Strategy Versus UnderstandingHow Orientations Toward Political Conversation Influence Political Engagement

Article *in* Communication Research · May 2008

DOI: 10.1177/0093650208315977

CITATIONS
88

READS
588

1 author:

Hernando Rojas
University of Wisconsin–Madison
93 PUBLICATIONS **3,857** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Communication Research
Volume 35 Number 4
August 2008 452-480

10.1177/0093650208315977
http://crx.sagepub.com
hosted at
http://online.sagepub.com

Strategy Versus Understanding

How Orientations Toward Political Conversation Influence Political Engagement

Hernando Rojas[1]
University of Wisconsin–Madison

This study combines empirical political communication research models with theoretical accounts provided by the theory of communicative action to expand the understanding of how communication matters for democratic political functioning, particularly under conditions of social instability. Building on the Habermasian distinction between strategic orientations versus understanding orientations in conversation, the author explores the role of conversation orientations as antecedents to political engagement. Examination of conversation orientations in Colombia, a society characterized by social conflict, provides evidence of the democratic benefits of orientations toward reaching understanding and the deleterious effects of strategic orientations for political involvement, associational membership, and ultimately participation, as well as the importance of including conversation orientations as explanatory factors in models that seek to explain political involvement. These findings speak to the potential for communicative rationality to transcend the use of force and bring about action coordination based on understanding in communities experiencing civil strife.

Keywords: *political conversation; civic participation; communicative action*

Mancur Olson (1965) has made us acutely aware of the problems and challenges of collective action, highlighting how action coordination is usually taken for granted despite the challenges inherent in achieving it. This work emphasizes that utilitarian rationality poses a barrier to collective action.

While all social organizations face the problem of action coordination, the solutions they pose to this challenge vary considerably. Some organizations resolve their action coordination needs by relying on mythical forces that ordain a path of action; some use hierarchical structures that command action; some engage in exchange that regulates action; and still others seek common understanding to determine a course of action.

Rather than existing as pure social types, organizations usually combine myths, power, market, and common understandings as action coordination mechanisms, thereby attaining coordination in the form of social integration. To a certain extent, all social organizations rely on myths, power, market, and commonality for their maintenance, yet they can be characterized by their prevalent integration mechanisms.

Following this logic, democracy is the political expression of a social organization in which common understanding is the prevalent form of social integration. That is, seeking common understanding is so prevalent that the exercise of power requires a manifestation of consent that is ultimately given through elections, but that requires much more than electoral participation. Political participation is the critical characteristic of consensual societies. This is not to say that all participatory behaviors are consensual, since participatory behaviors can be coerced or swayed, but rather to say that action coordination through shared meaning requires different forms of participation.

The mechanisms under which common understanding can be achieved in large-scale social organizations, especially societies experiencing internal crisis and division, are the central concerns animating this work. Combining empirical political communication research models with theoretical accounts provided by the theory of communicative action, I seek in this article to expand our understanding of how political conversation matters for democratic political functioning, particularly under conditions of instability.

Literature Review

The crucial impact of interpersonal conversation in politics has been documented since the early Columbia School studies (for extended reviews of this literature, see Delli-Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Rojas et al., 2005).

Discussion among citizens across different levels of conversation that range from informal talk to deliberation has been shown to be beneficial for civil society by creating an active, engaged, and informed polity (McLeod, Scheuefele, & Moy, 1999). More formal or deliberative discussion yields similar results enhancing schema integration (Gastil & Dillard, 1999), clarifying attitudes (Fishkin, 1995, 1999), generating more equitable distribution of resources (Sulkin & Simon, 2001), stimulating consensus and peaceful conflict resolution, and encouraging tolerance and active citizenry (Delli-Carpini, 1997; Mendelberg, 2002; Mendelberg & Oleske, 2000; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002).

As theories of democracy increasingly include deliberation as one of their cornerstones (Delli-Carpini et al., 2004), the importance of communication is often highlighted. But outside of formal arrangements—in complex social systems and in everyday life—it is not clear where deliberation takes place.

In the 1970s and 1980s, network studies again rediscovered the "lost" community that large-scale social transformations had supposedly destroyed, just as the Chicago School has rediscovered community in neighborhood and ethnic relations (see Bender, 1978, for a more fruitful approach to the loss-of-community hypothesis). Community as a spatially bounded membership of one solidarity or kinship group was no longer clearly present, so network analysts reformulated the nature of

community to one of multiple limited memberships. Community started to be treated as a "personal community." This was accomplished by looking at the type of relationships—a personal community or network of ties—instead of a spatial clustering of potential relationships (Fischer, 1982; Wellman, 1982, 1988, 1999; Wellman, Carrington, & Hall, 1988). These personal communities refer to primary ties that extend outside of the household and that serve to articulate people to the larger social system by providing them with "imaginative flexible means for gaining access to the resources of these social systems" (Wellman, 1988, p. 96).

Following this logic, personal communities become tools for navigating a world that is integrated at the system level. In such a world, deliberation takes place either in the political subsystem (Schudson, 1977) or in the mass media (Page, 1996), but not in everyday life. However, Friedland (2001) has argued that network analysts regained "community" at the expense of solidarity toward larger social constructs and doubted that these personal networks by themselves, despite the social support they sustain, can generate the trust and reciprocity that make social life possible. Instead, Friedland has proposed a theory of the communicatively integrated community in which communities with

> rich, cross-cutting networks of association and public discussion are more likely to formulate real problems, find solutions, apply and test those solutions, learn from them, and correct them if they are flawed: in short, to rule themselves, or work democratically. (p. 359; see also Friedland & Shah, 2005)

In a communicatively integrated community, rather than focusing on interpersonal ties that give access to community resources, the focus shifts to networks of discussion that allow for the reintegration of deliberative processes into everyday life.

In this article, I examine the effects of interpersonal networks of political discussion, understanding that they provide a micro-macro bridge (Granovetter, 1973) in which public discussion rests. The focus of this article is on individuals' discussion networks; that is, networks defined by political discussion that can function as deliberative forums that intermediate with the larger political system.

Political Discussion

Previous studies that have looked at political discussion have consistently found that network size and frequency of political discussion contribute to political engagement (e.g., Leighley, 1990). In particular, political talk has been found to contribute to political knowledge (McLeod et al., 1999), cognitive complexity (McLeod et al., 2001), identity (Walsh, 2003), political efficacy (Scheufele, Nisbet, & Brossard, 2003), and community engagement (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele, Nisbet, Brossard, & Nisbet, 2004; Wuthnow, 1994; Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000).

The possibility of being exposed to more information and dissimilar viewpoints and becoming aware of more mobilization opportunities suggests a positive relationship between discussion frequency and network size with political engagement in general. This is consistent with Granovetter's (1973) notion of weak ties: One would expect that as the size of a discussion network increases, so must the number of weak ties in it. Ultimately, then, weak ties in a network, as captured by the size of an egocentric network, ensure the flow of information across networks (see also Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, & Levine, 1995).

The role of network heterogeneity is less clear. Positive relationships between network heterogeneity, tolerance (Mutz, 2002), and political participation (McLeod et al., 1999; Scheufele et al., 2004; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001) have been established. However, political scientists have conversely argued that cross-pressures increase the complexity of issues hindering our action on them (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Lipset, 1960/1981); sociologists have contended that structural heterogeneity reduces affiliation with voluntary associations and political participation (Blau & Schwartz, 1984; Rotolo, 2000), focusing instead on network density as the enabler of collective action; and economists have considered that heterogeneity is a challenge to collective processes (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000; Varughese & Ostrom, 2001).

