).

2,763 respondents to the initial letter were invited to participate in online deliberations (or OP) leading up to the CP. Of these, only 44 made either a “considerable” ($n = 9$) or “modest” ($n = 35$) contribution to the online discussion leading up to the main event. It is based on these figures that we premise our following analyses, that there has been some level of willingness among citizens to participate in a democratic forum that makes heavy demands on time and effort.

In addition to those who did not respond to the initial recruitment, there is also another category of refusal to participate (by either refusing the offer, withdrawing, or not showing up). Of those individuals who initially registered their interest, a relatively small but significant number turned down their invitation to attend the CP. It is possible to compare these withdrawing individuals to participating individuals, who attended the CP using a “discursive” approach, which is related to, but is different in approach to the operationalization of discursive representation suggested by Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008). Here, we characterize individuals according to their dispositions to Australian democracy and its parliamentary system. Both groups completed a survey in conjunction with a Q sort involving scoring 48 statements covering this topic (see Appendix 1) on a Likert scale from “strongly disagree” (-5) to “strongly agree” ($+5$) (Table 3).⁵

To explore whether there were any systematic differences between CP “refusers” and participants, we conducted a *t*-test for differences in average response for all statements. Statements that differentiate accepters and withdrawers are shown in Table 4. The findings suggest that participants who actually participated in the CP tend to have a less cynical attitude toward politics (statement 4). Compared to withdrawers, citizen parliamentarians have a more positive appraisal of the political system and openness to the idea that society is capable of change, though gradually (statements 4-6). These findings are comparable to Neblo and others’ (2010) study where respondents who expressed willingness to deliberate are those who expressed trust with government. We consider these findings as indicative of the premises or predispositions necessary for individuals to commit in a deliberative process that deliberators generally express some level of confidence or moderate cynicism with existing democratic arrangements. By contrast, those who refused to participate express a stronger position toward voting based on self-interest, providing some indication of the

⁵ The Likert ranking of statements was performed prior to the standard sorting of statements from least to most agree in a quasi-normal distribution as per the convention for Q method. We use the Likert rankings here because the data are not constrained by the relative sorting of statements in the Q sort, and thus are better suited for observing relative changes in responses for individuals before and after participation in the CP.

political predispositions of citizens who end up refusing to participate in the deliberative forum. We return to build on this observation in the latter part of this article.

Table 3. Participants' Views

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Through conversation, would you say that your friends and family know your views about political matters?	4.5%	8.0%	15.9%	53.4%	18.2%
Are you compelled to defend your views on political matters?	4.5%	21.6%	33.0%	30.7%	10.2%
Do your friends and family share similar views to you about political matters?	1.1%	23.9%	27.3%	40.9%	6.8%

Note: n = 88 respondents.

We also find from the analysis interesting differences between accepters and online deliberators participating in the OP, although the numbers are small (n = 45). As for Refusers, OP participants are more likely to be against government intervention, but much more politically engaged and possessing strong political efficacy (statements 11, 13) and concerned with freedom of information (statement 44). On this basis, it appears that the charge of “usual suspects” is potentially more appropriate to the OP participants, with those willing to engage online already being much more politically active.

Expressed Reasons for Participation

A short survey was implemented for CP participants concerning their political behavior before the event (see Table 3). One striking outcome relates to participants' acknowledgement that their family and friends know about their political views but do not necessarily feel strongly about the need to defend them. One reason for this could be that participants' family and friends generally share similar views, creating a context where opinions do not have to be further explained and defended.

