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WHAT COUNTS AS DELIBERATION? COMPARING PARTICIPANT AND OBSERVER RATINGS

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As a matter of convenience, commentators often refer to events like the Australian Citizens' Parliament (ACP) as exercises in "democratic deliberation." This parallels the casual way we use the word when we say a jury has left the courtroom to "go deliberate." A more careful use of terms, however, leads us to ask whether, in fact, the jury will deliberate, or just reach a verdict hastily, without discussion or reflection. Likewise, one can ask whether the ACP—and the Online Parliament (OP) that preceded it—produced a fully deliberative process, let alone a democratic one.

To answer those questions, I provide in this chapter a particular conception of democratic deliberation and a pair of analytic approaches. I begin by distinguishing rigorous deliberation from democratic social relationships so that one can assess the two elements independently. I then look at each from two perspectives—that of trained outside observers and then that of the participants themselves. As students in my undergraduate course on public deliberation, the observers in question studied the same definition presented herein. Though they undoubtedly applied that definition with uneven precision, I believe they did so conscientiously, and at the very least, their perspective—thousands of miles removed from the ACP itself—provides a useful counterpoint to the subjective experience of the Citizen Parliamentarians (CP) themselves.

A Conception of Democratic Deliberation

In *Political Communication and Deliberation*, I refined a definition that I had developed earlier in collaboration with two graduate students.¹ That conception of public deliberation distinguishes the analytic and social aspects of such a process. To say that one has conducted a rigorous analysis, the following criteria must be met:

- Create a solid information base
- Prioritize the key values at stake
- Identify a broad range of solutions
- Weigh the pros, cons, and tradeoffs among solutions
- Make the best decision possible

But events like the ACP that strive to yield public deliberation want not only rigor but also democratic social relationships among the participants. This requires doing the following:

- Adequately distribute speaking opportunities
- Ensure mutual comprehension
- Consider other ideas and experiences
- Respect other participants

There exists no single method for assessing such criteria.² Chapters 5 and 6 use a qualitative approach to assess aspects of deliberation, and chapter 14 uses the same criteria presented above to look at facilitation at the ACP. Another alternative is the systematic content coding demonstrated in chapter 9, but this chapter relies instead on the perceptions of participants and outside observers, using survey items derived from the analytic and social dimensions described herein. By using those data, I hope to show the degree to which the OP and ACP met a common set of criteria for democratic deliberation.

Assessing Deliberation in the Online Parliament

Though this chapter does not examine discussion transcripts in detail, it is still helpful to get a feel for what deliberation looked like when it occurred in an OP session. The discussions themselves, after all, are what the par-