Moreover, political dialogue has been put into question. Critics of deliberative democracy have pointed out that the inequalities that affect representative democracy also affect deliberation (Sanders, 1997). Potentially more problematic, some evidence has related deliberation exercises with apathy (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) and polarization (Mansbridge, 1983).

This has led scholars like Michael Schudson to contend that conversation is not the soul of democracy. Schudson (1997) distinguished between conversation, characterized as spontaneous and based on equality, and democratic talk, described as being oriented to problem solving, rule governed, and of a public nature. According to this argument, since conversation tends to be among people who are homogeneous—those who already share predispositions and values—it does not provide an avenue to pursue the democratic resolution of conflict. Rather, it would be the norms of democracy that can turn conversation into democratic talk through ruled processes that provide equality.

This argument is deceptively simple and seems to forget that those "ruled democratic processes" are achieved precisely through interaction. If one takes Schudson's (1997) argument to the extreme, one is left with the futile notion that democratic talk requires a preexisting democratic polity. However, this sheds no light on the emergence of the democratic polity that is being explained.

It is also important to stress that a polarized view of interpersonal communications, in which conversation occurs among homogeneous actors and democratic talk occurs among heterogeneous ones, presupposes the existence of purposeful actors who choose among given goods to maximize utility. This can make sense under

rational choice theories of action (Joas & Beckert, 2002), but not under the logic of communicative rationality.

Orientations Toward Conversation

The early studies in empirical political science—and the political communication studies that have followed this tradition—have for the most part concentrated on instrumental rationality (Habermas, 1984), concentrating on the description of the political subsystem and the rules that govern political processes.

In doing so, political communication research gained empirical insight into the functioning of the political system but became dislocated from integrating the empirical regularities it uncovered to a more general understanding of society. A different tradition, one that emerged from rhetoric and cultural studies, has criticized political communication on the basis that in its urge to uncover the laws that regulate the political system, it has missed the construction of meaning that takes place in social interactions.

The work of John Dewey (1922/1988) provides a compelling critique of the purposeful actor by introducing the concept of habit. Habits—acquired demands for certain kinds of activity that constitute the self—result from the interaction of our bodily demands with the environment and with the bodily demands of others. Once a habit is constituted, the process of constitution is forgotten, and people think they can predict the outcome of an initiated series of actions.

The pragmatist rejection of a rational actor that exists prior to our interactions with others is consistent with Habermas's (1984, 1989) contention that a notion of rationality based on the effectiveness of certain means to attain specific goals—that is, instrumental rationality—misses that those goals are social constructions and, more fundamentally, that the actors who pursue said goals are also, at least in part, social constructions. Rather than moving away from the concept of rationality, Habermas moved away from the concept of individualistic rationality, replacing it with a notion of communicative rationality.

Communicative rationality involves a process of argumentation that encompasses instrumental rationality, but puts it alongside moral, evaluative, and expressive rationality. Ultimately, what this implies is a process of argumentation in which validity claims can be criticized as untrue, immoral, insincere, or inauthentic, and therefore validity cannot be detached from processes of intersubjective agreement.

Yet the use of language to coordinate action does not guarantee that a process of intersubjective agreement has been used to reach a common definition of the situation. Language can also be used strategically in interpersonal conversations to manipulate others, rather than to reach a common understanding (Miller, Boster, Roloff, & Siebold, 1987). In the latter case—that is, cases of strategic conversation—a communicative achieved agreement is not obtained, and communicative rationality is absent.

Accordingly, Habermas (1984) distinguished between strategic orientations in the use of language versus orientations toward reaching understanding. Strategic orientations involve "egocentric calculations of success," while orientations toward understanding refer to "harmonization of plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions" (p. 286) that come about through negotiation.

This distinction between strategic orientations versus orientations to reaching understanding is central to the theory of communicative action, since only in the latter rests the potential for achieving rationality. In this study, I contend that by integrating these unexamined facets of political discussion certain relations between political conversation and civic engagement can be clarified, strengthening empirical communication research.

Within the political communication tradition, certain strands of research that have been interested in providing empirical grounding for deliberative practices have embraced notions of communicative rationality, yet past research has focused mostly on argumentation and the level of formality surrounding the deliberative process (Schudson, 1997; Wyatt et al., 2000). This could possibly be a result of the emphasis on rationality as reason giving that is present in most normative deliberation theory.

Such empirical work on deliberation has been able to provide diverse evidence of "increased rationality" that can be attributed to the deliberative process, such as gains in opinion quality (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999), schema integration (Gastil & Dillard, 1999), or opinion change (Fishkin, 1999; Luskin, Fishkin, & Jowell, 2002). Most of these efforts have been designed to test whether opinions change and ultimately "improve" through the deliberative process. However, little empirical attention has been given to the original Habermasian formulation that distinguishes between strategic orientations in communication versus orientations toward achieving understanding. In this article, I contend that in addition to opinion expression we need to incorporate conversation orientations when evaluating deliberative democracy. In doing so, the degree of formality ceases to be the primary concern since both formal and informal interactions can be constitutive of a public sphere (Calhoun, 1992), and rather than focusing exclusively on opinion "quality," we can integrate conversation orientations and their action coordination functions.

This dual nature of language, which serves for common understanding but also for strategic maneuvering, needs to be placed at the heart of political communication research. The initial challenge of this work is trying to distinguish empirically between orientations to reach understanding and strategic orientations in political conversation and exploring their antecedents and consequences in the realm of democratic action.

To do so, I examine interpersonal communication and the potential integrative effects that arise from conversation oriented toward reaching understanding. Yet, in doing so, one cannot idealize interpersonal conversation, which can also be of strategic nature. To structure this inquiry, I have used research techniques that resonate

more with traditional political communication researchers and follow conventional models of hypothesis testing. Yet, the concepts used in the models and the implications that can be derived from them have the potential to be well received by scholars interested in notions of the public sphere, hopefully initiating a dialogue across disciplines.

Context of This Study

I chose to examine these relationships in the context of Colombia, a society in political strife, understanding that turmoil arises precisely from crises in action coordination mechanisms. The problems of consensual action coordination would thus seem to be amplified in societies in conflict, and therefore an understanding of communication orientations in such societies seems critical to shed light on the democratization potential of political conversation maintained under the logic of achieving understanding.

For most of its independent life, Colombia has been a country in which violence has played a critical role as a conflict resolution mechanism. Internal wars between liberals and conservatives that characterized the 19th century and roughly the first half of the 20th century evolved into a confrontation with communist guerillas in the context of the Cold War. This still unresolved conflict was fueled in the late 20th century by money pouring into the country from the sale of illegal drugs. Traditional landowners found in drug barons an ally against communist guerillas that led to the creation of private armies, known as paramilitary groups, that were supposed to fight the communist guerrillas and that have ultimately evolved into a new actor in conflict.

However, urban elites facing the challenge of drug lords trying to assert national political power, as well as international pressure, initiated a large-scale offensive against drug cartels. A failed peace process with FARC, Colombia's oldest and most important guerrilla group, at the turn of the century led to the election in 2002 of Alvaro Uribe as president, under the promise that guerrillas would be defeated through the use of force. While president, Uribe started a full-blown offensive against the leftist rebels and is currently negotiating a peace process with paramilitary groups.

In the midst of this political turmoil, Bogotá, Colombia's capital, emerged as a political alternative to Colombia's cycles of violence. A series of local governments since 1992 have emphasized political accountability, cultural innovations on citizenship, and the physical transformation of the city, changing the political game (see, e.g., Muñoz, Arturo, Bromberg, & Moncada, 2003; Pizano, 2003).

