

Kirkuk is the most disputed of Iraq's "disputed territories." Since the fall of Saddam in 2003, the Iraqi federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil have been engaged in a bitter struggle for control. The struggle, in turn, has been shaped by competition within the KRG, especially between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).¹ Broader regional and international dynamics have also played a role. For example, both Turkey and Iran have sought to influence conditions on the ground, partly to further their regional ambitions and partly to shield their domestic politics from possible spillover effects.

In all of this, "the fate of local Kirkukis has become a peripheral distraction at best."² Partly as a result of that, Kirkuk suffers from severe underdevelopment and neglect. Some areas are without power for more than 11 hours a day.³ And violence has spiraled. In rural areas, for instance, Islamic State (IS) attacks more than doubled between 2017 and 2018.⁴

There is, however, a more optimistic story to be told. Kirkuk city has a long history of inter-ethnic accommodation.⁵ In the past, multilingualism and intermarriage made it difficult to distinguish one Kirkuki from another.⁶

Kirkuk province also has considerable oil fields, estimated to contain about 9 billion barrels of oil.⁷

Like much of the developing world, Kirkukis are mainly young, born in the age of the internet and globalization.⁸ Compared to young people elsewhere in Iraq, Kirkukis also have better access to education.⁹

As an Iraqi governorate, Kirkuk also has its own legislative body, the Provincial Council (PC), which has the power to pass laws and collect taxes.¹⁰ In short, Kirkuk has severe problems, but it also has potential.

But how do we realize that potential? Crucial to any solution is building political institutions that allow people to overcome cynicism and mistrust. And that is precisely why, in recent years, scholars interested in researching institutions apt for deeply divided societies have begun to consider deliberative democracy.¹¹

Deliberative democracy conceives of democratic decision making not as a competitive “winner-takes-all” game, but as a cooperative process of discussion and debate. It defines the political legitimacy of a decision as the extent to which that decision has been arrived at through a free and open exchange of reasons and the extent to which people have seriously considered the arguments on all sides. This conception of political legitimacy is especially compelling in deeply divided societies, where public opinion is hostage to elite machinations and mutual mistrust. Elites know that often the best way to win support is to play on people’s fears and insecurities.¹² But while “playing the ethnic card” may win them votes, it produces shallow, polarised opinion. Deliberative democracy is intended to produce a more considered and informed public opinion, one that is less vulnerable to mutual suspicion and fear.

Besides an appealing reconceptualization of politics and political legitimacy, deliberative democracy also proffers to deliver important social and political benefits. Deliberative scholars claim that deliberative democracy can, among other things, promote mutual understanding, encourage civic mindedness, and foster faith in the democratic process.¹³

Deliberative democracy, however, is not a wonder pill. Its success depends on conditions on the ground. In Kirkuk, there are good reasons to be optimistic about the prognosis. Ordinary Kirkukis care as much, if not more, about their quality of life as about who ultimately controls Kirkuk.¹⁴ And within each ethnic group, there are diverse views on Kirkuk’s political future.¹⁵

Pragmatic attitudes and heterogeneity of opinion within ethnic groups suggest that polarisation need not be taken as a given—that a more inclusive and cooperative politics might be possible.

In this paper, we study whether such optimism is justified. We start by asking educated youth from each of Kirkuk’s three main ethnic groups—Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomans—about their views on Kirkuk’s political leaders and extant institutions, and on its future political status. As expected, we find mistrust and polarisation. But in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of the main political leaders and parties in Kirkuk, we also find broad support for Kirkuk’s becoming an autonomous region and each ethnic group’s having equal say.¹⁶ But the concern is that these more “liberal” answers may be superficial.

To probe whether people would change their minds if they had better information, the opportunity to talk with a diverse set of people and consider and reflect on the issues, we assigned participants to either small group deliberation or to a treatment in which balanced information was provided in advance of small group deliberation. Pessimism about the outcome of these interventions is understandable, even expected. In deeply divided societies, where fear and suspicion are rife, participants may fail to deliberate, or deliberate but divide still further.¹⁷ Neither treatment, as it turns out, appreciably changes trust in political leaders or institutions or changes people’s support for regional autonomy and “equal say.” But having gone through deliberation, we can be more certain that the elicited preferences reflect what people actually want.

Kirkuk

Kirkuk is a diverse province in northern Iraq. While no reliable census has been held since 1957, a 2011 UN estimate puts the province’s total population at just over 900,000 people. Kurds constitute 40 to 55 per cent of the population, Arabs around 30 per cent, and Turkomans

around 20 per cent. Christians and other minorities make up one to two per cent of the population.¹⁸ We limit our discussion to Kurds, Turkomans, and Arabs.

We conducted the study in early 2017. At that time, Kirkuk was under de facto Kurdish control; the provincial council was dominated by Kurdish leader and parties.¹⁹

Much has changed since then. In September 2017, the KRG held a referendum on secession that included Kirkuk.²⁰ The referendum was largely driven by the KDP's leader, Masoud Barzani. However, the KDP misjudged not only how its international backers would react, but also the strength and commitment of the Iraqi army. In October 2017, the US stood by while the Iraqi army and its Shia-dominated militia allies (the Hashd al-Sha'bi or "popular mobilization units") retook Kirkuk and its oil fields.²¹ The Iraqi federal government followed up with heavy sanctions on the KRG.

In recent months, both sides have come to accept that they are caught in a mutually hurting stalemate, and the most reasonable way out is a negotiated settlement on Kirkuk's future administrative status.²² There are three major options for governing Kirkuk which are constitutionally plausible:

1. Kirkuk remains a governorate under the authority of the Iraqi federal government (the status quo option);
2. Kirkuk joins the Kurdistan region and hence becomes a governorate under the authority of the KRG; or
3. Kirkuk becomes an autonomous region with a wide range of constitutionally enumerated powers.

