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The Political Psychology of Deliberation

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Abstract and Keywords

How does research from political and social psychology inform expectations for deliberation? In this chapter, we review two aspects of such research: the structure of individual belief systems and the role of group-based forces. Considerable evidence has shown that low levels of political knowledge, ideological inconsistency, and a vulnerability to framing effects are common elements of citizen belief systems. These represent both a challenge and an opportunity for deliberative forums. Evidence shows that deliberation can, under the right circumstances, interrupt typical cognitive patterns and produce more thoughtful and informed political judgments. But the extent to which deliberation has such salutary effects also depends on group-level dynamics and norms. We review three important types of group effects: group polarization, the effects of preference diversity on group interactions, and how unequal social identities can shape deliberative exchanges. The social and psychological forces present in deliberating groups require considerable additional study.

Keywords: political psychology, political knowledge, belief systems, framing effects, group polarization, group dynamics, group norms, social inequality

Deliberation is both an ideal and a reality. Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini report that one-quarter of Americans participate in face-to-face meetings about public issues (2009, 37), and in the United States and around the world, citizens deliberate together on juries (Gastil et al. 2010), in local neighborhood gatherings and other meetings (Bryan 2004; Fung 2004; Karpowitz 2006; Mendelberg and Oleske 2000), as part of deliberative mini-publics and civic forums (Karpowitz and Raphael 2014), and even in efforts to make recommendations for constitutional change (Warren and Pearse 2008). The fact that such deliberative opportunities are real and growing is itself a reason for scholars both theoretical and empirical to pay attention to them.

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As democratic theory has taken its well-chronicled “deliberative turn” (Dryzek 2000), opportunities for productive exchanges between political theory and the study of political behavior have proliferated. Such interactions have not always been easy (Mutz 2008; Thompson 2008) because the aims and scholarly values of the two approaches sometimes differ. Indeed, normative theories of deliberation articulate an ideal that may never fully be attained, meaning that empiricists cannot definitively “prove” deliberative theory right or wrong. Nonetheless, a number of theorists do urge that more deliberation actually occur in contemporary political life (Gutmann and Thompson 1996; 2004). Deliberative democratic theory asserts that democracy is best served when free and equal citizens justify their preferences over collective decisions to each other in an open and public process of reason-giving. What this means in practice is a matter for political psychologists to explore in a continuing fruitful dialogue with deliberative theory.

Though theorists debate the details (Chambers 2003; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Macedo 1999), it is possible to derive a set of standards from common elements of the deliberative approach to democratic theory. Most definitions involve discussion (p. 536) oriented to “egalitarian, reciprocal, reasonable and open-minded exchange of language” (Mendelberg 2002, 153).¹ Dryzek defines it as “communication that induces reflections on preferences, values and interests in a non-coercive fashion” (Dryzek 2000, 76; see also Mansbridge et al. 2010). Similarly, Myers and Mendelberg summarize deliberation as “the free, equal, and open-minded dialogue about a matter of concern among anyone affected by the issue” (2013, 701).

These definitions place free, equal, and open-minded communication at the center of democratic life and as the most important way of confronting disagreements. Deliberative theorists reject not only coercion or domination, which would clearly violate the free and equal clauses, but also the more subtle pursuit of power or even the weight of majority will per se as legitimate bases for democratic decision-making (Mansbridge et al. 2010; Young 2002). Deliberative theorists are, therefore, skeptical of the notion that preferences are prior to politics; they part ways with utilitarian theories that hinge on the aggregation of pre-formed preferences and interests (Mansbridge 1983). Instead, they hold that preferences can be formed and transformed through public talk. For example, Chambers (2003) describes listening and opinion change—a willingness “to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants” (309)—as central elements of deliberation.

This also means that offering and listening to reasons, rather than social forces, is the distinguishing characteristic of deliberation (Mendelberg 2002). As Habermas famously put it, opinion should not rest on power, instinct, or prejudice, but on “the forceless force of the better argument” (1975, 108). To be sure, theory has departed from the requirement that deliberators talk as if they are brains suspended in philosophical ether (Chambers 2003). As one group of theorists describes it, “Contemporary deliberative theorists have moved away from the language of ‘reason’, with its Enlightenment overtones of a unitary and knowable entity, to a focus on mutual justification” (Mansbridge et al. 2010, 67). Still, though reason is no longer commonly

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reified in these writings, a modified form of it continues to serve as a principal concept. Mansbridge and colleagues envision it this way: “Participants in deliberation advance ‘considerations’ that others ‘can accept’—considerations that are ‘compelling’ and ‘persuasive’ to others and that ‘can be justified to people who reasonably disagree with them’” (2010, 67).