To complement this survey, we analyzed the self-characterization of participants using thematic content analysis during different stages of deliberation. Transcripts of small group deliberations and plenary sessions of all four days of the CP were categorized using a coding manual which takes note of sentence structures (semantic form) and both *a priori* and inductive codes based on but not limited to deliberative democratic theory (see Bryman 2004; Neuendorf 2002). The units of

analysis are “turns” or utterances expressing an idea on a particular topic. These may be single or multiple sentences, depending on the participants’ speech style.⁶

Table 4. Average Responses to Statements

No.	Statement	Accept	OP	Refused	CP	
					Pre	Post
4	We are a democratic country.	2.6	2.7	2.1	3.0	3.7 ^b
8	The last thing we need is a Canberra “Big Brother” telling us what we should read and hear.	2.9	4.4 ^a	4.3 ^a	2.7	2.8
11	I don’t think we have a lot of input into legislation and a lot of things that are important.	2	3.0 ^a	2.9	2.1	0.9 ^b
13	I don’t know too much about democracy. I feel ridiculous voting.	-3.2	-3.9 ^a	-2.6	-2.9	-3.4
14	I don’t want to be in a place where only a minority’s viewpoint gets the right to say what’s going to happen.	3.1	3.9	3.6	2.8	3.3
20	Governments can talk a great game about “democracy.” They fall down, in practice, because they cannot accept any sharing of the power to influence decisions with those who might have different motives and ideas.	1.2	0.5	2.1 ^a	1.0	1.5
21	I don’t think there’s anything wrong with people voting for their self-interest.	0.2	0.5	1.6 ^a	0.3	0.5
28	A lot of people may be politically ignorant, but they believe what they see and hear on television, and that makes them vote the way they do. They have been brainwashed by the clever advertising people.	2.1	2.2	3.0 ^a	2.0	2.7
32	People get the government they deserve.	-0.3	-0.3	-1.7 ^a	0.1	-0.1
35	The political system is remote and closed and the connection with elected representatives is difficult, they are often faceless.	0.9	1.1	2.4 ^a	1.4	0.4 ^b
36	The party system is the main obstruction to accountable politics.	0.1	-0.4	1.7 ^a	0.5	0.1
44	We should strengthen protections of the free press in order to facilitate a more open and publicly accountable government.	2.8	3.7 ^a	2.6	2.7	2.6

Notes: ^a Indicates a significant difference compared to the Accept group (95%, based on independent samples *t*-test).
^b Indicates a significant change compared to pre-CP (95%, based on independent samples *t*-test).

Analyzing transcripts of “naturally occurring talk” allows us to map participants’ expressed aims for participating and the intersubjective dynamic of constructing and negotiating shared meanings of the deliberative process (Silverman 2006, 202). This approach to analyzing deliberation is starting to gain ground, as in the case of Stromer-Galley’s (2007) work which assesses the quality of reasoning among participants based on coding “engagement measures” in a deliberative forum. Olsen and Trenz (2010) have also utilized qualitative coding in their

⁶ Data analysis was conducted after the CP by a single coder well versed in both deliberative theory and thematic content analysis. This is an acceptable convention in qualitative analysis, particularly when the research is largely interpretive and exploratory (see Bryman 2004).

analysis of EuroPolis—a transnational deliberative experiment—to analyze common reference points of citizens from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds use to exercise communicative power and decision making.

In the CP, one of the resonant inductive coding categories that emerged from content analysis relates to participants' self-declared indifference to traditional modes of political participation. A number of citizen parliamentarians described themselves as “passive,” “fairly apathetic,” and “not interested” when it comes to politics as they usually encountered it. Some cited personal reasons, such as demands of everyday life (e.g., raising children and making a living) getting in the way of political education and involvement. Also resonant was the sense that Australian society, in general, has not been keen on having political discussions. One participant recounted that being raised in an Anglo-Saxon household in the 1960s contributed to his political apathy. “Political discussions,” he said, “weren't on the menu” because they were divisive and off-putting. Another stated the difficulty of finding one's voice when no one seems to listen, while some expressed sentiment about finding a place “where you can talk about politics without being howled down” (Participant 1959).⁷

Nevertheless, participants exhibited openness and willingness “to give politics a chance.” That is to say they were not averse to politics *per se*, and that willingness to participation in deliberation is at least partly based on opportunity. This can be considered consistent with the survey data presented above, that participants are able to share their views to others but are generally ambivalent or do not feel strongly about defending their opinions to others. The main problem appears to be one of context, where the everyday experience does not lend itself to political engagement.

