JOURNAL OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Rountree, J., et al. (2023). Rhetorical Alignment between Political Campaign Discourse and Deliberation. *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, 19(1), pp. 1–10. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.1367

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rhetorical Alignment between Political Campaign Discourse and Deliberation

John Rountree*, Windy Yvonne Lawrence† and Sara A. Mehltretter Drury‡

The role of rhetoric in deliberation has received considerable attention in deliberative and rhetorical theory, but it is still unclear how non-deliberative rhetoric can work symbiotically with deliberative rhetoric within deliberative events. This essay builds on previous theorizing to better understand the potential for overlap between these two kinds of rhetoric. We introduce the concept of rhetorical alignment as a practice that interfaces non-deliberative rhetoric with deliberative rhetoric. Rhetorical alignment is defined as an inventional opening within a deliberative system that occurs when the same rhetoric serves internal and external ends that have potential for symbiosis and which otherwise seem to be in tension. Working from the specific context of a US political campaign, we rhetorically analyze how local political candidates aligned their rhetoric to deliberative norms in a 'Candidate Meet & Greet' deliberation. The alignment, in the US campaign context, highlights how candidates' discourse simultaneously appealed to their character as deliberative leaders and reinforced deliberative norms. Rhetorical alignment is a conceptual resource to bridge deliberation with other forms of political communication. Practical implications for promoting power sharing and deliberative framing are also considered.

Keywords: political campaigns; deliberation; rhetorical analysis; political candidates; invention

Introduction

What is the proper relationship between rhetoric and deliberation? As both rhetorical and deliberation scholars, this question is central to our work, but it is also central to our experience as faculty who organize public deliberations with political candidates and ordinary citizens together. It is tempting to view candidates as 'rhetorical' agents, seeking primarily strategic electoral ends that are at odds with deliberation. On its face, 'rhetoric' seems counterproductive to healthy deliberation.

And yet, we have observed political candidates in the height of campaign season interface quite well as co-participants in these deliberations. For example, the fact that numerous candidates attend multiple deliberations is testimony that they perceive the events as important. Additionally, we have learned that candidates share airtime, ask questions, listen to others, and encourage participation. They reiterate the importance of engaging with people who do not see the world the same way as they do. Something symbiotic is occurring in these deliberations between campaign and deliberative discourse.

Current deliberative and rhetorical theory does not provide much explanation for this dynamic. This is not a small oversight, as there are many potential benefits of connecting deliberation to mass politics in political campaigns. We introduce the concept of 'rhetorical alignment' to complement current theorizing on the connection between rhetoric and deliberation. To flesh out this concept, we analyze transcripts from a public deliberation we held among university students, faculty, staff, community members, and political candidates in October 2020.

We develop rhetorical alignment as rhetorical critics engaged in 'conceptually oriented criticism' (Jasinski 2001). Conceptually oriented criticism is an abductive process, where the rhetorical critic engages in a 'back and forth tacking movement between the text and the concept or concepts that are being investigated simultaneously' (Jasinski 2001: 256). While we foreground theory in the organization of this analysis, we engaged in an analytic process of 'tacking' between textual analysis and theory. The concept of rhetorical alignment emerges neither solely through a deep reading of deliberative and rhetorical theory, nor through an inductive analysis of a text—rather, it is the juxtaposition of the two.

In what follows, we first review theorizing on the role of rhetoric in deliberation. Some treat rhetoric as separate from deliberation, while others conflate the two terms. However, even among those who, we would argue, properly frame the relationship between rhetoric

* College of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Houston-Downtown, US

† University of Houston Downtown, US

‡ Wabash College, US

Corresponding author: John Rountree (rountreej@uhd.edu)

and deliberation, there is still a need to conceptualize how deliberative and non-deliberative communication interface within deliberations. We introduce rhetorical alignment to conceptualize this interface. The methods section gives details on the deliberation under analysis, as well as the analytic approach of rhetorical criticism. In the analysis, we show how rhetorical alignment occurs in two ways in deliberations with candidates: through an overlap between the discursive acts of campaigning and the deliberative acts of firstly, legitimizing diverse perspectives and disagreement; and secondly, sharing discursive power. In the conclusion, we discuss the conceptual value of rhetorical alignment for bridging deliberation with other forms of political communication, as well as practical implications for framing and power-sharing in deliberations.

The Role of Rhetoric in Deliberation

The role of rhetoric in deliberation is difficult, partly because there is slippage in uses of the terms 'rhetoric' and 'deliberation.' Some democratic theorists separate rhetoric from deliberation as distinct modes of communication. These accounts often rely on an Aristotelian understanding of rhetoric as the art of persuasive speech (or more accurately, the art of 'observing' means of persuasion). Rhetoric, Dryzek (2010) contends, can help effectively connect different elements of the deliberative system, especially to level the playing field when different actors within the public sphere face structural constraints to participate in decision making. Young (2000) makes a similar case for rhetoric as necessary to overcome 'internal exclusions' that occur within deliberation.