These three options and their variations have been much discussed.²³ Yet the fundamental reason why no agreement has been reached is the sheer range of different and conflicting interests that are in play. Consider the local dimension.

The official positions of Kirkuk's political leaders and parties are broadly as one would expect.²⁴ Arab leaders see Kirkuk as an integral part of the Iraqi state; they oppose the idea of turning Kirkuk into an autonomous region and are committed to the status quo.²⁵ The two main Kurdish parties, the KDP and PUK, are divided on many issues but united in the belief that Kirkuk should be incorporated into the Kurdistan region.²⁶ The position of the main Turkoman coalition, the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), is harder to pin down. While it has called for the creation of a "special status," it is unclear what this means and whether it is preferred to leaving Kirkuk under the direct control of Baghdad.²⁷ What is clear, however, is the ITF's opposition to joining the Kurdistan region.²⁸

In short, Kirkuk's leaders and parties take radically different positions on how Kirkuk should be administered in the future. The reason parties take opposing positions is common to all deeply divided societies: "In Kirkuk and other disputed territories, local perspectives on governing arrangements and the distribution of administrative posts are informed first and foremost by an ethno-sectarian calculus: every side seeks a configuration that maximises its own demographic weight and prevents it from becoming a disenfranchised minority."²⁹ This zero-sum calculus is often expressed in mutually antagonistic, militaristic rhetoric: "fighting to the death" for "our" Kirkuk is a commonly heard refrain.³⁰

What is unclear, however, is whether ordinary people think the same. Some research suggests that each of the three main ethnic groups contains within it a diversity of political views and pragmatic attitudes.³¹ The question is how to discern those views.

Data and Design

To learn what ordinary Kirkukis think about their political plight, we organized a deliberative field experiment with Arab, Kurdish and Turkoman students from the University of Kirkuk. Granted, deliberative studies are never neutral.³² They require value judgements about who is to be included and how, the choice of topics for deliberation, the content of any briefing materials, and so forth. Yet while researchers inevitably bring their own presuppositions to bear, our study was designed to minimize the risk of bias.³³

Students were recruited through the Office of the Dean at the university's College of Education for Humanities and were offered a certificate of attendance as an incentive for participation. (The administrators felt that a certificate was a larger incentive than an offer of money.)

The students were asked to deliberate about the future of Kirkuk generally and about its future administrative status in particular: should the status quo be maintained, or might another option be preferable? Before we expand further on the design, we expand on the various considerations that apply to the sample, including ethnic diversity and the language in which students deliberated.

Sample

When assessing the scope for deliberative democracy, data from university students can be especially useful. Firstly, nearly 50 per cent of the population of Iraq is younger than 19 years old.³⁴ These young people are also increasingly educated—a large proportion take up tertiary education.³⁵ Secondly, if students from an ethnically mixed university cannot deliberate well together, the prognosis for successful deliberation including all citizens seems poor.

Ethnic Diversity

If deliberative democracy is to help deliver a more balanced and informed public opinion, then it is crucial that the best reasons on one side be countered by the best reasons on the other side. In a place like Kirkuk, where ethnic sensitivities and tensions are likely to loom large, participants from minority ethnic groups may lack the confidence to voice their views.³⁶ To ensure that each ethnic group had a “critical mass,” we asked the Office of the Dean to recruit roughly equal numbers of Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomans.

Language

Classes at the University of Kirkuk are taught in both Arabic and Kurdish. Arab and Turkoman students speak Arabic, while Kurdish students speak Kurdish. Kurdish students speak Arabic only patchily, while Arab and Turkoman students speak Kurdish more patchily still. This naturally raises concerns about the fluency of communication. There are, however, two offsetting points. First, in our study, the deliberations were facilitated by trained, neutral moderators who were fluent in both Kurdish and Arabic. Secondly, some evidence suggests that the quality of deliberation can be high even when interlocutors only share a second language: in a pair of mini-publics conducted in Belgium, the quality of deliberation was higher in the linguistically mixed groups (Dutch and French speakers deliberating together) than in the linguistically homogenous groups (Dutch or French speakers deliberating separately).³⁷ (Presumably, the quality of deliberation was higher because there was a greater diversity of opinion in the linguistically heterogeneous groups.)

Design

On 18 April 2017, 127 students showed up and filled out the arrival “pre-deliberation” questionnaire. Since classes are taught in Arabic or Kurdish, the questionnaire itself was

available in both languages. Although we had looked to recruit equal numbers of Arabs, Kurds and Turkomans, more Kurds (51) than Arabs (38) or Turkomans (32) showed up (five students either gave their ethnicity as “other” or refused to give their ethnicity). Due to a delayed start, 86 students left.³⁸ We call the group of students who left ‘L’.

The delayed start meant that we only had time to hold Deliberation-only (D), which was expected to take 1.5 hours, and not Deliberation and Information (DI), which was expected to take 3 hours. We decided to proceed with D and to hold DI with a fresh sample at the next available opportunity. The 41 students who stayed were randomly assigned to one of four small discussion groups with 10-12 participants each. However, since there were more Arabs (18) than Kurds (10) or Turkomans (12), some students were moved to achieve more ethnically balanced discussion groups.³⁹ After one and a half hours, the 41 participants retook a slightly amended “post-deliberation” version of the questionnaire (e.g., demographic questions were not asked the second time).

On 3 May, another group of 50 students (DI) filled out the pre-deliberation questionnaire. Again, we had asked for a roughly balanced sample, but this time there were more Arabs (19) in the sample than Kurds (15) or Turkomans (14) (two students did not give their ethnicity). There were also more women (33) than men (15) (two students did not give their gender). These students were first asked to read a carefully balanced information booklet.⁴⁰ Available in both Kurdish and Arabic, the booklet contained background information relevant to the different administrative options and factual premises concerning the pros and cons of each. One and a half hours later, we randomly assigned them to one of four small discussion groups. Once again, some students were moved across groups so that the ethnic balance of each group was similar.