This schism is manifest in the way participants characterized their apathy on the one hand, and their participation in the CP on the other. The manner of delivery is self-professional, with an implicit admission that apathy or lack of knowledge about politics—though justifiable—is undesirable and that their presence in the CP is a way of making up for this shortcoming.

⁷ Appendix 1 lists the Q sort statements. Full transcripts of participant statements are available from the authors upon request.

Table 5. Narrative Structures of Citizen Parliamentarians

Participant	Admission of Apathy	Presence in CP
Simplified content	I admit I have not been politically involved/aware but I am now here to share my views and learn from others.
Participant 6863	I confess I haven't really been involved in politics a great deal. I haven't paid a lot of attention to it, so I'm happy to see whatever I can get out of it and can hopefully contribute something to the overall day, few days that we've got.
Participant 1924	Basically, I don't know a lot about politics I've basically picked up my pen, come with an open mind, come to learn, come to yeah, listen.
Participant 0631	I'm nowhere near as aware of the system as I know I should be and I'm hoping it will be a chance to learn a bit more.
Participant 6559	I'm past being a passive passenger in this country I want to make sure that we move in a positive direction and not a negative direction and the only way I can see to do that is by getting stuck in and doing stuff. And that's one of this, that's what I see this probably as being the start really of my involvement in that area.

Table 5 maps the most common narrative structure among participants when explaining their reasons for joining the CP. The second row is a simplified sketch or summation of narratives, while the next four rows are a selection of actual statements with this popular narrative structure. Data from this section is derived from a systematic coding of argumentation structures to illuminate the linguistic pattern participants use to justify their claim.⁸ Of the 23 tables that discussed this topic, twelve statements follow the pattern of this narrative structure while 16 expressed similar content but delivered in a different manner—for example, “maybe look at something in a new way, something I haven’t thought about before” (Participant 3532). No other narrative structure had a comparable frequency as the one in Table 5.

Such a manner of self-characterization indicates participants’ negotiation of their credentials that merit their place in the CP. It builds a shared narrative that participants may not have advanced political knowledge or vast experience in political engagement, but they

⁸ Coding analytical units based on sentence construction aims to understand the argumentation structure of reasons and justifications used in a deliberative forum (see Snoeck and Francisca 1992). A separate manuscript which focuses on a linguistic analysis (using argumentation theory) of the CP is being prepared.

were nevertheless willing to express their views and learn from others. These self-characterizations contributed to creating a discursive context for the CP, where participants did not necessarily hold strong views on particular matters and came with an open mind.⁹

Instrumental Goals

Given the self-characterization of participants as having modest political experience, it is curious that they joined a political exercise that was rather demanding. Why did otherwise indifferent citizens join the CP? Proceedings from the first and final sessions of deliberations provide some answers to this question. In the first session, participants were asked to define their ideal outcomes and expectations from the CP. This is compared to the content of the final session, where participants were made to reflect on their experience and provide general comments on the four-day deliberative process. Statements were coded based on *a priori* categories informed by principles identified by deliberative theory as crucial to democratic practice. Among the initial codes include equality, respect, epistemic fruitfulness (learning new information, for example, about the political system), social learning (learning from and about others), and consequentiality (deliberation's impact or outcome) (see Bächtiger *et al.* 2010; Dryzek 2010; Fearon 1998; Rostbøll 2009; Warren 1999). These were treated as initial categories which were later revised, merged, or deleted depending on the frequency of statements referring to such principles.

In the first session, consequentiality emerged as the most resonant theme. Citizen parliamentarians expected that their participation will lead to actual results, although levels of these expectations vary. Below are the major subcategories under the theme “consequentiality” and examples of statements coded for each theme.

