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To cite this article: Sara A. Mehlretter Drury & John Rountree (2023): The Genre of Deliberative Guidance: Rhetoric and Deliberation in Citizens' Initiative Review Statements, Western Journal of Communication, DOI: [10.1080/10570314.2023.2183777](https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2023.2183777)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2023.2183777>



Published online: 24 Mar 2023.



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The Genre of Deliberative Guidance: Rhetoric and Deliberation in Citizens' Initiative Review Statements

Sara A. Mehlretter Drury & John Rountree

During the last decade, the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR) has offered an innovative design to incorporate citizen deliberation into ballot initiative elections, using a citizens' jury process to evaluate evidence and write an advisory CIR Statement on the measure for public engagement. This analysis turns attention to the Statements, and applying genre analysis, identifies an emerging genre of deliberative guidance. We argue that the genre of deliberative guidance invites readers to engage in a hermeneutic process of interpretation and decision making on ballot measures. We identify three components of the genre, offering evaluation and insights for deliberative design and practice.

Keywords: Deliberation; deliberative guidance; generic criticism; mini-publics; rhetoric

On June 16, 2009, the Oregon state legislature approved a bill that authorized the creation of a deliberative mini-public as part of the state's ballot initiative system. The resulting Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR), coordinated by the nonprofit organization Healthy Democracy, would be the first mini-public in the United States to be institutionalized as a regular part of policy making and governance (Gastil & Knobloch, 2020). From 2010–2018, the CIR has become a biennial event in Oregon, assembling a stratified sample of 18–24 Oregon residents to deliberate on ballot initiatives. The CIR has also spread to other localities, including Arizona, Massachusetts, and several cities and counties. While CIRs have addressed a range of topics,

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a consistent element is the creation of a Citizens' Review Statement (sometimes labeled a Citizens' Initiative Review Statement): a single page document to facilitate voter education before casting ballots (Gastil & Knobloch, 2020). These Statements represent a significant piece of public-facing, public-circulating rhetoric associated with deliberative mini-publics in the United States. While the internal processes and experiences of participants in mini-publics generally and the CIR specifically have been studied in detail, less work has been done analyzing and considering these Statements as an example of political discourse.

Deliberative mini-publics such as the CIR are rapidly becoming one of the most prominent deliberative innovations across the world (Elstub, 2014; Harris, 2019). Mini-publics are a helpful innovation because they provide the opportunity for a small group of the public to serve as functional stand-ins to represent the values and diverse perspectives of a population, while also having the time and resources to investigate and deliberate thoroughly on an issue (Warren & Gastil, 2015). Yet, as many advocates of deliberative mini-publics will explain, the proper role of such bodies is not to substitute for public judgment but to enhance it (Curato & Böker, 2016; Goodin & Dryzek, 2006). Niemeyer and Jennstål (2018) argue that the purpose of mini-publics in entering into public discourse is to induce a "deliberative stance" and to counter individual tendencies toward cognitive shortcuts, motivated reasoning, and information selection biases (pp. 334–5). This consultative role can come in many forms, but one of the most popular is the advisory report: a co-written document where a mini-public summarizes its findings and recommendations to influence policy discussion in the public sphere.

When so much of the influence of mini-public deliberations depends on a piece of public discourse, the character and quality of that discourse matters. A few conceptual models linking mini-publics to the deliberative system, particularly as a means to improve public discourse, have been developed (Curato & Böker, 2016; Felicetti, Niemeyer, & Curato, 2016; Niemeyer, 2014). Other studies have examined how individuals respond to mini-public reports (Gastil, Rosenzweig, Knobloch, & Brinker, 2016; Suiter, Muradova, Gastil, & Farrell, 2020). However, surprisingly little analysis of the rhetorical content of mini-public messages has been conducted. In this case, we apply rhetorical criticism to mini-public Statements, uncovering the functions of this public discourse. Using genre analysis, we demonstrate the quality of mini-public messages matters not only for explicit issue-relevant content but for meta-deliberative framing—how such messages guide audiences through an internal deliberative process and the implicit standards for deliberation they promote in the process.

The Citizens' Review Statement is a truncated public argument, and yet one with tremendous reach. In Oregon, it is mailed as part of the education booklet *Voters' Pamphlet* sent through the U.S. mail to every voter in the state; other states make the Statement available to the voting public. With the continued growth of CIR processes over the last 15 years, this essay seeks to examine the forms and functions of deliberative rhetoric present in the Statements. In so doing, we identify an emerging

genre of deliberative guidance, which includes jury advisory documents such as the Citizens' Review Statements. The genre of deliberative guidance prompts members of the public to engage in a hermeneutic process of interpretation and decision making on ballot measures, and supports the creation of democratic habits in the public. Using 16 CIR Statements, produced in processes from 2008–2018, we identify three generic components that contribute to this process: the replication of a deliberative process; the situating of the reader/voter to judge; and the promotion of robust deliberative reasoning via a rhetorical hybrid.

In this essay, we begin by examining the history of the CIR and review relevant scholarly research on this mini-public form of deliberative innovation. Next, we overview genre analysis, and apply that method to the 16 Statements. We analyze the forms and functions of this mode of public argument, revealing opportunities and shortfalls for public engagement. In the conclusion, we reflect on implications of deliberative guidance and suggest opportunities for future study.

The Citizens' Initiative Review and Vicarious Deliberation

Beginning in 2008 in Oregon, the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR) is a public deliberation process that was created to intervene in the state's initiative election system. During initiative elections, voters frequently lacked sufficient information to make a decision on any given ballot initiative. Initiatives lack clear partisan voting cues, and they deal with complex policy issues. In addition, the campaigns advocating for or opposing the measures are not always interested in providing the needed information to voters. To remedy this problem with the initiative system, practitioners advocated for, designed, and enacted a deliberative process to provide Oregon voters with reliable and accessible information about ballot measures before they voted on them (Gastil & Knobloch, 2020).