The students deliberated for an hour and a half and then took the post-deliberation questionnaire.⁴¹

As indicated above, each small discussion group was led by a moderator, fluent in both Arabic and Kurdish, trained to intervene only neutrally and as little as possible (e.g., “only intervene if a participant strays too far off topic or if a participant begins to dominate”). The students were explicitly told that they need not agree on anything or seek to reach consensus. If there was a consensus, it would be revealed in the post-deliberation questionnaire.

Measures

To measure respondents’ answers to our surveys, we used the following variables.

Socio-demographic variables: We asked respondents their age in years, their gender, how long they had lived in Kirkuk, which religion or religious sect they belonged to (Sunni, Shi’a, Christian, do not belong to any religion, or Other), and what their ethnic background was (Kurd, Arab, Turkoman, or Other). We also asked them about political activities in which they might have engaged. (See Appendix A for the text of the questions and the response options.)

Inter-ethnic interaction: To assess the degree to which students interact across ethnic lines, we quizzed participants about how often they have contact with members of the other ethnic groups and asked them to give their answers on a 1–5 scale: never (1), seldom (2), regularly (3), often (4), and very often (5).

Knowledge of Political and Economic Facts About Kirkuk: To assess how much they knew about important political and economic facts about Kirkuk, we quizzed participants about five facts. We asked them multiple choice questions about the population of Kirkuk, the percentage of Iraq’s proven oil reserves that Kirkuk’s oil fields have, where the funding for public servants and city reconstruction comes from, what Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi

constitution provides for, and whether the federal government or provincial council has priority in case of a dispute. For each question we included a Don't Know option.⁴²

Own Deliberative Capacity: We measured participants' capacity to deliberate by asking them how interested they were in political discussion, how comfortable they felt voicing their views, their interest in hearing others' views, their willingness to listen to conflicting views, and their openness to revising their views. We averaged responses to create an index and rescaled the average to lie between 0, reflecting lowest deliberative capacity on each item, and 1, indicating greatest deliberative capacity on each item.

Society's Deliberative Capacity: To measure the society's capacity for deliberation, we asked participants to rate how interested in general people were in discussing politics, how comfortable people felt voicing their views, how interested people were in hearing others' views, people's willingness to listen to conflicting views, and people's openness to revising their political views. Again, we averaged responses to create an index and rescaled the average to lie between 0 and 1.

Political Efficacy: To assess how politically efficacious people felt, we asked them about how confident they were about their ability, qualifications, and understanding of political issues. We also asked them to assess how informed they thought they were compared to others and whether they thought that politics was too complicated. We also asked them whether or not they felt that they had no real say in government and if they thought that public officials were indifferent to the issues that concerned them. (Once again, we averaged responses to create an index and rescaled the average to lie between 0 and 1.)

Trust in Political Leaders and Institutions: We asked respondents how much they trusted the provincial governor, the deputy governor, the provincial council, the federal government, the

KRG, the Council of Representatives (Iraq's unicameral legislature), the judiciary, the police, the army, politicians, political parties, the Independent High Electoral Commission, the media, and UNAMI (the UN mission in Iraq). We rescaled the responses between 0 and 1. We also averaged responses to create an index reflecting general trust in political institutions and leaders. We rescaled the index to lie between 0 (indicating lowest ratings on all items) and 1 (indicating highest trust on all the items).

Given that there are concerns that trust in institutions and leaders is split along ethnic lines, we also created indices that collated leaders and institutions thought to be leaning towards Arabs and Turkomans or towards Kurds:

- *Trust in Kurdish Leaning Leaders and Institutions:* We expected Kurds to trust local leaders and institutions, including, the governor, the deputy Governor, the KRG, and the provincial council (each of which was either a Kurd or Kurd-dominated at the time). And we expected Arabs and Turkomans to be especially distrusting of these local leaders and institutions. Thus, to track trust in local institutions, we averaged these items and rescaled them to lie between 0 and 1.
- *Trust in Arab/Turkoman Leaning Leaders and Institutions:* We expected Arabs and Turkomans to trust federal leaders and institutions more than local (in practice, Kurdish) leaders and institutions.⁴³ So, we averaged ratings for the council of representatives, the federal government, the judiciary, and the army, to track trust in federal institutions.⁴⁴

The Future of Kirkuk: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means opposing something as strongly as possible and 10 means supporting something as strongly as possible, we asked

respondents how strongly they would support the three constitutional options for administering Kirkuk listed above.

More precisely, to reduce measurement error, we created indices for two of the options for which multiple items were available. For the status quo option, we had asked respondents, on the same 0 to 10 scale, whether Kirkuk should remain a “governorate under the authority of the federal government,” whether it is “important to keep things as they are,” and whether what mattered most is “how the country as a whole develops.” We averaged the responses to these items to create an index that tallied participants’ attitudes toward the status quo.

For the autonomous region option, we asked respondents, again on the same 0 to 10 scale, whether Kirkuk should become a “federal region in its own right, with an extended range of powers,” whether it is important that “Kirkuk should have as many powers as possible,” that “decisions that only affect Kirkuk are made in Kirkuk (free from excessive influence from Bagdad or the KRG),” that Kirkuk “develops its own political identity,” and that “Kirkuk has equal standing within Iraq.” We averaged responses to these items to create an index that tallied participants’ attitudes toward an autonomous region.

Equal say: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means opposing something as strongly as possible and 10 means supporting something as strongly as possible, we asked respondents how strongly they would support the view that all of Kirkuk’s ethnic groups should have an equal political say.

Expectations

We expect young, educated Kirkukis to be divided along ethnic lines, to be distrusting of political leaders and institutions, and to have polarised views about Kirkuk’s future. But we also expect deliberating with one another in diverse small groups to change some of this. In

particular, learning more about each other should lead to greater mutual understanding and perhaps even lead to some convergence in their views.

