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Local Democracy Matters: How Deliberative Culture Shapes Public Evaluations of Local Government and Local Government Performance

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Is there democratic accountability to the public at the local level, and if so, how does it work? We know that a major part of democratic ability depends on citizens being able to properly evaluate government based on government performance, particularly at the local level. However, we know much less about all of the potential pathways to get from performance to evaluations and vice versa. This study argues that establishing a "deliberative culture" of routine discourse in public meetings can help explain public evaluations and government performance. With a focus on public education, I find evidence that residents of districts with a more deliberative culture are more likely to give positive evaluations of their schools, particularly when residents lack access to information or live in low-performing districts. I also find that in school districts with a more deliberative culture, students - on average - show a higher proficiency in reading and math. This trend also holds true for vulnerable sub- populations: poor students, Black students, and Latinx students. These results suggest that deliberative democracy plays an important role in local and urban politics.

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Abstract:

Is there democratic accountability to the public at the local level, and if so, how does it work? We know that a major part of democratic ability depends on citizens being able to properly evaluate government based on government performance, particularly at the local level. However, we know much less about all of the potential pathways to get from performance to evaluations and vice versa. This study argues that establishing a "deliberative culture" of routine discourse in public meetings can help explain public evaluations and government performance. With a focus on public education, I find evidence that residents of districts with a more deliberative culture are more likely to give positive evaluations of their schools, particularly when residents lack access to information or live in low-performing districts. I also find that in school districts with a more deliberative culture, students - on average - show a higher proficiency in reading and math. This trend also holds true for vulnerable sub- populations: poor students, Black students, and Latinx students. These results suggest that deliberative democracy plays an important role in local and urban politics.

Introduction

Is there democratic accountability to the public at the local level, and if so, how does it work? We know that a major part of democratic ability depends on citizens being able to properly evaluate government based on government performance (Fiorina 1978; Lewis-Beck and Steigmaier 2000). We have ample evidence that this performance is central to evaluations at the local level in particular (See Chingos et al. 2012). However, we know much less about all of the potential pathways to get from performance to evaluations. I am arguing that one pathway is deliberation, where local governments work to promote public discourse in order incorporate the public into the decision-making process. There has been a significant amount of research from deliberation scholars on how structured deliberation leads to increased legitimacy (Baiocchi 2001) and political knowledge (Fishkin and Luskin 2005; Esterling et al. 2011). A subset of this research has even focused on cities and special municipal governing efforts (Fung 2009; Warren and Pearse 2008). However, studies of deliberation have largely focused on controlled environments with not enough to say about its applicability to existing communities. As a result, local and urban politics researchers have yet to employ deliberation as a way in which centralized local governments achieve democratic accountability. I address these gaps by investigating the following questions. First, are city residents' perceptions of the quality of their local services related the extent to which their local governments promote routine deliberation with the public? Second, do local governments who promote routine deliberation actually perform better?

This study, therefore, examines the relationship between what I call the "deliberative culture" of municipal institutions and both residents' evaluations of local government

performance and how well local governments actually perform. I define deliberative culture as the extent to which leadership-initiated deliberative practices in public meetings solidifies into a community-wide culture of inclusion. I argue that local residents develop more positive evaluations of their local institutions when those institutions promote deliberative practices between residents and their public officials, and local institutions that promote deliberation, in turn, experience better performance outcomes. The study has four components: 1) a national-level analysis that links individual perceptions of local government deliberation to their evaluations of government performance, 2) a study of Los Angeles County that matches government elite perceptions of deliberation to their constituents' evaluations of government performance, 3) year-long observations of deliberations at board meetings that I match to the governing elite perceptions of deliberation, and 4) an analysis of the link between governing elite perceptions of deliberation and actual government performance captured through measures of student academic achievement. The individual and governing elite perceptions of deliberation, respectively, formulate two new measures of democratic behavior: the Public Perceptions of Deliberation Index (PPDI) captures resident perceptions and the Governing Elite Perceptions of Deliberation Index (GEPDI) encapsulates governing elite perceptions of deliberation. Both measures center on public discourse and are derived based on the deliberative democracy theoretical framework.

This project focuses on public education and school districts. In contrast to the work that links performance evaluations directly to performance indicators, I find evidence that residents living in districts with a strong deliberative culture are more likely to make positive evaluations of local government performance, particularly in districts that are low-performing. I find evidence that the governing elite perceptions of deliberative culture largely match actual video

observations of meeting recordings. I also find evidence that districts with a stronger deliberative culture perform better, particularly for vulnerable sub-populations. Specifically, students on average demonstrate a higher proficiency in reading and math. However, economically disadvantaged as well as Black and Latinx students, in particular, show higher proficiency in math and reading in more deliberative districts. In sum, focusing on a model of democratic accountability centered on a culture of discourse reveals major implications for government performance at the local level.

Performance Evaluations and Government Performance at the Local Level

There is tremendous debate in the local and urban politics literature on the types of indicators or heuristics that residents of cities use to make political evaluations. Much of the recent work demonstrates the importance of retroactive assessments of government performance in evaluating mainly local candidates (Berry and Howell 2007; Oliver et al. 2012) but also the quality of local public services (Chingos et al. 2012; Holbein 2016). This work is good at explaining positive evaluations in places where local governments perform well (and negative evaluations in places where local governments perform poorly). These studies show that, when things do (or do not) go well, people remain attentive and take notice. That work relies on residents accessing information of government performance to mediate performance-based evaluations (Schueler and West 2015), which makes sense: people typically have to *know* that their district is good in order to evaluate it as such. However, we still know very little about why people make positive evaluations when they are not well informed, not overly active, or when they *are* well informed that their local government is performing poorly.

