Motivated Reasoning in Political Information Processing: The Death Knell of Deliberative Democracy?

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Abstract: In this article I discuss what motivated reasoning research tells us about the prospects for deliberative democracy. In section **(I)** I introduce the results of several political psychology studies examining the problematic affective and cognitive processing of political information by individuals in non-deliberative, experimental environments. This is useful because these studies are often neglected in political philosophy literature. Section **(II)** has three stages. First **(IIi)**, I sketch how the study results from section (I) question the practical viability of deliberative democracy. Second **(IIii)**, I briefly present the results of three empirical studies of political deliberation that can be interpreted to counter the findings of the studies in section (I). Third **(IIiii)**, I show why this is a misinterpretation and that the study results from section (I) mean that it is implausible that sites of political deliberation would naturally emerge from the wide public sphere and coalesce into institutionalized forms of the practice such that deliberative democracy can satisfy its raison d'être. Finally, in section **(III)** I conclude that viable conceptions of deliberative democracy should be limited to narrower aims.

Introduction

Many advocates for deliberative democracy now view this family of approaches to politics prescriptively—and indeed concretely so, as achievable in some form.[2] This view registers the extension of deliberative democracy from the theoretical and normative domain to that of empirical investigation. Naturally this change provoked reaction from liberals (especially "realists") and what Jürgen Habermas calls "systems theorists."

If deliberative democracy proponents expound a politics that retains both a normative dimension and a capacity to partially control society's different functional systems (economy, media, education, etc.), then systems theorists argue that politics is simply one monadic functional system among others. As monadic it is evacuated of its supposed controlling/mediating qualities and forfeits much of its normative force for society at large. The argument is that deliberative democracy cannot occupy the role its proponents envision because it is structurally—and, as Habermas puts it, "semantically"—impossible for politics in general to effectively intervene in the other domains. This is not my concern in this article.

Rather, I take up the liberal, realist critique of deliberative democracy: namely, that preference aggregation and straightforward interest advancement are better political decision-making mechanisms than discursive practices because the latter, as variously required by deliberative democrats, have excessively burdensome cognitive demands. A well-known strain of this objection to deliberative democracy appeals to intractable public ignorance as a

generalized phenomenon rendering deliberative democracy unfeasible (or worse).[3] So long as this debate over deliberative democracy's cognitive demands was confined to theory (supported by theorists' "intuitions" about citizens' political information processing), the debate's salience was limited. Thus precisely deliberative democracy's move into the domain of empirical investigation portends interesting conclusions about the validity of the cognitive burden argument, and, in turn, the scope and nature of democratic decision-making and opinion-formation generally.

My objective in this article is to argue for the salience of a newly empirically shown dimension of one of the biggest challenges to deliberative democracy: achieving the conditions of a widespread[4] deliberative political environment *in the first place*.[5] This is distinct from challenging deliberative democracy on grounds that basic public ignorance precludes people from participating meaningfully in a deliberative environment once it is established. Indeed deliberative democrats have shown that public ignorance is a problem capable of remedy *precisely via deliberation*.[6] Deliberative democracy's challenge in accounting for how people come to the deliberative environment in the first place, however, is familiar, with some articulations of this challenge being more sophisticated[7] than others[8]. I argue in this article that the seeds for a strong articulation of this particular challenge to deliberative democracy are found in recent experimental studies from political psychology. The findings indicate that citizens in non-deliberative engagement with political information commonly show traits of faulty and biased processing. Moreover, this disposition is inherent in the fundamental action of memory and cognition, which themselves are inherent in the information processing. The objection to deliberative democracy on grounds of public ignorance is defeatable if public ignorance is understood as citizen misinformation or lack of information. This is what Robert Talisse calls "belief ignorance."[9] The new studies reveal, however, that political information processers in non-deliberative environments display motivated reasoning and attitude and belief strengthening/polarization in the face of countervailing facts. These behaviors are indicative of incompetence, what Talisse calls "*agent* ignorance": "a successful objection to deliberative democracy based in public ignorance data would have to show that citizens are highly susceptible to agent ignorance."[10]

Following Talisse, I will show that the prevalence of faulty and biased political information processing, as indicated in the political psychology studies, does represent a serious test to the practical viability of deliberative democracy because it inhibits the formation of deliberative environments. That is, although deliberation can likely reduce problems of agent ignorance, the formation of deliberative democratic environments as mainstream political venues is unlikely because the nature of agent ignorance in the non-

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[3] Works addressing deliberative politics and public ignorance (including the defense of the former despite the latter) include: Habermas 2008; Posner 2003, 2004; Rodriguez and McCubbins 2006; Somin 1998, 2004, 2006; Talisse 2004, 2005.

[4] I assume most deliberative democrats envision it as a broad challenge to prevailing liberalism, as opposed to a niche development: "Deliberative theory is ultimately concerned with the democratic process as a whole… Deliberative theorists make room for such activities as interest group bargaining and political protests, but most insist that their role… be justified at some point from a deliberative perspective" (Thompson 2008, 513).

[5] Thus in this paper I do not address the structure, rules, goals, matters of debate, procedure, and/or performance of deliberation once participants are present in a deliberative milieu.

[6] See: Fishkin and Luskin 2005; Habermas 2008.

[7] See: Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002.

[8] See: Posner 2004.

[9] See: Talisse 2004.

[10] Ibid., 7. Talisse writes: "[i]f the public ignorance objection is to succeed, what must be demonstrated is that … the public is not simply *misinformed*, but *incompetent*, and hence *unable* to muster the cognitive resources necessary for deliberative democracy" (ibid., 4).

deliberative political environment prior[11] to the deliberative democratic environment prevents the existence of a political culture conducive to said formation.

My argument contains the following steps. In section **(I)** I introduce the results of several political psychology studies examining the problematic affective and cognitive processing of political information by individuals in non-deliberative, experimental environments. This is useful because these studies are often neglected in political philosophy literature. Section **(II)** has three stages. First **(IIi)**, I sketch how the study results from section (I) question the practical viability of deliberative democracy as expounded by Habermas.[12] Second **(IIii)**, I present the results of three empirical studies of political deliberation that can be interpreted to counter the findings of the studies in section (I). Third **(IIiii)**, I show why this is a misinterpretation and that the study results from section (I) mean that it is implausible that sites of political deliberation would naturally emerge from the wide public sphere and coalesce into institutionalized forms of the practice such that deliberative democracy can satisfy its raison d'être. Finally, in section **(III)** I conclude that viable conceptions of deliberative democracy are limited to narrower aims.

I. Experimental Evidence of Motivated Reasoning in Political Information Processing

Many philosophical theories of political decision-making and opinion-formation assume that individuals are basically Bayesian updaters. When exposed to new data they should correctly respond by incorporating information congruent to prior judgments in a way that reinforces them; likewise, new information contradicting prior judgments should undermine them. This processing of new information in a predictable, expected way is one important quality of rationality. However, it is now accepted in political psychology that existing judgments serve as anchors with cognitive and affective values that predispose people to retain already held beliefs even when encountering significant contrary information [Redlawsk 2004]. This predisposition to "motivated reasoning" rests on the origin of the cognitive and affective values attached to the judgments confronted by the new information. That is, motivated reasoning stems from the interaction of cognition and affect (the "hot cognition" nexus) with memory (long-term and working). When a judgment is recalled (using working memory) in order to update it cognitively based on new information, that recall automatically activates an affective marker attached to the initial judgment (stored in long-term memory). In turn this connection of "hot cognition" and functional memory directly conditions the evaluation of the new information.[13] As Redlawsk (2004, 5) reports,

"Motivated reasoners make an immediate evaluation (like/dislike) of a piece of information they encounter, maintaining an online tally which summarizes the current affect toward the object (such as a political candidate). Thus the memory node for the candidate contains not only cognitive information but also this affective tally, and the tally is updated immediately upon the acquisition of new information. Structurally affect and cognition are inseparable. When new information is encountered, the affect associated with relevant existing knowledge interacts with affect toward the new information to form a virtually instantaneous assessment of the new information based not on cognitive evaluation but rather on the interplay between the online tally and the affective value of the new information."[14]

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[11] Both logically and temporally.