Analysis and Results

To shed light on the status quo, we merged data from all the pre-deliberation questionnaires. This gives us the best estimate of their feelings, attitudes, and preferences. Given that we do not expect respondents to change their opinions on issues within one and half to three hours or learn facts without any intervention, comparison between T2 and T1 gives an unbiased estimate of the effect of the intervention. Thus, for assessing the effects of deliberation, we compare T2 surveys of D and DI to the corresponding T1 surveys.⁴⁵ And we shed light on the extent to which we can compare results from D to DI because of differences in the samples.⁴⁶

Sample

The average age of participants in our sample is about 22 years (see Table 1). 82 per cent report having spent “all their life” in Kirkuk. About 80 per cent of the participants are Sunni, and about 7 per cent are Shi’a. The ethnic breakdown is as follows: 38.6 percent of the participants are Kurds, 33.3 per cent are Arabs, and 26.9 per cent are Turkomans. Women constitute nearly half of the sample (though generally more women than men go to university in the region). Encouragingly, the average student reports interacting with other ethnic groups “often” (mean = 3.75).

[Table 1 about here]

L, D, and DI

Our focus is on D (our deliberation-only treatment) and DI (our deliberation-with-information treatment). Our interest in L (the 86 students who left without deliberating) is only to the extent that it helps us understand attrition on the first day.

The people who stayed for deliberation differed significantly from those who left in a variety of important ways. For one, there were far more Kurds in the group that left than the group that stayed ($D - L = -.24, p = .01$; see Table 1). Correspondingly, the proportion of Arabs in the group that left were significantly lower than the group that stayed for deliberation ($D - L = .21, p = .03$). We cannot explain why more Kurds left than Arabs, though it may have been a factor like access to transportation. It could also have been that Kurds (as members of the then politically dominant community) felt that they had less at stake, whereas Arabs (as members of the then most politically marginalised community) felt that they had greater reason to want their voices heard. The other major difference is in the inter-ethnic interaction scores. Expectedly, those who left were much less likely to interact with members of other groups than those who stayed ($D - L = .49, p = .01$).

Moving to the primary focus of this analysis, the difference between D and DI, we can see that apart from a couple of variables, the differences between the two groups are modest. D and DI have similar proportions of Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomans—none of the differences are greater than 7 per cent and could have been obtained by chance alone. The differences between D and DI in proportion to who identifies as Shi'a or Sunni are smaller still—just 2 per cent and highly statistically insignificant. Differences in average age, proportion female, and other socio-demographic variables are small as well, and again we cannot discount the possibility that these differences occurred by chance alone. On the flip side, people in DI appear to be somewhat less politically active than people in D—all the differences on the political action battery are the same

sign, though only “worked for political organization” is statistically significant. The youth in DI are also much less likely to interact with people from other ethnic groups ($DI - D = -.91, p < .00$). Overall, aside from a couple of plausibly important places (more on which below), the groups seem reasonably well matched.

Status Quo

As expected, young educated Kirkukis are distrusting of their political leaders and institutions. On a 0 to 1 scale, where 0 means do not trust at all and 1 means trust completely, the average rating of politicians was a mere .14 (see Table 2). For political parties, the rating was a shade higher at .17. No institutions except for the police and the army breached .5. Trust ratings of the governor, the deputy governor, the federal government, the provincial council, the KRG, the council of representatives, UNAMI, the media, and the Independent High Electoral Commission were all less than .5.

[Table 2 about here]

If you thought that lacking trust in political leaders and institutions would make young educated Kirkukis politically active, you would be mistaken (see table 1). The percentage of participants reporting that they have contacted a politician, signed a petition, or engaged in street protest, generally hovered in the low teens (see Table 1). The percentage of participants reporting working for a political organization was in the low 20s. And, somewhat surprisingly, just about 26 per cent reported engaging in a discussion on social media. But are numbers in the low teens and 20s that bad? They are. Self-reports of political behavior are generally inflated by self-

presentation bias: people report engaging in political activities when they do not.⁴⁷ If you deflate the figures just a bit to account for the bias, the figures are yet more deflating.

These young, educated Kirkukis also knew very little about some of the basic facts about Kirkuk (see Table 3). Less than 5 per cent knew that Kirkuk's population is more than 900,000. Similarly, just 7.3 per cent of the respondents knew that Kirkuk has 20 per cent of Iraq's oil reserves. Other basic facts elicited similarly few correct answers. On none of the five basic facts was the proportion responding correctly greater than 20 per cent.

[Table 3 about here]

But until now, we have covered attitudes of the participants on the whole. In Table 4, we split trust in Kurdish leaning institutions and Turkoman/Arab leaning institutions and the three options for administering Kirkuk by ethnicity.

[Table 4 about here]

The results for trust are expected. There is considerable polarisation. On average, Arabs and Turkomans give Arab and Turkoman leaning institutions and leaders ratings that are 1.5 times as large as Kurds' ratings ($A = .50$, $T = .45$, $K = .29$). The ratings for Kurdish leaning institutions and leaders are yet more polarised, with Arabs and Turkomans giving an average rating of .44 and .19 respectively, and Kurds giving an average rating of .61.

Moving to administrative preferences for the future, we see the sharpest split on preference for a Kurdish Governorate (see table 4). Both Arabs and Turks give it an average

rating of just .09. Kurds meanwhile give it a rating of .69. The administrative option with the broadest support among ethnic groups is the autonomous region option, with an average rating of well over .6 by each of the ethnic groups.⁴⁸ Moreover, the fact that there is broad support across all three groups for a political future in which each ethnic group has an equal say (mean = .84, see Table 2) suggests that young educated Kirkukis want not just autonomy but a space where genuine partnership is possible.

Later in the section, we describe how, if at all, the broad support for this option changes as a result of deliberation and information. But before we do that, we describe how D and DI affect political knowledge, sense of political efficacy, and belief in own and society's deliberative capacity.

