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## **What Happened on Deliberation Day?**

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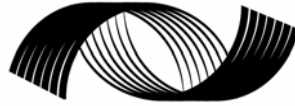
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## **Executive Summary**

What are the effects of deliberation about political issues? This essay reports the results of a kind of Deliberation Day, involving sixty-three citizens in Colorado. Groups from Boulder, a predominantly liberal city, met and discussed global warming, affirmative action, and civil unions for same-sex couples; groups from Colorado Springs, a predominately conservative city, met to discuss the same issues. The major effect of deliberation was to make group members more extreme than they were when they started to talk. Liberals became more liberal on all three issues; conservatives became more conservative. As a result, the division between the citizens of Boulder and the citizens of Colorado Springs were significantly increased as a result of intragroup deliberation. Deliberation also increased consensus, and dampened diversity, within the groups. Hence Deliberation Day produced group polarization, in the distinctive form of ideological amplification. Implications are explored for the uses and structure of deliberation in general.

## What Happened on Deliberation Day?

David Schkade, Cass R. Sunstein, and Reid Hastie

### 1. Introduction

The American constitutional system aspires to be a deliberative democracy – one that combines accountability with a high degree of reflection and reason-giving.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the deliberative ideal, many people have explored the foundations of political deliberation and its implications for political reform.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin have gone so far as to suggest a new national holiday, Deliberation Day, on which citizens would deliberate about national issues, in a manner intended to promote political learning and more reasonable judgments.<sup>3</sup> Many days, especially but not only during campaigns, are the functional equivalent of Deliberation Days, at least for some people some of the time. But what is likely to happen on Deliberation Day?

For a Deliberation Day to realize its promise, a reasonable variety of views must be expressed and discussed. Without exposure to competing views, citizens will not be able to engage in a balanced and informed weighing of positions – a prerequisite of deliberation. But sufficient diversity may be unlikely if people engage in voluntary self-sorting, or if citizens are sorted in geographical terms, where sheer demographics may well mean that most groups consist largely of like-minded people.<sup>4</sup> In fact there is evidence that in the United States, different communities are becoming more homogeneous in ideological terms.<sup>5</sup> To the extent that this is so, groups may well fail to have the requisite diversity on Deliberation Day. And even if considerable diversity exists, it remains possible to question the likely effects of deliberation. Perhaps error rather than truth, or confusion rather than clarity, will ultimately prevail.

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<sup>1</sup> See JOSEPH BESSETTE, *THE MILD VOICE OF REASON* (1994); ARTHUR LUPA & MATHEW D. MCCUBBINS, *THE DEMOCRATIC DILEMMA: CAN CITIZENS LEARN WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW?* (1998).

<sup>2</sup> See JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *BETWEEN FACTS AND NORMS* (1996) (elaborating deliberative conception of democracy); *DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY* (Jon Elster ed., 1998) (collecting diverse treatments of deliberative democracy); AMY GUTMANN & DENNIS THOMPSON, *DEMOCRACY AND DISAGREEMENT* (1996) (defending deliberative democracy and discussing its preconditions).

<sup>3</sup> See BRUCE ACKERMAN & JAMES FISHKIN, *DELIBERATION DAY* (2004).

<sup>4</sup> See Diana Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side* 46-48 (2006)

<sup>5</sup> See id.; Bill Bishop, *The Great Divide* (2004), available at <<http://www.statesman.com/metrostate/content/special-reports/greatdivide/index.html>>(showing increased uniformity within communities, defined in geographical terms).

To examine those effects, we created an experimental Deliberation Day. On this day, citizens from two cities in Colorado were assembled into five-person groups and asked to deliberate on three of the most contested issues of the time: global warming, affirmative action, and civil unions for same-sex couples. The two cities were Boulder, known to be predominantly liberal, and Colorado Springs, known to be predominantly conservative. Citizens were asked to record their views individually and anonymously; to deliberate together and to reach, if possible, a group decision; and then to record their post-deliberation views individually and anonymously.

What happened on Deliberation Day? The basic answers are simple. First, the groups from Boulder became even more liberal on all three issues; the groups from Colorado Springs became even more conservative. Deliberation thus increased extremism. Second, every group showed increased consensus, and decreased diversity, in the attitudes of their members. Many of the groups showed substantial heterogeneity before they started to deliberate; as a result of a brief period of discussion, group members showed much more agreement, even in the anonymous expressions of their private views. Third, deliberation sharply increased the differences between the views of the largely liberal citizens of Boulder and the largely conservative citizens of Colorado Springs. Before deliberation began, there was considerable overlap between many individuals in the two different cities. After deliberation, the overlap was much smaller.