[12] I use Habermas's vision of deliberative democracy because it is mainstream and influential.

[13] See: Redlawsk 2006; Redlawsk et al 2010.

[14] The online tally influences new information evaluation prior to the new information's updating action on the tally itself.

A question thus arises. Does motivated reasoning express itself in information processing prejudices that lead to faulty adjustment of political beliefs, judgments, attitudes, or behaviour? That is, to what extent might the nexus of cognition, affect, and memory involved in political information processing interfere with the expected ("rational") direction of judgment updating, for instance via prior attitude effects, conservation bias, or disconfirmation bias that "explains away" incongruent new information?

Redlawsk (2004) studied motivated reasoning in the context of a mock election campaign. Beforehand subjects were asked to evaluate virtual candidates, and then the experimenters controlled the information (both congruent and incongruent) that subjects received about the candidates (both those initially liked and disliked) during the campaign. Redlawsk (2002) had already demonstrated that subjects exposed to information affectively incongruent to prior beliefs about a preferred candidate afterward had a greater likelihood of approving of that candidate than control subjects. This "attitude strengthening effect" is also the first (1) hypothesis in Redlawsk (2004). More specifically, attitude strengthening is hypothesized for subjects experiencing limited levels of incongruent (i.e., negative) information about a candidate initially evaluated positively; no expectation is made about attitude strengthening in subjects exposed to incongruent information about candidates initially evaluated negatively. The second (2) hypothesis is that subjects do not display attitude strengthening at all levels of exposure to incongruent information. Beyond a certain level of incongruent information exposure, motivated reasoning's mechanisms are overwhelmed by the new information. At this point subjects cease to strengthen prior attitudes and begin to update their judgments in the "correct," "rationally" expected direction.[15]

Redlawsk's (2004) hypotheses are mostly confirmed by the findings, which can be examined under two related aspects: (a) subjects' affective responses over the course of the experiment, and (b) the effects of motivated reasoning on updating accuracy.

(a) Subjects' preferred candidates' positions on issues had to stray far from the subjects' positions in order to elicit anxiety about the initially positive candidate evaluation. Significantly, study participants exposed to 25% affectively incongruent information about their preferred candidate *had more* enthusiasm for her than participants exposed only to congruent information (ibid., 24). These findings are in line with expectations about motivated reasoning in its attitude strengthening form. Conversely, basically no amount of affectively incongruent information about an initially *disliked* candidate could increase enthusiasm about her. Once rejected, a candidate was disregarded regardless of the amount of encountered information that one might expect to generate an increasingly favourable opinion of her.

(b) As for motivated reasoning in terms of its expression in cognitive updating, the hypothesis was that it would result in the rejection of new inconsistent information, or at minimum a process of counterarguing, with the outcome being that accuracy in candidate issue placement would be diminished (ibid., 25). The findings showed, firstly, that subjects did not properly process information regarding the initially disliked candidate; this resulted in their conserving evaluations in the face of incongruent information. For instance, even for the incongruent condition in which an initially rejected candidate is then attributed issue positions that exactly match those of the subject 75% of the time, the subjects generally still did not increase their candidate evaluations, which one would expect if updating were accurate (ibid., 29). Second, as for the liked candidate, hypothesis (1) was not confirmed, but neither was Bayesian updating demonstrated: attitude strengthening was not shown, but neither did the subjects' overall evaluation of candidates display a linear updating trajectory (ibid., 30).

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[15] Those exposed to some incongruent information misperceive a candidate's position more than those exposed to no information at all, while those with intensive exposure to incongruent information update beliefs more accurately than those with only some exposure to incongruent information. See: Redlawsk (2004, 9-10).

Finally, Redlawsk (2004) determined how participant accuracy in identifying candidate issue positions (on affirmative action) varied as a function of information (in)congruence. Study participants display greatest accuracy[16] when the encountered information fits their initial evaluation of the candidate (ibid., 31). As incongruence increases, participants' matching of the candidate to issue positions declines in accuracy until the incongruence reaches a point at which perceptions of the candidate's position rebound and become increasingly more correct (ibid.).

In the conclusion, the author assesses that motivated reasoning blocks the persuasiveness of incongruent information, resulting in a "sticky" updating inflection point:

"The study as designed captured various indicators that might be expected to show effects of motivated reasoning… [S]ubjects in this study do not 'correctly' update their candidate evaluations and affective responses when encountering information that is counter to existing affective expectations. Global affect and evaluation… usually require a substantial bombardment of negative information about a liked candidate before updating adjusts appropriately… [T]he results show a failure to properly update for rejected candidates as well. In that case no amount of 'good' positions by a rejected candidate improves affect towards that candidate. The implications are clear. Once an evaluation is established… it is rather difficult to change it. People will apparently ignore, counterargue, or otherwise fail to account for new, affectively incongruent, information." (ibid., 33-34)

The "bolstering effect" attendant to counterarguing is a noted phenomenon of motivated reasoning and its expression in attitude strengthening.[17] For example, when exposed to new, negative information that challenges prior positive beliefs about a preferred candidate, people tend to denigrate the new information and produce contrary thoughts and arguments. This disconfirmation process recalls earlier positive information about the candidate, often leaving "a better feeling about the candidate even after encountering negative information" (Redlawsk et al 2010). Curiously, however, it is also affect—especially anxiety—that leads to corrected updating through "affective intelligence." At a certain exposure level, unpleasant affects compel greater scrutiny of incongruent information, which increases correct processing. Determining the point of this processing inflection is important, as an elevated threshold would indicate that individuals are poor political information processors.

Based on a very similar study as Redlawsk (2004), Redlawsk et al (2010) tested the effects of motivated reasoning—especially attitude strengthening—with a view toward determining the "affective tipping point" at which incongruent information becomes significant enough to generate affective intelligence that corrects attitude strengthening's capacity to distort information processing. Redlawsk et al's (2010) first finding demonstrates that faulty information processing displays different forms: updating can move in the wrong direction or move in the right direction *but with less increment or decrement* than would be predicted in a Bayesian process. For initially preferred candidates, study participants encountering 10% incongruent information actually ended the experiment with a *higher* estimation of them than they held initially, while participants exposed to 20% incongruence updated their candidate evaluation in the correct direction (negatively), but by less than an amount that would be predicted of Bayesian updaters (Redlawsk et al 2010, 578). Only at incongruence levels of 40% and 80% did subjects display linear updating in the correct direction (ibid.). In one statistical manipulation of results "the group that never actually encountered any incongruent information (Group 0) actually ends up somewhat less positive

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[16] Performance was similar for both initially liked and disliked candidates.
[17] See Edwards and Smith 1996; Taber and Lodge 2006.

about their favorite candidate at the end than either of the first two quartiles of incongruency (Groups 1 and 2). And those in the first quartile—averaging about 20% incongruent information—become consistently more positive about their preferred candidate, even in the face of a nonnegligible amount of negative information" (ibid., 579).