Implementation of proposals: “I believe that if any of the proposals get implemented then we will feel that we have actually contributed.” (Participant 5274)

Government feedback: “We wanted to have follow through on those proposals in either action or feedback if they're not followed through on.” (Participant 6734)

Come up with “good” proposals: “if we could somehow forge a coherent and well justified argument for a certain change . . . rather than walking away with a couple of wishy washy semi suggestions.” (Participant 4265)

⁹ Only one participant had an expressed political goal for participating as he felt that the information packets sent to participants before the CP were “a bit of a left-wing socialist . . . and there were some things that were written that weren't right and, like I've got the facts to prove that they're not right” (Participant 4970). This aside, citizen parliamentarians generally characterized themselves as detached from politics, but they remained optimistic about the possibilities of the CP.

Most participants expected government uptake on their proposals. Some considered the implementation of their proposals as the best indicator of the CP's success. Others had a more subdued expectation, hoping that they would at least get feedback from government on the status of their proposals or that their recommendations would be considered in parliament. Others limited their expectation for the group to come up with good enough proposals worthy of presentation to the parliament. Although there were different levels of expectation, these narratives were consistent in emphasizing the importance of government accountability to citizen parliamentarians.

One possible reason for the resonance of consequentiality relates to participants' impression that the CP was directly linked to the empowered space, which is certainly the impression given in the recruitment invitation (see Appendix 2)—although the organizers neither purposely nor explicitly pitched the event as directly linked to decision making. One participant, for example, considered CP different because he was sending his feedback to people who matter politically:

It's important for people to have their say, yes. If somebody's going to bitch to other people about something, I've always been told, 'Bitch to the person who's important, not with somebody who's unimportant. Tell them what you actually think of what's going on.'
(Participant 2735)

Also resonant were the goals of epistemic and social learning. Some participants recognized that securing tangible results from the CP will take time and that learning could be the best immediate result of the process. This statement is characteristic of those coded under epistemic fruitfulness.

I think tangible results are going to be hard to see because it's going to take time. I was very excited to be part of this . . . to learn a bit more about politics in this country, I don't know a lot, I don't know much at all but I'm willing to learn. (Participant 3647)

One way of interpreting this relates to the observation made earlier that participants felt that they did not have vast political knowledge, making enlargement of existing perspectives a more immediate goal. This observation is consistent with Lang's (2007) findings on the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly, where participants also identified learning as the primary attraction of the forum. This aim, as Lang mentions, is not limited to people who consider themselves "political junkies" but also those who identified themselves as having little knowledge of politics. Social learning or "hearing what other people have to say" is also a recurring theme at the beginning of the CP.

Table 6. Percent of Statements Coded under Instrumental versus Expressive Categories

	Day 1	Day 4
Total instrumental	79.8%	33.3%
Consequential	33.0%	10.3%
Epistemic fruitfulness	14.7%	0.0%
Social learning	26.6%	21.8%
Others	5.5%	1.3%
n =	87	26
Total expressive	20.2%	66.7%
Social	3.7%	34.6%
Emotive	0.0%	5.1%
Experience	4.6%	12.8%
Respect	4.6%	6.4%
Others	7.3%	7.7%
n =	22	52

Note: n = number of statements coded under this category.

Expressive Outcomes

In the final session of the CP, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences during the event and the extent to which their personal and collective goals have been achieved. Some reiterated the importance of acquiring feedback from the empowered space and learning from their peers. However, references to these themes were not as frequent when compared to the first day of deliberations. There was a notable shift in discourse from the first to the fourth day of the CP—from participants citing instrumental reasons for participation to emphasizing the “expressive” outcomes of the CP. Table 6 is a summary of the frequency of codes per category, comparing Days 1 and 4.

In deliberative theory, the instrumental view considers deliberation as a valuable political process because it enables citizens to make the most justifiable political decisions (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 21). The reasons citizen parliamentarians put forward earlier match this view, where the CP was considered a forum where they could learn from each other and generate sound proposals to be put forward to government. Consequentiality was an important component precisely because the process was expected to generate legitimate outcomes. In contrast, the expressive view considers the intrinsic value of deliberation—that it is an expression of mutual respect and recognition (Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Rostbøll 2009). Deliberation is a process of constructing the self and the other, generating a sense of community and group solidarity. There is a noninstrumental good for being able to take part in a deliberative process and engaging fellow citizens as peers in social interaction (Festenstein 2002). This is the view of deliberation that participants predominantly alluded to

at the end of the CP. The following list contains examples of recurrent subthemes of the expressive view and examples of statements coded under these categories:

