

Fourth-Track Diplomacy: Its Time Has Come

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic highlights both the challenges to and opportunities for a reimagining of diplomacy and, by extension, democracy. Traditional views of diplomacy assert that each nation should negotiate from a 'my country first' perspective. But the modern social problems we face internationally, with Covid-19 being arguably a 'dry run' for more global management of climate change, are characterised by a need for collaboration rather than for competition. A collaborative approach would likely help to ensure that more resources reached the poorest parts of the world. We contend that a new form of diplomacy is needed. Second-track diplomacy emphasised the engagement of non-state actors, and third track combined that with traditional diplomacy, but we argue that a fourth track is now both urgently needed and quite viable. This fourth track could *engage citizens in diplomacy* by using dialogue and digital technologies. A range of dialogic techniques could be leveraged to facilitate the incorporation of a much broader array of voices into the public sphere, infusing more diverse and outside-the-box perspectives into the creation of policies that directly affect citizens and their communities. Such engagement could also be global, connecting people from various countries with their counterparts around the world to explore how nations might work with one another to solve global and regional problems. One nation could help another to solve even a local problem. A massive disruption to routinised lives across the planet provides an unprecedented opportunity to create new ways to meaningfully include a much wider range of voices and perspectives within the way the People – of the global citizenry – do business.

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Introduction

We have reached the long-promised postmodern age, which aspired to upend authoritative constructs of Truth based within cultural perspectives tainted by White supremacist, Global North, and patriarchal systems (Schneider 2004; Susen 2015). However, as is the case with most imagined worlds (Slaughter 1998), the reality is unveiling itself to be more nightmare than panacea. It can be challenging for humans to imagine in advance the downsides of the ‘promised land.’ And while a non-negotiated frame forces too many people to live within ill-fitting norms and mores, the gradual eclipse of that framework has resulted in thousands of Rorschach ink-blot representations of ‘reality’ – each driving a variant truth that its adherents too often loudly assert to be the *only* possible Truth (Hiebert 1999; Randall and Phoenix 2009; Gavins et al. 2016).

For some, the absence of a collectively identified authority figure together with an inability to assess the expertise of someone who is advocating a particular point of view has resulted in the rise of bizarre ideas, conspiracy theories, pseudoscience, and questionable but highly influential lay ‘experts’ (Cheal 1990, Gergen and Joseph 2003; Pavić 2013). We have exchanged the appointed, traditional authority figure for a tower of Babel – lots of things being said but little of it coherent, useful, or based upon systematic interrogation. That said, however, direct access to massive amounts information via the phone in one’s pocket has also made it possible for many people who are bright and curious but lacking in access to formal education to become much more informed about the world around them (Lukes 2005).

Covid-19 has underscored the importance of a coherent and agreed-upon scientific method. In the United States of America, in particular, common agreement cannot be achieved to enact something so simple and rudimentary as mandatory mask-wearing in public spaces to help flatten the spread of Covid-19. Scholars have long been sounding the alarms warning that our democracy is struggling and drifting in an authoritarian direction (Offe 2011; Jebril et al. 2013; Taylor 2019), and the failure of urgent policy to be broadly adopted because many people no longer feel a part of a social corpus suggests that democracy needs a new agent. We contend here that digital technologies and social networking herald the possibility of a ‘Fourth-Track Diplomacy,’ a plausible antidote to the woes of postmodernity as it makes possible a collaborative, deliberated governance process by which people could come together to collectively discern and build upon a shared reality.

What Deliberation Does to Activate Democracy: Pathways to Empathy

When people engage ideas directly with others, particularly in small, facilitated groups

in which they have a chance to more deeply explore one another's views, they connect as *humans* with their co-explorers and can thereby begin to genuinely understand other people's perspectives (Gundersen and Goodney Lea 2013). This process provides an engine for the *verstehen* that Max Weber explored in his work, which is to say a deep knowing and appreciation – an *empathetic* understanding – of the other person's perspective (Elwell 1996). Weber's work was a response to the positivist world in which he found himself, but we arguably now have a means by which to actualise his vision. Practising dialogue and deliberation hones the citizenship skills that empower people to explore a range of views and to ascertain where they themselves stand, that is, what is my view (Offe 2011)? Essentially, dialoguing with others is the modern, digital version of the political pamphlet: instead of one person framing the argument for others to then discuss in a pub or town hall, everyone collectively has a chance to raise issues for exploring in a common, directly shared setting. This is true whether conducted in person or on social media such as Instagram. Through the process of co-exploration and co-construction of a shared understanding, democracy is collectively manifested.