The CIR comprises between 18 and 24 state residents chosen through a stratified, random selection process. With the help of trained, nonpartisan facilitators from the organization Healthy Democracy, panelists spend 4–5 days analyzing a ballot measure, hearing from advocates, and questioning experts. The panelists collaboratively write a one-page Citizens' Statement to explain the ballot measure to voters. The Statement includes key findings about the measure and the best arguments for and against the measure. The Statement is then placed in the state voter's pamphlet, which is mailed to every voting household.

Healthy Democracy independently ran a pilot of the process in 2008, and the Oregon State Legislature authorized another pilot of the CIR program for the 2010 elections. The 2010 pilot processes were accompanied by an academic evaluation team who concluded the deliberations were high-quality and the ensuing Statements were helpful to Oregon voters who read them (Gastil & Knobloch, 2010). The Oregon State Legislature subsequently passed a bill in 2011 to officiate the CIR as part of the state election process and to create a bipartisan commission to oversee the process. Since that time, Oregon has hosted five additional CIR panels,

and pilot CIR processes have been conducted in Arizona, California, Colorado, and Massachusetts. The CIR process has expanded to Finland and Switzerland as of 2019.

The CIR has itself become an important area of study within deliberation research (see Gastil & Knobloch, 2020; Gastil, Rosenzweig, Knobloch, & Brinker, 2016; Johnson, Morrell, & Black, 2019; Richards, 2018; Rountree, 2021). It is rare for a deliberative mini-public to have legal authority or discernible policy impacts, and the CIR makes a narrowly tailored but influential intervention into the initiative election system. Previous research has shown that the CIR influences voters in many ways, including their weighing of key values, knowledge of policy issues, political confidence, and voting decisions (Gastil, Knobloch, Reedy, Henkels, & Cramer, 2017; Knobloch, Barthel, & Gastil, 2019; Már & Gastil, 2020). In addition, at a time when scholars and practitioners are pushing to connect mini-public deliberation to the broader political system, the CIR provides a clear model for connecting the two (Beauvais & Warren, 2019; Curato & Böker, 2016).

Most of the research on the CIR has focused on the quality and character of the discussions within the panel, on the internal effects for participants within the CIR, or on the external effects of the CIR on those who read the Statements. Comparatively little research has assessed the products that the CIR creates: the Citizens' Statements that are the focus and output of the deliberations. This need in the literature is significant because the CIR's main influence is through the Statements it sends out to voters. Analyzing CIR Statements can reveal how a deliberative process can connect to the broader political system through the rhetorical products it creates.

Previous scholarship has argued that CIR Statements foster "vicarious deliberation," or what Goodin (2000) called "deliberation within" (Gastil, Richards, & Knobloch, 2014). Deliberation is generally conceptualized as an interpersonal activity. Sprain and Black (2018), for example, describe deliberation as an "interactional accomplishment," and they analyze and catalog key markers of interpersonal deliberation, including providing reasons to others amidst disagreement, giving indicators of listening and respect, and maintaining inclusive discourse. By contrast, vicarious deliberation is a process whereby audiences are invited to go through an internal deliberative process within their own minds. Audiences who are not able to fully participate in an interpersonal deliberative process thus are able to have a partial deliberative experience by being exposed to deliberative materials.

For deliberative scholars, vicarious deliberation is an appealing concept. First, the mechanism for deliberative processes to influence policy outcomes has often been unclear. Vicarious deliberation offers a concrete means of influencing existing policy processes. In the case of the CIR, it taps into the existing ballot initiative process to influence voters. Second, deliberative scholars have been accused of "abandoning" participation by the full public in favor of smaller mini-public forums (Chambers, 2009; Lafont, 2015). Vicarious deliberation provides a response to this critique by offering a way for mini-publics to "scale up" to the mass public (Curato & Böker, 2016).

In the case of the CIR, the opportunity for vicarious deliberation comes in the Citizens' Statement document. This document is meant for public engagement, as it is sent or advertised to citizens and written by their fellow citizens. The rhetorical form of these Statements represents an intersection of what Goodnight (1982) termed the technical and public spheres of argument. Rather than pronounce judgment, the Statements offer lists of reasons for and against a proposal. These reasons draw on a range of evidence, some relying on witness testimony (the technical sphere) while others pointing to advocate concerns and community considerations (the public sphere). The Statements present a norm for public deliberation that citizens should weigh each side's reasons and decide by casting their ballot. In public deliberation, the reasons brought forth should include expertise as well as the experiences of citizens, advocates, and the community (Drury, Elstub, Escobar, & Roberts, 2021). This process demonstrates how argument can construct policy understandings and invite—or discourage—vicarious deliberation by the broader public.

The fullest assessment of the CIR's vicarious deliberation impacts comes out of Gastil, Richards, and Knobloch (2014). The researchers took several steps to evaluate the CIR Statements from 2010. First, they conducted a phone survey of Oregon voters to assess the impact of the CIR Statements on their decision-making, including how useful voters found the Statements and how long they read the Statements. Second, they performed a fact-check of the CIR Statements, and they quantitatively coded the different sections of Statements to compare with deliberative criteria. This gave the researchers a measure of how much attention the CIR Statements give to some deliberative tasks, such as weighing pros and cons. Finally, they gave some attention to the discussion process in the CIR and any major topics that were present in the deliberations but absent in the Statements. While this included analysis of the language of the Statements, the authors focused more on how the Statements were constructed during the CIR deliberations rather than how the language of the Statements encourages a deliberative perspective from readers. Thus, a clearer understanding is still needed of how the language within Statements encourages or discourages vicarious deliberation from readers.