In addition to gaps on performance evaluations, the work on retroactive assessments leaves open alternative pathways for how to actually improve government performance. The

retroactive-evaluation-based approach suggests that the dissemination of information and information transparency could be central to improving performance, but that leaves the primary prescription centered on the members of the public using information to select the proper candidates in local elections. However, research has also demonstrated inequities in participation (Oliver 1999; Hajnal 2009) and representation (Hartney and Flavin 2014; Kogan et al. 2016) that favor residents with the least amount of need. So, the retroactive assessment literature also leaves room to further conceptualize the type of model of democratic accountability that could result in increased performance, particularly for vulnerable sub-populations.

There are alternative heuristics that have also been offered as ways to think about local democratic accountability. Studies have shown that partisan and ideological cleavages from federal and state politics can filter into evaluations at the local level (Kaufmann 2004; Tausanovitch and Warsaw 2014). Research has also identified the way in which co-ethnic racial cues play a major role as well (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Howell 2007; Hajnal 2009; Barreto 2010). These models are especially useful for explaining how resident evaluations may not always match retroactive assessments of performance. However, we have yet to fully determine how descriptive representation directly leads to positive evaluations of local government. Specific to the racial cue hypothesis, studies have shown how minority elected officials, in particular, engage in a range of grassroots (Tate 2003) and symbolic activity (Gilliam 1996; Marschall and Ruhill 2007) in route to shaping evaluations. So, it could very well be the case that racial cues are doing the work of partially tapping into something else.

The same gap applies to the racial and partisan cue narratives in the context of improving government performance. Studies provide evidence that partisan (Gerber and Hopkins 2011) and

racial (Meier and England 1984) descriptive representation, as well as the intersection of both (Meier and Rutherford 2016), can be attributed to improved government performance. However, scholars have yet to exhaustively determine the ways in which descriptive representation could lead to improved government performance. The conventional route is the notion that co-partisan or co-ethnic representatives "know what's best" for their groups. Another narrative is that descriptive representation lends itself to the inclusion of certain constituencies into the decision-making process.

I advance this literature by incorporating deliberation as an alternative conceptual model of how residents of cities evaluate government performance. Deliberation offers normative parameters for how democratic activity undertaken by public officials could also play a role in how residents evaluate the quality of their public services and goods. In particular, efforts by local governing boards to engage in deliberation with their constituents should improve the legitimacy of the decision-making, which can shift evaluations of performance – particularly when information is absent or performance is relatively poor. However, deliberation also offers a potential route to improving government performance. We have seen evidence of how the absence of public buy-in on local reforms can be detrimental to policy success (Stone et al. 2001). Deliberation becomes a mechanism through which local buy-in can be achieved.

Deliberative Culture

This article offers a new conceptualization of local democratic accountability rooted in the deliberative democracy theoretical framework, which emerges from political philosophy. At its base, deliberation is the notion that discourses between citizens and their representatives should either lead to the most well-reasoned political decisions or at least establish the legitimacy of the institution (Habermas 1985; Gutmann and Thompson 2009; Dryzek 2000; Cohen 1989).

Deliberation has tremendous internal debate that this project intends not to enter. Instead, I am interested in deliberation as a form of participatory democracy that places dialogue with (and/or between) the public at the center of institutional behavior.

The deliberation literature surfaces a set of principles that establish the boundaries for what makes discourse democratic. Normative scholars discuss the importance of public discourse in which institutions give equally sovereign individuals the opportunity to *exchange viewpoints*, ideas, or experiences (Habermas 1985; Gastil 2000). Institutions must also *encourage diversity* within the backgrounds of the individuals sharing viewpoints (Mansbridge 1983; Fishkin 1991). Further, theorists emphasize the essential role of individuals agreeing to pursue a *common interest* over individual self-interests (Benhabib 1996; Chambers 2003). Individuals should also be incorporated into discussions resulting in legally binding *collective decisions* (Habermas 1985; Cohen 1989), and the final decisions that representatives reach from these discussions with the public should be *justified* or explained back to members of the public (Gutmann & Thompson 2009; Dryzek 2000).

There is a growing empirical literature in which scholars have tested components of deliberative democracy. Numerous studies have examined how deliberative democracy functions beyond the United States in countries such as: Brazil (Baocchi 2001) and Canada (Warren & Pearse 2008). Empirical research in the United States has primarily focused on national-scale deliberations (Dahlgren 2005; Wright & Street 2007; Neblo et al. 2010), laboratory and field experiments (Druckman and Nelson 2003; Esterling et al. 2011), or studies of small groups (Fishkin & Luskin 2005; Gastil 2000; Ryfe 2002). There have also been a small number of studies that focus on U.S. cities (Fung 2009; Mendleberg & Oleske 2000; Karpowitz & Raphael 2014; Asen 2015), and this project adds to those contributions.

Most of the empirical research on deliberative democracy fixates on the effect of the actual discourse (usually in controlled environments) on political behavior. In contrast, deliberative culture is a concept aiming to explain what happens in more natural environments, where most local officials often do no more than allow for public comment on the monthly agenda and most community members avoid public meetings, yet alone public comment, unless a major controversy occurs. Deliberative culture focuses more on the behavior of the former (local officials) than the latter (the public), and it is the extent to which officials use their discretion – primarily during but also outside of – board meetings to actively seek out and respond to the concerns of the public. These more deliberative actions performed by local government officials have the capacity to shape the perceptions of constituents regardless of the extent to which they attend public meetings. Public – and sometimes symbolic – efforts at deliberation performed by governing elites send the message that they take constituent concerns seriously. Therefore, deliberative culture is a heuristic that public officials can send to their constituents that their institution takes input from the public.

By promoting public discourse and disseminating this heuristic, public officials can instill a culture of deliberation that should make constituents feel more included in the decision-making process. When people feel more included in the decision-making process, they should feel a sense of local control, which increases the legitimacy of the institution. Then, if people feel included in - and autonomous within - the decision-making process, they should be more likely to be satisfied local government performance. This string of logic leads to the first hypothesis:

H1: Residents of municipalities with a stronger deliberative culture will be more likely to form positive evaluations of local government.