With decreasing violence and the increasing importance of public opinion, Bogotá can be understood today as a laboratory for a new Colombia—one that chooses to resolve its political conflicts through inclusion rather than exclusion and through dialogue and shared understanding rather than through force and imposition. Understanding the underlying mechanisms of common understanding and political

participation in Bogotá can offer us important insight into the democratization processes, which can be applied to Colombia as a whole and potentially to other societies in turmoil.

Ultimately, I contend that the conversational model of democracy presented in this study is not only relevant for the case under study, but could also be applied to the study of other unstable societies and to more established democracies in which consensual action coordination is a permanent achievement rather than a developmental stage.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Relying on the insights available from the literature reviewed and synthesized above, in this article I advance a series of hypotheses. I predict that an orientation toward reaching understanding will be associated with increased political involvement, associational membership, and democratic participation. Here *political involvement* refers to a series of psychological-level variables that include political interest, political efficacy, political knowledge, and political awareness.

Previous research has provided evidence that political conversation results in increased levels of political interest, efficacy, and knowledge. In this article, I contend that in addition to discussion frequency or the formal attributes of one's discussion network, the orientation with which one talks about politics with others also matters for political involvement. Someone who talks about politics with an orientation toward reaching understanding—that is, taking into account the point of view of others in conversation and trying to integrate them into a common definition of situations—will grasp the complexity of social issues, becoming more interested in politics; will incur additional cognitive processing that would result in increased learning; and finally will see the potential to work with others, which would result in higher levels of efficacy. For these reasons, I offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Orientations toward reaching understanding through political talk will be positively related to political involvement.

In addition to these individual variables, an understanding orientation should also affect our civic connections to others. Civic associational memberships allow people to more readily resolve collective action problems (Putnam, 2000), but these associational forms themselves require levels of shared understanding to persist over time. People who have a stronger orientation toward understanding should find it easier to associate with others in the definition and pursuit of common goals. For these reasons, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Orientations toward reaching understanding through political talk will be positively related to associational membership.

Past research has consistently related political involvement variables and associational membership with civic and political participatory behaviors. In the reviewed models, political conversation plays a central role as an antecedent of both political involvement and political engagement variables. In the current research, I contend that beyond conversation frequency and network characteristics, an understanding orientation will result in higher levels of civic and political engagement. I expect an understanding orientation to not only facilitate the definition of collective action challenges but to also enhance capabilities to work with others to solve these challenges. In this research, I examine two potential participatory forms. One combines a repertoire of traditional civic and political behaviors that citizens can use to affect the political process and that could be characterized as a form of bottom-up participation. The other is a series of opportunities provided by local governments seeking to promote public participation that I refer to as *institutional participation* and that can be conceptualized as more of a top-down approach. Thus,

Hypothesis 1c (H1c): Orientations toward reaching understanding through political talk will be positively related to democratic participation.

On the other hand, it is not clear whether strategic orientations would be similarly related to political engagement. If a person talks about politics to manipulate rather than to understand, it seems likely that he or she will, for example, learn from the conversation, although it is also plausible that for purely strategic reasons, he or she would also be attentive to the discourse of others to preempt it. Kwak, Williams, Wang, and Lee (2005) have already provided evidence of how being attentive to talk is positively related to political mobilization. On the basis of these conflicting possibilities, the following research question is posed:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Will strategic orientations toward political talk be related to political involvement, associational membership, and democratic participation?

It is also plausible that the orientations toward discussion that an individual brings to political conversations will amplify or attenuate the more basic effects of engaging in frequent political talk. Given the predictions concerning the effects of understanding orientations on indicators of political engagement, I expect understanding to function as an amplifying moderator, whereas the expected effects for strategic orientations are less clear. To explore the possibility of interactions between orientations toward talk and frequency of political talk, the following research question is posed:

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Will orientation toward talk interact with frequency of political talk to affect democratic participation?

Given that orientations toward talk return as significant predictors of political engagement, it seems appropriate to explore the antecedents of these orientations. It

seems plausible that certain values, such as postmaterialist values, and particularly certain patterns of media use, could be related to conversation orientations. Differences in the production of content between news, its quest for social integration based on the notion of objectivity, and certain forms of entertainment that privilege competition, strategy, and individual success might result in different orientations toward political talk. Along these lines, Moy and Gastil (2006) have provided evidence of how certain forms of news consumption result in openness to political conflict in deliberation. Thus, the following research question is posed:

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What are the predictors of orientations toward talk?

Method

This study relied on local survey data collected in December 2003 and December 2004 in the city of Bogotá from a single panel of respondents. The December 2003 data were collected by a professional polling firm—*Deproyectos Limitada*—on behalf of the city government as an assessment of civic culture. The Civic Culture Study used random sampling techniques to identify an initial random sample of households. Using the city's digital map, 600 blocks were randomly selected. From these, and relying on stratified quotas, a sample of respondents representing the city's population on the basis of gender, age, economic strata, and neighborhood was selected. Wave 1 generated 1,433 face-to-face completed responses.

For the December 2004 wave of this study, a custom questionnaire was developed that complemented the questions posed by the Civic Culture Study with an array of questions about psychological orientations and communication practices. *Deproyectos Limitada* was engaged to recontact the individuals who had completed the 2003 questionnaire and solicit their participation in a second survey wave.

The attrition rate for this survey against the previous wave was 50.1%, with 715 respondents completing the second questionnaire. It is interesting that only 40 participants (2.8% of the original sample) refused to participate in the second wave. However, no contacts, for which residential instability was an important factor, resulted in this rate.

To examine the possibility of systematic attrition between the first and the second waves in the panel, a comparison of basic demographic characteristics between those who participated only in the first wave and those who participated in both waves was undertaken. The second wave sample was slightly older (M = 39.5 for Wave 1; M = 42.1 for Wave 2) and female (55% for Wave 1; 60% for Wave 2). However, in terms of political interest, knowledge, efficacy, associational membership, and civic and institutional participation (the political engagement criterion variables considered in this study), there were no significant differences between those who did not participate in Wave 2 and those who did.

The results presented in this study are all based on the cross-sectional analyses of the second wave of data, which contained the conversation orientations that are being advanced in this article.

Measurement

Criterion variables. Three groups of dependent variables were examined: (a) political involvement variables including political interest, efficacy, knowledge, and awareness; (b) associational membership; and (c) behavioral outcomes in terms of civic, political, and institutional forms of democratic participation.

Political interest was measured using a single item that asked respondents to gauge their political interest on an index ranging from 1 to 3, where 1 is *not interested* and 3 is *very interested* ($M = 1.64$, $SD = 0.63$).

Political efficacy was measured with three questions concerning respondents' assessments of their actual ability to influence government and solve community problems and their perception of government's responsiveness to people's initiatives. These measures of political efficacy were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*total disagreement*) to 5 (*total agreement*) and then combined into a single index constructed by averaging across a respondent's answers ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.3$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$).

Political knowledge was measured with nine items taking into account "rules of the game, the substance of politics, and people and parties" (Delli-Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 65). An additive index for political knowledge was constructed ($M = 5.1$, $SD = 2.4$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$).

Bogotá's city government had started an initiative to promote awareness and participation in a series of local councils to generate policy advice and monitoring of the local government (e.g., city planning council, school government, and local culture council). On a 3-point scale, respondents were asked whether they were aware of 10 different participation opportunities. Respondents who were unaware were coded as 0, respondents who were aware but had not been involved were coded as 1, and respondents who had been involved during the past year were coded as 2. A political awareness variable was calculated by collapsing those who were coded as 1 and as 2 into one category and then creating an additive index of 10 dichotomous items that gauged whether respondents were aware of the mechanisms ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 3.9$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).