Our interest in this paper is how CIR Statements, as part of a genre of deliberative guidance, operate on a meta-deliberative level to promote vicarious deliberation. Previous rhetorical scholarship has shown how texts of public argument, such as campaign debates (Rowland, 2018) or opinion polls (Ellwanger, 2017), can be analyzed to show how they contain implicit standards for public deliberation. In other words, instances of public argument extend beyond their explicit issue-relevant content into implicit meta-deliberative framing of how audiences should weigh said content. As we explain in the next section, we use a rhetorical analysis of genre to analyze how CIR Statements promote implicit standards of deliberation, thus creating a genre of deliberative guidance for the public.

Rhetorical Analysis of Genre

Rather than deal with the CIR Statements individually, we use rhetorical analysis to view them as a genre of public discourse, following in a method of generic criticism. The term “genre” refers to a set of discourses that can be interpreted and understood through an analysis of common forms and characteristics. The use of genre to categorize rhetoric was present in the Greco-Roman tradition of rhetoric, employed to understand different modes of practice—forensic, deliberative, and epideictic (Campbell, 2009; Miller, Devitt, & Gallagher, 2018).¹ In contemporary rhetorical studies, Campbell and Jamieson (1978) defined genre as “groups of discourses which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics ... what is distinctive about the acts in a genre is the recurrence of the [rhetorical] forms *together* in constellation” (p. 20). Furthermore, they elaborated that a genre is “a group of discourses” with “a synthetic core in which certain significant rhetorical elements, e.g. a system of belief, lines of argument, stylistic choices, and the perception of the situation are fused into an indivisible whole” (p. 21). A genre is established through recurrent situations and structures, responsive to societal exigences and contexts, and constrained by expectations.

As a multidisciplinary field, genre studies covers a wide range of artifacts, modalities, and temporalities (Miller, 2015; Miller, Devitt, & Gallagher, 2018; Olson, 1993). Focusing on public argument, generic criticism inductively analyzes artifacts to determine “whether similar rhetorical forms are linked by some factor” and how rhetoric “achieve[s] a particular function in a definable situation” (Koesten & Rowland, 2004, p. 71). The critic identifies the current situation’s constraints, and the ways that history and memory influence the artifact’s rhetorical action (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978, p. 27). Generic criticism offers the opportunity to categorize artifacts and consider their function toward “social action” (Miller, 2015), and explore the ways that recurrent discourses function to create understanding, meaning, and invitation.

Our approach to generic criticism works through the analysis of context and text. Genre can be established through determining forms of rhetoric with similarities (drawing on interpretative/heuristic approach), generalizability (drawing on ontological empirical approach), and situational factors that “influence the rhetor to make certain choices and thus explain similarities found across a variety of works” (Rowland, 1991, p. 135). The consistent, “recurring aspects of the rhetorical situation function as the glue for rhetorical genres” (Neville-Shepard, 2016, p. 125). The genre may still feature variations and violations, as “it is sometimes strategic to do the unexpected” (Rowland, 1991, p. 137). The task of the rhetorical critic is therefore to investigate the situation with an eye toward nuance, revealing the “subtlety and sensitivity” of the “communication” (p. 133–134). At its best, generic criticism “furthers understanding of both category and instance” (Kelley-Romano, 2008, p. 108).

Rhetorical scholars have shown the importance of closely analyzing public deliberation (Asen, 2015; Ellwanger, 2017; Parry-Giles, 2010; Steffensmeier & Schenck-

Table 1 Summary of All CIR Panels from 2008–2018

Location	Year	Ballot Issue	Abbreviation
Oregon	2008	Public school English immersion	(OR-58, 2008)
Oregon	2010	Regulated medical marijuana supply system	(OR-74, 2010)
Oregon	2010	Minimum criminal sentence increase	(OR-73, 2010)
Oregon	2012	Privately-owned casinos	(OR-82, 2012)
Oregon	2012	Corporate tax “kicker” funds for education	(OR-85, 2012)
Colorado	2014	Mandatory GMO labeling	(CO-105, 2014)
Jackson Co., OR	2014	Ban some genetically modified plants	(JC-15-119, 2014)
Oregon	2014	Open, top-two primary system	(OR-90, 2014)
Oregon	2014	Mandatory GMO labeling	(OR-92, 2014)
Phoenix, AZ	2014	Pension reform	(P-487, 2014)
Arizona	2016	Regulation and taxation of marijuana	(AZ-205, 2016)
Massachusetts	2016	Medical marijuana legalization	(MA-4, 2016)
Oregon	2016	Business tax increase	(OR-97, 2016)
California	2018	Local rent control	(CA-10, 2018)
Massachusetts	2018	Nurse-patient assignment limits	(MA-1, 2018)
Portland, OR	2018	Affordable housing	(PDX-26-199, 2018)

Hamlin, 2008), and our analysis continues that work by examining a set of concrete products that are directed toward the voting public. Given the widescale use of mini-publics and the repetition of the CIR in the United States as a democratic innovation, genre analysis offers a way of understanding and improving these linked deliberative discourses. Our analysis works inductively, revealing a genre of deliberative guidance, as well as specific functions of the rhetoric of CIR statements within this genre.

Our analysis identifies three components that constitute the emerging genre of deliberative guidance as evidenced through the CIR Statements. We argue that the Statements function as a public argument and aim to engage members of the public in a vicarious deliberative process. Using 16 CIR Statements from 2008–2018 (see Table 1), the analysis inductively identifies the generic, rhetorical forms of the CIR Statements.