This change carries significant implications for psychology’s role in deliberation research. When normative theory grounded itself primarily in abstract notions or stipulative ideals, it distanced itself from the way human beings actually operate. By then moving away from requiring deliberators to rely on logic and evidence and toward a vision anchored in human interaction, normative theory placed itself in the middle of the psychological enterprise.

Deliberative theorists’ vision involves claims about how political opinions and behaviors are affected by discussion with others. For example, among the theorized benefits of deliberative participation is an increase in civic engagement, activity, empowerment, and efficacy (Barber 1984; Fishkin 1995), greater tolerance for opposing points of view (Gutmann and Thompson 1996), a rise in political knowledge and the quality of reasoning, including a better understanding of the considerations relevant to one’s own (p. 537) preferences (Fishkin 1995; Chambers 1996; Mutz 2006), and a more capacious, empathetic understanding of other citizens, including those with very different or unequal backgrounds and perspectives (Chambers 1996). And this is only a partial and incomplete list. Deliberation is anticipated to have salutary effects on a host of variables that have long been central concerns for students of political psychology.

The Contributions of Political Psychology

Political psychologists can make several productive contributions to an understanding of what happens when people come together to talk about matters of common concern. We see these contributions not as a hostile audit of deliberative ideals but rather as part of a useful conversation that can engage both political theorists and deliberative practitioners alike.

First, political psychology can offer up a more complete view of citizens and their political tendencies and capabilities, including their beliefs, opinions, and habits of information processing. As Lupia, Krupnikov, and Levine put it, the question is whether deliberative theory is “psychologically realistic” (2013, 468). Understanding how citizens tend to think and feel about politics and thus their ability to live up to the requirements of deliberation helps to set expectations for both the virtues and the limits of opportunities for deliberative discussion.

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Second, political psychology can help to give empirical meaning to the ideals and standards articulated by deliberative theorists (Mutz 2008; see also Myers and Mendelberg 2013). As the political philosopher John Rawls put it, “At least in the course of time, the effects of common deliberation seem bound to improve matters” (1971, 359). But “improvement” is a vague standard. Political psychology can thus be helpful in exploring different operationalizations of deliberative ideals and their effects. Mutz (2008) argues, for example, that empirical researchers can help to define concepts, specify logical relationships, and evaluate the connection between a set of hypotheses and evidence. This process of pinning down operational definitions and relationships is critically important because normative ideals like improvement or equality or open-mindedness are complex and multi-faceted. Political psychologists contribute productively to deliberative theory by cultivating clear measures of deliberative processes or outcomes and advancing testable hypotheses. The goal of such effort is not to arrive at some definitive judgment on deliberative theory as a whole, but rather to specify middle-range concepts, contexts, processes, and associated outcomes in deliberation as it is actually practiced in contemporary political life.

Third, the mutual exchange of considerations cannot occur in isolation: deliberation is a group-based phenomenon. This fact is obvious, and yet, it has been under-theorized and its implications under-explored. Here, social and political psychology (p. 538) offer an understanding of group dynamics that can again shape our expectations for deliberative forums (Mendelberg 2002). To the extent that political psychologists open up the “black box of deliberation” to understand better what, exactly, happens within the group setting, the effects of social forces, background inequalities, and language will become clearer. As Mercier and Landmore (2012) argue, paying attention to the group-based nature of deliberation can help scholars better navigate the differences between the abundant evidence of psychological biases in individual processes of reasoning and what happens in deliberating groups.

The fourth potential contribution of political psychology to the study of deliberation flows from the third. Along with careful attention to hypothesizing and operationalizing deliberative processes and outcomes, researchers can begin to theorize and test the conditions under which deliberative ideals are more closely approximated. This contribution is the least developed in political psychology to date. Such conditions might include the features of the group—its gender, racial, or income composition, the diversity or homogeneity of its members’ pre-existing views, the rules and procedures it uses, its mode of interaction (online or face-to-face), or the presence or absence of moderators or experts. But attending to context might also mean exploring variation in the larger political and institutional settings within which deliberation occurs. Is the deliberative forum empowered by existing institutions to make decisions directly, or does it serve an advisory function? Some theorists are careful to define deliberative democracy as requiring a decision (Mansbridge et al. 2010), and the rules by which those decisions are reached are themselves a key institutional choice.² This is an area of considerable research within social psychology, where studies vary the requirement to reach a decision and observe the effects of that requirement on the use of reasons (Hastie, Penrod, and

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Pennington 1983; Kameda 1991; Kaplan and Miller 1987). Applied to deliberation, the goal of such investigation is not to “prove” that deliberation works or does not, but rather to pursue the more proximate question of which real-world conditions tend to facilitate deliberative ideals and goals.

With these contributions in mind, in the remainder of this chapter we offer a brief review of how political psychology can lead to an increased understanding of virtues and vulnerabilities of deliberation. Given the limitations of space, this cannot be an exhaustive rehearsal of all the relevant literature (see Mendelberg 2002; Lupia, Krupnikov, and Levine 2013; Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2011; Myers and Mendelberg 2013 for more complete treatments). Rather, we will highlight two broad areas of potential contribution: understanding citizen belief systems and exploring how features of groups affect deliberative processes.