Associational membership was measured by an additive index of 15 behavioral items that asked whether the respondent belonged to a wide range of organizations, including church, recreational, cultural, educational, environmental, professional, charities, cooperative, neighborhood, local, security, health, gender, ethnic, or labor unions ($M = 2.4$, $SD = 3.2$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$). All items composing the associational ties index were measured on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (*nonmember*) to 2 (*active member*).

Civic and political participation was measured with an additive index of 11 behavioral items that asked whether the respondent had carried out a series of behaviors in the past 12 months, ranging from classical political participatory behaviors (e.g., working for or donating money to a political party) to other broader forms of civic engagement (e.g., attending a local civic forum or doing voluntary work). All items indicating participation in local politics or community life were measured dichotomously (i.e., yes or no; $M = 0.92$, $SD = 1.8$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$).

I refer to institutional political participation as engaging the committees organized by local government that are described above. This variable was measured with an additive index of 10 dichotomous items that result from recoding the question described above in such a way that just awareness was recoded as 0 and having used the participatory mechanisms was recoded as 1 ($M = 0.5$, $SD = 1.3$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$).

Conversation orientations. With regard to political conversation, this study used traditional measures of discussion frequency, network size, network heterogeneity, and network density that are described below, and it sought to develop two measures for orientations toward political conversation. An understanding orientation in conversation was measured with a battery of questions that inquired about certain communicative practices that favor understanding the position of others in an effort to seek common understanding, or communicative rationality, rather than to strategically manipulate others through conversation. An index was created by averaging the scores from eight items asking participants about the importance of listening to others and learning from them in a political conversation, as well as their use of political conversation as a mechanism to promote solidarity, agreement, connection between people, the common good, understanding, and protection for the rights of others. Participants rated their agreement with the statements on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*; $M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.95$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

A strategic orientation toward conversation was measured using eight items that asked respondents to agree or disagree with a series of statements gauging whether they thought that political conversations were about gaining advantage, keeping your true attitudes to yourself, or in general getting others to do what you want despite their lack of agreement ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 1.1$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$).

Demographic variables. Five established demographic control variables (Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes,1960; Lipset, 1960/1981; Milbrath, 1965; Tingsten, 1937; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) were included in the model: gender (60.6% female), age ($M = 43.6$, $SD = 16.6$), level of education ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 1.7$), house stratum, a proxy measure of household income ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 1.1$), and length of residence ($M = 16.9$, $SD = 12.6$).

Predispositions. Two predispositions that have been related in the past to levels of participation were considered in this study: social trust (Putnam, 2000) and postmaterialist values (McLeod, Sotirovic, & Holbert, 1998). Social trust was measured using a single indicator that asked people to agree or disagree with the statement that "most people are honest" on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 to 5 ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.4$). Postmaterialist values were measured with three items that asked people about the importance of individual freedoms, expressive rights, and democracy as social goals ($M = 4.6$, $SD = 0.61$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$).

Media use. This group of independent variables included two that reflect the respondent's general surveillance use of media and one that represented entertainment uses (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). The measurement of the respondent's level of exposure to news consisted of nine items that asked the respondent about exposure to national newspapers, national magazines, local newspapers, national television news, local television news, radio news, and television and radio political commentary shows on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*frequently*; $M = 1.91$, $SD = 0.97$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$).

Attention to news was measured using six items that inquired about the amount of attention given to international news, national political news, economic news, and local political news on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*no attention*) to 5 (*a lot of attention*; $M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.21$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

Entertainment television use was measured with three items asking people to rate on a 6-point scale how often they watch reality shows, comedies, and soap operas ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.44$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$).

Conversation. Traditional measures of discussion frequency, network size, heterogeneity, and density were used as follows:

The frequency of political discussion was measured with a four-item index that asked respondents how often they discussed politics with family members, coworkers, neighbors, and friends on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*frequently*; $M = 1.6$, $SD = 1.18$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$).

The size of a respondent's political discussion network was measured by averaging four items that asked respondents with how many family members, coworkers, neighbors, and friends they discussed politics and current events ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 2.2$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$).

The heterogeneity of a respondent's political discussion network was measured by an index that averaged five items asking respondents how different the people they spoke to about politics were from them in terms of age, education, social class, political affiliation, and general views. These items were measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 5, in which 0 meant *very similar* and 5 meant *very different* ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.3$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

The density of respondents' discussion networks was gauged using three items that inquired whether the people with whom the respondent discussed politics knew each other and also discussed politics among themselves (M = 2.8, SD = 1.7, Cronbach's α = .90).

To examine whether talk orientations would interact with the frequency of conversation, multiplicative two-way interaction terms between frequency of talk and strategic orientation and with an understanding orientation were created. All variables used to construct our interaction terms were standardized before the interaction terms were created.

Results

To examine the relationships between communication orientations and political engagement, four sets of ordinary least squares regressions were performed to predict (a) political interest, efficacy, knowledge, and awareness; (b) associational membership; (c) civic, political, and institutional participation; and (d) orientations toward political conversation.

The first set of analyses predicts political involvement using a basic model that includes a series of demographic variables (gender, age, education, house strata, and length of residence), predispositions (trust and postmaterialist values), mass media use, traditional measures of interpersonal communication practices, and communication orientations.

The model for interest in politics explained 27.3% of the variance. Among the independent variables, gender ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .01$), years of residence ($\beta = .09$, $p < .01$), exposure to news ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$), attention to news ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$), frequency of political talk ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$), size of discussion network ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$), and having an understanding orientation in political talk ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$) contributed to levels of political interest (see Table 1).

With respect to political efficacy, the model explained 17.5% of the variance. Among the independent variables, house strata ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$), social trust ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$), attention to news ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$), entertainment television ($\beta = -.08$, $p < .05$), frequency of political talk ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$), understanding orientations ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$), and strategic orientations toward talk ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .01$) contributed to feelings of efficacy (see Table 1).

Regarding political knowledge, the model explained 46% of the variance. Gender ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .001$), education ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$), house strata ($\beta = .09$, $p < .001$), news exposure ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$), attention to news ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$), understanding orientations ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), and strategic orientations in talk ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .001$) contributed to political knowledge (see Table 1).

Finally, with regard to awareness of institutional participatory mechanisms, the model explained 39.5% of the variance. Education ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$), news exposure ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), frequency of political talk ($\beta = .08$, $p < .01$), network size

Table 1
Ordinary Least Squares Models Predicting Political Involvement and Associational Membership

Independent Variable	Political Involvement				Associational Membership
	Interest	Efficacy	Knowledge	Awareness	
Demographics					
Gender (male = 0)	−.10**	−.00	−.10***	−.02	.07*
Age	−.03	−.08	.00	.03	.08*
Education	.07	−.02	.25***	.17**	.08
House strata	−.03	.11**	.09***	.02	.11**
Residence (years)	.09**	.01	.01	−.02	–.01
Predispositions					
Social trust	.03	.11**	.05	.05	.07*
Postmaterialist values	.02	−.01	.01	−.03	−.01
Media use					
News exposure	.09*	.05	.09*	.17***	.17***
News attention	.14***	.11*	.16***	−.01	−.08
Entertainment TV	−.04	−.08*	−.05	−.10**	−.03
Political talk					
Frequency	.10*	.11*	−.05	.08*	.08
Network size	.13***	.03	.04	.15***	.20***
Network heterogeneity	.01	−.01	−.04	.08*	.04
Network density	.04	.03	.01	.04	.00
Talk orientations					
Common understanding	.19***	.08*	.22***	.12***	.14***
Strategic	−.01	−.12**	−.22***	−.23***	−.21***
R^2 (%)	27.3	17.5	46.0	39.5	31.8

Note: $N = 715$. Entries are standardized regression coefficients.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$), network heterogeneity ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$), understanding orientations ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$), and strategic orientations in political talk ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$) contributed to the awareness of institutional participatory mechanisms (see Table 1).