As Garsten (2011) systematically shows, these efforts to incorporate rhetoric in deliberative democracy treat it as a supplement to deliberative reasoning, as an important but separate category. The problem with a strict conceptual separation between deliberation and rhetoric is two-fold: firstly, it undervalues rhetoric as a form of practical reasoning; and secondly, it ignores the persuasive strategies evident in even the most neutral, process-oriented deliberative communication. First, multiple scholars have defended the art of rhetoric as one not concerned with the manipulation of an audience, but with appealing to an audience's judgment in all its forms, including appeals to character, rational argument, and emotion (Garsten 2011; Farrell 1993; Allen 2004). In fact, the attempt to create a strict separation between rhetoric and deliberation can lend credence to the critique that deliberation is either elitist or insufficiently concerned with real politics (Welsh 2013).

Second, the conceptual separation between rhetoric and deliberation reinforces, as Young (2000) rightly critiques, a sense of the innocence or superior authenticity of deliberation to 'rhetorical' communication. It takes persuasion out of deliberation, but persuasion cannot be removed from deliberation. Take, for example, facilitator communication. Deliberation facilitators are typically meant to be neutral and process-focused, and efforts to persuade interlocutors towards specific outcomes threaten the legitimacy of the process. Facilitators use communication approaches to support the process, such as 'making space for the quiet person' or 'acknowledging feelings' (Kaner 2014). These approaches are in their own way, efforts at persuasion—one aims to persuade a quiet participant that they have the capacity to join the deliberation; another aims to persuade participants that their feelings are being listened to. The distinction between different communication orientations is real and important, but this distinction cannot be between efforts at persuasion and efforts at reason or understanding.

If one turns to rhetorical studies, most scholarship on rhetoric and deliberation relies on a broad conception of both key terms. Alongside a permissive definition of rhetoric as encompassing practically all (if not all) human communication (Booth 2004), rhetorical scholars commonly conflate 'deliberation' with almost any public policy rhetoric (Kock & Villasden 2012: 3–4; Asen 2015: 14; Rood 2019: 35–6). Permissive definitions of deliberation of course, are not confined to rhetorical studies, and may be appropriate when discussing discourse within the deliberative system. However, if we only rely on a permissive definition that dissolves distinctions between deliberation and other forms of policy advocacy, we erode deliberation's descriptive and prescriptive power, risking what O'Neill (2002) calls a 'deflationary rhetorical perspective' that reduces all deliberation to mere strategic efforts to gain power.

We should resist efforts to treat deliberation as separate from rhetoric or to solely rely on permissive conceptions of deliberation. Rather, we should recognize deliberation as rhetorical but distinguish it from other forms of rhetoric. Ivie (1998) and Chambers (2009) take us in this direction with the term 'deliberative rhetoric,' which Chambers defines as a form of rhetoric that 'engages citizens' practical judgment and as such, treats its audience as autonomous deliberators deserving of respect,' which is distinct from 'plebiscitary rhetoric' that 'is concerned first and foremost with gaining support for a proposition and only secondarily with the merits of the arguments or persuasion for that matter' (Chambers 2009: 337). Building on Garver (1994), Garsten (2011) takes a similar approach to Chambers, separating rhetoric concerned with assent to specific propositions with rhetoric that promotes interlocutors' practical judgment. The distinction is between rhetoric aimed at internal and external ends; internal ends focus on the communicative act itself being virtuous, whereas external ends focus on impacting the audience's beliefs or choices. In other words, deliberative rhetoric reinforces the deliberative process itself as its own end, whereas non-deliberative rhetoric pursues ends external to the deliberation that could be achieved through other means.

Returning briefly to the central puzzle animating this essay—how is it that political candidates (or other 'strategic' actors) can interface well with deliberation—Garsten (2011) provides a tentative answer. Internal and external ends can be pursued simultaneously:

> The opportunity to practice [deliberative rhetoric] arises only when it is plausible to regard the activity of finding and using arguments (the internal end)

> as a viable means of producing choices or actions (the external end). Aristotle seems to have thought that the ancient city-state made this alignment of internal and external ends plausible. (Garsten 2011: 174)

The notion of 'alignment' between internal and external ends offers a more robust way to conceptualize different kinds of rhetoric operating within a deliberation. The term suggests that a symbiotic relationship can be developed between two different purposes. The point becomes clearer when Garsten uses campaign rhetoric as an example and considers the possibility of deliberation's internal ends being matched with the external ends of getting elected.