However, because we know that performance indicators play a major role in performance evaluations, the effectiveness of deliberation should be most pronounced in communities where either residents lack access to performance information or performance is low. Thus, the second hypothesis states that:

H2: The positive relationship between deliberative culture and evaluations of local government performance should be strongest for residents with low information or who live in the lowest-performing municipalities.

The implications for deliberative culture, however, should not be limited to people's perceptions of how their government performs. District leadership that imposes a deliberative culture should actually perform better as well. Routine open public discourse helps local officials better identify idiosyncratic problems that pose obstacles to strong performance. In the context of schools, this entails issues such as: air conditioning in classrooms, specific types of classroom bullying, cultural disconnects embedded within the district's curriculum. Deliberative culture should foster an environment where local officials can better identify issues, resolve them, and therefore improve performance. Through this logic, the final hypothesis proceeds as follows:

H3: Municipalities with a stronger deliberative culture should produce better policy performance outcomes.

Research Design: A Two-Pronged Approach to Analyzing Evaluations of Local Government Performance

In order to examine the policy evaluations of municipal residents, I narrow the focus to one issue, education, by analyzing evaluations of public school performance. The focus on education has a unique set of benefits. First, education generates affect. Due to compulsory education laws, the vast majority of Americans have significant exposure to education, which makes it one of the more salient and accessible policy issues. Second, local public education has

its own governing institutions – school boards – that are responsible for decision-making, although to varying degrees. The ability to match evaluations to a specific governing institution augments the ability to explore the potential relationship between institutional behavior and resident evaluations. Because of these reasons, other studies have focused on education when exploring local political behavior (See: Orr 1999; Berry & Howell 2007; Kogan et al. 2016; Meier & Rutherford 2016; Flavin & Hartley 2017). Education offers a suitable terrain for measuring municipal-level policy evaluations.

I estimate evaluations of public schools by relying on two separate survey projects that differ in reach: 1) a national survey of local residents and 2) a survey of residents of a specific metropolitan location: Los Angeles County, CA. The responses of municipal residents from across the United States (n = 809) comes from a survey conducted in 2000 by the Public Agenda Foundation entitled, "Waiting to Be Asked? A Fresh Look at Public Engagement." The Los Angeles component examines survey responses to the Loyola Marymount University "Public Outlook Survey" (POS) conducted in 2016. The POS encompasses a sample of over 2,200 respondents, and the respondents are dispersed amongst almost every one of the 80 school districts within Los Angeles County. Both instruments ask respondents to evaluate the quality of K-12 public education in their respective districts. Both instruments contain questions that ask respondents to evaluate the quality of their district's public schools. The datasets also include controls for germane alternative hypotheses. A detailed description of the school evaluation measures and control variables is provided in the appendix.

Measuring Deliberative Culture

The two separate survey projects become particularly useful for measuring the extent to which districts operate with a commitment to deliberative democratic practices or a "deliberative

culture." The national survey poses questions to the respondents that capture both public meeting attendance and their perceptions of how democratic their school board officials behave. Specifically, I analyze perceptions of whether: 1) the district seeks input from the public on major policy issues and 2) the district listens and takes into account education issues people care about. I combine meeting attendance (whether or not they attended a meeting within the past year) and these perceptions of governing institution deliberative behavior into what I call the Public Perceptions of Deliberation Index (PPDI), which ranges from 0-3. Table 1 displays the actual survey language used for each separate measure as well as the distribution of the responses. Table 1 indicates that there is sufficient variation within the PPDI measure. I, therefore, employ the PPDI as a proxy for municipal residents' perceptions of their district's deliberative culture.

The national survey, however, lacks the capacity to match resident evaluations of school performance to the democratic behavior of a specific school board. This deficiency makes the Los Angeles data necessary. Thus, in addition to the POS, I also utilize a survey of superintendents throughout Los Angeles County. With responses from 52 of the 80 superintendents (65% response rate), the survey assesses the districts' various commitments to democratic practices by having the superintendents answer six questions about the extent to which they observe the principles of deliberative democracy being practiced in their school board meetings. Specifically, the survey asks superintendents if they regularly observe: viewpoint exchange, opinion diversity, common good pursuit (both by the board members as well as community members, respectively), collective decision-making, and decision justification. The survey instrument presents superintendents with the response options of: 3)"always," 2)"usually," 1)"sometimes," or 0)"never." I compile the responses to the six

questions into an additive index called the Governing Elite Perceptions of Deliberation Index (GEPDI), which ranges from 0-18. Table 2 displays the actual survey language for each measure as well as the distributions of the responses. The GEPDI was developed and first employed by Collins (2018), and I utilize the GEPDI in this study as a deliberative culture proxy in the Los Angeles component of the study.

(Table 1)

(Table 2)

Verifying the Measure of Deliberative Culture

The measures indicating perceptions of deliberative democracy at the local level provide an efficient way to conduct what amounts to a very rare comparative study of deliberative democracy within local institutions. The primary challenge that emerges with relying on resident – and even administrative – perceptions, however, is determining the accuracy of those perceptions. Due to the absence of district identifying information, the national dataset provides no opportunity to verify the perceptions of the local residents. Once again, however, the Los Angeles dataset becomes extremely useful. Through the ability to actually identify the districts that the superintendents represent, I am able to find out more information about the public meetings. Therefore, I locate two districts within the sample that record their school board meetings and make those recordings publicly available online, while also differing in their GEPDI scores. As a result, I observe one district where the superintendent's responses made for an above-average GEPDI score, and a different district where a low score was assigned. The latter was the rarer instance in that districts are not required to record and post meeting recordings, and the vast majority of the districts who scored low on the GEPDI also happened to be districts that do not record meetings and post them online. Nonetheless, I will refer to the

above-average GEPDI-scoring district as "District A" and the below average district as "District B."[1]

Table 3 shows the specific GEPDI score differences between District A and District B. District A received an above average score of 13 (out of a possible 18), while District B received only a score of 7. In looking to verify the extent to which the score matched with the proceedings in the districts, I observed each meeting for each district that took place from September 2015 – May 2016, which amounts to a total of 20 meetings.[2] The meetings last on average close to 2.5 hours. In total, this project includes over 55 hours of video analysis. When observing the public meeting video recordings, I look for two specific indicators of deliberative governance: the number of members from the public who address the board and the number of responses to public commenters from members of the governing board. I record these frequencies for each month. I also, for each month, divide the number of responses to public comment by the total number of commenters. Through this, I produce a measure of the rate of board response per comment for each month.