The Generic Features of CIR Citizens’ Statements

In this section, we analyze the generic features of CIR Statements on a meta-deliberative level and consider how they invite (or fail to invite) vicarious deliberation from readers. Although the purpose of the CIR is to help voters in making their

own decision, we do not assume a priori that the generic features of CIR Statements function to invite readers to internally deliberate. It is possible for deliberative guidance statements to fail to promote vicarious deliberation in practice, creating a discrepancy between their stated purpose and their rhetorical action. For example, Curato, Vrydagh, and Bächtiger (2020) point out an important distinction between mini-publics that provide only a set of recommendations and those that provide reasoning for the broader public to consider. The former operate on a “shortcut track” where mini-publics are implicitly given more deference in decision-making based on their compositional features, whereas the latter operate on a “participatory track” that invites further deliberation by the broader public. Deliberative guidance statements that explicitly or implicitly call on readers to defer to the ultimate judgment of the authors would not invite vicarious deliberation from readers.

Based on our analysis of 16 CIR Statements, we argue that the generic features of CIR Statements do invite readers to engage in a hermeneutic process of interpretation and decision making on questions of public concern. This process is created through three key moves: by structurally replicating a deliberative experience that invites investigation and close reading, by situating the reader to make a judgment of the text, and by prompting robust deliberative reasoning through a rhetorical hybrid of information and advocacy. The interplay of the three features offers greater understanding of the generic action created through this discourse, and potential for evaluating the rhetorical functions of the genre of deliberative guidance.

Replicating a Deliberative Experience on the Page

First, the CIR Statements replicate a deliberative experience through their structure. CIR Statements are organized on the page to take participants through a quasi-deliberative process. This is evidenced through the different sections of the Statement and the functions they serve (see [Figure 1](#)), and through the opaque design of a Statement.

The paradigmatic CIR Statement is split into three main sections:

- Key findings
- Citizens’ Statement in favor of the measure
- Citizens’ Statement in opposition to the measure

The sections mirror the temporal sequence that participants in the CIR actually go through. The CIR process spends the first half day explaining the role of the panel in the policymaking process and introducing panelists to the practices of deliberation. Then, the panelists spend the majority of the CIR deliberation on creating, evaluating, and refining key findings about the measure. The final day and a half, the panel splits into two groups based on panelists’ support or opposition to the measure to draft the best reasons for and against the measure in question. In a similar process, readers are introduced to the CIR, given an information base through the “key findings” section, and then asked to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of competing positions on the measure in question.

Citizens' Review Statement

This Citizens' Statement, authorized by the 2011 State Legislature, was developed by an independent panel of 20 Oregon voters overseen by the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review Commission. The panelists were randomly selected from registered voters in Oregon and balanced to fairly reflect the state's voting population based on location of residence, party registration, age, gender, education, ethnicity, and likelihood of voting. Over a period of three and a half days the panel heard from initiative proponents, opponents, and background witnesses. The panelists deliberated about the measure and produced this statement. This statement has not been edited, altered, or approved by the Secretary of State.

The opinions expressed in this statement are those of the members of a citizen panel and were developed through the citizens' review process. They are NOT official opinions or positions endorsed by the State of Oregon or any government agency. A citizen panel is not a judge of the constitutionality or legality of any ballot measure, and any statements about such matters are not binding on a court of law.

Key Findings

- Labeling genetically engineered foods would provide information to let Oregonians make more informed buying decisions and this would offer them more control and transparency over their food purchasing decisions.
- The labeling requirements do not apply to alcoholic beverages, or prepared restaurant food because they are currently outside the food labeling system laws.
- Regardless of M92, consumers seeking GMO-free food can purchase items labeled non-GMO or organic.
- 64 countries, including most of Europe, Australia and Japan, already require labeling of genetically engineered foods and when those countries switched to requiring labeling food prices did not go up.
- The costs of actual labeling are a tiny fraction of the costs of compliance and certification. The bulk of private costs arise in segregation of products along the supply chain.
- Under M92, if passed, meat and dairy products from animals that have been raised and fed with genetically engineered feed and grain will not be labeled GE.
- Labels required by Measure 92 would NOT tell consumers which ingredients in a packaged food product are GMOs, or what percentage of the product is GMO ingredients.
- If we are going to sell GMO salmon that contain genes from an eel-like organism (something the FDA may soon approve), or other engineered fish or meat now in development, we should label them.
- Importantly, these costs will be borne by firms and consumers for both GM and non-GM foods as labeling foods as non-GM will require oversight costs.
- U.S. food producers already label their GMO foods in 64 countries.

Citizen Statement in Support of the Measure

Position taken by 9 of 20 panelists

- M92 would offer Oregonians more control and transparency over our food purchasing decisions and does not act as a warning or ban.
- Labeling genetically engineered crops could benefit Oregon family farmers that grow traditional crops by increasing public demand for crops that are not genetically engineered.
- U.S. food producers already label their GMO food in 64 countries, including Australia, Japan, and most of Europe.
- There is mounting scientific evidence that the widespread use of genetically engineered crops designed to survive large amounts of herbicide spraying is leading to a large increase in the use of these chemicals.
- A national consumer organization and a regional medical organization have stated that there are still questions about the long-term health effects of genetically engineered crops.

Citizen Statement in Opposition to the Measure

Position taken by 11 of 20 panelists

- Under M92, if passed, meat and dairy products from animals that have been raised and fed with genetically engineered feed and grain will not be labeled GM.
- The costs of actual labeling are a tiny fraction of the costs of compliance and certification.
- Labels required by Measure 92 would NOT tell consumers which ingredients in a packaged food product are GMOs, or what percentage of the product is GMO ingredients.
- Existing food labels already give consumers a more reliable way to choose foods without GE ingredients if that is what they prefer, including "organic" and "non-GMO" labels. Measure 92 conflicts with these national labeling standards.
- Thousands of food products would have to be labeled as "genetically engineered" – even if they're not. Thousands of other food products would be exempt from being labeled – even when they do contain or are produced with GMOs.

Figure 1 Citizens' Review Statement from M92 in Oregon, 2014

The pro/con framing engages readers in "choicework," where participants in a deliberation weigh alternative approaches to policy problems. In the case of the CIR, the choice is binary: a vote in favor or a vote against a ballot measure. Choicework has been recognized as an important element in deliberative framing that primes participants to weigh both the benefits and drawbacks of different policy approaches (Drury, Andre, Goddard, & Wentzel, 2016; Johnson & Melville, 2019).