Garsten (2011) does not explain how alignment would work, but the concept of alignment could offer insights for integrating political candidates, interest groups, or other traditional political actors into deliberations. Therefore, we develop the concept of 'rhetorical alignment' to build on Garsten and explore this potential interface. We define rhetorical alignment as *an inventional opening, within a deliberative system, which occurs when the same rhetoric serves internal and external ends that have potential for symbiosis and which otherwise seem to be in conflict*. There are a few key elements to break down in this conceptualization.

Deliberative system places deliberation in the wide variety of contexts that characterize a political system, and it has been recognized as the appropriate framework when combining rhetoric in mass politics with deliberation (Dryzek 2010).

Alignment occurs when there is a *seeming conflict in ends* between deliberation and other forms of political communication, when the latter pursues external ends that seem to be unachievable with the internal ends of deliberation. For example, Parkinson (2006) observed that television news relies on narrative and drama for the external end of gaining viewership, which can conflict with the internal end of deliberation. We expand in the next section how campaign rhetoric also seems to clash with deliberative internal ends.

Invention is a classical canon of the rhetorical art, referring to the stage of developing an oration where the speaker generates or discovers arguments to adapt to different situations (Herrick 2018). Referencing an *inventional opening* suggests the discovery of a rhetorical approach that can be deployed situationally based on the deliberative context.

The *same rhetoric serving internal and external ends that have potential for symbiosis* builds on Garsten (2011) and identifies that the same rhetorical acts can mutually benefit the internal ends of deliberation and external ends of other parts of the political system. The situation mirrors one recognized by rhetorical scholars: rhetors may need to address multiple audiences simultaneously. Benoit and D'Agostine (1994) reveal three strategies for doing so: selecting one audience to the exclusion of another; addressing the audiences separately; or integrating the audiences by finding a way to address both simultaneously. Integration mirrors what we mean by symbiosis. According to Benoit and D'Agostine, integration works by framing the ends of one audience as the means for another; of course, this matches up with the model of internal ends being used to serve external ends. Candidate rhetoric could be viewed as an internal end for deliberation (promoting healthy deliberative attitudes and processes in the immediate interaction), while it serves as an external end for the campaign (promoting candidates' public image). This relationship applies to other types of actors entering deliberative spaces, for example, with interest group advocates supporting deliberative aims, while 'instrumentalizing' deliberation for their own ends (Hendriks 2006).

To show how rhetorical alignment operates in practice, we outline the seeming conflict between political campaign rhetoric and deliberative rhetoric before analyzing rhetorical alignment from a deliberative forum.

Aligning Deliberative Rhetoric and Campaign Rhetoric

To investigate rhetorical alignment, in the rest of this essay, we look at deliberation in United States' political campaigns. Political campaign rhetoric seems to pursue external ends at odds with the internal ends of deliberation. In this section, we review the seeming conflict between the two forms of political communication, as well as some attempts to create a complementary relationship.

Campaign rhetoric emphasizes adversarial politics where one side attempts to win, and candidates do not need the support of the full electorate to do so. In US primary campaigns, candidates are incentivized to appeal to their base of supporters, but even in general election campaigns, candidates are incentivized to target messages to independents and potential vote defectors and to mobilize supporters to vote (Benoit 2007). As a result, candidates often exclude considering a wide array of interests in setting priorities and defining issues in the campaign. Deliberation, by contrast, pursues the internal end of collaborative reason-giving and perspective-taking among a diverse array of people to support the legitimacy of collective decisions (Benhabib 1996) and their epistemic merit (Landemore 2013). One important criterion for this process involves an obligation to consider others' views (Gastil & Black 2008). Deliberation does not seem to serve the external end of getting elected, as campaign communication focuses on a select set of interests from a target audience, rather than appealing to a diverse audience.

Additionally, campaign rhetoric is asymmetrical, and candidates may dominate discussion by not sharing discursive power within the deliberation. Discursive power is the ability to select, frame, and shape topics (Jungherr, Posegga, & An 2019). In research on US campaigns, candidates have been found to engage in two main types of strategic appeals, including appeals to partisan issues popular with their base of supporters and appeals to character or public image that contrast them with their opponents (Benoit 2017). Candidates have a strategic interest to define the most salient issues of concern to their base and public image aspects in

each election (Motion & Leitch 1996; Parry-Giles 2010). As such, candidates spend time giving speeches, taking out ads, and utilizing speaking strategies to elevate their power and set their campaign priorities within spaces designed for campaign speech (Tedesco 2001). However, deliberation emphasizes social equality in the discussion process; therefore, an important measure of successful deliberation is that it shares discursive power (Gastil & Black 2008). Again, the internal ends of quality deliberation seem at odds with the external ends of campaigns, at least in the US context.