Such engagement has been documented to impact participants' behaviours – they vote more, talk about issues with friends and family more, and write op-eds and letters to their political representatives (Gundersen and Lea 2013; Taylor 2019). This approach to discourse has a particularly significant impact on the views of conservatives, who tend to find themselves drawn towards more rigid, traditional ideas – if they can be motivated to engage, as conservatives are less inclined to be open to new experiences, which is what direct dialogue often feels like in societies that have emphasised passive observation of 'experts' debating in town hall meetings and on television news shows (Carney et al. 2008; Gundersen and Lea 2013; Zmigrod 2020).

Facilitated deliberation essentially prompts us to examine our values and how we might align with others around those values, which provide the structure for creating bridges to those that look, at first perhaps, to be diametrically opposed to our own way of thinking. While conservatives have been problematised as being too rigid, inflexible, and extreme in their views, and liberals like to think of themselves as enlightened and progressive, the reality is more complex: liberals must also examine their own biases (Theoharis 2020; Blake 2020). Fortunately, people are highly capable of engaging in such discourse with one another and often achieve significant self-reflection exactly because they are forced to interrogate another person's reality, examine how it differs from their own, and thereby understand the lived complexity of the other's perspective. We tend to construct 'the other' as some sort of two-dimensional avatar. Facilitated dialogue demands that we see and engage the complexity inherent in every person.

While dialogue in itself can help broaden people's views and empathy, it is much more powerful when that understanding can inform policy making. So, the next challenge

is to get municipal entities and policy makers to accept and incorporate citizen input, which is a process we regularly engage in courtrooms via a jury system. Often, though, government entities are otherwise resistant to engage citizens as partners in policy deliberations, seeing citizens as sources of passive input and votes but not as partners (Taylor 2019; Robinson-Jacobs 2020). However, we are at a tipping point, and some cities are trying new approaches. Pittsburgh, as an example, has created a system of 'Community Deliberative Forums' to help choose a new Police Chief and has now published guides to help other cities do the same (Cavalier 2018). How many different voices could be heard *before* a significant policy decision is made? Denmark has engaged citizens in virtual dialogues in direct interaction with politicians, but they found that politicians over-dominated the exchanges and that there tended to be a pretty consistent array of citizens that engaged (Jensen 2003). Those citizens were more likely to engage and to be more progressive in their views but, judging from the impact noted on more conservative citizens, efforts to recruit a wider array of participants is a good idea – both in terms of the impact of the dialogue but also with regard to the quality of the engagement. Dialogues are much richer when they incorporate a broad array of perspectives and life experiences.

The Current Moment: A Means to Respond to a Will

The current global moment lays bare the challenges before us as a global civilisation. Traditional diplomacy promotes a 'me-first' emphasis: advocate for your nation and what it needs and wants. The Covid-19 pandemic, however, demands that we work collaboratively to battle an unseen but deadly virus. As populations have grown, governance has become more distant and less representative of the people (Warren 2003; Warren 2009; Offe 2011). Corporations, political corruption, and lobbying efforts have more direct impact on the many system functions than do 'the people' (Schmitter 2000; Crouch 2008). The people have grown cynical as a result, causing them to be that much less engaged (Dalton 2004; Torcal and Monterro 2006; Jebril et al. 2013). But right now especially, we need reliable national and international guidance – from national and local health agencies as well as from entities like the WHO. A significant number of individuals, especially in the United States of America, are immovable with regard to not 'being made to wear' masks and are convinced that the pandemic is being overblown. They are dubious of their government and suspect it (or parts of it) has a nefarious intent. Some people even venture the possibility that the pandemic is all a ruse to keep us at home and move us online, as if we were at the doorstep of entering *The Matrix*. The characterising aspect of those who come to embrace conspiratorial theories and other controversial ideas is that they tend to be persons who have less access to *deliberative education and opportunities* that might allow them to actively explore and better understand the world in which they live and their stand on the issues it presents (Offe 2011).