The simplest statement of our findings is that deliberation among like-minded people produced *ideological amplification* – an amplification of preexisting ideological tendencies, in which group discussion leads to greater extremism. If our experimental findings generalize to the real world, deliberation will lead groups of like-minded people to show increased extremism, decreased internal diversity, and greater divisions across ideological lines. These effects should be expected to occur when groups self-sort in purely geographical terms; they should also occur when the sorting occurs in terms of what people read and watch.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Shanto Iyengar and Richard Morin, Red Media, Blue Media, Washington Post (May 3, 2006), available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/03/AR2006050300865.html>. Iyengar and Morin conducted an experiment in which people were permitted to choose to read accounts, on the same subject, from Fox News, National Public Radio, the British Broadcasting Company, and CNN. They found a great deal of self-sorting. Republicans consistently favored Fox News, especially on politically charged topics, whereas Democrats divided their choices between CNN and NPR. Independents showed no preference. The authors conclude: “The importance of source labels to news consumption will only grow as technology diffuses and consumers increasingly customize their online news menus. As this trend progresses, there is the real possibility that news will no longer serve as a “social glue” that connects all Americans; instead, the very same lines that divide voters will also divide news audiences.”

Ideological amplification of various kinds has been established in other experimental settings, as we shall see; but to date, the phenomenon has been little explored in the context of contested political issues. As we shall also see, our experimental design diverges dramatically from that in related experiments.<sup>7</sup> In key ways, our design corresponds more closely to the real world of social deliberation, both formal and informal.

In this essay, we report the results of our Deliberation Day experiment, attempt to explain those results, and offer some brief remarks on the implications for law and democracy in general. We suggest that the Colorado experiment has analogies in many domains of democratic life. It offers a vivid warning about the consequences of any kind of sorting along political lines, raises fresh doubts about the uncritical celebration of political deliberation, and suggests the need for careful institutional design of well-functioning democratic processes. Let us begin with the details of the study.

## **2. Deliberation Day in Colorado**

### **A. Procedures**

Sixty-three voting-eligible adults between the ages of 20 and 75 participated; thirty-four were women and twenty-nine were men. Participants were recruited from two counties in Colorado for a study on opinions about social and political issues by a professional survey research firm using random digit dialing. They received \$100 for a two-hour session. The Colorado location was selected purely for logistical convenience. A similar recruitment protocol could have been followed in any state or geographical area.

Half of the sample was drawn from Boulder County, which voted 67% for Democratic candidate John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election, and the other half from El Paso County (Colorado Springs), which voted 67% for Republican candidate George Bush. Participants were also screened to have generally liberal (Boulder) or conservative (Colorado Springs) political views.<sup>8</sup> There were a total of five conservative groups and five liberal groups, with five to seven

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<sup>7</sup> See the treatment of James Fishkin's studies, below.

<sup>8</sup> Screening questions included the following. (a) "In general, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?" (b) "Suppose you were in the voting booth and you came across an office for which two candidates . . . were running and you had never heard of either one. Which candidate would you choose-- the Democrat or the Republican--or would you just not vote for that office?" Grades were also assigned to various people on how they would be as president. The conservative names included Dick

members each. In each county, participants came to a central location at a local university for the study. In the first session, each person completed an individual questionnaire about his or her personal views on several topics; participants engaged in this task before being informed that they would be part of a group discussion.

After all participants had completed their individual questionnaires, they were moved to a different room and told that they would discuss some of the issues as a group. The following instructions were read aloud by a study administrator:

“Next you will meet as a group to discuss some of the topics you just considered in the survey. As a group, your job will be to try to reach a consensus among you about each topic. As an individual, your job is to express your personal opinion on each discussion topic, and to attempt to reach a group consensus through discussion. You will have 15 minutes per topic.

One member of your group has been randomly selected to be the ‘monitor.’ The monitor’s job is to (1) read instructions and questions aloud to the group, (2) make sure the group performs each discussion task in the proper order, (3) set the timer at 15 minutes for each discussion and (4) record the group’s final consensus opinion at the end of each discussion.

The monitor will be given 5 numbered envelopes, which should be opened in numerical order. For instance, the monitor will first open Envelope 1, read the question and instructions inside to the group, and then set the timer for 15 minutes. At the end of the 15 minutes, the monitor will record the ‘Group Consensus Opinion’ (if there is consensus), and then open Envelope 2.