Rhetorical alignment seems unlikely, given the campaign incentives to pursue discourse at odds with deliberation, but there have been positive steps towards creating a complementary relationship between deliberation and campaigns. One model empowers citizen deliberators to evaluate campaign discourse. Gastil & Black (2008), for example, conceptualize how 'deliberative elections' could create a virtuous cycle of voters deliberating on who to elect, then evaluating their performance in office. Candidates could meet electoral ends by performing well in such evaluations.

Some deliberative mini-publics have been used to assess candidates in practice, such as citizens' juries organized through the Jefferson Center in the United States or the National Issues Convention held in Austin, Texas in 1996 (Crosby 2003; McCombs & Reynolds 1999). In Athens, Greece in 2006, a Deliberative Poll was used to select a candidate for mayor for the left-wing party PASOK, and other Deliberative Polls have evaluated candidates for office in Britain and the United States (Fishkin 2009). In these cases, citizens were given the time and resources to consider candidates and campaign issues. They could then question candidates on the issues and offer formal ratings in some cases.

While candidates had incentives to join these deliberative processes to enhance their credibility, or in the Athens case, to be selected for the party's nomination, the conventional wisdom seems to be to maintain the integrity of citizen deliberation by keeping it one step removed from political leaders during election campaigns. Some processes, for example, have incorporated politicians as co-deliberators, but outside of the campaign context (Neblo, Esterling, & Lazer 2018; Grönlund et al. 2022).

Based on this gap in the literature on studying politician-citizen interactions in an election context, we posed a broad research question for this study to explore the dynamics of candidates engaging with citizens in deliberation:

> RQ: How do political candidates in an election cycle interact with other participants in facilitated small group deliberations?

In the next section, we review background on the deliberation under analysis that did incorporate political candidates as co-participants with ordinary citizens before going into the methods of our analysis. In the analysis, we show how rhetorical alignment provides a way to conceptualize the productive integration of candidates and campaign rhetoric with deliberation.

Candidate Meet & Greet Deliberation

This essay examines communicative interactions in deliberation from an online 'Candidate Meet & Greet' deliberation hosted on October 28, 2020, just six days before election day. The Candidate Meet & Greet is a staple event at a southwestern, public university that is co-hosted between a center for deliberation and the student government association (SGA). The event is open to the public and brings together local political candidates, students, members of the public, and other members of the university community.

The Candidate Meet & Greet event originated as a student-led, student-run event, with the goal of just bringing candidates on campus for a traditional, political mix-and-mingle for students to get to know local politicians. In 2018, the SGA invited the faculty-run center to co-host the event because of the trust that had been built between the two organizations, and because the SGA sought to create more opportunities for deliberative dialogue at the event. Over time, the event went through multiple iterations, gaining valuable participant input and increasing trust with the SGA. In 2020, the center created more structure for the event. Two to three trained student facilitators guided each discussion group to promote greater shared speaking time among participants.

The 2020 event took place less than a week before election day in the context of heated and competitive local elections that featured huge fundraising efforts, controversial attack ads, vandalism of the Democratic party headquarters, and fights over pandemic voting rules. Additionally, due to COVID-19, the event was moved to an online, Zoom format to allow for simulated, face-to-face discussion during a time of grave public health concerns surrounding large gatherings of people.

Participants were not limited to students as were previous iterations of the event. University students, university faculty and staff, political candidates, and other community members were invited to a two-hour Zoom deliberation. For university community members, the event was advertised through flyers, mass email invitations, and through reaching out to individual instructors to bring their classes. In addition, email invitations were sent out to all local candidates to participate.

The event was framed through an issue guide that was collaboratively created by the center and the student government through extensive interviews with 100 university stakeholders and community members. The guide poses the question 'what should be "We the People's" role in democratic life?' It frames three possible approaches to the question, including focusing on activities they could take as individuals (e.g., buying green, supporting causes through financial donations); focusing their time on voting, researching candidates, and motivating others to vote; or collaborating with others in their communities to affect change. The issue guide supported the use of a National Issues Forum-style process during the deliberation, which is a commonly used and recognized method for helping community members work through tradeoffs between actions during deliberation (Gastil & Dillard 1999; Dillard 2013; Carcasson & Sprain

2016). Additionally, though the deliberation was a 'one-time' event, it was situated within a bi-annual initiative, which holds deliberations with political candidates and elected leaders before each local election. In doing so, the organizers seek to hold deliberation forums, which build the community's resources for collaborative action by developing engaged community members, increasing mutual trust, and improving democratic skills and attitudes (Carcasson & Sprain 2016).

To promote healthy discussion and help with logistics, participants were given several guidelines in the opening speech by the center director, such as 'Be brief, and allow others to participate,' 'Listen to understand,' and 'Disagreement is important, but do so with curiosity, not hostility.'