Overall, these results offer strong support for H1a, according to which understanding orientations would be positively related to different measures of political involvement. In the models, controlling for a host of indicators that in the past have been related to these forms of involvement, those with a higher orientation toward understanding also have higher levels of political interest, political efficacy, political knowledge, and institutional awareness.

On the other hand, a strategic orientation toward conversation was also related to political involvement, but its effects were mostly negative. That is, people who are more strategic about their conversations scored significantly lower on political

efficacy, political knowledge, and institutional awareness. Only in the case of political interest was this relationship not significant. With regards to RQ1, then, these results indicate that there is mostly a negative relationship between a strategic orientation in conversation and different forms of political involvement.

For the second analysis regarding associational membership, the model explained 31.8% of the variance. Among the independent variables, gender ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$), age ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$), house strata ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$), social trust ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$), news exposure ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), size of political discussion network ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), understanding orientations ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$), and strategic orientations in talk ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .001$) contributed to levels of associational membership (see Table 1).

These results offer support for H1b, according to which an understanding orientation in political talk would be positively related to associational membership. That is, people who tend to seek common understanding through conversation are more likely to associate with others for diverse social purposes. On the other hand, those with a strategic orientation to conversation are less likely to belong to different civic associations. These results provide further evidence of the deleterious effects of a strategic orientation in political talk that was established in the initial set of analyses pertaining to RQ1.

For the third set of analyses to predict civic, political, and institutional forms of participation, an additional model that includes interaction terms for talk orientations and frequency was included alongside the basic model.

The regression model predicting civic and political participation explained 27% of the variance (see Table 2, Model 1). In this model, education ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$), exposure to news ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), entertainment television ($\beta = -.08$, $p < .05$), discussion frequency ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$), discussion network density ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$), and an understanding orientation ($\beta = .12$, $p < .01$) are significant predictors of participation. When the interaction terms were entered (Model 2), the new model explained 29.4% of the variance and revealed a significant interaction between talk frequency and an understanding orientation ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$).

The regression model predicting institutional political participation explained 18% of the variance (see Table 2, Model 3). In this model, news exposure ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$), entertainment media use ($\beta = -.08$, $p < .05$), discussion frequency ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), and an understanding orientation ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$) were significant predictors of institutional forms of participation. Once the interaction terms are added to the model (Model 4), variance explained increased to 19.5%, and both the interaction between an understanding orientation and discussion frequency ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$) and the one between a strategic orientation and frequency are significant ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .05$).

These results yield support for H1c, according to which an understanding orientation would be positively related to civic and institutional political participation. In these data, an orientation toward understanding is positively and significantly related to civic participation and institutional forms of political participation.

Table 2
Regression Models Predicting Civic and Political Participation

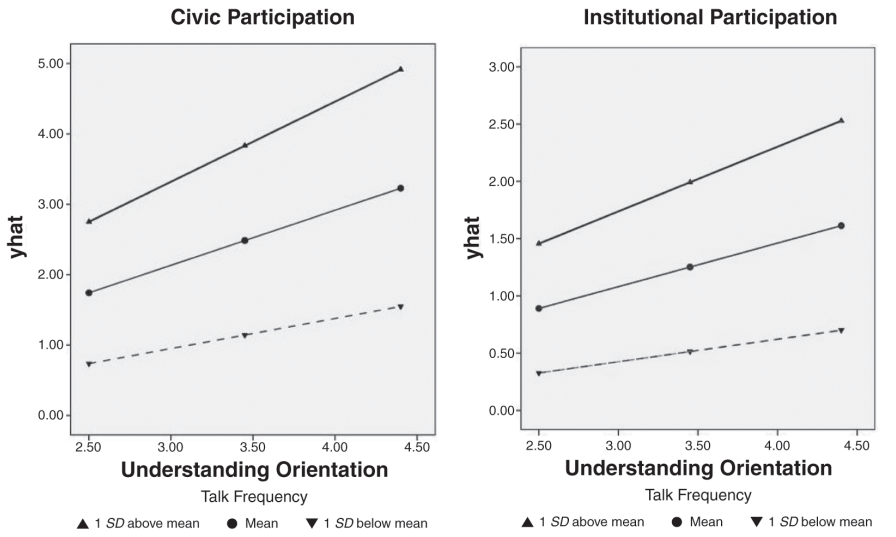
	Civic Participation		Institutional Participation	
Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Demographics				
Gender (male = 0)	.01	.02	.02	.03
Age	.05	.04	.04	.03
Education	.11*	.10*	.08	.07
House strata	.02	.02	−.02	−.02
Residence (years)	.06	.05	.05	.04
Predispositions				
Social trust	−.01	.00	−.05	−.05
Postmaterialist values	.03	.02	−.04	−.04
Media use				
News exposure	.17***	.17***	.07*	.07
News attention	−.05	−.04	.00	.01
Entertainment TV	−.08*	−.08*	−.10*	−.09*
Political talk				
Discussion frequency	.25***	.22***	.26***	.23***
Network size	.09	.07	.09	.08
Network heterogeneity	−.04	−.03	.03	.03
Network density	.09*	.09*	.01	.00
Talk orientations				
Understanding orientation	.12**	.16***	.08*	.09*
Strategic orientation	.01	.01	−.02	−.01
Frequency × Understanding		.17***		.12***
Frequency × Strategic		−.02		−.07*
Total R^2 (%)	27	29.4	18	19.5

Note: $N = 715$. Entries are standardized regression coefficients.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

With regard to RQ1, on the role of strategic orientations regarding participation, the results are tenuous. Both for civic and institutional forms of participation, the results are not significant, which suggests no main effect of strategic orientations on participation. These results suggest that the effects of having a strategic orientation in political conversations, while negatively affecting variables that are important for democratic functioning such as political knowledge, efficacy, awareness, and associational membership, are not necessarily negatively related to all measures of political engagement.

With respect to RQ2, concerning potential interactions between talk orientations and frequency, these results show that there is a positive and significant interaction for an understanding orientation for both civic and political participation. To better understand these patterns of relations, the interactions are plotted (see Figure 1), using values of conversation orientation and frequency of talk that are 1 standard

Figure 1
Interaction of Understanding Orientation and Talk Frequency



deviation below the mean, at the mean, and 1 standard deviation above the mean (Aiken & West, 1991; Hayes, 2005), with a clear pattern of amplifying moderation emerging. For strategic orientations, there is no significant interaction in the civic realm, but there is a negative and significant one in the institutional participatory realm (see Figure 2), according to which as frequency of conversation increases, those with a higher strategic orientation are less likely to become involved with these institutional participatory mechanisms.

To answer RQ3, which inquired about the predictors of orientations toward talk, a third set of regressions was conducted. In these analyses, orientations toward political talk became the dependent variables and demographic variables, predispositions, and media use were included as independent factors that could potentially contribute to talk orientations.

The model for talk geared toward reaching understanding explained 16% of the variance. The results indicate that education ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), postmaterialist values ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$), and paying attention to news ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$) contributed to higher levels of an understanding orientation (see Table 3).

On the other hand, the model for strategic talk explained 24.5% of the variance. Education ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .001$), house strata ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .001$), attention to news ($\beta = -.08$, $p < .001$), and entertainment uses of media ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) contributed to higher levels of strategic orientations toward political talk (see Table 3).