Social aspect: “having the opportunity to talk with an amazing diverse range of people that I otherwise wouldn’t run into; let alone have the you know, time to, you know talk with.” (Participant 4845)

Emotive aspect: “One of my most defining moments was what just took place in Parliament. In the House of Reps. That I think was just so incredibly moving.” (Participant 3129)

Deliberative experience: “we’ve all come together, sat down, we might have totally opposing views and we’ve talked through them and all and made decisions that we’re all relatively happy with in the end.” (Participant 3853)

The social aspect of the CP was the most recurring theme at the end of the process.

Characterization of this deliberative gain ranges from forging friendships to engaging with people one would not have met otherwise. The CP’s sample selection provided participants a unique opportunity to interact with people from different parts of Australia, diverse age groups, and different ethnic and professional backgrounds. One consequence of having such a mix is that participants were able to challenge and revise their preconceptions on particular groups of people. Several participants, for example, admitted that their views on the Australian youth have changed after seeing younger participants actively engaging in the process. Another confessed to have changed her views on Aboriginal people after listening to one of the plenary speakers. Small-group deliberations also had a social component in that participants tend to relate their personal experiences to the subjects of deliberation. Immigrants, for example, explained the challenges they have encountered upon moving to Australia and how attending “Saturday school” helped them appreciate Australia’s political system and cultural practices. These anecdotes, apart from being used as discursive tools to make a political argument in favor of harmonizing state laws on education, served as mechanisms for self-characterization and currencies for establishing social relationships among participants (see Bächtiger *et al.* 2010; Young 2001).

Participants also made a number of references to the event’s emotive aspect. The CP was characterized as a historic event, not only because it was the first CP but also because it was held at the Old Parliament House in Canberra. Narratives of “just being here” and being able to deliberate in an historical political site were resonant at the end of the CP. A number

of participants expressed appreciation for the symbolic convergence of Australians from different walks of life in Canberra.¹⁰

The social and emotive aspects created a distinct discursive experience for citizen parliamentarians, which they have shown appreciation for at the end of the process. Respect emerged as one of the most deeply valued components of the CP in that citizens felt that they were in a safe and supportive environment where, as one participant put it, “you can say anything, it could be way off the branch and it’d be okay” (Participant 7161). The discursive norms that governed the event provided the “bridging capital” or bonds that linked previously disparate groups to a shared experience (Hartz-Karp *et al.* 2010, 364). In a survey conducted after the deliberative process, 82 percent of respondents declared that they believe citizen parliamentarians “often” or “almost always” honestly expressed what was on their mind, and 85 percent stated that they always felt that their fellow citizen parliamentarians treated them with respect. In a sense, because the group is so diverse, it is only through the language of respect, sincerity, and tolerance that they were able to create a shared and meaningful discursive space.

Discussion

Through the empirical data presented above, we have provided a careful characterization of citizen parliamentarians’ discursive profile. We moved beyond the simple description of deliberators based on their demographic background and attempted to gain deeper insight into their political views and expressed motivations for participating in a demanding democratic exercise.

In summary, participants who attended the face-to-face deliberation in Canberra are those who tend to be less cynical toward politics. Compared to those that withdrew participation, citizen parliamentarians have a more positive appraisal of Australian democracy. They also acknowledge that societies are capable of gradual change. Moreover, these participants are already able to share their views with their peers, except that they are not necessarily placed in a context where they are asked or compelled to defend their opinions. Although the numbers are small, we also find differences among those who participated in the online OP who tended to have higher levels of perceived political efficacy.