The second set of findings determined the affective tipping point. The amount of incongruent information at which subjects stopped attitude strengthening is 13.4%, although subjects had to reach a threshold of 28% incongruent information before their candidate evaluations became more negative than their initial evaluations (ibid., 583).[18] As the study authors point out, "in our data there is a range of incongruency (I), $0 < I < 28$, between which evaluations of an initially liked candidate are on average higher than for the ideal candidate, that is, one who takes positions perfectly congruent with a subject's own preferences. But the exact tipping point itself is less important than the fact that our results strongly support both motivated reasoning effects and accurate updating, at different levels of incongruency" (ibid., 583).

Beyond candidate evaluations, Taber and Lodge (2006) report a motivated reasoning experiment that tests attitude development (including strengthening) for political issue arguments (affirmative action and gun control). A particular focus of the study was selective information processing such as disconfirmation and confirmation biases. The important hypotheses were: (1) prior attitude effect (people consider arguments consistent with their own judgments superior to countervailing ones), (2) disconfirmation bias (people unduly counterargue and discount incongruent arguments, while uncritically accepting congruent arguments), (3) confirmation bias (people seek out information that confirms beliefs), (4) attitude polarization (attitudes become more extreme despite exposure to balanced pro and con arguments), (5) attitude strength effect (motivated skepticism increases with stronger policy attitudes), and (6) sophistication effect (politically more knowledgeable people display greater motivated skepticism because their knowledge base allows greater counterarguing of incongruent information).

The first result connected hypotheses (1), (5), and (6). Prior attitude systematically affected subjects who were sophisticated and/or had strong beliefs concerning the issues; but those subjects with low political sophistication levels and/or weak prior beliefs demonstrated little or no prior belief effect. That is, for example, participants already supportive of affirmative action scored congruent arguments encountered during the experiment as higher than incongruent arguments, while mutatis mutandis the same held for opponents of gun control (ibid., 760-761). Only "nonsophisticates and those with weak priors" did not demonstrate the effect (ibid.). Hypothesis (2)—also postulated to vary as a function of subject sophistication and prior belief strength—was likewise confirmed. Both bolstering of congruent arguments and denigration of incongruent ones were shown for sophisticated and unsophisticated subjects, with sophisticates being clearly more biased (ibid., 761). This finding of disconfirmation bias in fact understates subjects' poor political information processing. That is, despite experimenter exhortation to the contrary, many subjects short-circuited cognitive evaluation of the arguments altogether. In explaining updated judgments, many "Ps made simple, content-free affective statements to the effect 'I like (don't like) this argument or conclusion' or simply said they liked or disliked the facts or figures supporting an argument" (ibid., 763).

Hypothesis (3) was similarly confirmed by the findings, with subject sophistication playing an intensifying role: for each of the participant groups, "proponents of [an] issue sought out more supporting than opposing arguments, and this difference was quite

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[18] The authors controlled for partisan identification, adding that "strong partisans in a general election would have a very high tipping point… compared to non-partisans" (ibid., 590). This article addresses partisanship and ideological identification in section (II).

substantial for sophisticates in both studies and for both issues" (ibid., 764).[19] Finally, hypothesis (4), attitude polarization/strengthening, was demonstrated: "we found strong evidence of attitude polarization for sophisticated participants, those with strong priors, and (most importantly) those who were biased in their information processing" (ibid., 765).[20] One notes that this was true even though subjects who supported different sides of the issues were exposed to the same balanced flow of information. That is, subjects on different sides of the issues further diverged in their opinions despite seeing the same, even information and arguments. Politically unsophisticated subjects and those with weak prior preferences did not polarize.

  The experiments by Nyhan and Reifler (2010) also exposed subjects to information incongruent with their prior beliefs, but, unlike the studies discussed thus far, its presented information was *demonstrably correct* (as opposed to attitudinal, such as positions on issues like affirmative action). Moreover, the new information to which subjects were exposed in Nyhan and Reifler (2010) was presented in the context of persuasion—the objective of the study was to test the effectiveness of correcting subjects' misperceptions about politics (WMD in Iraq, tax cuts, stem cell funding).

  The first main expectation of the study—carried out in two experiment waves in 2005 and 2006—is a disconfirmation bias that functions for factual political questions like it does for attitudinal issues (ibid., 307). Thus corrections are likely to be less effective than they would be for rational updaters. Next, like the classic one-liner "the less they know, the more they know it," the study postulates a fact-oriented version of the polarization seen in the studies on political attitudes. That is, the study hypothesizes a "backfire effect" wherein corrections of factual political misperceptions through exposing subjects to true facts will result in some subjects "supporting their original opinion even more strongly" (ibid., 308). Ideological strength[21] is an important mediating factor for all of these expectations. "Defensive processing is most likely to occur among adherents of the ideological viewpoint that is consistent with or sympathetic to the factual belief in question (i.e. liberals or conservatives depending on the misperception). Centrists or adherents of the opposite ideology are unlikely to feel threatened by the correction and would therefore not be expected to process the information in a defensive manner" (ibid., 308). Therefore it is hypothesized that corrections will not fix misperceptions in ideological subgroups likely to hold the misperception. Finally the authors note two points. Subjective issue significance was expected to correlate with greater counterarguing, and (following Taber and Lodge 2006) subject political knowledge was expected to be a factor in correction efficacy (ibid., 309). Knowledgeable subjects have greater capacity to resist corrective information through

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[19] When possible, "sophisticated respondents selected arguments from like-minded groups 70–75% of the time… Ps were more likely to read the argument of a sympathetic source than to expose themselves to an opposing point of view. Supporters of gun control or affirmative action were significantly more likely to search out the arguments of 'their' issue groups (e.g., Citizens Against Handguns or the NAACP). As expected, these results are particularly pronounced for sophisticates" (ibid.).

[20] "We find substantial polarization among participants who processed information in a biased manner, but not among those who were less biased. This finding directly and clearly links the processes of motivated skepticism to attitude polarization as our theory predicts… Participants whose argument strength ratings were most skewed by disconfirmation biases had significantly more extreme attitudes on affirmative action and gun control after rating the arguments, while those whose ratings were more evenhanded showed no significant attitude polarization. Similarly, confirmation biases… led to more extreme attitudes as compared to the least biased participants for both issues… We find consistent evidence of directional partisan bias—the prior attitude effect, disconfirmation bias, and confirmation bias—with a substantial attitude polarization as the result. Our participants may have tried to be evenhanded, but they found it impossible to be fair-minded." (ibid., 765-767)

[21] Although the authors do not report results on the partisanship factor, they note that the results were similar to those for ideology.

counterarguing, but are also more capable of understanding corrective information in the first place, and therefore of eventually updating beliefs properly.

Ultimately Nyhan and Reifler (2010) had mixed results that, on the whole, support the hypotheses. The 2005 wave clearly supports the "backfire effect," with ideological positioning playing an important role (ibid., 313). Conservative subjects who (a) believed that Iraq had WMD immediately prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion and (b) were exposed to corrective information were more likely afterwards to think that Iraq had WMD than conservative subjects in the control condition. The percentage of conservative subjects who said that Iraq had WMD prior to the U.S. invasion increased from 32% in the control condition to 64% in the experimental group exposed to the corrective information (statistically significant results) (ibid.). The 2006 results on the WMD experiment were different, however, as the WMD correction caused conservatives in the experimental condition to update their beliefs correctly (to aver that Iraq did not possess WMD prior to the invasion) (ibid., 314). The authors postulate several reasons for the difference between the 2005 and 2006 results. First, the Bush administration had distanced itself from the WMD claims by 2006; second, by 2006 polls showed that republicans nationally had increased belief that Iraq did not have WMD; third, among experimental group republicans there was a decrease from 51% to 36% in the belief that Bush "had done the right thing" in invading Iraq (ibid., 314). Additionally the authors note that the experimental subgroup claiming that Iraq was the most important political issue *did* show a backfire effect.