The deliberation consisted of five stages of small group discussion (see **Figure 1**). First, participants identified a personal stake in the issue. Then, they took time to consider each of the three options separately. Finally, the deliberation concluded by discussing what actions both the community and individual participants could take. To maximize candidate-citizen interaction, political candidates were rotated to a new breakout room after each segment. The plan for the forum had two candidates randomly paired together who would then rotate among the groups. However, some candidates who pre-registered did not show up to the deliberation. The result was that there was one pair of candidates that rotated together across the Zoom rooms, while the other candidates were rotating alone.

Analytic Methods and Texts

To answer our research question about the interactions of candidates and other participants in deliberation, we analyzed small group discussions from the Candidate Meet & Greet. Ethics approval was secured for recording some of the breakout rooms during the deliberation. During registration, participants were given the option to participate in a research component for the deliberation. Consenting participants were placed in breakout rooms, where student assistants recorded videos of the discussions through OBS Studio, while others could participate through unrecorded breakout rooms. This resulted in five discussion groups being recorded, transcribed, and de-identified with five candidates and 32 other participants.

To analyze the transcripts, we used rhetorical criticism, an interpretive research methodology that draws on the fields of rhetoric, argumentation, and communication studies (Condit & Bates 2009). As a type of interpretive approach to deliberation research (Ercan, Hendriks & Boswell 2017), rhetorical criticism does not employ experimental designs or make strong effects claims; indeed, rhetorical scholars have been warned away from making claims about direct effects (Zarefsky 2008). Rhetorical critics examine communication artifacts to understand how they create meaning and invite deliberative judgments within a given context (Rountree 2022).

Rhetorical criticism is an abductive process, where researchers orient back and forth from text to theory, allowing the significant meanings in a text to guide the analysis. Jasinski (2001) describes this as 'conceptually oriented criticism,' which relies on 'the constant interaction of careful reading and rigorous conceptual reflection' (256). While rhetorical criticism has its roots in analyzing historical speeches, Lawrence and Bates (2014) note the importance of using rhetorical criticism to examine deliberative speech acts, the back-and-forth exchanges between interlocutors, capturing the shared rhetorical creation that occurs in small group deliberation. Rhetorical critics have investigated, for example, the discourse of public deliberation processes, such as epistemological assumptions in local water supply deliberations (Lind 2019) and argument quality in citizens' juries (Drury et al. 2021; Rountree 2021).

Rhetorical critics typically forgo formal methodological procedures (Rountree 2022), but as Lawrence and Bates (2014) suggest, the approach mirrors that of qualitative thematic analysis that uses open coding, axial coding, and theoretical sampling (Lindlof & Taylor 2017). In this study, each author closely examined the transcripts for instances that addressed the research question, noted where important phenomena occurred, met with the team to compare notes and iteratively generate, define, and refine themes, and returned to the transcripts for another round of analysis. This process continued through multiple rounds until the themes were fully developed, defined, and agreed upon by the research team to proceed to the write-up stage. Through an iterative process, the analysis was then juxtaposed to rhetorical and deliberative theory to develop the concept of rhetorical alignment.

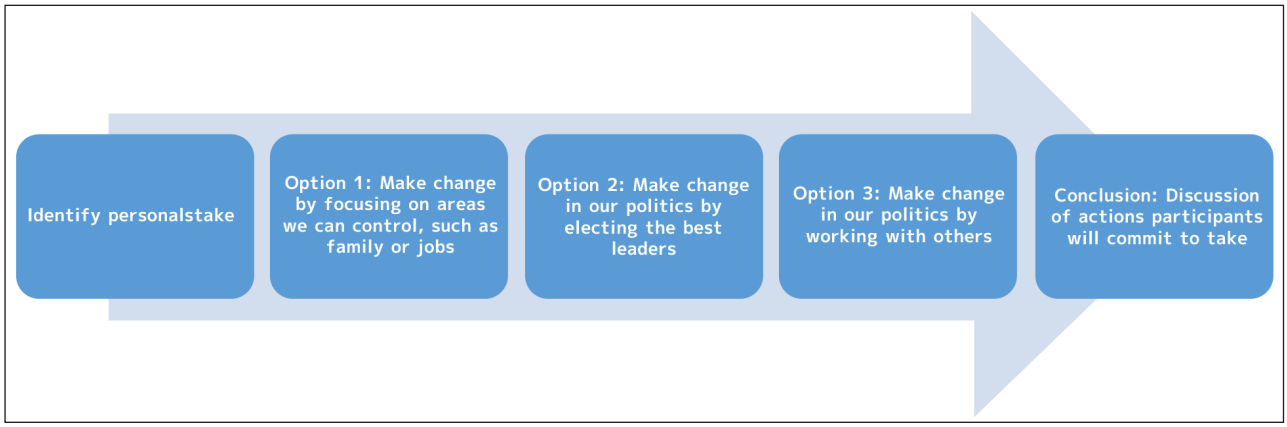

Figure 1: Deliberation rounds in Candidate Meet & Greet.