The very top of Table 3 displays the rate of board response per comment for both Districts A and B. The difference in board response rates suggests that District A is indeed more deliberative. District A, which had the higher GEPDI score, had a rate of board response to public comment (26%) that was double the rate for District B (13%). When looking at the rate of board response to public comment across months, Figure 1 illustrates that there were only two months in which District A experienced a lower rate than District B. Beyond the statistical frequencies, the quality of the discourse in District A was much more related to policy decision-

[1] More information about the districts is provided in the appendix. The identity of the districts, however, remains confidential due to IRB restrictions.
[2] More information about the meetings is listed in the appendix.

making (e.g. facilities upgrades, project contracts, teachers salaries) while public commenters in District B largely consisted of students led to the meetings by their teachers to be recognized for academic or extracurricular accolades. District B largely discussed policy issues (e.g. contracts, social-emotional learning programs, dual-language immersion programs) towards the very end of meetings with no public presence. Overall, the meeting observation evidence suggests that the deliberative activity being observed in the video recordings of meetings aligns with the superintendents' perceptions of their districts. The rest of this article examines the extent to which this distinction is linked to systematic differences in how people evaluate local institutions and how well local institutions perform.

(Table 3)

Are Local Residents of More Democratic School Districts Making More Positive Evaluations?

National Evidence

What is the relationship between local government commitment to democratic practices and local resident performance evaluations? Figure 2 shows the relationship between a national sample of local residents' evaluations of their schools and their perceptions of how democratic their school boards behave. The graph on the top in Figure 2 shows the statistical association between perceptions of deliberation (PPDI) and evaluations of school quality, and the graph on the bottom shows the relationship between the PPDI and the belief that respondents get their money's worth. The relationships perform as expected in that the statistical associations are both positive and statistically significant. Table 4 provides the numerical estimates. Specifically, per-unit shift on the PPDI, local residents' log odds of holding a positive evaluation towards the quality of the schools increases by 0.376. Similarly, local residents' log odds of holding the view that they are getting their "money's worth" from the public schools increases by 0.387 per-shift

along the PPDI. The log odds translate to 8% differences in the predicted probability of making a positive evaluation per-unit shift along the PPDI (See Figure 2). Both statistical relationships are significant at 99% confidence levels.

(Table 4)

While the results perform as expected, it remains unclear if deliberation is doing the work the model claims. The primary alternative hypothesis of concern is that the effect of deliberation might really actually be masking the effect of residents accessing information on the quality of their districts. As a result, I perform a series of additional tests to examine how residents form evaluations in the absence of these information cues. In particular, I disaggregate the data to re-estimate the models for individuals who are **not**: 1) high in information about issues in the district, 2) active parents involved in schools,[3] or 3) residents of districts with strong community ties.

As the results show on Table 5, respondents of all three subsets are still significantly more likely to feel satisfied with their schools when they perceive deliberation. Figure 3 illustrates the consistency in the correlation between perceptions of deliberation and satisfaction with schools across subset populations by showing the increases for, low-information adults (7% per-unit shift and 22% across the full range), adults uninvolved with schools (9% per-unit shift and 27% across the full scale), and the adults who sense weak community in their districts (9.67% per-unit shift and 29% across the full scale). The national evidence suggests that deliberative culture matters.

(Table 5)

Los Angeles County Evidence

[3] I also subset the data and estimate the models for all non-parents and find the same results.

Do democratic practices matter for resident evaluations beyond the residents' individual perceptions of democracy? Are district-wide indicators of deliberative culture related to evaluations of schools? Furthermore, how do estimations of the effect of deliberation perform when accounting for actual government performance indicators? This section addresses those questions directly.

Earlier in this article I detailed my reconstruction of the Governing Elite Perceptions of Democracy Index (GEPDI) using Los Angeles County superintendents' perceptions of how democratic their school board meetings are based on the principles of deliberative democracy. I then find evidence supporting the reliability of those perceptions through observing video recordings of board meetings and finding that the activity in the board meetings matched the perceptions of the superintendent. Now, I turn attention to the evaluations of Los Angeles County residents who live in the districts of the superintendents who provided their perceptions of their district's deliberative culture. I also bring in measures of how students perform in those districts in order to test how deliberation holds once controlling for actual performance.

So, are residents of Southern California districts with a deliberative culture more likely to make positive evaluations of their neighborhood schools? Table 6 (column 1) suggests that they are. A one-unit shift in the GEPDI is associated with residents being 1% more likely to feel satisfied with the quality of their schools, and residents of the most democratic districts are, on average almost 18% more likely to feel satisfied with the quality of their schools, although the relationship is only significant at the 95% level. Including a measure of academic performance – district-level student proficiency rate in math – in column 2 erodes that statistically significant relationship. However, while the performance measure complicates the relationship between deliberation and school satisfaction, performance is also not a significant predictor with or

without deliberation in the model. So, the relationship between deliberation, performance, and school satisfaction must be further untangled.