The 2006 study also tested the backfire effect for tax cuts (i.e., that Bush administration tax cuts increased government revenue, which they did not) and stem cell funding (that the Bush administration banned all stem cell research, which it did not). For the tax cut experiment, correction for the experimental group of conservatives failed to correct misperceptions that the tax cuts raised government revenue. Moreover the backfire effect was again demonstrated, as "conservatives presented with evidence that tax cuts do not increase government revenues ended up believing this claim more fervently than those who did not receive a correction" (ibid., 315). Finally, for the stem cell issue, the correction failed to convince liberals in the experimental group that, contrary to their prior beliefs, the Bush administration did not institute a blanket ban on stem cell research (although there was no backfire effect) (ibid.).

In general, then, Nyhan and Reifler (2010) shows that corrective information does not lower incorrect prior beliefs and misperception for committed subjects, and sometimes actually leads to *stronger* belief in misperceptions. There is clearly a connection of these findings to those concerned with attitude strengthening/polarization and other forms of biased information processing not characteristic of Bayesian (rational) updating. Thus the authors conclude by referencing the support that their study provides for the prevalence of motivated reasoning in political information processing.

"The backfire effects that we found seem to provide further support for the growing literature showing that citizens engage in 'motivated reasoning.' While our experiments focused on assessing the effectiveness of corrections, the results show that direct factual contradictions can actually *strengthen* ideologically grounded factual beliefs—an empirical finding with important theoretical implications." (ibid., 320)

It is to some of these theoretical implications that I now turn.

II. Deliberative Democracy and the Empirical Challenge to Rational Political Processing

(IIi)

The aforementioned political psychology studies are significant for deliberative democracy because they apparently demonstrate "agent ignorance," incompetence in individual political information processing. Talisse cites "agent ignorance" as a likely deliberative democracy defeater because the "excessive cognitive burden" is ingrained in the individual processor. Agent ignorance in its motivated reasoning form puts the viability of deliberative democracy into question because its mechanisms (disconfirmation/confirmation bias, counterarguing, pre-cognitive/affective judging based on prior beliefs) and effects (attitude strengthening/polarization, partisanship, ideological tenacity) are counterfactual to a central premise of deliberative democracy: that individuals consider sometimes threatening political information with an open mind.

To wit, almost all variants of deliberative democratic theory assume three essential foundations.[22]

(1) A certain (variably stringent) discursive procedure is supposed to be a source of legitimacy for political decisions and attitude/belief formation (Habermas 1996, 287-328; Neblo 2005, 4). The motivated reasoning studies do not impact this issue.

(2) The relatively free, open, equal exchange of justifiable reasons and validity claims among deliberators is supposed to be competent (presumably including maximal effort to reduce bias) (Habermas 1996, 304-307; 2008, 144-145; Neblo 2005, 3; 2010, 5; Talisse 2004, 455). This in particular is responsible for "discursive quality." Habermas explicitly stresses the centrality of discursive quality: for deliberative politics, "the discursive level of public debates constitutes the most important variable" (Habermas 1996, 304).[23] Here deliberative democracy is vulnerable in light of the political psychology studies. Deliberative democracy looks practically weakened if the requisite discursive quality is excessively burdensome because competent exchange of reasons and validity claims is significantly inhibited.[24] Prima facie this is what motivated reasoning indicates, insofar as political information processors do not update beliefs/attitudes rationally when faced with statements contradicting prior beliefs. Indeed accepting other understandings of and facts about the political world—and incorporating them into one's political worldview—is essential to deliberative politics.

(3) Deliberative democracy's exchange of reasons and validity claims should produce *different*[25] outcomes (opinions, decisions) than models of politics based on preference aggregation or competitive/cooperative interest advancement (Neblo 2010, 2-4; Thompson 2008, 498). The stronger form of this position affirms that deliberative democracy's forum model should in fact lead to *superior* outcomes (Habermas 1996, 304; Neblo 2005, 2; Talisse 2005, 187).[26] Habermas captures eloquently the way in which deliberative democracy's normative procedure(s) and substance are supposed to cash out in practical—empirically measurable—improvements in political decision-making: "[f]or the deliberative model…,

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[22] In naming only these principles, I exclude elements of deliberative democracy's more demanding formulations—e.g., that deliberators reason on the basis of philosophical principles that all other interlocutors could accept, etc. (Guttmann and Thompson 2004; Cohen 1997).

[23] See also: Habermas 2008, 145.

[24] Habermas (1996, 325) acknowledges this: the communication model of deliberative democracy "ignores attitudes and motives at cross-purposes to the orientation to mutual understanding and is thus blind to egocentrism, weakness of will, irrationality, and self-deception."

[25] A strictly proceduralist advocate of deliberative democracy might argue that different outcomes are unnecessary to justify the effort of deliberative democracy, because the process of reaching decisions through deliberation *inherently* strengthens their legitimacy, or enriches discussants' lives, has ethical benefits, etc. Neblo (2010, 2) minimizes this claim's force: "[i]f decisions under deliberative democracy do not differ from aggregative democracy, then it is more difficult (though not necessarily impossible) to justify spending the time, money, and social resources to change the status quo."

[26] Once we accept that deliberative politics should produce *different* outcomes than alternative models, it then follows that a justifiable deliberative politics should produce *better* results.

embedding the will of the electorate and the formal procedures of deliberation and decision-making in the vibrant and maximally unregulated circulation of public opinion exerts a rationalizing pressure towards improving the quality of the decisions" (Habermas 2008, 143). That is, deliberative democracy significantly earns its stripes because discussion (the normative desideratum) matters practically. We assume that quality exchange of reasons and validity claims leads individuals to hold reliably updated beliefs and attitudes formed in light of the reasonable beliefs and attitudes of others; *this process in turn should lead to better decisions*.[27]

However, the motivated reasoning studies call into question the ability of political information processors to reliably update their beliefs and attitudes when faced with a situation wherein new information countervails their priors—as just mentioned, the sort of situation that is the heart of the discussion aspect of deliberative democracy. Instead of reliably learning from new, incongruent information, political information processors tend to strengthen attitudes and polarize. Indeed the counterarguing mechanism behind attitude strengthening/polarization is especially problematic for deliberative democracy. Discursively counterarguing an interlocutor's point is the heart of deliberation, so it should be worrisome for deliberative democracy advocates that political psychology studies suggest that this activity leads not to individuals' attitudes and beliefs evolving to track reasonableness and truth, but rather to belief divergence and inaccurate updating. Thus, given the information processing nature of individuals who would form deliberative pools, we have reason to believe that deliberative democracy may produce worse decisions and more problematic opinions than other democratic modes. In fact, Thompson's (2008, 499) overview of empirical studies of deliberative democracy shows that the results of deliberative decision-making and opinion-formation are often no better (and sometimes worse) than that of individual preference aggregation or interest advancement. Rodriguez and McCubbins (2006) performed experiments that conclude that deliberation produces worse outcomes than these other modes, a conclusion all the more melancholy in that their design factored in information sharing costs, which most theoretical models of deliberative politics exclude despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that doing so elides the contradiction between deliberative democratic theory's fundamentally important deliberative quality and reality's fundamental insistence that things that cost more are scarcer.[28]

Also discouraging for deliberative democracy is another realist element casting doubt on the presence of favorable conditions for deliberative quality. Namely, some of motivated reasoning's problematic manifestations—counterarguing and disconfirmation bias—are characteristic of precisely those individuals who are knowledgeable and interested in politics (Taber and Lodge 2006, 767). This is because these individuals have the cognitive resources to effectively denigrate incongruent new information, a fundamental aspect of the counterarguing and disconfirmation that lead to greater polarization (ibid.). The potential impact of this state of affairs on deliberative democracy seems disturbing: from where is the required deliberative quality to emerge if politically sophisticated and knowledgeable interlocutors have elevated risk for bias, while the relatively unbiased are politically ignorant?[29]

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[27] One could settle for "*better opinion-formation,*" if one is less ambitious about deliberative democracy or uncomfortable with deliberative politics focusing on decision-making.