Analysis of Candidate Meet & Greet Deliberation

The analysis revealed candidates often adapted their campaign discourse to the deliberative environment. The analysis revealed that candidates adapted their rhetoric to the deliberation in two key ways: legitimizing diverse perspectives and disagreement; and sharing discursive power. Candidates did not sacrifice their campaign ends in adopting a deliberative rhetoric. Instead, they discovered a path for rhetorical alignment, where both forms of adaptation met the internal ends of deliberation, while serving the external end of promoting candidates' public image as deliberative leaders.

The following analysis shows how deliberative norms can be promoted even during an electoral campaign with the small intervention of a two-hour, facilitated online deliberation on a meta-democratic question ('What should be "We the People's" role in democratic life?'). This intervention can help reinvent deliberative interactions between citizens and candidates. While having a more polarizing discussion topic might call for a more extensive intervention, the Candidate Meet & Greet shows that rhetorical alignment can happen between campaigns and deliberation.

Projecting deliberative leadership through legitimizing diverse perspectives and disagreement

The first type of alignment involves appeals to candidates' public image by legitimizing diverse perspectives and disagreement. Campaign image appeals focus on electoral success and are generally achieved by elevating personal qualities, experience, values, and principles in contrast to opponents. Yet, to argue that one's personal qualities, experience, or values are superior to another's conflicts with the internal ends of deliberative rhetoric. The internal ends of deliberative rhetoric imply that individuals who speak from multiple standpoints and experiences should be equally valued in decision-making. Candidates in the deliberation thus tie together their candidacy with the importance of listening to diverse perspectives and valuing disagreement. In a space where deliberative norms have been highlighted, candidate discourse that values and promotes those norms also become an appeal to their image as deliberative leaders, and through a virtuous cycle, this reinforces the norms of the discussion.

One candidate framed themselves as a 'political activist' who 'got into this to make a difference,' but stressed that as a current elected official, it was essential 'to have conversations with people that disagree with us so that we can hear from people with different backgrounds and different perspectives.' Another candidate talked about working with the public, encouraging community members to 'have access to their representatives' by 'calling [them].' However, in the same speaking turn, this candidate also emphasized 'the only way to broaden your perspectives is to listen to people who don't agree with you.' In both cases, the candidates connected their own experiences in running for office or serving as a current elected official to the importance of bringing diverse community perspectives into politics. In other words, the candidates were not only seeking supporters, but also actively encouraged disagreement as a healthy part of democracy.

Furthermore, candidates often appeal to their public image by connecting their actions with deliberative leadership. A third candidate, for example, was asked by other participants how one can tell who the best leaders are during an election. The candidate explained that they should try to find someone who would listen to the whole community as an elected official. This was referenced as both a communicative process and as a type of public-spirited approach to representation:

> But you want somebody who will actually listen to the community as a whole and not just to a few people. That's what I was looking for in a candidate and, unfortunately, I didn't find it. Then, I was trying to push somebody else to run for office, and nobody else would. So that's why I'm here [...] So yes, you have to listen to your constituents. And you have to seek after the best interests for the whole community, not just that one constituent [....]

The candidate never explicitly used this as an appeal to support their candidacy, but it is implied in their discussion of how to elect the best leaders. The two-step rhetorical approach on display here identifies the need for a particular type of candidate ('somebody who will actually listen to the community as a whole'), then claims the candidate in question fulfills that need ('so that's why I'm here'). Deliberative leadership, within this context, is framed as a campaign issue. The type of deliberation is not fully elaborated on here, though the candidate was clear that it involves hearing diverse perspectives. Additionally, the candidate's presence in a deliberative space organized for diverse views served as further evidence of their political leadership. They admitted later in the discussion that listening to the community will likely come through advocacy groups raising different issues that need to be considered—but there was also an implication of deliberation with the broader public, such as the space they were occupying during these discussions. The candidate, at another point of the discussion, emphasized the need 'to listen to your community, to listen to the challenges, to listen to the needs, to listen to what people are saying, and then to represent that in [state capitol].'

Overall, we have shown in this section how candidates aligned their campaign rhetoric with that of the deliberation by framing deliberative norms as an appeal to their public image. Specifically, legitimizing diverse perspectives and disagreement within the polity is articulated as a form of deliberative leadership, and candidates were able to connect that vision of leadership to their own actions and attitudes. In the next section, we examine how candidates share discursive power as another form of deliberative leadership in the discussions.

Projecting deliberative leadership through sharing discursive power

The second theme that emerged in the analysis was candidates bolstering their projection of deliberative leadership by sharing discursive power with community

members, and as a result, encouraging community member participation. Given the incentive for candidates to set policy priorities when campaigning, it is significant that candidates in this deliberation often shared discursive power among their groups by allowing other participants to speak first, by making references to creating space for others, and by allowing extended silences to occur before speaking. In isolation, this seems to be a sacrifice by candidates, not rhetorical alignment. However, in a deliberative context where candidates have promoted deliberative leadership, sharing discursive power further enacts the goodwill of candidates as deliberative leaders.