Figure 2
Interaction of Strategic Orientation and Talk Frequency

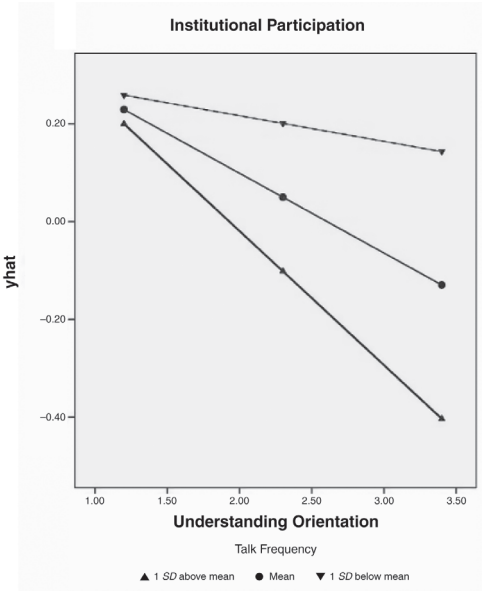


Table 3
Ordinary Least Squares Models Predicting Talk Orientations

Independent Variable	Understanding Orientation	Strategic Orientation
Demographics		
Gender	−.06	.02
Age	.05	.09
Education	.17***	−.16***
House strata	−.07	−.13***
Incremental R^2 (%)	4.7	15.9
Predispositions		
Social trust	.01	−.06
Postmaterialist values	.21***	.05
Incremental R^2 (%)	5.9***	1.1*
Media use		
News exposure	−.07	−.05
News attention	.21***	−.08*
Entertainment TV	.06	.29***
Incremental R^2 (%)	5.4***	7.6***
Total R^2 (%)	16.0	24.5

Note: $N = 715$. Entries are standardized regression coefficients after demographic control.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

These results suggest that education and certain values are associated with an understanding orientation, but more interesting, different media uses emerge as important predictors of conversation orientations. There seems to be a clear pattern that relates news attention with an understanding orientation, while certain entertainment uses of media are related to a strategic one.

Discussion

Overall, these results provide empirical support for the notion that an orientation toward political conversation matters for political engagement, while simultaneously lending additional support to the assertion that political conversation matters for democratic functioning. These results are particularly important bearing in mind the context in which these data were collected. Schudson's (1997) contention that democratic institutions are necessary for democratic conversation to take place paints a bleak picture for large parts of the world in which such institutions are not in place. However, these results suggest that political conversation can lead to democratic practices even in societies such as Colombia where democratic practices are found wanting.

The findings regarding orientations to talk are the most significant contribution of this article. Understanding orientations were found to support greater political involvement and democratic participation, whereas strategic orientations were generally negatively related to these outcomes. In contrast to strategic orientations, an understanding orientation positively predicted political interest, efficacy, knowledge and awareness, associational membership, and civic and political participation.

This set of findings opens new avenues for the study of political discussion. Empirical research on political talk has stressed the importance of network features, such as size, heterogeneity, and frequency of talk. More recently, work has considered features of the individual conversant, namely attentiveness and argument quality. This work strongly indicates that future models and empirical tests of political conversation need to consider the role of orientations toward discussion when examining the effects of talk on political involvement and democratic participation.

The fact that these effects are amplified for those who speak frequently only bolsters the need for future research to consider an understanding orientation, while at the same time reinforcing the centrality of frequent political talk for democratic participation. That these effects were found when accounting for factors such as network size, heterogeneity, and density increases confidence in the conclusion that future models of discussion effects must acknowledge the role of these orientations.

Taken together, these observations indicate that political conversation is not only about how often we talk, and with how many, but also about the manner in which we choose to speak and listen to those with whom we discuss politics. This provides empirical evidence for the Habermasian distinction between strategic orientations and orientations toward achieving understanding, especially when one considers the mostly negative impact of strategic orientations to talk.

This study provides an initial measurement for orientations toward talk, but it is one that needs to be further developed. In particular, the antecedents of different orientations have to be explored. This study provides evidence that postmaterialist values foster an overall understanding orientation, as does news attention, whereas entertainment television fosters strategic orientations. These differences provide initial insight that suggests that the logic under which mass media content is produced is critical for communicative orientations. These models need to be expanded and tested not only as a general orientation, but also in given situations to better understand the contextual factors that might change an orientation from strategic to understanding or vice versa.

The distinction between strategic versus understanding orientations toward talk has the potential to inform a broad body of political communication research. It also provides initial empirical support to one of the theory of communicative action's central tenets. In this work, orientations are measured as a reflection of past behaviors and not as a personality attribute. The latter assumes that individuals may have particular political conversation styles, choosing to be strategic in conversation or striving to reach understanding. These styles may change across contexts, suggesting that the situational aspects of communicative orientation are something that need to be addressed by future research.

In the case presented here, interpersonal conversation is paramount for democratic political participation. In places like Bogotá, Colombia, social ties can also operate as obstacles to modernization strategies by instead establishing systems of patronage. However, political conversations that are oriented toward reaching understanding have the potential to overcome such normatively undesirable consequences of social capital and instead operate as vehicles for social inclusion and action coordination through common understanding, which in turn could result in peaceful conflict resolution.

Whether these effects are restricted to the context of a society in crisis remains to be seen. The results reported here for communication orientations should be replicated in societies that have higher levels of communicatively achieved action coordination to see whether such orientations matter across democratic contexts, in both stable societies and those in crisis. This study suggests that these findings have implications for all societies, not just those that have been referred to as societies in crisis, but of course this is an empirical question. Furthermore, future research needs to establish potential boundaries to understanding orientations. That is, certain groups might develop worldviews from internal communal processes, but we cannot forget that communicative rationality rests on an ever-expanding notion of inclusion. A worldview that might emerge as a common definition of a situation loses its grounding on communicative rationality when force or manipulation are sought to coordinate the actions of other groups.

In this study, I contended that Bogotá provides an ideal scenario for this research, with the expectation that it would provide a strict test for the propositions being developed. The rationale was that if significant relationships were observed between

communication and action under the conditions of duress that characterize the Colombian political situation—a situation that is characterized by low participation levels, high levels of violence, and a radicalized citizenry—these relationships should hold in other societies. Future research might compare different regions of Colombia, some of which suffer higher levels of violent conflict resolution, and the Colombian case with those of other societies in conflict. Both are natural progressions for this research program.

Regarding this study's design, I chose a local survey as an initial test of the potential of communicative social capital. Surveys, as with any other research method for that matter, have great advantages but also limitations. Ideally, the relationships that have been tested in this article should also be pursued using multiple methodologies. The observation of small-group interaction with the notion of communication orientations in mind would in particular be an extraordinary advancement in understanding and comparing the communicative democratic potential of a community.

In this article, I have posited a causal flow that goes from conversation orientations toward political engagement, yet a reversed flow, or reciprocal causation, is also plausible. Future research that takes into account multiple measures in time is needed to address these questions empirically. In addition, there is a need to develop broader measures to assess the communicative rationality of communication, writ large, that cut across both interactions with mass-mediated communication and interpersonal communication. The measures used in this work focus on orientations toward interpersonal communication and must be developed further and, at the same time, expanded to include mediated forms.

What are the dimensions involved in each of these orientations? What are other predictors of communicative orientations? How do these orientations interact with more traditional measures of personality and cognitive processing? These are some of the questions that need to be addressed by future research. But, most fundamentally, a research program in this area would have to determine under what conditions strategic orientations are replaced by understanding orientations. A contribution of this nature would go a long way toward promoting change in societies in crisis; change from the violence erupting from the absence of communicative action coordination mechanisms.

Appendix
Question Wording

The original questionnaires are in Spanish. I translated the items used in this article.

Political Interest

How interested are you in politics?

Here we will use a scale on which 1 = *not interested*; 2 = *somewhat interested*; and 3 = *very interested*.