Impact of D and DI

Political Knowledge

We expected both D and DI to increase political knowledge but expect DI to be more effective. As we note above, young, educated Kirkukis did not know some of the fundamental facts about Kirkuk that we quizzed them about. Pooling across all pre-deliberation surveys, the average proportion correct was .14 (see Table 3). D did not help matters. The average proportion of correct answers post-deliberation was if anything possibly a bit lower ($D_{t2} - D_{t1} = -.03$, $p = .08$). This does not mean that respondents knew less at the end of the deliberation. There is a difference between getting an item right and knowing it—some people simply guess correctly. Post-deliberation scores can therefore be lower than pre-deliberation scores if people are a bit luckier when guessing randomly on the pre-deliberation wave than on the post-deliberation wave.⁴⁹

DI participants, however, learned a fair bit. The knowledge scores of respondents assigned to DI more than doubled ($DI_{t2} = .25$; $p < .000$), starting albeit from the low baseline of .11. The absolute gain of .14 is in line with the kinds of gains we see in Deliberative Polls (often viewed as the “gold standard” for mini-publics).⁵⁰ The post-DI score of .25, however, suggests that even after DI, most of the participants still did not know some of the basic facts.

Political Efficacy, Own and Society’s Deliberative Capacity

Deliberating under good conditions or being provided with balanced information and then deliberating under good conditions does little to change how efficacious people feel. After participating in D, people felt more comfortable voicing their own opinion, and felt that others were more willing to listen to conflicting views. However, DI doesn’t seem to have made much of a difference to political efficacy or to own or society’s capacity to deliberate. We consign further discussion of these results to Appendix C.

Trust in Political Leaders and Institutions

Young, educated Kirkukis distrust political leaders and institutions. And neither D nor DI does much to change that. The effect of both D and DI is uniformly substantively small, generally less than .05, and statistically insignificant (see Table 2).

Given that some of the leaders and institutions are closely identified with certain ethnicities, in Table 4 we split trust in institutions and politicians that are plausibly identified with different ethnicities by ethnicity. We expected sharp cleavages to begin with and a narrowing of the cleavages post D and DI. However, there are no consistent changes in either D or DI.

Let’s start by focusing on trust in Kurdish institutions. In line with expectations, Kurds, on average, give Kurdish leaning institutions and leaders an average rating of .61, Arabs .44, and

Turkomans .19. For polarisation to decrease, ratings by Kurds need to decline or ratings of Arab and Turkoman needs to increase. In D, Turkoman do indeed end up trusting Kurdish leaning institutions and leaders more ($D_{t2} - D_{t1} = .08, p = .05$), though this increase is offset by Arabs, whose trust in Kurdish leaning institutions and leaders declines by the same amount. Kurds' ratings marginally increase but the rise is not statistically significant. In DI, however, both Turkomans' and Arabs' trust in Kurdish leaning institutions and leaders declines by .08 ($p = .25$) and .05 ($p = .11$), respectively, and Kurds' faith in Kurdish leaning institutions and leaders increases by .11 ($p = .05$). Even if you treat the decline in Arab and Turkoman trust as noise, the fact that Kurds' faith increases means that there is net polarisation of trust.

We see a similar pattern when we move to trust in Arab/Turkoman leaning institutions—no change or a slight move toward greater polarisation. In DI, the movements are substantively small (.05 or smaller) and statistically insignificant. In D, the only change that is large enough that we can sort of see over statistical noise is in the ratings by Turkomans. Turkomans come to trust Arab leaning institutions and leaders more ($D_{t2} - D_{t1} = .14, p = .06$). The upshot, however, is that none of the groups are particularly trusting of leaders and institutions, and deliberation, with or without information, does little or nothing to increase that trust or to reduce polarisation.

Future of Kirkuk

Did deliberation change participants' views about the three main options? Table 2 suggests that it did not. Yet given that we expect sharp ethnic divisions on attitudes toward various proposals, lack of movement in the aggregate may hide some patterns. To address that concern, we split the analysis by ethnicity (see Table 4). As expected, Arab and Turkoman participants expressed support for the status quo option. Averages began high and stayed high

(hovering between .6 and .7). By contrast, Arab and Turkoman support of the Kurdish governorate option began and remained rock bottom.

Again, as expected, Kurds support the Kurdish governorate option. DI began slightly lower (.58) than D but ended up in much the same place (above .8). We do not know why they began lower. It may have to do with the fact that (as we note above) people in DI appear to be somewhat less politically active than people in D and are also much less likely to interact with people from other ethnic groups. But whatever the reason, the treatment produced a statistically significant effect ($DI_{t2} = .28; p < .05$).

It is when we turn to the autonomous region option that we see the most striking results—especially in comparison to the official positions of Kirkuk’s leaders and parties. Kurds are as supportive or more supportive of this option than of the Kurdish governorate option (.80 and .80 in D, and .92 and .54 in DI, respectively). Arabs and Turkomans began over .6 and stayed there. And in DI, Turkoman’s support of the autonomous region option went up significantly ($DI_{t2} - DI_{t1} = .10; p = .03$).

Equal Say

Support for “equal say” also remains undiminished after D and DI (see Table 2). All three groups support this option—and seem to do so with some conviction. This is particularly noteworthy with respect to Kurds who, as the then politically dominant group, arguably had most to lose. Granted, Kurds in DI begin somewhat lower (.62). But ended up the most supportive of all on this option (.95; $DI_{t2} - DI_{t1} = .33; p = .01$). In light of this data, one interpretation of the broad support for the autonomous region option is that young, educated Kirkukis want to find a space where genuine partnerships are possible. Neither the Kurdish Governorate option, with its

attendant concern about Kurdish influence or domination, nor the status quo option, with its concern about the Arab influence or domination, provide that.