Choicework is designed to resist deliberative participants thinking that policy options are risk-free or come without tradeoffs.

Additionally, the structure of a CIR Statement invites a hermeneutic process where readers spend time interpreting the overall message of the text and its meaning and application to the vote at hand. The evidence for our interpretation lies in the opacity of a CIR Statement. A Statement itself offers no clear conclusion, no clear next steps. The Statement drops off with no conclusion. What little introduction the Statement provides has no relevance to the content of the measure. There are no summary paragraphs within a Statement giving a bottom line. Readers are thrown into a series of decontextualized bullet points about a ballot measure that do not necessarily relate to each other. Outside of their sequence in the Statement, the bullets are given no clear hierarchy—they are all on the same alignment on the page.

These structural features of the document, which may at first seem mundane, serve to give the reader interpretive work to do. The reader must evaluate all of the bullets to decide what is most important. They must come to their own conclusions at the end of the document about which arguments are stronger and which are weaker. This is ironic, as CIR Statements are supposed to increase accessibility to decipher complex ballot initiatives. They serve this function, however, by offering clear language to explain different pieces of the measures, not by short circuiting the reasoning process.

The dominant indicator of any sort of final judgment of the panel comes through the vote tally of how many panelists supported and how many opposed the measure. This is a feature of most, but not all, CIR Statements. The vote tally has been a controversial feature among researchers since 2010 for the exact reason that it offers a summary judgment rather than encourages deliberation—it is, in other words, a mismatch to the genre of the Statement. The evaluation team recommended in its report in 2016 for future CIRs to remove the vote tally from the Statements, noting that the tallies may provide a convenient shortcut for voters not to read and engage with the Statements:

First, it distracts panelist attention away from the substance of the Statement and toward the split that will come when a vote is taken. This problem was more visible in the 2016 Review because the split between panelists for and against the measure could be seen in the rising frustration of some panelists during their deliberations. Moreover, the emphasis on the vote tally detracts from the Review's substance when media accounts of the Review stress the "vote" and "endorsement" of the panel over its findings

There is another candidate for a reasoning shortcut in the Statements. The second half of the page on a Statement is divided roughly evenly between arguments for and arguments against. Sometimes these sections have "summary" lines to capture the main reasoning in the section. For example, the CIR Statement on Measure 74 covered a proposition to legalize medical marijuana. The summary Statement in favor of the measure reads "Summary: Measure 74 creates a safe, compassionate, and prompt access program for Oregon medical marijuana patients, introduces regulation, and is financially sound." While this may seem to provide the type of summary

judgment that will provide voters with a clear directive, they must also contend with the summary Statement from those opposed to the measure: “Summary: Measure 74, a thinly veiled attempt to legalize marijuana, has a high probability of being abused!”

By incorporating separate sections for arguments in favor and arguments against, CIR Statements promote a weighing of the tradeoffs and benefits of a measure, but they also create a different kind of reasoning shortcut in the number of bullet-point reasons under each category. If a reader sees that there are four favorable reasons and only two reasons in opposition, they may conclude that the favorable arguments outweigh the unfavorable on the basis of quantity alone. Thus, there is an incentive for CIR panels to create balanced Statements with an equal or roughly equal number of bulleted reasons for each side. Indeed, the number of reasons for and against measures are well-balanced across all CIR Statements (see [Table 2](#)). Of the 16 CIR Statements we analyzed, 11 contained the exact same number of reasons for and against within the statement, even though the number fluctuated across statements (e.g., OR-58 had nine reasons in favor and nine reasons against, while AZ-205 had three reasons in favor and three against). Four other statements only had one more reason for one of the sides, and OR-73 was an outlier with four reasons in favor and six against.

In structuring balanced Statements, CIR panels invite a more deliberative process from readers. Creating a balanced Statement with equal or roughly equal reasons for and against promotes full consideration of both sides. It resists providing readers with a reasoning shortcut based on the quantity given to one position. As a design

Table 2 Number of Bulleted Reasons in Statements in Support or Against

Measure	Support	Against	Balance
OR-58, 2008	9	9	0
OR-74, 2010	6	6	0
OR-73, 2010	4	6	-2
OR-82, 2012	7	8	-1
OR-85, 2012	6	5	+1
CO-105, 2014	5	5	0
JC-15-119, 2014	5	5	0
OR-90, 2014	5	5	0
OR-92, 2014	5	5	0
P-487, 2014	5	5	0
AZ-205, 2016	3	3	0
MA-4, 2016	3	4	-1
OR-97, 2016	5	4	+1
CA-10, 2018	3	3	0
MA-1, 2018	3	3	0
PDX-26-199, 2018	3	3	0

element, balance promotes vicarious deliberation, but it also risks being artificial and not fully reflecting the deliberative process of the panel or deliberations ongoing in the public sphere. For example, there may only be three compelling reasons to oppose a measure, but a panel may be incentivized to generate a fourth reason if there are four reasons on the other side. Some degree of artificiality may be a necessary tradeoff in deliberative guidance that invites choicework among balanced options.

In sum, public messages that promote vicarious deliberation must be structured to replicate a deliberative experience on the page. In this section, we showed how the CIR Statements accomplish this by mirroring the temporal sequence of a deliberation and by resisting cognitive shortcuts to judgment. In the next section, we show how these Statements also invite readers to participate in a policy judgment with their opening framings.