¹⁰ For example, two participants reflected back on the opening statement by a local indigenous leader at the plenary where he explained the symbolism of Canberra from the perspective of a Ngambri man while others referred to the “energy” they felt once the proceedings began. These details were described as “moving,” “powerful,” and “emotional,” which contributed to the profound meaning participants associated to the CP as a “once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

Based on their expressed motivations for joining the CP, it can be inferred that linking the deliberative forum to decision makers provided an initial hook to participants—in conjunction with a very carefully produced invitation card (Appendix 2). However, this changed as participants completed the process. At the end of deliberations, appreciation for the process itself ended up being the most resonant sentiment. This, we suggest, can be interpreted as related to—if not a function of—citizens subscribing to generally positive (as opposed to cynical) political views. It is this composition of participants that underscores their openness to learning about and appreciating the merits of the current political system.

In the final section of this piece, we discuss the implications of our findings to the broader literature on deliberative democracy. In particular, we focus on (1) the importance of reaching out to citizens that have some interest in politics by providing a context for engagement and (2) the practical implications of the shifting appreciation of deliberative forums from instrumental to expressive gains.

Reaching Out

Organizing deliberative forums has two democratic obligations for it to be an inclusive form of political practice. The first is to create a context that provides citizens a fair chance of not only getting their voices heard but also hearing the other's side. Part of this is allocating a reasonable amount of time for meaningful political conversations to ensue, an appreciation of participants' presence by covering their travel costs, the prospects for decision makers to consider participants' views, and the "ground-breaking" nature of the CP. Put another way, the process was pitched as a "deliberative event"—a high profile nationwide activity whose sole purpose is for a select few to discuss, reflect on, and propose ways in which the democratic system can be better.

While we do not have conclusive data that can single out this approach as more effective than other participant outreach strategies, we have presented some indication from qualitative analysis that suggests citizens' appreciation for the distinct communicative context the CP provides. The nature of the event, concerning the democratic process at the national level, may account for the differences that we observe compared to Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini (2009) where we find a lesser role of community involvement in overcoming barriers to participation. Also, whether the "excitement" the CP generated is predominantly due to its framing as a major event can only be supported by a partial explanation. At best, we can only cross-reference this to the literature that provides empirical evidence to higher participation

rates in deliberative events that are linked to the empowered space (see e.g., Neblo *et al.* 2010). We can also relate this to one of our findings where participants tend to believe in society's capacity for gradual change. The opportunity to act and instigate change may also be modest yet sufficient initial incentive for participation.

However, as we demonstrate, no matter how well the invitation to participate is framed, it still requires that there is a sufficient enthusiasm for political participation. In contrast to Neblo and others (2010), we found that actually turning up, as opposed to expressing an interest in participating, was more likely where there is greater trust in the system as a whole. There is a range of factors that may explain this difference, such as contextual ones, including issue topic (where the CP topic went straight to the nature of the democratic process), or there may be other behavioral explanations. Certainly, the difference between expressing interest and attending is worthy of greater scrutiny.

While it is straightforward to achieve demographic (or descriptive) representation, the recruitment of a broad discursive profile is less straightforward. There was significant self-selection among invited participants on the basis of their attitudes toward Australian democracy and its parliamentary system. More research and insight need to go into the methodology of recruiting based on discursive profile—including other factors potentially contributing to participatory capacity, such as personality and opportunity—instead of simply relying on the standard sampling techniques based on demographic background.

Nevertheless, the CP's composition makes a case for future deliberative forums to be cognizant of their outreach function. As we noted earlier, most citizens who had not attended a deliberative meeting are those who had never been asked to do so. The case of the CP illustrates that, given the opportunity and under the "right" conditions, self-confessed politically uninformed but open-minded citizens will, at the very least, consider participation.

Instrumental Aims, Expressive Gains

Participants' self-evaluation after the proceedings presents a case for the ability of "ordinary" citizens to appreciate the intrinsic value of deliberation independent of its impact on policy. The abstract ideals of the expressive view have manifest empirically in terms of delegates' appreciative comments on being able to gain knowledge about the other and practice mutual respect toward people they have just met. For most participants, coming together and engaging with a diverse group of people as peers based on the deliberative virtues of openness, equality, and respect was an important, if not a sufficient, highlight of the CP. This

empirical insight is a valuable affirmation that the expressive view of deliberation is not only sensible and appreciated from within the quarters of political theorists and deliberative democrats but also actual citizens who have completed a deliberative process.