The Deliberative Citizen

If nothing else, political psychologists are likely to agree on one conclusion: deliberation is an unnatural state of affairs for most citizens. Decades of political science research (p. 539) on the nature of citizen beliefs has shown that citizens do not think much about politics most of the time, that they have, on average, very low levels of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), that they struggle to connect their opinions to larger political ideologies, and that their issue opinions tend not to be very stable over time. In Converse's memorable words, "large portions of an electorate do not have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy among elites for substantial periods of time" (1964, 245). Bartels puts it somewhat (but not much) more gently: most citizens have meaningful beliefs, "but those beliefs are not sufficiently complete and coherent to serve as the starting point for democratic theory" (2003, 49). Because citizen attitudes are fragmentary and casual, they carry with them only ill-formed and sometimes contradictory sets of considerations, not concrete or reliable preferences about political issues. When asked to give their opinions, they simply average across the set of considerations that happen to be accessible at the top-of-the-head (Zaller and Feldman 1992). This process explains the attitude instability Converse first identified, as well as a host of other dynamics—such as the fact that when it comes to politics, many people are highly vulnerable to question wording and other framing effects (Bartels 2003; Achen and Bartels 2016).

In addition to the problem of low knowledge, people are also often misinformed, holding factually inaccurate beliefs and, even worse, expressing high levels of confidence about those false beliefs and resisting correction unless unavoidably confronted with the correct information (Kuklinski et al. 2000). Nor is it the case that individuals judge information objectively when they receive it, even holding constant the quality of the information. Rather, they are strongly influenced by biases, such as the characteristics of the messenger (Kuklinski and Hurley 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 2000), and by their emotions and prior attitudes (Redlawsk 2002). Evidence for motivated reasoning—the biased processing of information based on pre-existing emotions and attitudinal predispositions—is abundant (Taber and Lodge 2006; Kunda 1990; Kahan et al. 2012). People tend to be forgiving and uncritical of information or arguments that fit their predispositions and unforgiving and hypercritical of information that contradicts their beliefs. Those with strong pre-existing attitudes tend to double down on their prior opinions after they are exposed to a balanced set of arguments about an issue (Taber and Lodge 2006). Even more broadly, Lodge and Taber (2013) argue that when it comes to politics, people do not evaluate arguments consciously and carefully then reach a considered opinion; rather, most of the time, political judgments are made quickly, emotionally, and outside of conscious awareness, then rationalized with reasons afterwards. In other words, judgment typically comes *before* reasons—the exact reverse of the decision-making processes anticipated by deliberative theory.

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These tendencies may be a stable, pervasive aspect of human cognition (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). Psychologists distinguish between “central” processing of information, where reasoning is effortful, slower, explicit, and systematic, and “peripheral” processing, which relies on quick, implicit inferences based on stereotypes and other heuristics (Kahneman 2011; Lodge and Taber 2013). Political reasoning often seems to be of the latter type. In addition, emotions are not separate from reasoning; often, (p. 540) they precede and shape the reasoning process (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000; Albertson and Gadarian 2015), and do so outside of conscious awareness. These cognitive processes may lead to systematically biased beliefs, such as those described above, as well as a tendency to hold high opinions of in-groups and low opinions of out-groups (Kinder and Kam 2010). Because people are prone to these sorts of biases and distortions in information processing, errors in their political judgments are systematic. Most people make similar sorts of errors. That means the biases will not be neutralized by the “miracle of aggregation,” to use Converse’s phrase (Converse and Pierce 1986). Deliberation does not cancel cognitive or affective biases merely by assembling individuals into a group (but see Gilens 2012 chapter 3).

This psychological literature presents both a problem and an opportunity for deliberative theories. On the one hand, the fact that people are rationalizers, not reasoners, means that it is not the “forceless force of the better argument” that leads them to their political conclusions most of the time. But it is precisely because judgments about politics are often ill-formed, incomplete, and biased that deliberative theorists argue in favor of more deliberative opportunities (Fishkin 1991; 1995). This is the opportunity that theorists see in deliberation. Deliberation is meant to interrupt the usual cognitive patterns and move political judgment from the realm of peripheral to central processing.³ Such a change is likely to be challenging or uncomfortable for some (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; but see Neblo et al. 2010). Deliberation may simply be out of reach for them. But if people’s political attitudes are often an ambivalent mix of conflicting and partially-formed considerations (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012), perhaps there is room for learning (Prior and Lupia 2008), for recognizing the other side (Mutz 2006), and even for thoughtful opinion change in response to new information (Hochschild 1993).