One place to observe this is in who speaks first in the different rounds of the deliberation. The person who speaks first can frame the issue and prioritize aspects of the topic they find most relevant. This can create 'path dependency,' where early interventions in the deliberation have a larger effect on the course of the conversation (Goodin 2008). We saw this, for example, when a student opened one of the rounds explaining how politics impacts them 'financially, emotionally, and mentally,' and other participants mostly limited their conversational turns to aspects of the topic the student prioritized. A faculty member agreed that politics 'has impacted us in every aspect of our lives' and 'caused family dissention with relatives.' The candidate also spoke in response to the student's priority setting: '... one of the reasons I decided to run for office is because of how politics is impacting me and my family. It impacts our dynamic, meaning our stability. Our physical and mental health... our ability to earn equal pay.' This example demonstrates how candidates shared space by relating their issues with the community members who shared first.

Candidates spoke first in roughly half of all discussion rounds. Facilitators opened most rounds by inviting anyone to speak, hence candidates had the opportunity to start the discussion, but often chose not to. In fact, candidates often spoke only after extended silences and marked their hesitance to dominate the discussion. In one round, the candidate waited 12 seconds after the facilitator opened the floor before relenting, 'I guess I'll start. I did not get into this business to be shy.' The 'I guess' marked the candidate's uncertainty about starting, and the following sentence justified their decision to speak first. This act of justification reinforced the expectation that others will speak—candidates are not presumed to open discussion. Another candidate indicated they would end their turn to give others a chance to talk: 'So I'll stop there because I don't want to take up everyone's time.' Here, the candidate justified why they stopped speaking. The first candidate defended their goodwill against the presumption of dominating discussion, and the latter candidate proactively built up their goodwill as someone who makes space for others.

Simultaneously, while candidates shared discursive space and priority setting with citizens, they also actively encouraged community member participation in decision-making. This encouragement of active community member decision-making participation contrasts with campaign discourse, where candidates typically demonstrate their fitness to lead as sound decision-makers, which results in citizens being relegated to the narrow role of voter.

Encouraging participation took several different forms. In some cases, candidates urged other participants to speak during quiet moments. One candidate responded to an extended silence by asking, 'Is it true that politics don't affect anyone else?' A different candidate, after speaking their turn, responded to other participants' silence by asking them more about their experience and how they came to be involved in the event:

> So it's kind of quiet. And I'm a candidate and candidates can talk. So I'll just be honest. I'd love to give this group ideas because I was once sitting where you were. And I know what that felt like and I remember the challenges that I dealt with around that time [...] Is this all one study of class? Can somebody give me some more clarity on that part?

In this short speaking turn, the candidate justified speaking once again. The candidate indicated they 'can talk,' but this notably does not mean the candidate 'will' talk here. They briefly used the conversational opening to indicate their willingness to help the students with ideas ('I'd love to give this group ideas'), to identify with the position they are in ('once sitting where you were'), and to invite them to speak again on how they became involved in the event and where they are in their college careers. This established the candidate's motives to help the students, but this was then performatively contrasted with their ability to open the space for others. In other words, the exchange reveals an inventional opening, where a candidate could promote their public image as someone who wants to listen and be helpful, while also sharing power within the deliberation.

The candidates' commitment to enabling other participants to join the conversation was further demonstrated through deference to the student facilitators. The facilitators' role was to help ensure each person had a chance to speak, and by deferring to the facilitators, candidates showed goodwill to the process that protected shared discursive power. For example, in one round, the facilitator was accidentally disconnected from the online meeting briefly. This left a minor power vacuum, as no one had clear authority to lead the rest of the discussion round:

Candidate:	[Facilitator] must have a technical difficulty. She must have a technical challenge. Is there anyone else that would like [to speak] then? Let's just pick up, [Student].
Student:	I'll go for it.
Candidate:	If [unintelligible] would like to hear that [unintelligible].
Student:	Let's see. Let's see. Hmm. Should I pick up as a facilitator or should I just comment?
Candidate:	I hear that. I think you can rock it. Do it.
Student:	Just go. Okay. All right. So we've heard a lot about, I think, the plus sides of it. And I think, [Alumnus], we did point out some downsides of it. Are there any other downsides, any other issues with this approach that anyone can foresee?

In this instance, the candidate reinforced student-led facilitation. When the facilitator first disconnected, the candidate jumped in to act as a facilitator and kept the discussion going by calling on a student to speak. The student expressed uncertainty, unsure if the candidate was suggesting they pick up as facilitator or be the next to comment. The candidate encouraged them, saying 'you can rock it,' making space for the student and others to speak.