[28] Habermas (1996, 325) acknowledges this challenge to deliberative democracy.

[29] The authors warn against considering the unbiased ignorant as democracy saviors. This group shows no evidence of *principled* moderation, and their ignorance and apathy undermine normatively secure democracy by undercutting application of individual preferences to policy (Taber and Lodge 2006, 767-768).

At this point we can tie together the preceding set of challenges to deliberative democracy by discussing a real-world political phenomenon that bears out the conclusions of the studies on agent ignorance and motivated reasoning. In his *Sublime Object of Ideology* Zizek (1989, 49) remarks that ideology is not simply a set of false beliefs: rather, "[a]n ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favor." This concept of ideology expresses precisely the attitude/belief strengthening that we know is associated with motivated reasoning. How does this play out concretely? Recall that in wave 1 of Nyhan and Reifler (2010, 313) conservative participants who believed that Iraq had WMD before the 2003 U.S. invasion showed a statistically significant tendency to increase belief in this mistaken "fact" after being presented with a factual correction. As it happens public discourse forms a sort of "natural experiment" paralleling the experimental results. When post-war findings like the Duelpher Report established that Iraq had neither significant WMD stockpiles (deployed or otherwise) nor an active WMD program prior to the invasion, there emerged a stream of counterarguing (especially, but not only, by conservatives who supported the Iraq invasion on the back of WMD "evidence" indicating that Hussein's government was an international threat due to WMD). In the context of motivated reasoning, what is interesting about this reaction is the extent to which *the absence of discovered Iraqi WMD* was variously "rationalized" to further justify the invasion despite the discrediting of the original justification (*the putatively established presence of WMD*).

The reactions—all without evidence—took several forms. A well-known version concentrated on how the Iraqi government had ostensibly shipped its WMD to Syria prior to invasion (Media Matters 2007; Hot Air 2010; Salon 2007). A second version mooted the idea that Iraq did not in fact have WMD, but did want them and planned to restart its WMD programs (Washington Times 2006). Thus it was unpredictable and dangerous enough to warrant attack (ibid.). A third version claimed that Iraq's government ordered its WMD to be dispersed and hidden so well in the lead-up to invasion that they could not be found (RightWingNews 2010; Slate 2003). This last statement of putative events also had political pedigree. The argument's formulation par excellence was actually Tony Blair's infamous claim *before* the invasion—namely that Iraqi weapons were deployed in the desert in a way so diabolical that they were both buried/hidden and launch-ready within forty-five minutes (BBC 2004).

Despite their different substance, in all cases these counterarguments have two common elements that fit the model of motivated reasoning's attitude/belief strengthening in the face of information incongruent to priors. (1) Although the Iraqi government's external assessment as dangerous (and thus worthy of invasion) was originally based on its possession of WMD, the fact of not finding them indicated not that the original assessment was incorrect, but rather that the Iraqi government was even wilier and scarier than originally thought, and thus still worthy of invasion. This typifies disconfirmation bias and its bolstering effect. (2) The counterarguments adduced the Iraq regime's evil character, a quality that comes to justify the original belief (the necessity of invasion) even though this quality was not originally the (publicly averred) crucial part of the decision calculus (although generalized disgust at the regime was doubtless one factor in creating consent to topple the government). This exemplifies the attitude/belief strengthening effect that occurs due to the mechanism of recalled original affect (in this case disgust) that is linked to counterarguing.

Adducing this issue of Iraq's WMD began with reference to wave 1 in Nyhan and Reifler (2010). And obviously one should point out that wave 2 from the same study did not result in the type of attitude/belief strengthening—the "backfire effect"—observed in wave 1. In fact this result is consistent with Redlawsk et al's (2010) finding of an "affective tipping point," and with Habermas's argument that people "develop reasonable opinions on political

issues in the long-run" (2008, 172). But political events and decision-making (capable of influence by public opinion) happen in the short-term. Thus it is discouraging that the optimistic conclusion to be drawn from the motivated reasoning studies is that individuals "eventually get it." One imagines that most of the time "eventually" will be insufficient to prevent the consequences of poor political decision-making that arises from agent ignorance. On this reading our correct political judgments are consigned to retrospectively understanding mistakes—but, as Keynes said, in the long-run we're all dead.

(IIii)

 Talisse (2004, 464) tempers the problems that agent ignorance presents to deliberative democracy by asserting that it would likely vitiate *all forms* of democracy: "it seems likely that such findings [of agent ignorance] would prove devastating to every conception of democracy, not just deliberativist views." This is an intra-democratic version of Churchill's quip that democracy is the worst form of government except for the alternatives. However, it is unclear whether **(a)** Talisse's claim is true (it is not clear that interest-advancement and aggregation theories of democracy are as vulnerable to agent ignorance objections as deliberative democracy), and, if it is, **(b)** whether that militates preferring a fatally flawed deliberative democracy over non-democratic political forms (enlightened authoritarianism, etc.).

 I think a better approach to questioning the salience of political psychology literature concerning individual political information processing is to emphasize that it is just that— *individual*. This is actually a variant of the deliberative democratic retort to all claims that it is flawed on empirical grounds. Typical objections to deliberative democracy are that it is unrealistic, or that people neglect politics because they have no voice, or that they are uninformed, etc.; the typical deliberative democrat answers that *precisely deliberative democracy would partially solve these ills*. Mutatis mutandis deliberative democrats could respond similarly to the motivated reasoning experiments. That is, perhaps deliberative democracy would produce less attitude and belief strengthening/polarization, disconfirmation bias would be reduced because deliberators have to justify positions, confirmation bias would be reduced because deliberators are exposed to incongruent information, etc.

 To this end, deliberative democratic engagement with realist objections has increasingly relied on evidence from experiments that operationalize and test deliberative democracy in several variants. Results have been mixed, but numerous studies indicate that applied deliberative democracy can meet its normative and theoretical expectations, like reducing bias, increasing citizen participation, and generating more rational and improved opinion-formation and decision-making than other political approaches. Before moving on to an evaluation of this research's significance for reforming politics along deliberative lines, it is worthwhile to provide a brief summary of some of the results of the most interesting studies.

 Neblo et al (2010) looks at a central question for deliberative politics: given political disengagement and belief ignorance readily observed in general political culture, do individuals respond positively to the opportunity to be involved in deliberative political activity wherein they are expected to process political information according to rational standards of deliberation? A political science landmark, the study asked participants to engage in online deliberation about immigration with both peers and their U.S. Congressperson. Some experimental conditions involved substantial time sacrifice both in terms of deliberation itself and the information study period preceding it. Despite the sometimes demanding nature of the deliberative exercise, results showed that "willingness to deliberate in the United States is much more widespread than expected" (ibid., 567). Overall, participants showed more enthusiasm for the deliberative political process than for other approaches (ibid., 570, 581). The deliberative condition also produced another normatively encouraging result: "it is

precisely people who are less likely to participate in traditional partisan politics who are most interested in deliberative participation…; people are attracted to such [deliberative] participation as a partial alternative to 'politics as usual'" (ibid., 567). Externally, this last result is encouraging because it is generally considered desirable that more people be engaged with politics, since this ostensibly leads to greater legitimacy of decisions. Both study results are encouraging internally for the concept(s) of deliberative democracy, as they show that deliberative democracy's normative assumptions (e.g., people ought to prefer to participate in deliberative democracy because of deliberative principles like greater voice) cash out in measurable behavior (people act on the preference).