The first place to look for answers is the very setting that deliberative theorists have designed for the express purpose of cultivating the deliberative citizen: deliberative forums. Among the most frequently studied aspects of these forums is opinion change. That is often taken as a preliminary, easy measure of the anticipated outcome of open-mindedness. Participants are exposed to relevant information and reasons from multiple sides, and then assembled into deliberating groups to process these materials and come up with a collective set of relevant questions or decisions (Fishkin 1995). Multiple studies across a wide variety of contexts find that people’s opinions move as a result of participating in these deliberative events (Luskin Fishkin, and Jowell 2002; Barabas 2004; Andersen and Hansen 2007; Esterling, Fung, and Lee 2013; Farrar et al. 2010; Gastil, Black, and Moscovitz 2008; Gastil and Dillard 1999; Karpowitz and Raphael 2014). On the other hand, Gilens (2011) argues that the magnitude of opinion change from experiences

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like Deliberative Polls is quite modest given the intensity of the experience, and others have maintained that the size of opinion change depends on the nature of the issue and the intensity of pre-deliberation opinions (Wojcieszak and Price 2010; Farrar et al. 2010). But of course, opinion change by itself is not evidence either for or against deliberative processes. Opinions may move as a result of non-deliberative processes including social pressure, the sheer repetition of arguments, or prejudice (p. 541) toward outgroups, as classic studies in social psychology demonstrated (for a review see Mendelberg 2002). By the same token, they may remain steady after a careful weighing of the evidence and considerations on both sides of the issue. High-quality deliberation does not hinge on the presence or absence of change, per se, but rather on evidence that group processes helped individuals and groups gain new knowledge, confront different perspectives, and thoughtfully consider (or reconsider) their views (Ackerman and Fishkin 2004).

With respect to knowledge, abundant evidence exists that deliberation can increase participants' factual understanding of the issues under discussion (Andersen and Hansen 2007; Barabas 2004; Farrar et al. 2010; Gastil and Dillard 1999; Karpowitz and Raphael 2014). Esterling, Neblo, and Lazer (2011) demonstrate that deliberative knowledge gains tend to be widely distributed and are not merely a function of prior levels of political sophistication, and Fraile (2014) shows that deliberation can reduce the gender gap in political knowledge. In addition, knowledge gains can persist after the deliberative event has concluded, as deliberators become more motivated to attend to the political information around them (Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009; Levendusky, Druckman, and McLain 2016).

Deliberation also appears to have other salutary effects on the structure of citizen opinions.⁴ Using data from seven National Issues Forums, Gastil and Dillard (1999) find that participation in deliberative events increases attitude certainty and can have a modest effect on ideological consistency (see also Gastil, Black, and Moscovitz 2008; but see Sturgis, Roberts, and Allum 2005). Given citizens' tendency to lack meaningful opinion, this evidence of growing opinionation may often be a positive development (though in situations of entrenched conflict, certainty could be considered anti-deliberative). In addition, Cappella, Price, and Nir (2002) demonstrate that people who are exposed to disagreement in their political conversations emerge with a larger "argument repertoire"—in other words, an increased ability to list reasons why they hold their opinions as well as reasons why someone might hold an opposite opinion.⁵

Deliberation can help ameliorate one of the most consistent and troubling demonstrations of problematic information processing and attitude instability: framing effects (Tversky and Kahneman 1981; 1986). As Tversky and Kahneman demonstrated, individuals tend to respond differently to logically equivalent problems, depending on how those problems are presented. In one of their most famous examples, the expected number of people avoiding death as a result of a new healthcare program is framed as the likelihood that people "will be saved" or the likelihood that people "will die." Though the expected number of individuals saved is equivalent across both ways of presenting the problem, framing this number as a loss as opposed to a gain decreased participants' support

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dramatically. Results such as these demonstrate ways in which public opinion appears easily manipulated, inconsistent, and arbitrary. However, Druckman (2004) shows that when assigned to a group discussion setting where individuals have a chance to talk together, especially in groups where half the participants had been exposed to one frame and half to another, individuals resisted framing effects and thus expressed preferences that were more coherent and rational. Even in discussion groups where all (p. 542) individuals had been exposed to the same frame, framing effects were reduced as compared to a control group of people who did not deliberate with each other, though the reduction occurred primarily among those who like thinking about difficult problems and had experience in economics and statistics classes.

It appears, then, that deliberation can interrupt some psychological tendencies, such as low levels of knowledge, lack of meaningful opinions, or equivalency framing effects, that have worried democratic theorists. But such positive effects are not always the result of a deliberative exchange of reasons. For example, some studies of deliberative forums find that knowledge gain and opinion change can occur prior to any discussion at all, as deliberators anticipate the opportunity to take part in an event (Esterling, Neblo, and Lazer 2011; Farrar et al. 2010). These results are consistent with research by Tetlock (1983) and by Kruglanski and Freund (1983), who find that people who know their opinions will be made public are less vulnerable to motivated reasoning and other cognitive biases. The mere expectation of being held accountable for opinions in a public, discussion-based process can cause people to pay more attention and think more seriously than they otherwise would.