Situating the Reader to Make a Judgment of the Text

The second function of CIR Statements is to situate the reader to make a judgment, thus promoting vicarious deliberation through a greater individual agency. The opening language of a Citizens' Statement is important and should not be underestimated in any such mini-public product. For readers, it frames what they should do with the text, how they should approach it and engage with it. It explains who they should see themselves as in relation to the text and the policy issue. As Warner (2002) explains, every piece of public discourse has an implicitly or explicitly constructed public it is addressing. In policy rhetoric, addressed can be constructed as many different types of publics—as passive witnesses to historical events, as heroic underdogs in a righteous fight against big business, as functionaries who will keep making slow progress on an important policy issue, as victims of an unfair political system, as heirs to a political legacy, as hard-working entrepreneurs who can achieve the American dream, and so on. Any of these constructions invite the reader to engage with a piece of policy discourse differently.

CIR Statements implicitly situate the reader as a member of a deliberative public doing reasoned analysis of a policy issue. This situating move comes through an opening paragraph or two that accompanies every CIR Statement to explain what the CIR is and how the Statement was created. The wording and number of paragraphs varies somewhat across the 16 CIR Statements that have been produced. Nevertheless, with the exception of three of the panels (Colorado on proposition 105, Arizona on proposition 487, and a Portland CIR on Measure 26–199), each of these introductory salvos contain two distinct pieces: (1) a disclaimer that the opinions expressed by the panel are not the official opinions of the government, and (2) a description of the CIR process.

For example, below are the opening paragraphs from the 2014 CIR in Oregon on Measure 92:

The opinions expressed in this statement are those of the members of a citizen panel and were developed through the Citizens' Initiative Review process as adopted by the Oregon State Legislature. They are NOT official opinions or positions endorsed by the State of Oregon or any government agency. A citizen panel is not a judge of the constitutionality or legality of any ballot measure, and any statements about such matters are not binding on a court of law.

Description of Citizens' Initiative Review

This statement was developed by an independent panel of 19* Oregon voters, chosen at random from the voting population of Oregon, and balanced to fairly reflect the state's voting population. The panel has issued this statement after three and a half days of hearings and deliberation. This statement has not been edited nor has the content been altered.

The juxtaposition of these two components creates a tension for the reader, signaling the CIR's simultaneous status as legitimate and illegitimate, official and unofficial. Oregon's CIR Statements are included in the official voter's guide, which is mailed to every voting household in the state by the Secretary of State's office. This signals the CIR Statement is to some extent legitimate and official. On the other hand, the reader is confronted at the beginning of the Statement with a warning that the opinions and positions expressed in the Statement are "NOT official" (capitalization in original).

The tension in language is a result of the multi-authored nature of the CIR Statement. The CIR in Oregon, in particular, foregrounds the complicated ethos of these documents, as Oregon is the only state as of this writing to instantiate the CIR into state law as a regular part of the initiative process. When approving the CIR for the voter's guide, the legislature simultaneously foregrounded the CIR Statement as a potentially useful aid to voters but not as a voice of state government, particularly on questions of constitutionality. The 2011 authorizing legislation for the CIR in Oregon (H.B. 2634, 2011) thus deliberately introduced the tension into the CIR statements. It mandated the exact wording of the disclaimer to be included in the document, but it also tasked the Secretary of State's office with writing a description of the CIR process.

The two pieces of the introductory language work together navigate the multi-authored text, to grant some legitimacy to the panel while also not allowing it to speak on behalf of the state. Functionally, however, the two pieces also create ambivalence in the document and situate readers to be critical. The disclaimer cautions readers not to assume the Statement is fully correct, even warning that "a citizen panel is not a judge of the constitutionality or legality of any ballot measure." The simultaneous inclusion of the Citizens' Statement in the pamphlet but warning about its accuracy invites the reader to go through the Statement and exercise judgment. The Statement is not to be taken at face value—it should be critically analyzed. Meanwhile, the second piece tries to build up a sense of legitimacy through a description of the composition of the panel and of the deliberative process it went through. It explains the randomly selected participants who are meant to represent the state demographics, and it references the significant length of time the panel

spent deliberating on the issue. The last sentence of the above passage also strongly reinforces the sense of the legitimacy of the panel: “This Statement has not been edited nor has the content been altered.” Indicating the Statement has been preserved is an act of deference to the citizen panel and the value of its unaltered words.

The Oregon CIR was used as a model for pilot CIRs in other states, and the pilots adopted a similar introductory format to their Statements. Both Massachusetts Statements provided longer preludes in their explanatory notes about the Citizens’ Initiative Review and its findings. The 2018 CIR pilot from Massachusetts included an entirely separate page to describe the CIR. It gestured to the value of the Statement by indicating that the Statement contains information the panel considered “strong, reliable, and important for their fellow voters to know.” Then, it presented a brief history of the CIR in Oregon, identified what groups helped organize the pilot process in Massachusetts, explained how the panelists were selected, and outlined the deliberative process of the panel. All of these moves invite the reader to view the panel as an independent, strong source of information. Yet, it ends with the same type of disclaimer that accompanies other CIR Statements: “The views expressed in the Citizens’ Statement are solely those of the Massachusetts CIR panel. They are not the opinions or positions of Representative Hecht, Tisch College, Healthy Democracy, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, or any government agency” (MA-1, 2018). This tension in the introductory language seems to be in service of a similar purpose in Massachusetts as it was in Oregon, as the bill proposed to pass the CIR into law in Massachusetts (H. 561, 2015) also would have mandated the formula of a short description and disclaimer statement.

Even if the state legislators were not attempting to situate readers to critically evaluate the text, the invitation to judgment is an important feature of the genre. If reading a CIR Statement is to provoke an internal deliberation, then any introductory framing has to prompt readers to consider, not blindly accept, the conclusions of the panel. This is consistent with scholarship that has suggested mini-publics should affirm the ultimate decision-making power of the democratic public (Curato & Böker, 2016) and should not rely on “blind deference” (Lafont, 2015). In the next section, we show how the structure of the CIR Statements encourages a robust engagement of information and persuasion, and ultimately invites readers to come to a reasoned judgment of the text.