Each discussion should last approximately 15 minutes. **DO NOT** take straw votes until you are close to the end of your time – use the full 15 minutes.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Be sure not to close discussion before everyone has had a chance to talk.

If you understand these instructions, you can open Envelope 1 and begin discussion on the first topic.”



Participants discussed the three issues as a group and tried to reach a consensus in fifteen minutes of discussion. After the discussion, they filled out another questionnaire in which they re-rated each issue privately as individuals. All discussions were videotaped.

## B. Materials

Each group discussed the same three issues, and every member rated their personal attitudes before and after discussion on a 1 (Disagree Very Strongly) to 10 (Agree Very Strongly) scale.

Disagree Very Strongly	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Agree Strongly	Agree Very Strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

The three issues were:

1. The United States should sign an international agreement to reduce the greenhouse gases produced in this country that contribute to global warming.
2. When different applicants for the same job or educational opportunity are almost equal on relevant criteria, then the job or admission should be given to members of groups in society that have been discriminated against in the past.
3. Two adults of the same sex should be able to form a "civil union," which would entitle them to certain legal rights such as joint home ownership, or access to the other's retirement or medical benefits.

The first questionnaire also included demographic information and some filler items.

## C. Results

The recruitment process was successful in assembling groups in Boulder that were, on average, significantly more liberal than those in Colorado Springs in their initial opinions (Table 1). When combined across all three issues, individual pre-discussion opinions show substantial differences between the two counties.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 1. Summary of Individual Responses**

### BOULDER (liberal groups)

	mean pre-deliberation	mean post-deliberation	moved down	stayed same	moved up	% groups polarized
Global Warming	9.19	9.44	5	18	8	60%
Affirmative Action	5.81	6.38	6	11	15	80%
Civil Unions	9.22	9.69	1	19	12	100%
Overall	8.07	8.50	12	48	35	80%

### COLORADO SPRINGS (conservative groups)

	mean pre-deliberation	mean post-deliberation	moved down	stayed same	moved up	% groups polarized
Global Warming	5.13	2.97	21	7	3	100%
Affirmative Action	2.84	1.61	19	10	2	100%
Civil Unions	2.48	2.19	8	18	5	80%
Overall	3.48	2.26	48	35	10	93%

We now explore the effects of deliberation, separately analyzing the consequences for individual views and the consequences for group decisions.

1. Individual mean shifts toward extremity. With respect to the views of individuals, the results showed consistent evidence of ideological amplification. Six groups produced individual

<sup>9</sup> A repeated measures ANOVA showed that there were highly significant differences between the two samples in their pre-deliberation opinions on the issues to be discussed:  $F(1,61) = 234.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This difference was separately significant for each of the three issues (each issue  $p < .001$ ).

means that shifted in the same direction as the general leaning of the group for all three issues, and the other four groups did so on two of the three issues. There were a total of thirty group discussions (ten groups X three issues per group). Overall, then, twenty-six of thirty discussions (87%) produced ideological amplification in individual judgments. (An analysis of the medians produced essentially identical results.)

This pattern of amplification is confirmed in a more formal analysis. For all individuals, we subtracted pre-discussion opinions from post-discussion opinions on each issue to produce an attitude shift “difference score.” For the liberal groups, a positive difference would represent amplification and for the conservative groups it would be a negative difference; and this is exactly what we observe (Table 1). This difference between counties is highly significant,  $F(1,61) = 56.1$ ,  $p < .001$ , and is separately significant for each issue (global warming  $p < .001$ , affirmative action  $p < .001$  and civil unions  $p < .02$ ). Thus we clearly observe a shift toward more extreme opinions in groups of both ideologies, but in opposite directions.

There is a small but statistically significant tendency for the conservative groups to shift their opinions more, after discussion, than do the liberal groups ( $p < .01$ ). However, it would be a mistake to pay much attention to this difference. While some groups would undoubtedly shift more than others, the difference found here is probably an artifact of the fact that on global warming and civil unions, liberal groups were so extreme at the beginning that there was little room for them to move after discussion (Table 1).