The extent to which deliberation has positive effects on political knowledge also depends on the nature of the deliberative setting and the features of the group discussion. For example, in an experimental study in which they randomized whether discussion about current political issues occurred in politically mixed or homogeneous groups, Levendusky, Druckman, and McLain (2016) find that relative to a non-deliberating control group, participants in both discussion conditions were more engaged with the issue—they thought more carefully about the issue, it became more important to them, and they were more likely to search for additional information about the issue, even going so far as to provide their email addresses so that they could receive additional communication about the topic. They were also more likely to sign a petition addressing the issue. Thus, deliberation strengthened participants' attitudes and increased the likelihood that they would access relevant political information—outcomes that directly support the hopes of democratic theorists.

At the same time, the researchers also showed that deliberation intensified partisan thinking—a dynamic that is deeply inconsistent with open-minded willingness to consider opposing points of view. Specifically, discussion primed the importance of partisan identity, and this effect was especially large in the homogeneous discussion condition. Talking with fellow partisans reinforced participants' pre-discussion partisan commitments, thus increasing the likelihood of partisan motivated reasoning. This effect also occurred, though to a lesser extent, in mixed discussion groups. The downside of

stronger and more constrained attitudes may be a tendency to see the world through partisan-tinted glasses and the possibility that discussion will exacerbate partisan polarization instead of prompting deliberators to listen carefully to the other side (see Mutz 2006 for similar findings in dyadic discussion).

In sum, research shows that deliberative events can nudge citizens toward more deliberative processes and outcomes. The most consistent and widespread effects are for (p. 543) gains in information, whether about the issue or about the considerations that play into any given side. Reports of a meaningful elevation in the quality of reasoning, and in the causal connection from reasoning to opinion, are more scarce or show more limited effects (see research reviewed by Mendelberg 2002, but see also Gerber et al. 2016, which contrasts the effect of arguments backed by reasons to arguments repeated frequently). Moreover, existing work also points to the need to attend to group-based forces, which means examining the actual exchange of talk—a topic we take up next.

The Social, Cultural, and Emotional Side of Deliberation: Group Communication and Inequality

If group-level processes can be key to laudatory deliberative outcomes, social and political psychologists worry that groups themselves can also introduce other potential sources of bias. Groups can, under the right circumstances, serve to correct some individual-level errors and biases (Mercier and Landemore 2012), but they may exacerbate others and expose individuals to social pressures and other forces that create deliberative trouble. This means that careful attention to the nature of the group and its influences on talk and decision-making is essential. While group-level forces are many, and a comprehensive review would take up much more space than is available here, we highlight three sources of group effects: a tendency toward group polarization, the role of preference diversity, and the effects of unequal social identities.

Group polarization is the finding that discussion can amplify the strength of majority opinion, moving the members of a like-minded group predictably “toward a more extreme point in the direction indicated by the members’ pre-deliberation tendencies” (Sunstein 2002, 176).⁶ This dynamic can result from two distinct processes: first, social comparison, where group members work to maintain their reputations and self-conception by emphasizing the attitudes they perceive to be normative within the group; and second, persuasive arguments, where the pool of good arguments that support the majority view is likely to be larger than the arguments that support the minority view (Sunstein 2000).⁷

Despite considerable support for these tendencies in laboratory settings, the evidence in favor of group polarization in deliberative events has been mixed (Karpowitz and Raphael 2014). Schkade, Sunstein, and Hastie (2007) find evidence of it in ideologically

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homogenous groups discussing political issues (see also Levendusky, Druckman, and McLain 2016), as do Price, Nir, and Cappella (2006) in an online setting where deliberators discussed tax policy plans. On the other hand, Luskin, Fishkin, and Hahn (2007) discover no tendency toward polarization in a study of Deliberative Polls, and Farrar and colleagues (2009) turn up only sporadic evidence of any group composition effects in an experimental study that also relied on the Deliberative Polling approach. Lindell (p. 544) et al. (2017) show, too, that even when it is present, polarization is not always a departure from deliberative ideals.