Political candidates' adaptation to deliberative norms is not a foregone conclusion, as previous research has shown that actors accustomed to other forms of political communication do not always engage well with deliberative processes (Hendriks 2011). Candidates navigate rhetorical environments where they must set the policy agenda and persuade others of their policy views. Yet, in an event marked by deliberative norms, candidates risk losing goodwill by violating those norms. Not only would a candidate cut against one of the guiding principles from the event organizer to 'be brief, and allow others to participate,' but they would also negatively contrast themselves with what many participants were defining as good leadership. In addition, a candidate dominating discussion risks clashing with a student facilitator in a university setting. A candidate quarrelling with a student among students, faculty, staff, and alumni could appear disrespectful and unsupportive.

Conclusion

The value of rhetorical alignment revealed through this analysis is twofold. First, it conceptually captures the possibilities for deliberative and non-deliberative rhetoric to work symbiotically. Building on previous conceptions of rhetoric in deliberation, rhetorical alignment shows how the internal ends of deliberation can integrate with the external ends of other forms of political communication. Although deliberative practitioners may want candidates, interest groups, or other deliberative system actors' motives to be the same as their own, rhetorical alignment reveals that alignment can happen in rhetorical acts themselves, rather than the motives of rhetors.

Second, rhetorical alignment reveals an opening to create more connections with political candidates as full participants in deliberation. We do not contend this single forum altered local campaign discourse or the post-deliberation rhetoric of individual candidates, but it did reveal an opening for further collaboration to bolster deliberative goals. Theorists and practitioners should more intentionally consider rhetorical alignment to create effective linkages between deliberative innovations and the political system. Candidates, for example, could lend publicity and legitimacy to deliberative processes, which are both important for linking deliberation to the public sphere (Curato & Böker 2016). Candidates could be informal resources in the deliberation for information on exigent political issues and could in turn, better learn from citizens. The possibility of political leaders serving this informational role was also identified in Grönlund et al. (2022). Creating processes that include political candidates as co-participants may also raise citizens' sense of political efficacy.

Our analysis also provides implications for deliberative practice when incorporating political candidates into deliberation. Deliberative formats may lessen the issues that arise from unequal power in candidate-citizen communication. When candidates participate in groups with everyday people, they hold legitimacy power, a type of status that is gained from title and position (Lyngstad 2017). Deliberation designers can capitalize on the potential for well-designed spaces to distribute 'discursive power.' When citizens, who are traditionally low-status group members, are trained as facilitators, our case study illustrates how their presence can mark sites where candidates are incentivized to share discursive power. Facilitators may even more intentionally engage in strategies, such as calling on students first, to help build discursive power for low-status group members.

A deliberation's framing may help foster rhetorical alignment, and future research should explore the connection between organizers' framing and the rhetoric of candidates in mixed spaces. Ground rules and opening speeches can help co-create deliberative norms candidates recognize they must navigate to elevate their own credibility in the group. Designers may additionally consider how issues of power asymmetry can be related to 'levels of participation' baked into discussion frames, such as 'lay control,' 'collaboration,' and 'consultation.' 'Lay control' refers to processes that make citizens the sole authority for decision making, 'collaboration' implies 'shared decision making,' and 'consultation' is 'characterized by citizens being invited to give their input' (Pratt 2019: 52). In our case, the discussion frame centered on 'We the People's' role in 21st century politics, whereby candidates were being consulted in the decision-making, instead of the other way around.

There are important limitations to this analysis. The topic was not a traditional hot button issue that would have foregrounded partisan identification and entrenched disagreements. Future research should investigate how candidates and participants interact with a more divisive issue. Previous scholarship suggests a deliberative environment (e.g., facilitators, deliberative framing) could mitigate against polarization by promoting engagement with alternative views (Strandberg, Himmelroos, & Grönlund 2019). Candidates may also still be incentivized to demonstrate deliberative leadership in such an environment, but the issue merits further investigation.

Additionally, the advertised title for the deliberation, 'Candidate Meet and Greet,' potentially created role confusion for candidates who are accustomed to traditional 'meet and greet' events that center the candidates, instead of the more equal engagement privileged in a deliberation. Future research might consider how the naming of a deliberation can hold powerful framing implications for engagement rules. Finally, this study investigated the co-constructed meanings of participants in a candidate-citizen deliberation, but future research could take an experimental approach to understand the direct effects of these types of interventions on candidates and campaigns.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Rountree, J., Lawrence, W. Y., & Drury, S. A. M. (2023). Rhetorical Alignment between Political Campaign Discourse and Deliberation. *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, 19(1), pp. 1–10. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.1367

Submitted: 27 August 2022 **Accepted:** 11 September 2023 **Published:** 15 November 2023

Journal of Deliberative Democracy is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by University of Westminster Press.