I address this problem, once again by performing a subset on the data. The logic here is that, if residents are simply making retroactive evaluations based on student performance, then something else has to explain variation in satisfaction with schools in districts that perform relatively poorly. So, I calculate the median math proficiency rate[4] for the districts in the sample (35%) and separate the data into two groups: low performing (35% math proficiency or below) and high-performing (above 35% math proficiency). I, then, re-estimate the original model on the two subsets, and as column 3 of Table 6 shows, the relationship between deliberation and school satisfaction is strongly significant at the 99% confidence level for the low-performing districts, even when controlling for student performance. Meanwhile, deliberation and school satisfaction are hardly related at all for the high-performing districts (Table 6; column 4). As expected, the socioeconomic factors at the individual level tell most of the story for the higher-performing districts. Figure 4 illustrates how deliberation performs in the four models: the relationship is strongest when only focusing on the low performing districts. Still, this provides more evidence that, under certain conditions, deliberative culture matters.

(Table 6)

Do Democratic Districts Actually Perform Better?

Perceptions of deliberation seem to play a role in how people evaluate their schools when they lack access to indicators of positive performance. Again, the theoretical claim is that, in the absence of information cues, routine deliberation fosters inclusion that informs how individuals

[4] I also test the models using student reading proficiency rate and get the same estimation pattern. The achievement measures used are a part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) of which the California Department of Education oversees and publicly reports the aggregate results.

evaluate their schools. However, while it is important to determine how deliberative culture can explain evaluations, particularly in low-performing districts, it is equally important to understand if deliberative culture also offers a pathway for districts to actually improve. I address this question by, once again, focusing on Los Angeles, and this time testing the statistical relationship between the GEPDI and two academic achievement measures: the percentage of the students proficient in reading and the percentage proficient in math. I model district-level differences in reading and math proficiency amongst all students. However, because deliberation seems to be most effective where academic performance is low, I am more concerned with how more deliberative districts are performing with respect to the most vulnerable students. Therefore, I also model differences in reading and math proficiency for students in districts deemed economically disadvantaged, and I also examine proficiency differences amongst Black and Latinx students as well. It is important to test the extent to which deliberative culture is associated with better performance from students most likely to underperform due to contextual factors.

Before producing estimations, this analysis requires the use of non-parametric bootstrapping due to the small sample size at the district level. While the Los Angeles County survey included almost two-thirds of the total population of superintendents within the County, the sample size itself (n=52) hampers multivariate statistical analyses. The use of the non-parametric bootstrapping allows me to increase the sample size, which merely increases the precision of the estimates. Methodologists have detailed the utility and validity of this technique (Mooney 1996). Through the use of non-parametric bootstrapping, I generate a new sample of 250 for this analysis. The descriptive statistics of both the original sample and bootstrap sample

are on display in the appendix. The only noticeable differences between the original and bootstrapped estimates, as intended, are the size of the standard errors.

As expected, district-level wealth is by far the strongest predictor of performance. However, the regression model estimations suggest that, controlling for wealth, more democratic districts do seem to perform slightly better on average. Figures 3 & 4 depict the plots of the regression coefficient estimation of the relationship between the district GEPDI and the percentage of students in the district scoring proficiently in reading (Figure 3; Column 1) and math (Figure 4; Column 1). A unit increase along the GEPDI is associated with an almost 1% increase in the percentage of students proficient in reading and math, respectively. Furthermore, these results include statistical controls for a range of factors: school board election turnout (Flavin & Hartney 2017), school board election type (Meier & Rutherford 2016), the superintendent's perception of the board's relationship with the business community (Stone 2001), as well as the teacher's unions (Moe 2011), the racial diversity of the district (Orfield & Frankenberg 2003), and the percentage of students living in poverty. Students as a whole demonstrate slightly higher levels of reading and math proficiency in more deliberative districts.

This trend extends to the vulnerable sub-populations as well. Figures 3 & 4 show the same coefficient estimate for economically disadvantaged students within each district, Black students, and Latinx students, respectively. Per-unit increase along the GEPDI, economically disadvantaged students are also 0.8% more likely to reach proficiency in math. Black students are 1.2% more likely to reach proficiency in math, and Latinx students are 0.6% more likely. When considering the full range of the scale, economically disadvantage students of the most democratic districts are on average over 14% more likely to reach proficiency in math than students of the least democratic districts. Meanwhile, Black students are 22% more likely – and

Latinx students 11% more likely – to reach proficiency in math in the most democratic district compared to the least. The trend also appears in reading proficiency, although the results are weaker. Economically disadvantaged students of the most deliberative districts are 9% more likely to reach proficiency in reading than those in the least democratic districts. Meanwhile, Black students are 13% more likely to reach proficiency in the most democratic districts, while there was no statistically significant difference between the percent of Latinx students proficient in reading by GEPDI score. Still, the results as a whole suggest that vulnerable sub-populations reach higher levels of academic achievement in more deliberative districts. These are relatively small gains, but the implications are extremely significant.

Conclusion

The local politics literature as a whole - as well as the larger American politics literature – has placed central the idea that democratic decision-making is a practical and useful expectation for institutions. However, the local politics literature in particular has yet to incorporate deliberative politics into the larger discussion. Despite its omission, I find evidence that local institutions vary in terms of their use of deliberative practices. The extent to which local institutions foster a deliberative culture is strongly linked to how people feel about local government as well as how well local governments perform. When focusing on public education, I find that peoples' evaluations of their public schools are positively associated with the deliberative culture in their district, especially when they lack access to indicators of positive performance. I also find that students' academic achievement – as a whole and for vulnerable subgroups - is positively correlated with the deliberative culture within their district. These findings suggest that not only do deliberative practices matter for local political behavior, but deliberation also matters for crucial life outcomes.