Reasoning in a Rhetorical Hybrid

Finally, the genre promotes robust deliberative reasoning through a rhetorical hybrid of information and advocacy. Deliberative rhetoric deals with questions of the future. The genre of deliberative guidance prompts the reader to evaluate a range of knowledge, values, and opinions as they consider future action—namely, whether to vote in support or against a proposal. Jamieson and Campbell (1982) define “rhetorical hybrids” as the “creative fusion” of rhetorical elements and forms; the term is “a metaphor intended to emphasize the productive but transitory nature of

these combinations” (p. 147). The citizen-authored texts offer various pieces evidence relating to the measure (such as facts, statistics, testimonies, and so on), and then shift to persuasion, value- and interest-based reasons to support or oppose. Together, this hybrid of information and advocacy functions to prompt an informed, critical deliberative reasoning in the voter-citizen.

In design, deliberative mini-publics are meant as a more participatory way to influence the public policy making process. Many mini-publics include sessions with expert witnesses, or individuals who provide evidence to citizens on the issue. The experts may give background information or overviews of a topic; other experts may function in a role of providing a “witness” aligned with a particular policy perspective (Roberts, Lightbody, Low, & Elstub, 2020). These experts may serve in informational capacities, or may present opposing “expert” views. Typically, the mini-public participants have an opportunity to question the experts and discuss their presentation in small groups. This process encourages a common understanding of the issue at hand and equips CIR participants to select and report out the most relevant information relating to the ballot measure.

Information most often is expressed in the “Key Findings,” which offer a range of knowledge about the issue for the reader. These “Key Findings” represent both common (or public sphere) facts as well as arguments from expertise. For example, Statements may offer current laws or legal procedures impacted by the measure, such as “Measure 97 is an amending to an existing law” (OR-97, 2016) and “The initiative enacts a 15% tax on retail sales [of marijuana]” (AZ-205, 2016). The Statements also cite expertise (technical sphere), sometimes going so far as to note particular organizations or individuals, such as “A 2017 Stanford University study showed that San Francisco experienced higher rental costs ... ” (CA-10, 2018), “The CDC has determined marijuana causes less dependence than other controlled substances” (AZ-205, 2016), and “According to Roberta Mann, a law professor at the University of Oregon, if [Measure 97] passes, it is likely that 75% of the tax burden would be borne by shareholders & investors rather than being reflected in increased pricing for goods & services” (OR-97, 2016). The reader is therefore encouraged to consider a range of perspectives and information, blending together community understandings, the current situation, and relevant expertise.

The rhetoric of the “findings” sections tends to express a high degree of certainty. For example, in the 2010 Measure 74 Statement, the findings speak with certainty: the measure’s language “lacks clarity on regulation, operation, and enforcement;” the program “is financially self-sustaining;” and the “measure shall provide an assistance program” (OR-74, 2010). Similarly, the Massachusetts nurse-patient assignment limits offer clear direction if the measure passes, including that hospitals “will be required to have a written plan in place” and “unit specific ratios will apply to all Massachusetts hospitals” (MA-1, 2018). Expressions of certainty and verifiability foster shared understanding of the problem, demonstrating the importance of information for deliberative reasoning.

After the Key Findings, the Statements offer more persuasive rhetoric as a pathway of reasoning in support or opposition of the measure/proposal. As observed in previous CIR research (Rountree, 2021), the argumentation of these rationales is often framed in contingency, positioning the reader to question and evaluate potentiality and impact. The majority of reasons moved beyond shared knowledge to advocate *why* a voter-citizen might choose to support or oppose a measure. Contingent rhetoric acknowledges the uncertainty of the future, and functions to suggest the need for evaluative judgment—how likely (or unlikely) is a result or condition to occur? Across the CIR Statements, the bulleted points for and against a measure used language such as “could” and “may,” such as the measure “could increase costs” and “could result in a 1% lack of creation of jobs” (OR-97, 2016); or the proposal “may reduce income of property owners” and “could cause neighborhood decline” (MA-1, 2018). This uncertain language prompts the reader to consider whether or not to accept the reason. Since contingent discourse deals with enacting policy or measures that will result in future actions, contingency is a responsible aspect of deliberative argument.

Later CIR Statements channeled more advocacy, first naming a “finding” in support or opposition (often contingent in expression), and then providing an explanation for why the finding was a reason to vote for or against the measure. For example, the first bulleted point offering opposition to California’s Proposition 10: Local Rent Control Initiative stated:

Finding: Prop 10 rent controls may reduce the income of property owners. Safe affordable living options may be reduced if property owners forego maintenance and repairs to cut operating costs.

This is important because: The lack of safe housing is a serious concern for many communities and could cause neighborhood decline. This may reduce property value

The contingent language signaled to the reader that the reasons contain some elements of uncertainty. The advocacy becomes stronger through the phrase, “This is important because ...” followed by the expression of an interest or value that is at stake in the voter’s decision, which in this example is preserving property values. Explanations such as these encourage the reader to first evaluate the probability of the argument (is it likely to happen), and then engage in assessing whether the value or interest aligns with their understanding of the issue (is the decline in property value something to be avoided, despite other potential benefits of the measure). By including contingent language, CIR statements move from information to persuasion, and function to put the evaluation and decision actions on the voter-citizen.

With the rhetorical hybrid of information and advocacy, the CIR statements position evidence from the public and technical spheres as important to the common understanding of the issue. The hybridity of the documents fosters robust consideration of a range of arguments important to vicarious deliberation. The findings tend to rely on expertise and reliable, common information, whereas the sections in support and in opposition invite the reader to consider the application of values

and interests as benefits and tradeoffs. Deliberative guidance should prompt citizens to consider a range of public and expert information alongside their own personal experiences. It also should bring that diverse information into the reasoning process of deciding in favor or against a particular action. In the CIR statements, the rhetorical hybridity supports these norms, prompting vicarious deliberation as the reader considers the most important facts and justifications. Such a process offers a more informed, participatory, and collaborative perspective on public issues.