Habermas (1962) described the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century public spheres as ones of extensive deliberation at cafés and salons by well-heeled citizens who were well informed by their reading of newspapers. That elitist enclave of erudite discourse gave way, he contends, to an era of industrialisation which produced a much larger, consumer-oriented society. Eventually, we were *Bowling Alone* (Putnam 2000). But then everything changed again halfway into the first decade of the new millennium: social media began to emerge. Eventually, this created vibrant online communities, and they were not so elitist. Indeed, they were wildly democratic – at first. However, as computing power accelerated, algorithms emerged and changed everything (O’Neil 2016; Noble 2018). Suddenly, the information traded on social media could be manipulated by corporations, governments, influencers, and hackers. Full democracy demands a strong capacity for *discernment* – the sort of skill one is likely to acquire when engaging in deliberation (Dahlberg 2010; Offe 2011; Black 2012).

Efforts such as The American Democracy Project (<https://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/>), organised by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, attempt to broaden the reach of deliberative-based learning, but few Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are represented in its spaces, and those schools comprise a population that is often removed from such opportunities. Without adequate effort to engage *all* groups in direct, dialogic, representative democracy, you get what many around the world have been watching unfold in the United States of America: people on the streets for *months*. The system is clearly not inclusive if some people are relegated to protesting in the streets for so long *just to be heard*. If they cannot breathe, the rest of us cannot (or will not) hear (Florido and Peñalosa, 2020). Organisations like the National Issues Forum (<https://www.nifi.org/>) recruit everyday citizens to create guides that explore a policy realm that can then be used to subsequently engage other citizens to explore the topic via direct, small-group, facilitated dialogues.

We are also now at a point in the evolution of our technologies where they can provide many more informational resources to those outside post-secondary educational structures (Lukes 2005). Some groups have been very intentionally disconnected from the information that would allow them to better understand their political locations and interests, but now they can readily access extensive information even from just a smart phone (Anttiroiko 2003; Amelin et al. 2016). Such powerful mobile technology also equips us, at this point in human history, such that we could have much more direct democracy. It is ironic that we have been debating the use and security of mail-in ballots here in the United States of America as the November election approaches, when we could be using digital technologies to facilitate a safe and secure election (Laukkonen 2020). But more than that, we could also be using such technology to garner direct input from citizens to provide guidance on policy-making decisions,

though the methods by which best to do this are still being explored (Dahlberg 2010; Black 2012; Participedia, 2020). *Deebase* and *Consider It* are two online platforms in which anyone who would like to can explore and deliberate various issues.

Still, while we have the means (smart phones, social media) and the human capital (a wide array of experts and organisations dedicated to facilitating dialogue and deliberation), not every nation or municipality has the political will to integrate citizen input within our governance systems. Some municipalities make a special effort to engage citizen input, but too often the mindset is to have a town hall meeting or city council hearing as a means of allowing citizens to be perfunctorily heard. Typically, rules are deployed to ensure that not all views get equal time to be heard, which can allow lawmakers and others to manipulate the results of such deliberations towards friends or patrons they favour. But what if we could engage citizens directly in providing input on policies?

Reconceptualising Diplomacy for the Twenty-First Century: A Fourth Track

Traditional definitions of diplomacy have either stressed its main purpose – the art of resolving international difficulties peacefully – or its principal agents – sovereign nations, or its chief function – the management of international relations by negotiation (Stanzel 2018). Such a definition assumes state actors, symmetry of information, and clearly identifiable stakeholders with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities. However, today's postmodern world is messier. The interlocutors of today's diplomats are not necessarily their peers but instead comprise a wide range of people that may be affected or impacted by international relations.

Garrett Mattingly (1955) has argued that it is very striking how little diplomacy has changed from Bernard du Rosier in 1436 to his own time. From a white, masculine model that is premised on 'country first', changes in the structure of the international community have necessitated continual adaptations in diplomatic tactics (*ibid.*). Track 2 diplomacy includes civil society and academia but often those in the room are men and/or come from elite backgrounds. Track 3 diplomacy is a combination of the first two. Not only is there now greater public interest in diplomatic activity, but also growing demand by the public to participate in what has traditionally been the purview of diplomats and governments (*ibid.*). In addition, the advent of technology and social media now allow for non-state actors to also have a role in influencing foreign policy, putting pressure on state actors to act on shared intelligence and insights in real time (*ibid.*).