Discussion

We began this paper by noting that Kirkuk is the most disputed of Iraq's disputed territories. But we also noted that Kirkuk has promise. Much is made of its huge oil resources, but perhaps its most valuable resource is its educated youth. The question is how to tap this latter resource.

To shed light on this question, we conducted an original survey and intensive deliberative field experiment. We expected to find apprehension and mistrust, but not to the degree that the survey reveals. Arabs and Turkomans do not trust Kurdish leaning institutions and leaders, and Kurds do not trust Arab/Turkoman leaning institutions and leaders. This is as one would expect. But while Arabs and Turkomans have some trust in Arab/Turkoman leaning institutions and Kurds have some trust in Kurdish leaning institutions, scores are hardly overwhelming, rarely making it past .5.

Other measures give reason for hope. Participants assigned to DI learned a fair bit—the knowledge gains are in line with what we see in other deliberative experiments. And participants were no less convinced about their or society's deliberative capacity, suggesting that on the whole deliberation went reasonably well. They were no more convinced either. But a sharp negative change would have suggested something deeply problematic—that exposure to conflicting views deepens rather than ameliorates divisions.

Granted, university students likely give us an all too rosy impression of what might be—of the prospects for a more cooperative, less zero-sum, approach to politics. For one, university

students are normally taught in a diverse environment. (The University of Kirkuk is ethnically mixed and attended by both men and women.) For two, data suggest that people with more schooling are more likely to attend deliberative events.⁵¹ So, while university students shed light on what *some* young people might conclude if given the chance to consider the issues in small diverse groups, they are hardly representative of young people generally, let alone the broader population. On the other hand, as we indicated earlier, if students from an ethnically mixed university cannot deliberate well together, we really need to worry. University students are likely to go on to hold prominent positions in society. Consequently, we have a special reason to care about their views, both before and after deliberation.

The most intriguing results cover attitudes about Kirkuk's political future. Opinion on some proposals is expectedly polarised. Arabs and Turkomans support the status quo and oppose the Kurdish governorate option, while Kurds support the reverse. Deliberation does not change these polarised responses. Where opinion is not polarised, however, is on the autonomous region option. In one case—Turkomans assigned to DI—participants became even more convinced of the merits of this option.

The fact that, both before and after deliberation, there is broad support across all three groups for an autonomous region may be read in two closely related ways. First, it may signal a desire to extract Kirkuk from the ongoing struggle for control between the Iraqi federal government and the KRG. Secondly, it may signal a desire for greater control of their own political destiny—the autonomy to make decisions for themselves rather than having them made by someone else. As part of both, it may signal a desire to escape the rhetorical divisiveness of local leaders and politicians.

Of course, there is reason to worry that ethnic divisions might simply reproduce themselves within this new administrative configuration. Kurdish leaders and parties would presumably be in the majority which might continue to bedevil any future power sharing deal. Yet while this is a possibility, it is not what young, educated Kirkukis appear to want. What they want is not just autonomy but an equal say. The idea that all groups should have an equal say is something all groups—across both D and DI—firmly support. Indeed, nowhere else do we see such consistently high scores.

All said, our expectations for improvements from deliberation continue to be modest. Yet while our participants deliberated for only an hour and a half, and while there were some important differences between our D and DI, there are nevertheless hints that more might be still possible—that a polarised public opinion need not be inevitable or that today’s youth are destined to repeat the mistakes of yesterday’s. We offer no ideas here on the question of how a more deliberative politics might be brought about; nor do we offer ideas on what deliberative institutions might need to look like in a divided society such as Kirkuk. But what we do offer is some modest encouragement for those interested in such questions. The prize would seem to be worth pursuing.

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Table 1: Differences in Socio-demographics and Political Behavior Across Groups at T1

	Pooled T1	T1			Diff.			
		L	D	DI	D - L	<i>p</i>	DI - D	<i>p</i>
Age	22.00	21.95	22.10	22.00	.14	.73	-.10	.82
Female	.56	.56	.49	.63	-.07	.46	.14	.17
Born in Kirkuk	.77	.79	.76	.73	-.03	.67	-.02	.82
Lived All Life in Kirkuk	.82	.88	.74	.76	-.14	.09	.02	.85
Religion								
Shi'a	.07	.07	.05	.07	-.02	.66	.02	.73
Sunni	.81	.79	.82	.84	.03	.65	.02	.84
Ethnicity								
Kurd	.39	.49	.25	.32	-.24	.01	.07	.48
Arab	.34	.24	.45	.40	.21	.03	-.05	.67
Turkoman	.26	.24	.30	.28	.06	.50	-.02	.81
Inter-ethnic Interaction	3.75	3.76	4.24	3.33	.49	.01	-.91	.00
Political Activism								
Contact with Politician	.13	.14	.16	.06	.01	.85	-.09	.18
Worked for Political Org.	.23	.23	.33	.13	.09	.30	-.20	.03
Worked for Other Orgs.	.21	.25	.24	.13	-.01	.88	-.11	.19
Signed Petition	.12	.17	.10	.05	-.08	.24	-.05	.36
Lawful Public Demonstration	.23	.24	.25	.21	.01	.86	-.04	.69
Social Media Discussion	.26	.25	.29	.23	.04	.62	-.06	.54
Formal Group Discussion	.27	.28	.32	.21	.04	.65	-.10	.30
Street Protest	.14	.14	.18	.11	.04	.62	-.07	.35
<i>N</i>	176	86	41	49				

Note: The survey questions we report on in this table were only asked once—at T1.