Implications

In the introduction to this paper, we posited that the CIR Statements from 2008–2018 represented an emergent genre of deliberative guidance. Mini-publics are seen as a way to connect time- and labor-intensive deliberative processes with broader deliberative democracy, to enhance the participatory nature of democracy. In the United States, mini-publics like the CIR have enhanced the educative functions of ballot measure voting, where randomly chosen, representative mini-publics can offer informational evidence and opinion-based rationales for and against a particular measure. The analysis here demonstrated that CIR Statements encourage the citizen-voter to take part in a hermeneutic process of interpretation and decision-making; in other words, to extend public deliberation in a mini-public to every voter who engages the Statement before casting their vote on the ballot measure.

The generic analysis identified a stabilizing genre of deliberative guidance that functions to uphold norms of robust deliberation and promote vicarious deliberation in the broader public as social action. The CIR Statements replicate the deliberative experience of the mini-public, offering the process toward a broader public through vicarious deliberation. Yet if a reader is to engage in vicarious deliberation, the framing should invite them to participate in a judgment rather than accept a judgment. Finally, the Statements offer opportunity for shared participation in deliberative democracy, through the establishment of a common understanding of expertise relating to the problem and by connecting the advocacy of values and interests of stakeholders to positions in support and in opposition to the measure. The rhetorical hybridity of information and advocacy can encourage robust deliberation via reasoning that incorporates multiple forms of evidence, expertise, and values. The genre of deliberative guidance offers great potential for vicarious deliberation. At the same time, it also exposes the conceivable barriers to that process for the reader/citizen, particularly the danger of summary judgments that may short-circuit the internal deliberative process.

One important insight for practice is that deliberative designers should carefully weigh the decision to include or not include pro and con sections to deliberative guiding statements. Presenting separate sections for and against a proposition could help readers weigh the benefits and tradeoffs of a policy option, which is an important element of deliberative choicework. However, as discussed in the analysis, those creating deliberative guiding statements may be motivated to balance the

number of reasons for and against an option. This action would help resist giving the impression that the deliberative guiding statement is making a recommendation, but the number of reasons may be artificial and not reflect the actual deliberative process it is meant to represent.

Further, pro and con sections in mini-public statements may also present an inaccurate binary representation of public debate. An important distinction between the CIR and other deliberative processes is that the CIR is meant to help voters make a binary choice. The statements in favor and opposition may be justifiable for the CIR but not for more open-ended deliberations. By design, the CIR artificially reduces positions on ballot measures into two camps, when public discourse on the issue may be an “argumentative polylogue” with more than two positions in the public debate (Lewiński & Aakhus, 2014). For example, on a ballot measure increasing corporate taxes, one could be opposed to the measure because it increases corporate taxes too much or because the measure does not go far enough. As Lewiński (2016) explains, putting multiple “discourse coalitions” into the pro or con camp can create “strange bedfellows” that do not accurately represent the argumentative polylogue. While the CIR may be justified in implementing a pre-ordained dichotomy because of the binary decision facing voters, other deliberative processes should consider a more inductive approach to reasoning and choice-framing that better reflects the discourses in the public sphere.

While our analysis here has focused on the CIR Statements, future research should consider the genre of deliberative guidance across other forms of public discourse. For example, could the functions of inviting participation, situating the audience as decision-maker, and offering shared investment in participatory democracy be created in other rhetorical settings? One avenue could be to assess whether deliberative mini-public advisory documents beyond the CIR serve a similar function within the genre of deliberative guidance, for example, with citizen advisory statements in recent citizens’ juries and assemblies in Ireland, Scotland, and the European Union. Other research might consider the functions of deliberative argumentation in fostering social knowing and action, particularly around the factors of investing agency in the reader; offering clear expert information and persuasive advocacy; and encouraging a deliberative judgment that acknowledges values, trade-offs, and other elements of in-person deliberative systems. As interest in mini-publics and deliberative democracy continues to grow, generic criticism offers pragmatic insights for public argument and deliberative design.

But this genre may also prove relevant beyond deliberative mini-publics and be able to applied to public policy discourse on more broadly. Given the previously studied deliberative potential of these settings, one might consider how deliberative guidance is constructed and functions in participatory journalism (Abbott, 2017), participatory budgeting (Dias, 2018; Gilman, 2016), online settings (Christelle, Dillard, & Lindaman, 2018), social media (Jennings, Suzuki, & Hubbard, 2021), and public consultation and meetings (Townsend, 2021). Other research might consider how deliberative guidance can be adapted to serve functions beyond

vicarious deliberation. While vicarious deliberation is one model of influence, deliberative guidance could, for example, also encompass products that publics can use to enhance interpersonal deliberation in the public sphere. Further analysis of the varied rhetorics of deliberative guidance could illuminate the opportunities and constraints of the genre, offering pragmatic insights for democratic practice.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank John Gastil and Laura Black for providing early feedback on this manuscript. Additionally, we would like to thank other members of the Citizens' Initiative Review research team who have consistently supported this scholarship.

Note

1. The category of "deliberative" rhetoric dates back to Aristotle (2018), who divided public discourse into three: forensic, dealing with the past and typically considered to be found in the dealings of court systems; epideictic, dealing with the present situation and circumstances, commonly referenced as rhetorics of praise and blame; and deliberative, which Aristotle defined as a speech that "attempts either to persuade or dissuade, whether speaking in private or a public assembly" (Book I.3). In this sense, an orator's deliberative rhetoric convinces their audience to either take or reject action.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Disclaimer

Any opinions, findings, recommendations, or conclusions expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the authors' places of employment.

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