Two concerns are the reliance on perceptions as opposed to actual discourse in measuring deliberative culture and the use of cross-sectional design instead of an experiment. The objectivity of the video observations of school board meetings as well as the consistency between elite and non-elite perceptions across spatial levels suggests that the public and elite perceptions are sufficiently reliable, but this approach is not ideal. This leaves open the competing explanation that deliberative culture is simply masking another scenario in which "all good things go together." However, I find deliberative culture doing its strongest work in places where other good things are not happening. This is an important finding that sets the precedence for a larger follow-up study centered on causal-inference.

Nonetheless, there are significant and notable implications emerging from this work. It suggests that positive outcomes can arise when local institutions in places with the most at stake commit to deliberation. It is also important to note that local institutions can face a number of obstacles to in route to creating a deliberative culture. The economic and financial conditions of municipalities still have a powerful imprint on how well local governments perform (Peterson 1981), which was evidence by the null result for the high-performing districts. In addition, racial cleavages also remain a prominent factor in what happens locally (Bobo & Gilliam 1990; Hajnal 2009), and the scholarship on deliberative democracy demonstrates the way in which racial conflict within a community can prevent institutions from engaging in deliberative discourse (Mendelberg & Oleske 2000; Fung 2009; Collins 2018). Racial conflict is especially harmful when evidence suggests that racial and ethnic minority students might perform better academically in school districts with a strong deliberative culture. Similarly, partisan or ideological polarization from national politics can also filter into local politics (Tausanovitch & Warsaw 2014), which can disrupt deliberative discourse as well and in turn hurt the educational

experiences of all students, particularly students from poor families. So, as future work continues to uncover the important role that racial and ideological divisions play in local politics, scholarship should also consider how these divisions could impact the capacity for democratic public discourse and the positive outcomes that are associated.

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Table 1: Public Perceptions of Deliberation Index (PPDI)
[Survey of Local Residents - National]

In the past year, about how many public meetings have you attended, if any, where the direction or policies of the schools in your district were discussed – none, one or two meetings, three or four, or more than that?	• Attended at least one meeting: 35% • Attended no meetings: 65%
When your school district sets policies on things like discipline, spending or curriculum, does the district usually make a formal effort to get the public's input, does it usually proceed without public input, or don't you know enough to say?	• District usually makes a formal effort to get public's input: 17% • District usually proceeds without public input or Don't know enough to say: 83%
Do you think the officials and administrators in your school district really listen and take into account the education issues that people in the community care about, is this not happening, or don't you know enough to say?	• They listen and take into account education issues people care about: 35% • This is not happening/don't know enough to say: 65%

Table 2: Governing Elite Perceptions of Deliberation Index (GEPDI)
[Survey of Superintendents – Los Angeles]

The following questions ask you to reflect on school board meetings in your district:

Are community members open-minded when considering different viewpoints on a topic?	• Always: 6% • Usually: 58% • Sometimes: 21% • Never: 2%
Are community members interested in pursuing district-wide interests (as opposed to group/individual interests)?	• Always: 17% • Usually: 45% • Sometimes: 34% • Never: 2%
Are board members interested in pursuing district-wide interests (as opposed to group/individual interests)?	• Always: 51% • Usually: 36% • Sometimes: 9% • Never: 2%
Are community members involved in the policy-making process along with district officials?	• Always: 13% • Usually: 38% • Sometimes: 24% • Never: 2%
Once a policy decision is reached, do district officials take time to justify decisions to community members?	• Always: 25% • Usually: 42% • Sometimes: 28% • Never: 4%
Does a demographically-diverse representation of individuals provide input at board meetings (as opposed to a homogenous group)?	• Always: 15% • Usually: 40% • Sometimes: 30% • Never: 13%

Table 3: Comparing Public Meeting Observations		
	District A	District B
School Board Meeting Observations		
Response to Comment Per Month	**26%**	**13%**
Total Public Comments	105	190
Total Response to Comments	25	22
Elite Perceptions of Democracy		
Democracy Index Score	**13 (of 18)**	**7 (of 18)**
Viewpoint Exchange	2	2
Decision Justification	3	1
Diversity	2	0
Common Good (Community)	2	1
Common Good (Board)	3	2
Collective Decision-Making	1	1
Ecological Factors		
Enrollment Size	**5,000 - 10,000**	**5,000 – 10,000**
Percent Student Poverty	**> 40%**	**> 20%**
Ethnic Diversity Index*	**60**	**59**

Note: All estimates are averages except elite perceptions. Elite perceptions measures are scored responses to superintendent surveys. Approximate averages are not provided in order to preserve the identity of the district superintendents.

***** The state of California provides the Ethnic Diversity Index. This measure captures how evenly distributed the racial-ethnic composition of the district relative to the state. Scores range from 0-100. Higher scores indicate more diversity. According to the Education Data Partnership, the highest score in the state is currently 76.

Table 4: Local Resident Evaluations of Public Education (National Survey of Local Residents)		
	Schools are Quality	**Money's Worth**
Deliberation (resident perceptions)	0.376***	0.387***
	(0.093)	(0.093)
Parent Active in Schools	0.311	0.119
	(0.346)	(0.317)
Strong Community	0.727***	0.496**
	(0.158)	(0.172)
Civic Group Member	-0.086	-0.086
	(0.179)	(0.188)
Voter (Self-Reported)	-0.144	0.130
	(0.172)	(0.182)
Well Informed	0.413*	0.631***
	(0.187)	(0.188)
Special Interest in Control	-0.044	-0.151
	(0.157)	(0.171)
Urban District	-0.428*	-0.100
	(0.176)	(0.196)
Parent	0.273	-0.171
	(0.204)	(0.217)
Homeowner	-0.081	-0.019
	(0.185)	(0.207)
Education Attainment	-0.078	-0.054
	(0.183)	(0.193)
Income	0.153	0.312
	(0.183)	(0.189)
Black	-0.671	-0.575
	(0.280)	(0.331)
Latinx	-0.446	-0.538
	(0.315)	(0.398)
Female	0.248	0.184
	(0.156)	(0.168)
Observations	809	809
***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05		
Notes: Models are logistic regression estimates.		