Table 2: Trust in Institutions and Leaders and Views About Kirkuk's Political Future

Items	Pooled T1	D				DI			
		T1	T2	Diff.	p	T1	T2	Diff.	p
<i>Trust in Kurd Leaning Leaders & Inst.</i>									
Governor	.46	.33	.31	-.03	.55	.39	.39	.00	.93
Deputy governor	.41	.34	.33	-.01	.69	.31	.29	-.02	.57
Provincial council	.48	.39	.34	-.06	.20	.42	.37	-.04	.40
Kurdistan Regional Government	.37	.38	.34	-.04	.34	.25	.28	.02	.65
<i>Avg. Trust in Kurd Leaning Inst. & Leaders</i>	.45	.37	.34	-.03	.36	.39	.38	-.01	.68
<i>Trust in Arab/Turkoman Leaning Leaders & Inst.</i>									
Federal govt.	.37	.41	.41	.00	.97	.37	.36	-.01	.84
Council of Representatives	.28	.28	.24	-.04	.41	.27	.34	.07	.17
Judiciary	.31	.27	.26	-.01	.79	.32	.38	.06	.11
Army	.62	.72	.65	-.07	.24	.62	.60	-.02	.61
<i>Avg. Trust in Arab/Turkoman Leaning Inst. & Leaders</i>	.40	.41	.39	-.03	.51	.38	.41	.03	.30
<i>Trust in Other Leaders & Inst.</i>									
Politicians	.14	.12	.17	.05	.30	.10	.12	.01	.66
Political Parties	.17	.16	.18	.02	.53	.14	.12	-.01	.78
Independent High Electoral Commission	.22	.24	.27	.03	.60	.24	.25	.01	.90
Media	.48	.41	.43	.02	.64	.46	.42	-.04	.26
UNAMI (UN Iraq)	.35	.34	.38	.04	.52	.29	.26	-.03	.38
Police	.54	.62	.60	-.01	.68	.58	.62	.03	.25
<i>Political Future: Status Quo</i>									
Status quo	.54	.56	.58	.01	.84	.60	.52	-.08	.15
Keep things as they are	.33	.32	.36	.04	.54	.37	.31	-.06	.30
Good of entire country	.87	.89	.91	.02	.60	.89	.80	-.09	.04
<i>Status Quo Index</i>	.58	.59	.62	.03	.31	.64	.56	-.08	.06
<i>Political Future: Autonomous Region</i>									
Federal region	.41	.34	.48	.14	.03	.44	.51	.07	.28
Kirkuk increase powers	.71	.72	.65	-.07	.27	.68	.78	.10	.01
Kirkuk makes own decisions	.77	.75	.69	-.06	.23	.77	.72	-.04	.44

Kirkuk protect from outside interests	.85	.79	.81	.02	.73	.90	.73	-.18	.00
Kirkuk develop own political identity	.79	.71	.76	.05	.30	.76	.75	-.01	.82
Kirkuk equal standing in Iraq	.92	.92	.87	-.04	.23	.95	.92	-.03	.36
<i>Autonomous Region Index</i>	.73	.70	.68	-.02	.43	.73	.76	.03	.24
<i>Political Future: Kurdish Governorate</i>	.33	.30	.35	.05	.17	.21	.29	.08	.07
<i>Ethnic Groups Equal Say</i>	.84	.83	.83	.00	1.00	.86	.90	.03	.57

Note: *Responses were reverse coded so that larger numbers reflect greater efficacy; All the p-values are two-tailed.

Table 3: Proportion of Correct Responses to Factual Questions

Items	Pooled	D				DI			
	T1	T1	T2	Diff.	p	T1	T2	Diff.	p
Population of Kirkuk	.04	.10	.10	.00	1.00	.04	.39	.35	.00
Percent Oil Reserves	.07	.15	.17	.02	.32	.08	.31	.22	.00
Source of funding	.18	.20	.10	-.10	.10	.12	.12	.00	1.00
Article 140 of Constitution	.20	.22	.15	-.07	.26	.10	.29	.18	.01
Federal vs. Provincial Gov.	.19	.10	.10	.00	1.00	.18	.12	-.06	.26
<i>Average</i>	.14	.15	.12	-.03	.08	.11	.25	.14	.00

Note: All the p-values are two-tailed.

Table 4: Trust in Leaders and Institutions and Views About Kirkuk's Political Future by Ethnicity

Items	Pooled T1	D				DI			
		T1	T2	Diff.	p	T1	T2	Diff.	p
<i>Trust in Arab/Turkoman Leaning Leaders & Inst.</i>									
Arabs	.50	.54	.48	-.06	.21	.45	.50	.05	.36
Kurds	.29	.34	.25	-.09	.35	.18	.19	.01	.87
Turkomans	.45	.27	.41	.14	.06	.51	.49	-.02	.67
<i>Trust in Kurd Leaning Leaders & Inst.</i>									
Arabs	.44	.48	.40	-.08	.04	.40	.32	-.08	.25
Kurds	.61	.43	.45	.02	.73	.52	.63	.11	.05
Turkomans	.19	.11	.19	.08	.05	.22	.16	-.05	.11
<i>Political Future: Status Quo</i>									
Arabs	.74	.70	.65	-.05	.20	.77	.75	-.03	.68
Kurds	.40	.39	.48	.10	.10	.46	.28	-.18	.02
Turkomans	.65	.58	.71	.13	.01	.63	.61	-.03	.72
<i>Political Future: Autonomous Region</i>									
Arabs	.64	.63	.63	.01	.91	.62	.65	.03	.55
Kurds	.86	.80	.79	-.01	.78	.92	.89	-.03	.42
Turkomans	.67	.72	.66	-.07	.22	.68	.79	.10	.03
<i>Political Future: Kurdish Governorate</i>									
Arabs	.09	.18	.21	.03	.65	.00	.06	.06	.16
Kurds	.69	.80	.87	.07	.28	.54	.83	.28	.02
Turkomans	.09	.09	.19	.10	.18	.09	.06	-.03	.34
<i>Ethnic Groups Equal Say</i>									
Arabs	.88	.85	.80	-.05	.54	.99	.91	-.08	.26
Kurds	.76	.76	.86	.10	.12	.62	.95	.33	.01
Turkomans	.90	.86	.85	-.01	.93	.98	.83	-.15	.20

Note: All the p-values are two-tailed.