In terms of diplomacy work involving citizens, citizen diplomacy traditionally refers to 'how citizens as private individuals can make a difference in world affairs'

(McDonald 1991, 119). Conceptually, scholars have debated the differences between ‘citizen-led’ (Black 2010, 13; Sharp 2009, 287; Tyler and Beyrerinck 2016) and ‘state-led’ (Gregory 2011, 351–352; Tyler and Beyrerinck 2016) forms of citizen diplomacy. To overcome this strict dichotomy, others have proposed a variety of options such as ‘network diplomacy’ to depict the greater number of actors involved (Heine 2013, Thakur 2013); ‘a jazzy dance’ of coalitions to achieve specific goals (Khanna 2011, 22); ‘communication technologies’ to reconstruct traditional diplomacy such that it addresses citizens’ concerns (Hochstetler 2013, 188; Seib 2012, 106); and ‘convergence’ through the acceptance of citizen diplomats as ‘citizen ambassadors’ in fulfilling official engagements (Copeland 2009, 169; Sharp and Wiseman 2012, 172). However, as Lee (2020) has highlighted, such representations restrict the conceptualisation of citizen diplomats to them being individuals whose existence is ‘fixed’ within the geographical limits of a single nation-state sovereignty. While scholars have explored and argued for the imagined, contested, fluid and multiple identities emerging under globalisation (Anderson 1983; Butler 1990; Hall 1987; Ong 1993; Storey 2003), this gap persists (Lee 2020).

There is a need for a new normative framework, as evidenced by the significantly changing world environment and the way in which we conduct political discourse. It is necessary to reconcile the interests of all stakeholders and build trust. This needs to be done in a way that allows governments to operate as sovereign actors but at the same time harnesses the influence and potential of other actors, including global citizens, as a new track in order to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We also need to go beyond the prism of the US and the anglophone world, as is usually associated with public diplomacy especially since September 11, 2001 (Melissen 2005).

At the Global Diplomacy Lab, a think-and-do tank turns diplomacy on its head by including non-traditional actors and using innovative methodologies to facilitate dialogue. We call this new track *Diplomacy 4.0*. The core of Diplomacy 4.0 is to link global and local opportunities. We are in an age in which ALL citizens could participate directly and *globally* in shared governance – governance that would be decentralised, non-authoritarian, and collaborative. What would that world look like? As we explore what values people might have in common across the planet, how might that change political and policy divides that now seem intractable? As Nye argued, countries that are likely to be more attractive in postmodern international relations are those that help to frame issues, whose culture and ideas are closer to prevailing international norms, and whose credibility abroad is reinforced by their values and policies. But this would likely radically change who is influencing our world’s policies. If the merit of ideas and values were the guiding principles, would it be Donald Trump or Tsai Ing-wen; Jacinda Ardern or Jair Bolsonaro?

We can see this process in motion already, as reflected by people erupting in protest

around the planet to support the Black Lives Matter movement and, in so doing, challenging the prejudicial behaviour evidenced within the United States' system of justice. The people of many nations banding together around common values can challenge the dominance of massive political entities like the United States of America and can potentially shame it into reforming itself by underscoring how its values just simply do not align with those of much of the planet. This is essentially what happened to help end the apartheid system in South Africa. The first author can vividly recall shanties across the 'diag' (centre) of the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus, erected there and on campuses around the globe to shame South Africa into reform. That eventually caused them to be banned from world cricket matches, which some say finally prompted the necessary change. That is fourth-track diplomacy, but in its nascent form. We now have the means to empower the people as global citizens to collaborate in a way that aligns more nations and peoples to common values that embody an elevation of everyone's humanity and human rights.