Table 5: Local Resident Evaluations of Public Education for Respondents Not Involved in Schools, Without a Strong Sense of Community, and Low in Information (National Survey of Local Residents)						
	Schools are Quality			**Getting Money's Worth**		
	Low Info	Not Involved	Weak Comm.	Low Info	Not Involved	Weak Comm.
Deliberation (resident perceptions)	0.311**	0.406***	0.401**	0.352**	0.325***	0.450***
	(0.116)	(0.098)	(0.132)	(0.126)	(0.098)	(0.147)
Strong Community	0.681***	0.775***		0.510	0.589**	
	(0.185)	(0.164)		(0.220)	(0.181)	
Civic Group Member	-0.125	-0.133	0.011	-0.046	-0.183	-0.085
	(0.215)	(0.187)	(0.255)	(0.249)	(0.202)	(0.307)
Voter (Self-Reported)	-0.193	-0.224	-0.195	0.170	0.118	-0.182
	(0.205)	(0.177)	(0.241)	(0.238)	(0.189)	(0.292)
Well Informed		0.469*	0.437		0.595**	0.643*
		(0.195)	(0.262)		(0.196)	(0.295)
Special Interest in Control	0.297	0.003	-0.061	0.123	-0.054	0.237
	(0.182)	(0.164)	(0.216)	(0.217)	(0.180)	(0.265)
Urban District	-0.216	-0.342	-0.499*	-0.081	-0.021	-0.417
	(0.207)	(0.183)	(0.246)	(0.251)	(0.203)	(0.317)
Parent	0.371		-0.242	0.011		-0.482
	(0.247)		(0.284)	(0.283)		(0.369)
Parent Involved in School	0.409		1.004	-0.522		0.676
	(0.509)		(0.564)	(0.571)		(0.563)
Homeowner	0.004	-0.121	-0.103	0.031	-0.064	-0.043
	(0.215)	(0.190)	(0.244)	(0.263)	(0.213)	(0.298)
Education Attainment	0.102	-0.146	-0.268	-0.099	-0.065	0.205
	(0.219)	(0.189)	(0.265)	(0.258)	(0.205)	(0.311)
Income	0.137	0.256	-0.058	0.244	0.394	0.180
	(0.216)	(0.189)	(0.261)	(0.245)	(0.199)	(0.310)
Black	-0.759*	-0.598	-0.887*	-1.316*	-0.328	-0.345
	(0.355)	(0.301)	(0.376)	(0.623)	(0.355)	(0.469)
Latinx	-0.378	-0.583	-0.583	-0.472	-0.386	-0.757
	(0.365)	(0.329)	(0.433)	(0.507)	(0.402)	(0.652)
Female	0.237	0.281	0.145	0.260	0.243	-0.014
	(0183)	(0.162)	(0.216)	(0.218)	(0.177)	(0.264)
Observations	584	731	395	584	731	395
***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05						
Notes: Models are logistic regression estimates.						

Table 6: Local Resident Evaluations of Public Education (Los Angeles County)				
	Satisfied With School Quality			
	Deliberation	Deliberation + Performance	Low Performance	High Performance
District-Level Factors				
Deliberation (elite perceptions)	0.010*	0.008	0.017***	0.010
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.012)
Math Proficiency Rate		0.003	0.011**	-0.003
		(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Ideology Alignment	0.048	-0.050	0.050	0.083
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.052)	(0.065)
School Board Election Turnout	-0.001	-0.001	0.006*	-0.005**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
At-Large School Board Elections	-0.010	-0.021	-0.001	-0.005
	(0.062)	(0.038)	(0.049)	(0.130)
Policy Awareness (elite perceptions)	0.026	-0.034**	-0.058**	-0.003
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.030)
Student Poverty Rate	-0.002***	-0.001	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Individual-Level Factors				
Homeowner	-0.027	-0.027	-0.046	0.031
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.027)	(0.054)
Married	0.012	0.012	0.023	-0.100
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.056)
Parent	-0.009	-0.009	-0.023	0.132*
	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.061)
Some College	-0.050	-0.049	-0.038	-0.123
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.035)	(0.077)
College Graduate	-0.050	-0.048	-0.053	-0.008
	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.072)
Beyond College	-0.062	-0.062	-0.061	-0.072
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.039)	(0.085)
Working Class	0.025	0.024	0.012	0.195*
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.096)
Middle Class	0.069**	0.068**	0.056	0.210*
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.091)
Upper Class	0.070	0.070	0.044	0.277**
	(0.028)	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.109)
Citizen	-0.071***	-0.070***	-0.096***	0.047
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.065)
Black	-0.010	-0.006	-0.004	0.060
	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.128)
Latinx	0.029	0.028	0.018	-0.039
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.038)	(0.079)
Asian	0.007	0.001	-0.015	0.050
	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.039)	(0.079)
Liberal	0.083***	0.083***	0.103***	-0.041
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.065)
Moderate	0.025	0.025	0.029	0.034
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.077)
Observations (District-Level)	47	47	23	24
Observations (Individual-Level)	1890	1890	1628	262
***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05				
Notes: Models are fixed effects estimates from multi-level model estimations				

Figure 1: Rate of Board Response to Public Comment by Month for District A and District B (Sep. 2015-Dec. 2016)