This mixed pattern of findings can be explained in part by focusing on the importance of deliberative institutions and contexts, which may interrupt the processes of polarization. For example, Sunstein (2002) asserts that within the Deliberative Polling design, the lack of a collective decision, the presence of a random sample of the population, the balanced panel of experts, the presence of moderators, and the written briefing materials might all work to shift the argument pool and alter the norms of the group and thus the effects of social influence in ways that will reduce polarization. Esterling, Fung, and Lee (2013) examine a large-scale deliberative event, the “Our Budget, Our Economy” meetings organized by AmericaSpeaks, in which participants at nineteen different cities came together to talk about the nation’s fiscal future. Prior to deliberation, researchers asked a battery of questions about participants’ views on the policy questions under consideration. At each site, deliberators were then randomly assigned to tables where they spent the day discussing the issues with others and reviewing background materials. Because of random assignment to tables, some groups were more conservative in their fiscal attitudes, some more liberal, and some mixed (though none of the groups were completely like-minded). Using a variety of tests, the researchers uncover no evidence of consistent polarization. Conservatives assigned to conservative tables did not become more conservative, nor did liberals who happened to be assigned to more liberal groups become more liberal.

Esterling, Fung, and Lee (2013) do, however, find evidence of what Taber and Lodge (2006) call individual-level “attitude polarization”—that is, when exposed to a *diverse* set of arguments, people moved in the direction of their own ideological predispositions. Thus, conservatives assigned to more ideologically diverse tables became more conservative, and the opposite was true for liberals at diverse tables. Deliberation did not, therefore, bring an end to motivated reasoning; instead, it produced a form of motivated skepticism about arguments from the other side.⁸

Barabas (2004) shows that relative to a non-deliberating control group and to people who reported talking about Social Security outside of formal deliberation, deliberators significantly increased their understanding of basic facts about Social Security. This factual knowledge translated into systematic changes in opinion about public policy, *but the changes depended on both the individual’s pre-discussion understanding of the issue and on the presence of deliberative consensus* (defined as more than two-thirds of a group’s comments about the issue being in a consistent direction). When a consensus existed, individual opinion moved in the direction of the consensus regardless of prior

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knowledge levels. On issues about which group discussion was more diverse and no consensus emerged, however, those with low pre-deliberation knowledge moved in the direction of the group's prevailing opinion, while those with greater pre-discussion knowledge levels (and presumably more developed views) tended to be unmoved or even to move in the opposite direction from the consensus. Thus, Barabas finds that the ability of deliberation to move opinion depends both upon increases in factual knowledge and on group- and individual-level factors, such as the diversity of opinions (p. 545) voiced within the group and the willingness of participants to keep an open mind. In sum, deliberation had expected effects in some respects. Those with lower knowledge gained it, and this gain changed their opinion. That points toward a reason-based process. However, consistent with a social forces framework, opinion change was heavily shaped by the majority opinion. Further in line with a social explanation, those with strong prior opinions were also susceptible to majority social influence rather than the forceless force of the argument. Had the opinion change been caused by the majority's persuasive arguments, these individuals would have changed in diverse groups as much as in consensus groups, yet they change only in the former.

Together, these studies highlight the importance of attending to a deliberator's pre-discussion preferences and experiences, to the dynamics of the group, and to the interaction between the two. What emerges from attending to these interactions is not a simple story. Well-designed deliberation can, at least under some circumstances, avoid some of the pitfalls that social psychologists worry most about. Informative discussions can have a persuasive effect on individuals, but this does not necessarily mean that individuals treat their pre-deliberation views in an objective way or that deliberation suspends the psychological mechanisms that have been found in other contexts. Rather, pre-deliberation views continue to shape and inform the way deliberators interpret and respond to the diverse arguments they hear. In this sense, at least on issues where citizens have developed stronger attitudes or policy commitments, deliberation is unlikely to fundamentally alter those commitments. One possible implication of this conclusion is that deliberation of the kind that theorists envision is more likely to occur when preferences are less fully developed or on issues that are emerging onto the political scene and have not been the subject of long-standing or ideologically entrenched debate.

These insights raise the question of when and how deliberators in group settings can be influenced by the other side. Deliberative theory requires that minority preferences be heard and that group decisions stem from a free and fair exchange of information, not merely the strength of the majority. So, when do groups ignore minority views, and when do they take them seriously? Using innovative lab and field experiments, Myers (2017) highlights the challenge for minority preferences. He randomly assigned whether a piece of relevant information was given either to a member of the numerical majority or the minority in terms of interests relevant to the discussion topic. The information was more likely to be ignored when it was given to a member of the minority. When the interests of group members conflict, groups may thus experience a collective form of "motivated reasoning," discounting information from minority interests and thus biasing the group's consideration of relevant reasons and ultimately undermining the quality of its decision

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process. The good news is that when the information was in the hands of a majority member, the group used it in the objectively correct manner to reach its decision. This finding challenges a large literature in psychology that finds that groups are almost always unable to appropriately share information held by its members. Paradoxically, then, the clash of interests—a factor assumed to undermine quality deliberation because interests are supposed to take a backseat to open-minded discussion—can neutralize cognitively biased information-sharing (another danger of (p. 546) group discussion). However, that merely rescues deliberation from one trouble only to plunge it into another.