Some Successful Efforts that have Engaged Direct Citizen Deliberative Input

Some communities have experimented to this end. One of the most robust is a state-wide effort in West Virginia: the West Virginia Center for Civic Life (<http://www.wvciviclifec.org>) actively engages citizens throughout the state to help understand and shape policy issues in partnership with non-profits and local financiers. Inclusive Dubuque (<http://inclusivedbq.org>) engaged citizens in exploring how to make their community more inclusive of all, and that initial effort has been sustained so that citizens continue to have input and involvement in many of the issues impacting their community. Horizon Foundation designed Speak (easy) Howard County (<http://www.speakeasyhoward.org>) and has used this programme to discuss mental health, nutrition, and even end-of-life planning in the county via direct engagement with its residents through faith communities.

The Baltimore Police had been developing a robust community engagement unit until the unrest after Freddie Gray died in police custody thinned resources, which was arguably precisely the time when citizen engagement might have made a profound difference in police-community relations. However, even where police agencies have reached out for citizen input, they do not always do a good job translating such input into policy. Minneapolis police had consulted with the NAACP, who had engaged community members for input and who advised the department to curtail their permitted use of choke holds well before the death of George Floyd in their custody, but the agency did not take heed of the suggestion (Robinson-Jacobos 2020). The National League of Cities (<https://www.nlc.org>) has a similar focus on direct civic engagement and open data and has had some impact on communities based upon this data-driven input. RDFG (<http://www.reddotfoundation.org>) manages the largest

open-source crowd map in the world, plotting incidents of sexual harassment and abuse and then identifying clusters of incidents on a global map (which allows one to zoom in to see incidents anywhere in the world at the street level). They leverage the data they collect to engage communities, their residents, and their local governments and policing entities to identify and address the reasons behind a cluster of incidents in a particular neighbourhood or community.

One notable aspect of all of the approaches described here is that they use small-group facilitators (at a table, if in a larger forum) to help draw out a range of views. People are fully capable of themselves facilitating a dialogue, but experienced facilitators can help. An adept facilitator does not dominate or script or otherwise try to control a dialogue. Ideally, they simply provide a little bit of oil to keep the interaction smooth and flowing, drawing people into the conversation and gently moderating those who might be inclined to dominate until the group itself reaches a rhythm. There are now hundreds and hundreds of groups all around the world with trained facilitators and even topical content that could be leveraged to build the civic muscle required to enact a fourth track of diplomacy. If we could develop a broad capacity to engage citizens in deliberation within each nation, we could then create spaces where everyday citizens could engage with other citizens from among the global community to understand and propose policy approaches and positions for addressing *global* challenges. What would the Covid-19 response have looked like if citizens from around the planet had been able to interact in ways that built empathy for the big, world picture? Would the poorest 25 per cent of countries be struggling in so many associated ways because the economic impact was so much more pronounced in places where families have no margin at all, or might people from richer countries have insisted that more aid go to places such as Yemen (*The Guardian* 2020)?

A Genuinely Democratic and Inclusive World: Build the Playing Field and They Will Come

It can seem a fool's errand to try to engage civil discourse in societies in which political discourse has been so vitriolic. Where is the common ground when some will outright deny the existence of any impact of an overtly racialised past while others live still oppressed by it? But, arguably, this is precisely when such efforts should be engaged. Some in the dialogue field discount some individuals as irredeemable. If your ideas are too 'extreme,' then you must not even be allowed a seat in the circle. Some contend that we have to use certain phrases and follow certain procedures in order to ensure that everyone is 'safe' in the circle. But this creates a circle of 'Whos,' to reference a classic Dr. Seuss tale. Everyone is happy and agreeable and properly engaging the talking stick. But how does the 'Grinch' then join the conversation? As noted above, *all* can benefit markedly from exploring a range of ideas with other people.