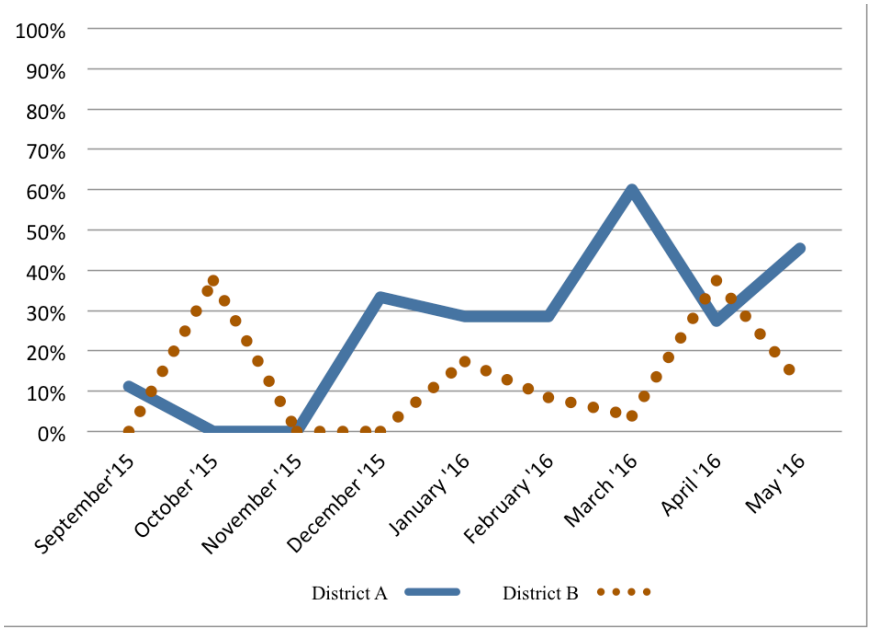

Figure 2: District Resident School Satisfaction as their Superintendent's Perception of Deliberation Shifts One Unit Controlling for Student Performance

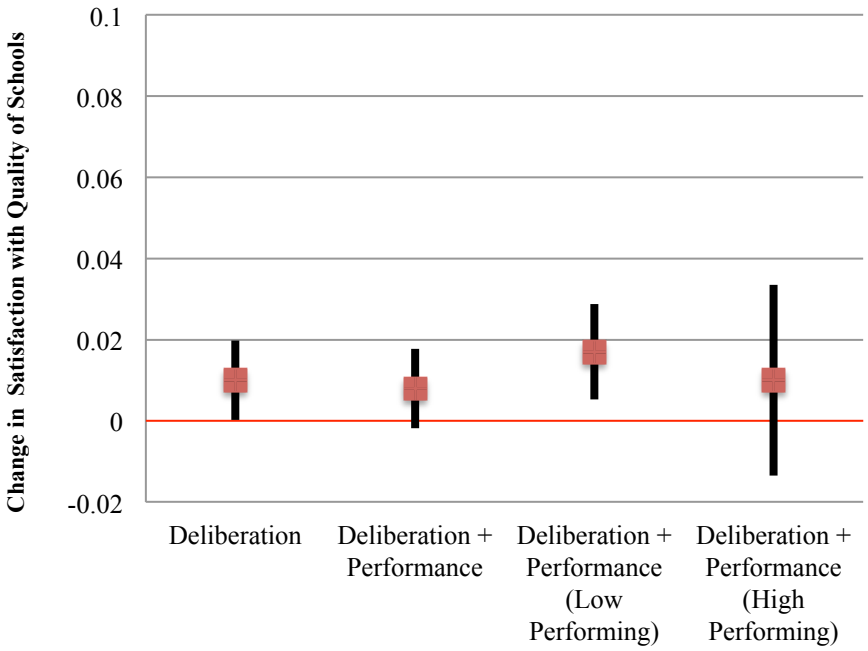

Figure 3: Reading Achievement District Average by Deliberative Democracy Index Score

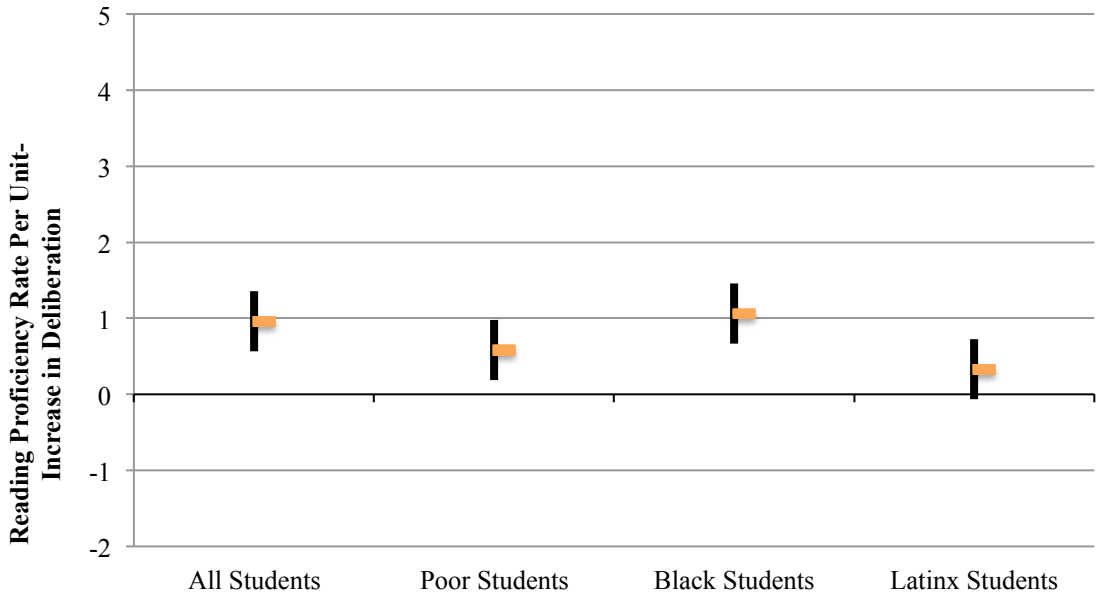

Figure 4 Average Reading and Math Achievement Per District for Vulnerable Sub-Groups by Deliberative Democracy Index Score