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Political Knowledge
We would like to ask you a few questions about local and regional issues (correct answers are coded as 1; incorrect or missing values as 0).
"Who is the major of Bogota?"
"Can you recall the name of any city council member?"
For the following question, we will use a multiple-choice format. Could you please tell us
"What is the political constitution of Colombia?"
"What is Congress?"
"What does the Supreme Court do?"
"What is the City Council?"

Political Efficacy
Some people believe that they can have influence on political issues, while others believe they cannot. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale ranging from 0 to 5, where 0 means *completely disagree* and 5 means *completely agree*?
People like me can solve community problems.
I can influence government.
Local government is responsive to people's initiatives.

Associational Membership
Now, I will read you a list of organizations. For each one, I will ask you to tell me if you are a member, if you are a member but not so active, or if you are an active member of
Church or religious organization
Sports, social, or recreational club
Artistic, musical, or cultural organization
Educational organization (PTA or alumni)
Labor union
Environmentalist or ecological organization
Professional organization or chamber
Charity organization
Cooperative
Neighborhood organization
Local action junta
Security or "crime stoppers" organization
Health organization
Women's group
Ethnic organization
(No membership coded as 0, not-so-active member coded as 1, and active member coded as 2)

Civic Participation
Now, I will read you a list of activities that certain people do concerning government and politics. Please tell if you have done any of the following in the last 12 months:
Attended an organized political rally, speech, or protest.
Attended a public meeting of your municipality or of an educational institution.

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Served in a committee of a local organization.
Served as an officer of a club or organization.
Signed a petition.
Worked for a political party.
Given a speech.
Wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine.
Called a live radio or TV station to express your opinion.
Been an active member of a group that seeks to influence public policy or government.
Contributed money to political group.
(*No* coded as 0 and *yes* as 1)

Institutional Awareness and Participation

What mechanisms or citizen participatory spaces are you aware of and have you used in the past year?
Election recall
Open government
City planning council
Local planning council
Citizen meetings
School government
Health community committee
Utility monitoring committee
Citizen watch groups
Local culture council
(*Not aware* coded as 0, *aware* coded as 1, and *participated* coded as 2).

Social Trust

On a scale ranging from 0 to 5 where 0 means *completely disagree* and 5 means *completely agree,* how much do agree or disagree with the following statement:
Most people are honest.

Postmaterialist Values

These days people talk a lot about the priorities we should have in our community. We would like you to tell us how important the following priorities are on a scale ranging from 0 to 5 where 0 means *not important* and 5 means *very important*:
Protect individual freedoms.
Give people the opportunity to express their opinion.
Protect democracy.

News Exposure

We would like to ask you some question about your use of mass media. On a scale on which 0 means *never* and 5 means *frequently,* how often do you read, listen, or watch the following types of shows?
National daily newspapers
National news magazines
Local newspapers
National television news

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Local television news
Political TV talk
Radio news
Political radio talk
Radio political humor

News Attention

Beyond the frequency with which you use these media, how much attention do you pay to the following type of news? Here we will use a scale on which 0 means *no attention* and 5 means *a lot of attention.*

International news
National political news
News about security
Economic news
Local political news
News about your locality

Entertainment TV

We would like to ask you some question about your use of mass media. On a scale on which 0 means *never* and 5 means *frequently,* how often do you read listen or watch the following types of shows?

Reality shows
Comedies
Soap operas

Political Talk

On a scale ranging from 0 to 5 on which 0 means *never* and 5 means *frequently,* how often do you talk about political events with

Your family
Your coworkers
Your neighbors
Your friends

Network Size

Now we would like you to think about the people that you have talked to about politics and current events within the past month.

With how many members of your family would you say you have talked to?
With how many coworkers would you say you have talked to?
With how many neighbors would you say you have talked to?
With how many friends would you say you have talked to?

Network Heterogeneity

Thinking about these people with whom you talk about politics, and using a scale on which 0 means *very similar* and 5 means *very different,* how different these people are from you in terms of

Age
Education
Social class

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Political affiliation
General views
Network Density
Still thinking about the people with whom you talk about politics, how much do you agree with the following statements? Here we will use a scale ranging from 0 to 5 on which 0 means *completely disagree* and 5 means *completely agree.*
The people I talk to about politics know each other.
The people I talk to about politics are friends among themselves.
The people I talk to about politics talk about politics among themselves.
Understanding Orientation
On a scale ranging from 0 to 5 on which 0 means *completely disagree* and 5 means *completely agree,* how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
In political conversations, it is paramount to listen carefully to what others have to say.
When I talk politics, it is more important for me to learn than to convince.
Through my conversations I promote solidarity with others.
In essence, politics seeks for us to reach agreements through conversation.
When I talk about politics, I feel connected to the people I am talking to.
Through conversation, political interests can be put to work for the common good.
Talking about politics lets me understand why others see things differently.
Political conversations are important to protect people's rights.
Strategic Orientation
On a scale ranging from 0 to 5 on which 0 means *completely disagree* and 5 means *completely agree,* how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
To say something while thinking something else is essential when talking about politics.
I talk about politics if I obtain some gain by doing so.
In political conversations, form is more important the substance.
When you talk about politics, sometimes it is best not to express what you really think.
People are tired of being asked to talk to reach political agreements.
The head of the family decides and need not reach agreement with other family members.
Instead of so much discussion, it is best if someone says how things are.
Trying to reach agreements through conversation is a waste of time; it is best if someone decides what to do and it is done.

Note

1. The author wishes to express profound gratitude to Lewis A. Friedland for introducing him to the Theory of Communicative Action, to Dhavan V. Shah for comments on drafts of this manuscript, and to Michael E. Roloff and two anonymous reviewers whose insights and thorough observations greatly improved this work. Please address correspondence to Hernando Rojas, Department of Life Sciences Communication, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 440 Henry Mall, Madison, WI 53706-1563; hrojas@wisc.edu.

References

Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Alesina, A., & La Ferrara, E. (2000). Participation in heterogeneous communities. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 115*, 847-891.

Ball-Rokeach, S. J., Kim, Y. C., & Matei, S. (2001). Storytelling neighborhood: Paths to belonging in diverse urban environments. *Communication Research, 28,* 392-428.

Bender, T. (1978). *Community and social change in America.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Berelson, B. R., Lazarsfeld, P. F., & McPhee, W. N. (1954). *Voting: A study of opinion formation in a presidential campaign.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Blau, P. M., & Schwartz, J. E. (1984). *Crosscutting social circles: Testing a macrostructural theory of intergroup relations*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Calhoun, C. (1992). Introduction: Habermas and the public sphere. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 1-48). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. (1960). *The American voter.* New York: Wiley.

Delli-Carpini, M. X. (1997). *The impact of the "money-politics" citizen assemblies on assembly participants*. Philadelphia: Pew Charitable Trusts.

Delli-Carpini, M. X., Cook, F. L., & Jacobs, L. R. (2004). Public deliberation, discursive participation and citizen engagement: A review of the empirical literature. *Annual Review of Political Science, 7,* 315-344.

Delli-Carpini, M. X., & Keeter S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dewey, J. (1988). *Human nature and conduct*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1922)

Fischer, C. S. (1982). *To dwell among friends: Personal networks in town and city*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fishkin, J. S. (1995). *The voice of the people: Public opinion & democracy.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Fishkin, J. (1999). Toward a deliberative democracy: Experimenting with an ideal. In S. Elkin & K. E. Soltan (Eds.), *Citizen competence and democratic institutions* (pp. 279–90). State College: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Friedland, L. W. (2001). Communication, community, and democracy: Towards a theory of communicatively integrated community. *Communication Research, 28,* 358-391.