While these results raise doubt that deliberation will yield in practice to the “forceless force of the better argument,” a large literature in social psychology identifies some conditions under which minority influence can occur (see Mendelberg 2002 for a detailed overview). Work in this research tradition shows that group norms greatly shape whether a minority wields influence in the group. A group norm that welcomes dissent actually matters more than individuals’ beliefs and attitudes (Paluck and Green 2009). A norm nudges the majority to take the minority seriously enough to listen to its arguments and process them, prompting the kind of deep thought and open-mindedness that deliberation requires (Moscovici 1985; Turner 1991).

Some scholars point to the conflict in perceptions as the mechanism. The pathway to minority influence lies in cognitive imperatives to get an accurate read on the world (Mutz 1998). The minority challenges the majority’s way of seeing (Wood et al. 1994). As the majority struggles to figure out which view of reality is more correct, it must think afresh (Moscovici 1985). The result is the kind of mutuality that resembles the deliberative standard of reciprocity.

Others point to social identity as the mechanism (Turner 1991). The minority is more likely to affect the views of the majority the more that it evokes a common social identity with the majority. In that case, minorities can both influence and avoid the stigma of the dissident. Deliberation in contexts where the disagreement maps onto salient social cleavages often shuts out the minority (David and Turner 1996).

The work on minority influence shines a light on the crucial difference between interest minorities and social identity minorities in deliberative settings. Much of the empirical research on diversity or disagreement, reviewed above, studies the effects of interest diversity almost exclusively. But that focus provides an incomplete picture of the processes that play out during deliberation. For one, even when political preferences are the nominal axis of disagreement, social identities can play an important subtext role. The Levendusky, Druckman, and McLain (2016) study considered above is an example. Political controversy primes partisanship, which figures as a social identity as much as or more than it operates as a set of preferences about issues of politics. For another, identities may form an independent source of group dynamics.

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Take, for example, the case of gender. Women are socialized in ways that have led to a gender gap in self-confidence (Beyer and Bowden 1997), a heightened sensitivity to cues about their value (Bylsma and Major 1992), a deficit relative to men in expectations about competence (Karakowsky, McBey, and Miller 2004; Rosenwasser et al. 1987), and a corresponding hesitancy to take on leadership roles. These tendencies may be especially pronounced in political settings, which are often still regarded as a “man’s game” (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001), though they are relevant to any setting where men and women talk together with the goal of making binding decisions. As Ridgeway and Correll explain, “Self-other competence expectations affect the likelihood that an individual will speak up with confidence in the setting or hesitate and wait for another to act. ... When someone speaks up, these expectations affect whether others ignore (p. 547) or listen to what is said. Thus, self-other competence expectations affect the extent to which men and women assert themselves, whether their ideas and points of view are heard, and whether they become influential in the context” (2004, 518). In other words, social identity affects how individuals enter into a group discussion, their likelihood of speaking up and being heard during the discussion, and their ability to be seen as influential members of the group after the discussion is over. Identity is thus much more than a “background” variable within groups; instead, identity-based inequalities can shape group processes and outcomes from beginning to end.

Our work on gender and deliberation illustrates this framework (Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014). Our point of departure was the observation that women tend to exercise less power than men. This inequality may manifest itself at every step of the way when a group deliberates. To study this problem, we gathered individuals into small groups to discuss how much society—and the group itself—should tax its members to redistribute the funds to the least well off. We arranged the participants into groups that varied in gender composition. In addition, the group was randomly assigned a decision rule by which it was required to render its decision. One rule was the standard majority rule; the other was unanimous rule—that is, the group was instructed to decide by consensus. The combination of women’s relative numbers and the rule created status for women in the group. Women in groups where women were a minority fared poorly—if the group used majority rule, which advantages the gender majority. Women fared better, however, if the group used unanimous rule, which aids the minority.

So far these results are consistent with a preference explanation. Any group would benefit from majority rule when it is the majority, and from minority protection of unanimous rule if it is the minority. However, other results are not explained by a preference framework, but instead, by the framework of gender inequality. Women benefited in these ways regardless of their political preferences or values. In other words, gender shapes group discussion in ways not accounted for by preferences over political issues, or even the values that underlie them, such as egalitarianism (Mendelberg and Karpowitz 2016). Furthermore, men benefited more than women in the equivalent situation. Men leverage the potential of a rule more effectively than women do, no matter what it is; they carry more influence than women both as the gender majority under majority rule and as the gender minority under minority rule. They also weather the

disadvantages of low identity status in the group more effectively; women sink lower than men as the gender minority under majority rule. Again, these patterns do not show up when people are considered as preference groups. Finally, this argument finds support in studies of enclave deliberation. That is the idea that disadvantaged identities have a particular, legitimate need to meet in groups consisting only of their own members (Karpowitz and Raphael 2014; Young 2002). This expectation has received almost no systematic, rigorous empirical test to this point. In conducting such a test, we find that under some conditions, women in enclaves—and especially those who enter discussion with the least self-confidence—gain substantially, even when we account for political views (Karpowitz and Mendelberg forthcoming). Men do not receive these benefits, reinforcing the role of social identity.