Neblo et al (2010) evidences *willingness to participate* in deliberation.[30] In a paper based on the same experiments as Neblo et al (2010), Esterling et al (2007) examines participants' *capacity to correctly process political information* in deliberative environments. That is, Esterling et al (2007) more directly addresses agent ignorance through comparing deliberators' updating of political knowledge with that of non-deliberators. Experimental condition participants were asked to learn about and discuss immigration issues and policy with their Congressperson, while control subjects were only given information to study individually. Results supported the hypothesis that participants would have a strong capacity for learning as a response to the deliberative opportunity, with gains deriving from three mechanisms: (1) the deliberation sessions, (2) the desire to prepare knowledgably for the sessions by studying the preparation materials, and (3) the generally increased interest in following politics due to the deliberative opportunity (ibid., 2, 18). Both the deliberation and control condition participants were asked a battery of factual immigration policy questions prior to experimental treatment/non-treatment and then surveyed afterward to ascertain their knowledge gain. Deliberation had a pronounced effect on participants, as "for each item save one, the deliberative treatment increases the probability of a correct answer by between 20% and 45%" (ibid., 20). Thus, overall, deliberators' learning was superior to that of non-deliberators. Moreover, both the initially politically ignorant and knowledgeable showed similar political knowledge gains (ibid., 22).

Neblo (2010) tests the hypothesis that "talk matters." The activation of normative deliberative principles produces political decision-making and opinion-formation distinct from that of individuals in non-deliberative settings (ibid., 1). The experiment also focused on testing numerous sub-hypotheses about the mechanisms behind the "talk matters" hypothesis: two of interest are the "filter hypothesis" (deliberation decreases the role of affect in political judgment) and the "forum hypothesis" (deliberation's demand for reasonable justification of political judgment reduces bias, including ideological bias) (ibid., 4). These two hypotheses thus examine the issue of whether deliberation contributes to improved quality of political judgment. Experiment participants were asked to deliberate about three controversial issues likely to be affected by ideological bias: affirmative action, homosexuals in the military, and tax reform (either toward a flat tax or more progressive taxation). Briefly, the results showed, first, that for all three issues deliberative groups produced clearly (and statistically significant) different political judgments from non-deliberators. In fact, for the flat tax issue "exactly half of the deliberative groups made a choice different from what they would have chosen by voting" (ibid., 11). As for the filter and forum hypotheses, they were also born out, although less clearly (ibid., 15-19). The author notes that ideology's effect was unaltered for the tax issue because deliberative quality was low (due to issue complexity), indicating a limit to the forum hypothesis (ibid., 19). Still, especially for the affirmative action issue, the forum hypothesis was confirmed, "with ideology going from a strong predictor of one's position before deliberation, to insignificance post deliberation" (ibid., 16).

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[30] For example, contrary to Posner (2004) or Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002).

Finally, Fishkin and Luskin (2005) ran experiments operationalizing deliberative democracy in the form of deliberative polling. This involves using a deliberation process to generate opinion used for public feedback to policymakers, rather than asking individuals what they privately think about an issue/policy (and then aggregating responses). The experiment is promising for deliberative democracy in two ways—one external to and one internal to deliberative democracy. Externally, deliberative polling is a promising avenue for generalization of deliberative politics because polling is an established tool that can be relatively easily reformed and has a natural link-up to policymakers with powers that could translate deliberatively generated political will into action. In terms of internal validity, these deliberative polling experiments confirmed numerous claims of the normative and theoretical side of deliberative democracy. These experiments have been covered in the deliberative democracy literature so I will only briefly mention the major findings. First, post-deliberation participants had different voting intentions than pre-deliberation, which supports the "talk matters" hypothesis (ibid., 12-16). Second, not only did deliberators increase their knowledge of political issues, but the change in knowledge was related to change in voting intention (ibid.). Third, against a common objection that deliberation produces issue confusion, deliberation participants understood the political debates more, not less (ibid.). Fourth, preferences did not necessarily polarize under deliberative conditions, a significant finding vis-à-vis political psychology findings concerning attitude and belief strengthening/polarization as a result of political information processor exposure to views and facts countering prior judgments (ibid.). Lastly, deliberation on *balanced* facts produced balanced learning. This counters the objection that political information processors are plagued by ineradicable (dis)confirmation biases (i.e., overall political judgment formation is benefited when people are exposed to different perspectives than their preferences, an exposure that they unconsciously avoid as individual processors).

(IIiii)

From one perspective, one draws the lesson that the results of empirical studies of deliberative political environments demonstrate their capacity to mitigate the type of agent ignorance that much realist political theory presents as deliberative democracy's Waterloo. The deliberative democracy studies summarized in this article show that deliberation's requirements—justification in arguments, exposure to alternate viewpoints, inclusive discussion, etc.—can lead participants to reflect with less bias, change beliefs more rationally, and gain political knowledge, and indeed in a way that fits Redlawsk's (2010) notion of a "tipping point."

From a different perspective, however, the import of these studies is opaque. There are two basic responses to the empirical literature on deliberative democracy. First, one can cite the empirical deliberative democracy literature variously reporting that deliberative groups polarize (Sunstein 2002; Schkade et al 2010) in a way consistent with motivated reasoning, or reach inferior decision-making results compared to non-deliberative groups when the costs of information and communication are factored into the experiments (Rodriguez and McCubbins 2006). These studies critical of deliberative democracy's prospects and/or desirability merit attention, but this issue is not my concern. I am rather interested in a second critical response to the empirical literature on deliberative democracy: namely, *how are societies supposed to arrive at deliberative democracy in the first place*? To state this question differently: even in contemporary democracies can we reasonably think that there will exist the conditions of possibility for the widespread emergence of deliberative democracy in the broad political culture such that deliberative politics' raison d'être is not vitiated either **(a)** because those conditions assume effects that would only be available *as a result* of widespread adoption of deliberative political decision-making and opinion-formation, or **(b)** because widespread

institutionalization of deliberative democracy would require *a paternalism that undermines the very democracy* that deliberative democracy is to promote? As the cited studies each already assume a deliberative environment, they do not address these questions—but they are important because they go to the heart of determining the purpose and real-world potential of deliberative politics.

We can dispense immediately with one potential objection to this line of questioning: that inquiring about deliberative democracy's capacity to reach widespread social purchase misses the point because deliberative democracy is (or can be) purely critico-normative. There are several problems with this defense. First, normativity presumes that ought implies can,[31] and this is a fortiori the case for politics insofar as its concern with establishing justice inherently involves the translation of ethical/normative principles into institutional arrangements. Second, one notes that much of both the empirical and theoretical literature testing and/or advocating deliberative democracy grants that an essential part of the justification for the enterprise stems from its real potential as an alternative model of political discourse and decision-making. This is analytically true for the empirical studies (otherwise why execute them?). Moreover, the intellectual history of empirical studies on deliberative democracy reveals that the impetus for executing them was the need to respond to criticisms of deliberative democracy's feasibility and/or real-world performance by generating social-scientific data that support deliberative democratic *theory* and allow its engagement with political scientists (Thompson 2008, 498-499; Habermas 1996, 302, 324; 2005; 2008).