The shift of emphasis from instrumental pre-deliberative aims to expressive post-deliberative gains also provides an illustration of how citizens react to the dynamic of deliberation. Participants have stopped gauging their deliberative gains based solely on their original objective. As deliberations progressed, they developed new sensibilities and motivations for continuing to deliberate including appreciation for deliberation's social and affect aspects, as well as the distinct experience of being able to talk about politics under supportive conditions. This, we suggest, is a considerable deliberative achievement. The challenges of engendering these norms have been documented in several deliberative processes (Connelly, Richardson, and Miles 2006; Laurian 2007).

To have participants expressly appreciating a communicative experience marked by mutual respect, reciprocity, and equality is not an easy feat for deliberative practice. Under closer examination, the expressive motivation may not be dissimilar to the "expressive rationality" identified by Brennan and Lomasky (1993; see also Goodin and Roberts 1975) when explaining why people vote despite individually having a minimal impact on the outcome. And it is possible that longitudinal investigation of the phenomenon will reveal an increase of this kind of behavior with experience. In other words, expressive behavior becomes part of the democratic repertoire as opportunities give rise to behavior.

Yet the declining emphasis on CP's policy impact is worth acknowledging. The lack of references to consequentiality at the end of the process may be indicative of participants' tempered expectations for the CP's potential to impact public policy directly (see Button and Mattson 1999). This could be a cause for concern as there have been several deliberative forums which, based on the organizers' assessment, have fared poorly in terms of delivering its potential to influence policy (see Rask, Worthington, and Lammi 2011). Needless to say, for advocates it is certainly a cause for concern if deliberative forums begin to acquire the reputation of being inconsequential, especially since, at least based on the CP data, citizens are initially enticed to participate in forums that have the potential for influencing policy. In order to be consequential, microdeliberative forums such as the CP must be meaningfully connected to the deliberative system by having its outcomes either taken up in the empowered space, able to inform public debates, or to build confidence among previously politically disinterested participants (Dryzek 2010, 168-70). The first two may be the more

challenging outcomes to both secure and track, but, at the minimum, the CP could claim to have fulfilled the latter.

Overcoming Apathy: People Really Can Like Politics

This article demonstrates, in contrast to Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), that people really do like politics, if given the chance to properly engage with it, at least under deliberative contexts. Not only did the CP participants admit greater pleasure at just being able to develop and express their positions, they also increased their appreciation of the same political system they had previously viewed as remote and, for some, undemocratic. This observation begs the question of whether a more deliberative polity might potentially switch the democratic process from one of “stealth” to one involving a more engaged public.

Appendix 1

Q sort Statements

No.	Statement
1	Democracy is a term which has lost much of its original meaning.
2	If you want your vote to count for anything, then you need to not vote in ignorance, you need to know something about what you're being offered.
3	There's a dollar democracy that runs through our supposed democracy.
4	We are a democratic country.
5	The fundamental dynamic of Australian society is that it is one of evolution, not revolution.
6	We live in a great democracy.
7	Our political system's strength is that it can change to meet changing circumstances.
8	The last thing we need is a Canberra "Big Brother" telling us what we should read and hear.
9	In Australia the rich have virtually unlimited access to the legal system and the capacity to use it to achieve their own ends.
10	You don't have to wait three years to say 'I'm not happy with the job you did.' You can apply pressure, and enough people writing to the local member can turn the situation around.
11	I don't think we have a lot of input into legislation and a lot of things that are important.
12	Sometimes I get a bit worried that there's a lot of small minority groups that tend to get a lot of the say.
13	I don't know too much about democracy. I feel ridiculous voting.
14	I don't want to be in a place where only a minority's viewpoint gets the right to say what's going to happen.
15	The true believers are about decency in life, about a capacity to debate the issues and to receive different views.
16	We as individuals have a right, that's what democracy means to me.
17	Republicanism is a smokescreen for democratic treachery, incompetence, and lunacy.
18	Our government is attempting to mould our society to the needs of a profit-oriented market.
19	I'm always cynical about government processes.
20	Governments can talk a great game about "democracy." They fall down, in practice, because they cannot accept any sharing of the power to influence decisions with those who might have different motives and ideas.
21	I don't think there's anything wrong with people voting for their self-interest.
22	The true function of government is to maintain peace and justice. This does not include interfering in private transactions of its electors.
23	If Australia is to recover from the horrible mess we are in at present, we will need leaders of high principles, who will govern with honesty, justice, and righteousness, fearlessly putting into practice the principles of the Bible.
24	Our community and nation should invoke a spirit that you are important, that you do have a way of influencing things.
25	Until women are equally represented in Australian parliaments, we will not have a genuine representative democracy.
26	I suppose we do have an upper class and a lower class.
27	The only time we are all equal is when we vote in the ballot box.