¹ Jüde, "Contesting Borders?" See also Manning, "Political Elites."

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- ² Wolff, "Governing (in) Kirkuk," 1362.
- ³ NCCI, "Kirkuk Governorate Profile," 5.
- ⁴ Markusen, "The Islamic State," 4.
- ⁵ Anderson and Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk*, 85.
- ⁶ More precisely, intermarriage was common between Kurds and Turkomans in Kirkuk city. Bet-Shlimon, "Group identities," 918. ICG, "Reviving UN Mediation," 8-9, n. 30.
- ⁷ Reuters, "Iraq, BP to sign deal."
- ⁸ UNDP. United Nations Development Program.
- ⁹ Knights and Ali, "Kirkuk in Transition," 23.
- ¹⁰ For a critical appraisal, see Ottaway and Kaysi, "The State of Iraq," 12.
- ¹¹ For an overview, see O'Flynn and Caluwaerts, "Deliberation in Divided Societies."
- ¹² Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 349-360.
- ¹³ Kuyper, "The Instrumental Value of Deliberative Democracy."
- ¹⁴ ICG, "Reviving UN Mediation," 7; Natali, "The Kirkuk Conundrum," 438, 441; Wolff, "Governing (in) Kirkuk", 1371.
- ¹⁵ Anderson and Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk*, 192-203.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Anderson, "Power Sharing."
- ¹⁷ Luskin et al., "Deliberative Across Deep Divides," 116.
- ¹⁸ Cf. Anderson and Stanfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk*, 42-44; Rydgren and Sofi, "Interethnic Relations," 29; Wolff, "Governing (in) Kirkuk", 1369.
- ¹⁹ See O'Driscoll, "Conflict in Kirkuk," 37.
- ²⁰ Rudaw, "Kirkuk Province Votes in Favour." The vote was boycotted by Arab and Turkoman council members.
- ²¹ Kaplan, "Foreign Support."
- ²² E.g., Al Monitor, "Iraqi Kurds;" ICG, "After Iraqi Kurdistan's Thwarted Independence Bid," 14.
- ²³ Cf. Anderson and Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk*, 189-203; ICG, "Iraq and the Kurds," 7-10; Romano, "The future of Kirkuk," 274-277; Wolff, "Governing (in) Kirkuk," 1375-1379. O'Driscoll, "Conflict in Kirkuk", explains how discussions could learn from other, similar cases such as Brčko, Bosnia.
- ²⁴ Granted, there is support for some sort of special status within all three groups. Anderson and Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk*, 195-196; Wolff, "Governing (in) Kirkuk", 1371. However, we highlight official positions here since official positions are what parties seek to enforce on members.
- ²⁵ Natali, "The Kirkuk Conundrum", 439; Wolff, "Governing (in) Kirkuk", 1370.
- ²⁶ Wolff, "Governing (in) Kirkuk", 1370-1371.
- ²⁷ Anderson and Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk*, 201-202.
- ²⁸ Romano, "The future of Kirkuk," 273; Rudaw, "Kirkuk Province Votes in Favour."
- ²⁹ ICG, "Reviving UN Mediation," 8.
- ³⁰ Sowell, "Ethnic Dimensions."
- ³¹ See note 14 above.
- ³² Steiner, "Deliberative Research."
- ³³ Two of the authors of this paper are ethnically Kurdish.
- ³⁴ See note 8.
- ³⁵ For background context, see Barwari, "Understanding the Political Economy of the KRI."
- ³⁶ O'Flynn and Sood, "What Would Dahl Say?" 47.

³⁷ Caluwaerts and Deschouwer, “Building Bridges.”

³⁸ The event’s start-time had to be pushed back because of an unscheduled ceremony to commemorate a Turkmen student killed fighting IS in Mosul.

³⁹ One male student refused to give his ethnicity.

⁴⁰ We include the English translation of the booklet in Appendix B.

⁴¹ One student who gave her ethnicity as Turkoman did not fill out the questionnaire for the second time. The data from this student was eliminated from the analyses.

⁴² Allowing participants to confess their ignorance rather than simply forcing them to guess.

⁴³ Historically Turkomans have suffered at the hands of federal leaders and institutions. At the time that we conducted our study, however, the most relevant issue was Kurdish control of Kirkuk.

⁴⁴ We could add the police to this list but there are two types of police: local and federal. The local police are trusted by Kurds and the federal police by Arabs and (relative to conditions on the ground in Kirkuk) Turkomans. Given that we had phrased the item ambiguously (“the police”), we omit it from the ethnic trust index.

⁴⁵ How much we can learn from these comparisons is hampered by small sample sizes. Small sample sizes mean that we cannot distinguish some substantively meaningful changes from noise—many of those changes are not statistically significant. This does not mean that if the experiment were replicated on a larger sample, we would see “no” effect. It just means that we cannot say what the effect would be.

⁴⁶ Given that our focus is on the future of Kirkuk, we do not discuss all the questions posed in the questionnaire in the main text. We consign discussion of remaining items to Appendix C.

⁴⁷ Bernstein et al., “Overreporting Voting.”

⁴⁸ That said, Table 2’s “autonomous region” index suggests that participants were ambivalent or uncertain about the precise institutional form that should take. They strongly support the view that Kirkuk should have greater power, make its own decisions, be protected from outside interests, develop its own political identity, and have equal standing in Iraq. Yet their support for federal structures and powers (an obvious way, at least to us, of instituting these views) is only half as strong.

⁴⁹ For details, see Cor and Sood, “Guessing and Forgetting.”

⁵⁰ See and overview, see Fishkin and Luskin, “Experimenting with a Democratic Ideal”.

⁵¹ Westwood et al., “Deliberative Pluralism.”