To return to the questions posed above, if we assume that critico-normative theories of deliberative democracy should consider feasibility, then the political psychology literature on the irrationality of individual political information processing (motivated reasoning, bias, belief/attitude strengthening) represents a serious challenge to the idea that widespread deliberative democracy can emerge naturally from contemporary liberal democratic societies' political cultures.[32] This is because the literature's findings show that—when left to their own devices—the individuals comprising liberal democratic societies' political cultures are largely incapable[33] of the type of reflective, evenhanded political information processing that deliberative democracy requires. That is, although true that these same individuals are capable of reflective, rational political information processing *once in* a deliberative environment, it is these individuals *qua individuals in a **non-deliberative** political environment **prior** to the desired deliberative environment* that would be the agents responsible for creating the deliberative political environment, and these agents are unfit for this task (incompetent in Talisse's sense). Thus the idea of widespread deliberative democracy emerging from existing political culture suffers from chicken-egg circularity.

This theoretical critique of deliberative democracy's practical potential is buttressed when we factor in the state of political communication and culture that enable mass liberal democracy and would have to be a central mechanism for transitioning to deliberative democracy. Indeed the media through which political communication and culture form the substrate for public opinion-formation[34] amplify motivated reasoning and biases, and thus work against deliberative politics' requirements. Credit Habermas for broaching how "a

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[31] Dilemma situations challenge this notion of practical philosophy, but in such cases one often concludes that there is no valid norm. But if this is true of critico-normative deliberative democracy, then why bother theorizing its norms?

[32] I remind here that the agent ignorance at issue in the political psychology studies involves encountering new information that updates priors, and not new, completely uncontextualized information. The former is, of course, what is usually in play in ongoing political debates in the public sphere.

[33] For an explanation of how motivated reasoning, bias, and attitude/belief strengthening effects of individuals are likely evolutionarily hardwired, see: Taber and Lodge 2006, 767-768.

[34] In the remainder of this paper I deal with the potential of widespread deliberative democracy; thus I refer to individual/mass opinion-formation (not decision-making).

normatively loaded conception of 'deliberative politics' cohere[s] with our supposedly realistic image of the media society" (Habermas 2008, 138). As a deliberative democracy advocate, his answer is predictable: "[n]either the structure nor the power dynamics of political communication in the mass media pose unsurmountable obstacles to the formation of rationally filtered, and in this sense 'considered,' public opinions" (ibid., 139). Against Habermas, however, one notes at least three inter-related aspects of contemporary political discourse that exacerbate motivated reasoning and thus inhibit the discursive quality essential to deliberative democracy: (1) the perception of politics as spectator sport; (2) a media landscape that intensifies confirmation/disconfirmation bias; (3) significant partisanship and hardened individual ideological beliefs.

(1) Behavior inexplicable through rational/public choice theory is often addressed by arguing that non-instrumental personal satisfaction—expressivist, or psychic benefits— explains apparently irrational political engagement by the masses, whose expectation of decisively using knowledge gained from this engagement to affect outcomes (e.g., via voting) is so small that the costs[35] of political engagement outweigh expected instrumental benefits. Beyond the useful fact that such psychic benefit avoids the paradox of explaining political involvement by adding intrinsic interest to the expected utility calculus, we should consider the character of this psychic benefit: namely, it resembles vicarious interest in spectator sports. Ilya Somin puts the analogy this way: fans are knowledgeable about their favourite teams not because they can influence game results, but

"because it increases the enjoyment they get from rooting on their favorite teams. But if many of the citizens who acquire significant amounts of political knowledge do so primarily for reasons other than becoming a better voter, it is possible that they will acquire knowledge that is of little use for voting, or will fail to use the knowledge they do have in the right way… Red Sox fans who passionately root against the Yankees are unlikely to evaluate the evidence about these teams objectively… Yankees fans no doubt feel the same way about the Red Sox. Similarly, Democratic partisans who hate George W. Bush, and Republicans who reflexively support him against all criticism, might well want to acquire information in order to augment the experience of cheering on their preferred political 'team.' If this is indeed their goal, neither group is likely to evaluate Bush's performance in office objectively or accurately." (Somin 2006, 261)

What are the implications for deliberative democracy? On this reading contemporary engagement with political discourse is mostly characterized by motivated reasoning. Thus political discourse works primarily toward amplifying the initial affective and cognitive attachment/detachment that individuals develop for issues or personalities. The effect is the fomenting of political tribalism largely incompatible with deliberative democracy's requirement of a reason-giving/-taking environment that promotes the open-minded acceptance of the better argument (leading to accurately revised judgments). In turn, when this deficit in deliberative quality is scaled up it is hard to see how deliberative democracy can emerge.

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[35] Habermas acknowledges the difficulties that deliberative politics faces given the time and cognitive burdens involved in political engagement. He responds that most political information consumers employ heuristics and unconscious strategies to reduce the burden of acquiring information for making judgments. Consequently in the "long-run people can be knowledgeable in their reasoning about their political choices without possessing a large body of knowledge about politics" [Habermas 2008, 172]. See conclusion to section (Ii) for why this "long-run" argument is problematic.

(2) Another challenge to the formation of discursive quality underpinning conceptions of deliberative democracy arises from characteristics of contemporary political media, which have increased the volume of political discussion as the expense of depth and quality.

(a) First one notes a connection with the point above: mass broadcast/cable/print news generally cover politics like sports. This aggravates the tendency to engage with politics for tribalistic psychic benefits. In particular, election contests and aggregated public opinions about controversial issues are treated largely as horseraces with updates provided by a profusion of polls. Politics' "sportification" has many reasons: changing media platforms and consumption preferences, the twenty-four hour news cycle, pressure on newsroom budgets (causing reduced investigative/analytical journalism and increased press release reliance), and outlet ownership and/or executives with political positions that coverage supports. Whatever the reasons, media treatment of politics as spectator sport has the following effect: as the apparent zero-sum nature of politics is privileged within mass political culture, the public-opinion formation process is colonized by a win-at-all-cost attitude that marginalizes political discourse quality. The psychic benefits of being on the "winning" side are increased, while the force of the better argument appears either irrelevant or a costly luxury given the disincentive of being on the "losing" side. Paine's pamphlets or Hearst's newspapers attest that the adversarial aspect of political mass media is well-worn, but its persistence in its contemporary pernicious form discredits the hope that modernity's omnipresent media exposure can make individuals more informed, better political reasoners. Contra Habermas, contemporary political mass media give no indication of being a surmountable obstacle on the way to discursive democracy and every indication of continuing to corrode deliberation in the public sphere.

(b) Digital communications (especially the internet) are considered the antidote to malignant mass media: "given the revolution in electronic communication, the deliberative paradigm is well-suited to relating the strong normative ideas to present-day social complexity in such a way that they are not frustrated from the outset by countervailing facts" (Habermas 2008, 143). Cable news, blogs, forums, and social networks offer extensive content spectra and utility as information acquisition and sharing tools. Thus electronic media potentially make individuals more (and more quickly) informed, draw more people into political discourse, and yield more active participation (ibid., 157). However, this positive potential for deliberative democracy is largely nullified by electronic media's "echo effect" (Nie et al 2010; Purcell et al 2010; Sunstein 2001; 2004). These media increase power of disconfirmation/confirmation biases and polarization, as it is simpler to avoid information contradicting one's preferences or find succor against challenges to one's beliefs by reading and/or contributing to sympathetic Web sites or other fora (thus eliciting counterarguments generating polarization).