Deliberative spaces must be:

1. *Radically* inclusive: No avatars where you ‘imagine’ alternative views, nor suggestions that some people just cannot behave ‘properly’ enough to participate. Set ground rules and expectations, but ensure the spaces include a range of backgrounds, experiences, ways of thinking, and attitudes. It will be harder, but that is what makes it radical.
2. Facilitated: Municipalities and other entities must expect to pay for, *de rigueur*, a competent, trained, seasoned facilitator to facilitate each small group or table in a larger group. The facilitator is less traffic cop than inclusion companion: they should be actively seeking ways to ensure all have space and can be heard. One need not agree but all must at least consider all views.
3. Tolerant: Everyone must be coaxed and reminded that ALL views are welcome to be aired. One must be civil, but civil does not mean using the ‘correct’ language or otherwise stepping gingerly around controversial topics (Gundersen and Lea 2013). It means digging into hard topics in a way in which everyone can be genuinely heard, hence the need for a competent facilitator. If someone is outright abusive to anyone else, then they must be reminded of the ground rules and dismissed if they again ignore the ground rules. Facilitators must be mindfully non-partisan and not advocate for any particular view while they are facilitating.
4. Attentive to the inclusivity of partner groups: Municipalities will need to engage partner organisations in the dialogue and deliberation space, and there should be a stated, mindful process for doing so. Do not, for instance, engage a group in which all of the leaders are White and/or men. If an organisation does not engage or prioritise diversity within its own structures, how well will it be able to engage it in communities or projects? Universities could also be great partners under the umbrella of efforts like America’s Democratic Promise. Those like the University of the District of Columbia or Berea College, that are anchored to a marginalised community that is under-engaged by deliberative opportunities, are great partners for bringing in a much broader array of voices.
5. Incentivising: Citizen engagement efforts should offer childcare and some kind of incentive to participants. Some undertakings, such as Washington, DC’s *Communicating Across Cultures* initiative to explore the intersection of gentrification and culture, a partnership between the DC Arts Council and Howard University’s communications scholar, Natalie Hopkinson, provide a meal, entertainment, and a small gift card to participants, which people appreciate – especially now. People *want* to

participate in dialogues, but a little push makes it more likely they will opt to try this than to stay home and watch Netflix. Providing a small acknowledgement of the value of their input can help to encourage and normalise this activity.

Concluding Thoughts

Sociologists have long argued for the exposure hypothesis, which contends that exposure to the ‘other’ promotes knowledge and acceptance. The ‘other’ becomes known and, we find, much more like us than not. The challenge is to provide spaces for people to come together and engage – *off the streets*. When people are on the streets actively protesting for three continuous months, then democracy has failed to incorporate a sufficient representation of voices. That said, one might also observe the Black Lives Matter movement as example of a sort of spontaneous fourth-track diplomacy. People from around the world are standing up for Black Americans because they can see the hypocritical legacy that has grown within and alongside the United States of America. This is a powerful example of other nations being able to join together to elevate their voices to challenge one of the world’s largest and most powerful countries. Imagine what could be done if that energy were cultivated and routinely engaged. It will not be an easy path. The autocratic turn in leadership around the globe underscores how upsetting a concept true representative democracy is. Elites detest it as it holds them accountable. Even citizens can sometimes be convinced to lend their vote towards the elevation of an autocratic administration in hopes that the autocratic energies will be applied only to those they wish to marginalise, but autocracy rarely incorporates internal limits.

Still, municipalities around the planet are well positioned in our age of social media to engage their residents directly and, in so doing, build a twenty-first-century railway: a fourth track of diplomacy. An entity such as the United Nations¹ could help immensely with this. It would be a messy, decentralised process – democracy tends to be, but facilitators are widely available and up for the job. They will also learn a lot by doing this work. Some may try to ‘control the chaos,’ but they will, with practice, eventually learn the *zen* of facilitation: you cannot control it, but you can hold it and give it just enough structure so that people can really see and hear one another. Once they do, their own curiosities will sustain it.

Deliberation builds in all of us the capacity to genuinely consider a range of views and can make it harder for any of us to accept marginal ideas as they do not typically

1 In full disclosure: The first author is CEO of Red Dot Foundation Global (RDFG), which is an ECOSOC contributing member to the U.N. RDFG also holds an Executive Committee seat overseeing the Social Development Groups.

endure against real people, who come from a range of views and experiences, actively exploring together. By engaging in deliberation with our fellow national and global citizens, we begin to figure out or *formulate* (Offe 2011) what we think, why we think it, and what we might want to do about it. Creating that in any nation would be transformative but doing it across nations and networking the planet – *that* would be revolutionary. That is the fourth track that we call upon all of us to begin building, together and deliberately.

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