Continued.

Appendix 1 (continued)

28	A lot of people may be politically ignorant, but they believe what they see and hear on television, and that makes them vote the way they do. They have been brainwashed by the clever advertising people.
29	Free markets work because individual people, cooperating peacefully and voluntarily through markets, can achieve much that politicians and bureaucrats cannot achieve using compulsion and direction.
30	Low female participation rates compound the domination of the public realm by males.
31	Concluding that some races/cultures are better than others must be avoided.
32	People get the government they deserve.
33	There is no real difference in ideological terms between the major parties and preference distributions are problematic.
34	Too few people have a lot of sway in the system. Corporate lobbyists, vested interests, pork barreling, and contributions to political parties are all problematic.
35	The political system is remote and closed and the connection with elected representatives is difficult, they are often faceless.
36	The party system is the main obstruction to accountable politics.
37	People are quite capable of processing and thinking about the vast majority of issues facing our society but as long as we are subjected to "news lite" the level of political debate will remain facile.
38	It would be a great thing if voters could vote on specific issues, not only on a whole party program at election time.
39	In the Senate there should be elected representatives who are not from the major parties but from smaller interest groups.

- 40 We suffer a Parliamentary Democracy and an archaic and conflict oriented, “two party system” where one of two main parties will manipulate us for the next few years.
 - 41 The people we elect are loyal not to we dumb bunnies who elected them, but the agenda and dogma of their party.
 - 42 Proportional Representation also forces parties to coalesce and moderates out the extreme political views.
 - 43 We should not be afraid of disagreement. Indeed, an important feature of a liberal democracy is respect for conflicting ideas; difference is part of the human condition.
 - 44 We should strengthen protections of the free press in order to facilitate a more open and publicly accountable government.
 - 45 There is a lot of consultation by government—but who is listening? And what power do they have to make changes?
 - 46 Democracy means that all policy is exposed to open discussion and debate in a public political space of all citizens before being put to a transparent, accountable vote.
 - 47 Democracy means we, the people, are responsible for what government does, or fails to do.
 - 48 Not voting is a form of expression. It’s a way of telling parties that no one is offering policies that appeal to you.
-

Appendix 2

Citizens' Parliament Invitation



It is our privilege to advise that

First / Last Name

has been randomly selected
from the electoral rolls to register for

Australia's first Citizens' Parliament

6 - 9 February 2009,
Old Parliament House, Canberra
RSVP: see over

Fred Chaney AO

Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG

This invitation to register has been sent to less than 0.05 per cent of Australians, from the electoral rolls.

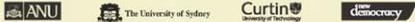
One registered citizen will be further randomly selected, from each of the 150 Federal electorates, to come to Canberra next February to join the first Citizens' Parliament.

This is a unique opportunity for everyday Australians to discuss ways to improve our political system, and make recommendations to Government.

Travel, meals and accommodation will be provided.

RSVP: Please register by 22 August 2008 at www.citizensparliament.org.au or call 1800 015 600.

The Citizens' Parliament is independent of any political donations or funding.



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