It seems implausible that deliberative democracy could emerge when these inhibitors to deliberative quality are scaled up to a society-wide level. Taber and Lodge (2006, 756) make this point as well, arguing that processes of selective information exposure influence subsequent attitudes and behavior, and that this in turn has implications for the distribution of aggregate public opinion. Moreover, insofar as it amplifies motivated reasoning (such as bias or polarization), electronic media's echo effect has the discouraging implication that the "affective tipping point" would be even higher in the real socio-political world than in Redlawsk's et al (2010) experiments (which limit confirmation/disconfirmation possibilities).

(3) Engagement with politics is ideological and partisan, even among non-elites with noncomprehensive and incoherent political perspectives. There are many reasons for this: the effects of political media and politics considered as spectator sport, the utility of ideology and partisan identification as heuristic devices for processing political information, etc. Habermas—again to his credit—notes the problematic potential of this issue: the mutual

understanding necessary for deliberative politics "depends on contexts characterized by a capacity for learning, both at the cultural and the personal level. In this respect, dogmatic worldviews and rigid patterns of socialization can block a discursive mode of sociation" (Habermas 1996, 324-325).

Indeed one notes the pernicious effect of ideology and partisanship in the context of the motivated reasoning studies. Redlawsk (2004; 2006) and Redlawsk et al (2010) *factored out* ideology and partisanship in the political candidate judgment components of their studies by designing the experiments such that subjects only made judgments about candidates belonging to their self-selected party identification. But if motivated reasoning was prevalent *even in a judgment-updating environment designed to reduce it* through reducing ideological and partisan filters, then it is reasonable to think that motivated reasoning would be even more prevalent in the natural political environment: "strong partisans in a general election would have a very high tipping point… Likewise, ideologues, as opposed to moderates, might also be harder to move off their initial support for a candidate very close to them" [ibid., 590]. Mechanisms for this are easy to imagine: significant ambient ideology and partisanship mean greater willingness to engage in confirmation/disconfirmation bias and counterarguing, which in turn lead to belief polarization (itself a part of the vicious circle of the reproduction of ideology and partisanship), and thus to poor political judgment updating. Thus, if the motivated reasoning studies all cast doubt on the ability of widespread deliberative democracy to emerge from current political culture, then the fact that said political culture is even more ideological and partisan than the experiments should only strengthen that doubt.

A common answer to realist objections—based on motivated reasoning or public ignorance—to deliberative democracy is that deliberative democracy is the cure for these problems. This is not a satisfactory response because the question is how deliberation can first emerge as a widespread political modality from the given socio-political environment. As just shown, this environment precludes such a natural emergence because several of its features block the capacity to engage in mutual political understanding based on unmotivated and unbiased evaluation of the force of the better argument.

At this juncture deliberative democracy advocates might retort that although widespread, natural emergence of deliberative politics is currently unimaginable, enlightened elites could proactively shape democracy toward this orientation. Indeed advocates could cite real-world deliberation in politics: deliberative polling, deliberative juries, issue-based citizen deliberation with elites, and deliberative assemblies have been designed and convened by experts in the theory and practice of politics to concretize deliberative democratic theory. Bracketing the contested issue of the relative effectiveness of these specific initiatives (Thompson 2008), transforming these niche practices into a large-scale reform of democracy risks paternalism that would undermine the democracy in deliberative democracy. This conclusion rests on two related considerations.

First, justification for reforming a social system as fundamental as political decision-making and opinion-formation faces a very high standard in terms of the normative legitimacy of altering people's established preferences. Even Habermas, for instance, acknowledges both the normative and practical dangers of "cognitive overburdening" likely with large-scale shifts to deliberative politics demanding more onerous political information consumption and processing (Habermas 1996, 320). As an elite imposition, this would be highly problematic.

Second, justification for reforming a social system as fundamental as political decision-making and opinion-formation faces a very high functional standard. Instituting widespread deliberative democracy requires showing not only that it is highly likely to work as theorized, and not only that its potential for democratic outcomes is superior to that of

existing aggregative democracy, but also that risks of retaining the status quo outweigh risks of reform. Deliberative democracy does not meet this standard. Consider how the devil is in the details, of which deliberative democratic reforms would contain myriad. For example the British Columbia Citizens Assembly—a one-off deliberative body that recommended changes to B.C.'s electoral system—was convened by random lottery. Random selection is essential to ensuring both representational equality and discussion balance (Fishkin and Luskin 2005). However, if, as some deliberative democrats suggest (Levine et al 2005), such an institution were scaled up to widespread and frequent decision-making that substantially replaced elected representatives with randomly selected deliberators, there would be a problem of political accountability. Although true that the B.C. Citizens Assembly decision was subject to a (failed) popular referendum, it is difficult to imagine that for generalized deliberative assemblies referenda could be held with enough frequency and voter turnout to ensure oversight by the body politic. Thus by what method of approbation or censure would deliberators be responsible to the citizenry? Certainly this is a radical example, but the problem of political accountability in a large-scale deliberative democratic system is a serious one; absent a solution, deliberative democracy is implausible as a political modality intended to significantly supplement—much less supplant—more traditional modes of democratic politics.

III. Conclusion

This article covered two related, overarching themes. First: presenting evidence of political agent ignorance as an expression of motivated reasoning in order to counterbalance theoretical and empirical claims advocating deliberative democracy as a public reasoning procedure that defeats said ignorance. Second: arguing that the character of overall political culture promotes the conditions in which agent ignorance and motivated reasoning thrive, thus either undermining an endogenous emergence of a widespread deliberative democratic environment or making its possibility contingent on a paternalistic institutionalization process that would vitiate its essential normative criterion of being sufficiently democratic. Thus my argument emphasizes that deliberative democracy advocates must address the issue of how we get to deliberative democracy in the first place, if we should take it seriously as a normative political program answering the manifest weaknesses of aggregative liberal democracies.

However, my reading of the political psychology studies on motivated reasoning and agent ignorance does not imply that the fact that real-world political culture is not deliberative means that deliberative politics tout court is utopian. Indeed one objection to my analysis could be that we should not reject deliberative democracy because it cannot emerge naturally as a widespread socio-political phenomenon precisely because deliberative democracy does not have to be widespread in order to have normative salience.

Certainly, as Thompson (2008, 513) points out, this minimalist position is not shared by most deliberative democrats: "[d]eliberative theory is ultimately concerned with the democratic process as a whole… Deliberative theorists make room for such activities as interest group bargaining and political protests, but most insist that their role—and the form they take—be justified at some point from a deliberative perspective." I however side with the idea that a deliberative democratic program with scaled-down ambitions can be institutionalized in the form of targeted opinion-/discourse-formation and decision-making (e.g., generating input for meta-political decisions such as constitutional reform). Results could in limited instances even be binding on policymakers. Indeed there are examples of political experts and elites who organize deliberative fora in a way that is both influential and limited (thus avoiding the criticism of socio-political engineering). Examples include:

deliberative juries, ad hoc Citizen Deliberative Assemblies or Advisory Bodies (à la the British Columbia Citizens Assembly, or those in Mali and India sponsored by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), televised deliberative groups (deliberative focus groups or citizen roundtables), deliberative polls (such as those conducted by Fishkin), and deliberative consultation with policymakers (such as the Networked Governance program experiment by Neblo et al). These initiatives represent deliberative democracy's potential for cashing in its normative promise, but beyond such highly targeted efforts deliberative democracy flies too close to the sun.

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