(p. 548) **Concluding Thoughts**

Deliberative events are happening in formal decision-making institutions that have long existed as well as in a growing number of new civic forums. Deliberative theory has provided a useful way to conceive of the goals such forums should serve. Political psychology in turn can help deliberative theory to become more than a set of sometimes abstract aspirations.

Our brief review has shown that much more attention needs to be paid to the group-level contexts in which deliberators are brought together. Scholars have only just begun to understand how and when groups affect their participants in ways that are consistent with normative aspirations and when groups do just the opposite. We have highlighted the importance of attending to features such as the group's mix of preferences and social identities and to the institutional side of deliberation, such as its internal processes and external political context. Much more remains to be done to understand other elements of the deliberative context, such as the presence of moderators (Humphreys, Masters, and Sandbu 2006; Mansbridge et al. 2006; Rosenberg 2007) or the choice between online and face-to-face gatherings (Price 2009). Empirical investigation into these group-level factors is still in its infancy.

Other institutional factors may matter as well. For example, small-scale deliberation occurs within a larger political system that is almost always less deliberative. Deliberators can always quit deliberating and pursue their interests through elections, the courts, or other more adversarial options (Karpowitz 2006). How will the presence or absence of such alternative institutions affect what happens within the deliberative group? A naive version of deliberative theory would see the creation of specifically deliberative institutions as the remedy for the democratic shortcomings of its citizens. We have shown here that deliberating groups can, under the right conditions, lead to a more informed and thoughtful version of public opinion, but at the same time, such groups also expose citizens to other social and psychological forces that require increased attention

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of their own. Far from facilitating an escape from political psychology, the proliferation of deliberative institutions and methods heightens the need to understand psychological variables and processes all the more.

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Notes:

(1.) Our approach to deliberation focuses on group-based discussion, not on informal conversations between individuals (see Mutz 2006; Walsh 2003 for careful studies of those settings) or on individual reflection about reasons and ideas disseminated by the mass media (see Chambers and Costain 2000; Page 1996 for examinations of this notion of deliberative reflection). For lack of space we also do not discuss the growing fruitful literature on the use of citizen deliberation to check corruption, reform authoritarian systems, and promote democracy (Fujiwara and Wantchekon 2013; Humphreys, Masters, and Sandbu 2006; Olken 2010).

(2.) Whether collective decisions are required for group discussions to count as deliberation is the source of some dispute among deliberative theorists (Chambers 2003; Cohen 1989; Fishkin 1995; Gutmann and Thompson 1996).

(3.) Effortful central processing is not necessarily a synonym for better decision-making, as Scherer et al. (2015) show for medical decisions. Similarly, Kuklinski and colleagues (1991) find that asking individuals to avoid gut-level reactions and to reflect about the consequences of their judgments actually *reduced* tolerance toward outgroups.

(4.) By contrast, deliberation appears to have more mixed effects on outcomes like tolerance, prejudice reduction, and efficacy (Lindell et al. 2017; Myers and Mendelberg 2013).

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(5.) Both List et al. (2013) and Farrar et al. (2010) show that deliberation can increase the extent to which participants' attitudes are "single peaked"—that is, preferring policies that are closer to a single point along a policy dimension over policies that are farther from that preference point. Single-peakedness is a critical attribute of individual opinions on many social choice accounts of democracy because it helps to avoid cycling and other unstable collective outcomes.

(6.) A related idea is attitude convergence—the notion that discussion prompts opinions to move toward the pre-discussion group mean, even in groups that are not ideologically or attitudinally homogeneous (Myers and Mendelberg 2013).

(7.) A well-known example of social comparison processes at work is the idea of groupthink, which involves strong group pressure toward conformity, a willingness to stifle or overlook information that does not fit the group's emerging consensus, and a tendency to interrogate the ideas and perspectives of the out-group more harshly than those of the in-group, thus leading to poor decision-making outcomes (Janis 1982; Baron 2005). Consistent with groupthink, Druckman (2004) shows in his framing study that in homogeneous groups, participants who were most vulnerable to framing effects demonstrated a substantial overconfidence bias in their judgments.

(8.) On a more hopeful note, in a related study of a large deliberative event focused on healthcare policy, Esterling, Fung, and Lee (2015) also find that individuals reported increased satisfaction with the process and the policy outcomes when their table's discussion included a moderate level of ideological disagreement, suggesting that deliberators wanted to hear the other side as long as the two sides were not excessively polarized (or excessively homogeneous) in their attitudes. In addition, Lindell et al. (2017) find that both polarized and moderated effects can have deliberative characteristics.

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