Friedland, L. W., & Shah, D. V. (2005). Communication and community. In S. Dunwoody, L. Becker, G. Kosicki, & D. McLeod (Eds.), *The evolution of key mass communication concepts: Honoring Jack M. McLeod*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Gastil, J., & Dillard, J. P. (1999). Increasing political sophistication through public deliberation. *Political Communication*, *16,* 3-23.

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology, 78,* 1360-1380.

Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the rationalization of society*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The theory of communicative action*: *Lifeworld and system: A critique of functionalist reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hayes, A. F. (2005). *Statistical methods for communication science*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (2002). *Stealth democracy: American's beliefs about how government should work.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Huckfeldt, R., Beck, P. A., Dalton, R. J., & Levine, J. (1995). Political environments, cohesive social groups, and the communication of public opinion. *American Journal of Political Science*, *39,* 1025-1054.

Joas, H., & Beckert, J. (2002). A theory of action: Pragmatism and the creativity of action. *Transactional Viewpoints, 1*, 410-413.

Kim, J., Wyatt, R. O., & Katz, E. (1999). News, talk, opinion, participation: The part played by conversation in deliberative democracy. *Political Communication, 16*, 361-385.

Kim, Y. C., & Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (2006). Civic engagement from a communication infrastructure perspective. *Communication Theory*, *16,* 173-197.

Kwak, N., Williams, A. E., Wang, X., & Lee, H. (2005). Talking politics and engaging politics: An examination of the interactive relationships between structural features of political talk and discussion engagement. *Communication Research, 32,* 87-111.

Lazarsfeld, P., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1944). *The people's choice.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Leighley, J. E. (1990). Social interaction and contextual influences on political participation. *American Politics Quarterly, 18,* 459-475.

Lipset, S. M. (1981). *Political man*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1960)

Luskin, R., Fishkin, J., & Jowell, R. (2002). Considered opinions: Deliberative polling in Britain. *British Journal of Political Science, 32,* 455-487.

Mansbridge, J. J. (1983). *Beyond adversary democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McLeod, J. M., Scheufele, D., & Moy, P. (1999). Community, communication and participation: The role of mass media and interpersonal discussion in local political participation. *Political Communication*, *16,* 315-336.

McLeod, J. M., Scheufele, D., Moy, P., Horowitz, E. M., Holbert, R. L., Zhang, W., et al. (1999). Understanding deliberation: The effects of discussion networks on participation in a public forum. *Communication Research, 26,* 743-774.

McLeod, J. M., Sotirovic, M., & Holbert, R. L. (1998). Values as sociotropic judgments influencing communication patterns. *Communication Research, 25,* 453-480.

McLeod, J. M., Zubric, J., Keum, H., Deshpande, S., Cho, J., Stein, S., et al. (2001, August). *Reflecting and connecting: Testing a communication mediation model of civic participation.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC.

Mendelberg, T. (2002). The deliberative citizen: Theory and evidence. *Political Decision-Making, Deliberation and Participation, 6,* 151-193.

Mendelberg, T., & Oleske, J. (2000). Race and public deliberation. *Political Communication, 17,* 169-191.

Milbrath, L. (1965). *Political participation: How and why do people get involved in politics?* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Miller, G. R., Boster, F. J., Roloff, M. E., & Siebold, D. R. (1987). MBRS rekindled: Some thoughts on compliance gaining in interpersonal settings. In M. E. Roloff & G. R. Miller (Eds.), *Interpersonal processes: New directions in communication research* (pp. 89-116). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Moy, P., & Gastil, J. (2006). Predicting deliberative conversation: The impact of discussion networks, media use, and political cognitions. *Political Communication, 23,* 443-460.

Muñoz, J., Arturo, J., Bromberg, P., & Moncada, R. (2003). *Refelexiones sobre cultura ciudadana en Bogotá* [Reflections on citizen culture in Bogota]. Bogota, Colombia: Observatorio de Cultura Urbana.

Mutz, D. (2002). Cross-cutting social networks: Testing democratic theory in practice. *American Political Science Review, 96,* 111-126.

Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Page, B. I. (1996). *Who deliberates? Mass media in modern democracy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pizano, L. (2003). *Bogotá y el cambio: Percepciones sobre la ciudad y la ciudadanía* [Bogota and change: Perceptions on the city and the citizenship]. Bogotá, Colombia: IEPRI-CESO.

Price, V., Cappella, J. N., & Nir, L. (2002). Does disagreement contribute to more deliberative opinion? *Political Communication, 19,* 95-112.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rojas, H., Shah, D. V., Cho, J., Schmierbach, M., Keum, H., & Gil-De-Zuñiga, H. (2005). Media dialogue: Perceiving and addressing community problems. *Mass Communication & Society, 8,* 93-110.

Rotolo, T. (2000). Town heterogeneity and affiliation: A multilevel analysis of voluntary association membership. *Sociological Perspectives, 43,* 271-289.

Sanders, L. M. (1997). Against deliberation. *Political Theory, 25,* 347-376.

Scheufele, D. A., Nisbet, M. C., & Brossard, D. (2003). Pathways to political participation? Religion, communication contexts and mass media. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 15,* 300-324.

Scheufele, D. A., Nisbet, M. C., Brossard, D., & Nisbet, E. C. (2004). Social structure and citizenship: Examining the impacts of social setting, network heterogeneity, and informational variables on political participation. *Political Communication, 21,* 315–338.

Schudson, M. (1997). Why conversation is not the soul of democracy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 14,* 297-309.

Shah, D. V., McLeod, J. M., & Yoon, S. H. (2001). Communication, context and community: An exploration of print, broadcast and Internet influences. *Communication Research*, *28,* 464-506.

Sotirovic, M., & McLeod, J. M. (2001). Values, communication behavior and political participation. *Political Communication, 18,* 273-300.

Sulkin, T., & Simon, A. F. (2001). Habermas in the lab: A study of deliberation in an experimental setting. *Political Psychology, 22,* 809-826.

Tingsten, H. (1937). *Political behavior: Studies in election statistics.* London: P. S. King.

Varughese, G., & Ostrom, E. (2001). The contested role of heterogeneity in collective action: Some evidence from community forestry in Nepal. *World Development*, *19,* 747-765.

Verba, S., & Nie, N. (1972). *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality.* New York: Harper & Row.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic volunteerism in American politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Walsh, K. C. (2003). *Talking about politics: Informal groups and social identity in American life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wellman, B. (1982). Studying personal communities. In P. V. Mardsen & N. Lin (Eds.), *Social structure and network analysis* (pp. 61-80). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Wellman, B. (1988). The community question re-evaluated. In M. P. Smith (Ed.), *Power, community and the city* (pp. 81-107). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishing.

Wellman, B. (1999). The network community: An introduction. In B. Wellman (Ed.), *Global village: Life in contemporary communities*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Wellman, B., Carrington, P. J., & Hall A. (1988). Networks as personal communities. In B. Wellman & S. D. Berkowitz (Eds.), *Social structures: A network approach* (pp. 130-184). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wuthnow, R. (1994). *Sharing the journey: Support groups and America's new quest for community*. New York: Free Press.

Wyatt, R. O., Katz, E., & Kim, J. (2000). Bridging the spheres: Political and personal conversation in public and private spaces. *Journal of Communication, 50,* 71-92.

Hernando Rojas (PhD, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2005; MA, University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, 1994; BA, Universidad Externado de Colombia, 1989) is an assistant professor in the Life Sciences Communication Department, University of Wisconsin–Madison. His research is centered on the relationship between communication practices and community engagement in three interrelated lines of inquiry: interpersonal communication and motivations for democratic engagement; the public sphere and emerging communication technologies; and how perceptions of media and media effects affect public opinion.