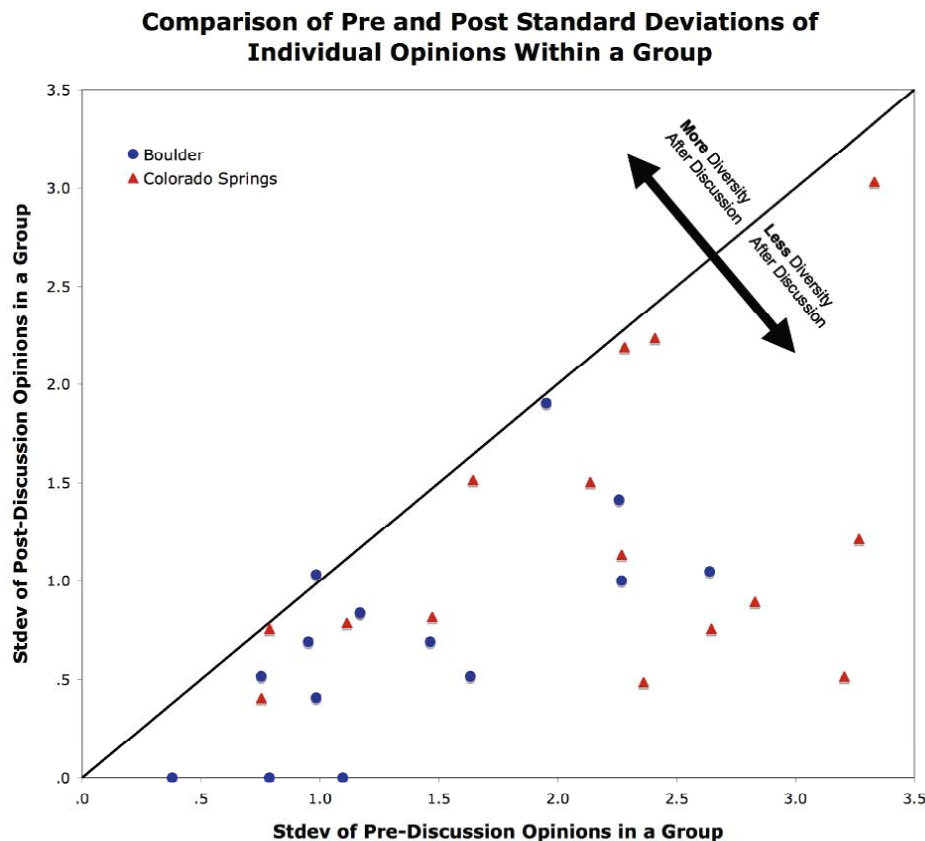
2. Differentiation: the gap between liberals and conservatives. Liberals and conservatives have different opinions and beliefs about many social and political issues, and it is no surprise that they might come to our study with differences on the particularly salient and controversial issues we chose for discussion (see Table 1 and footnote 5 above). What is the effect of deliberation, by like-minded groups, on those differences? The answer is simple: Because of the ideological amplification resulting from the group process, the initial gulf between opinions in the two counties (8.07 for Boulder vs. 3.48 for Colorado Springs, a difference of 4.59) grew far wider (8.50 for Boulder vs. 2.26 for Colorado Springs, a now much larger difference of 6.24,  $p < .001$ ).

3. Reduced internal diversity. Another important question about deliberation is whether participants will converge or diverge during the process. A common method for measuring diversity in opinions is by their standard deviation. For our Deliberation Day, the result is clear:

The diversity of opinion within our groups (as measured by the standard deviation of their ratings on an issue) was markedly lower after deliberation (Figure 1). The standard deviation of individual opinions in the group was lower after deliberation for no fewer than twenty-nine of the thirty group-issue combinations, and fell from a median of 1.17 pre-deliberation to .69 post ( $z = 4.7$ ,  $p < .001$ , by a sign test). In other words, deliberation greatly promoted intra-group homogeneity.

If we look across groups within a county, a similar pattern can be found: the standard deviation among groups in Boulder declined from .67 to .51, and in Colorado Springs from .85 to .76. After deliberation, the opinions of even different groups of people from the same place were more similar -- despite not talking with each other. Overall, then, deliberation created more homogeneity of opinion within a location.

**Figure 1. Opinion Diversity Declines After Deliberation**



4. Group decisions. What is the relationship between individual views, pre-deliberation, and the views of deliberating groups? This question is of independent interest, because much of

the time, what matters is what groups think and do as such, not only what their members think and do as individuals. The basic answer is that group decisions were more extreme than the mean or median of pre-deliberation judgments.

Overall, twenty-five of thirty groups (83%) reached a consensus decision on a numerical scale response within fifteen minutes – ten of ten on global warming, seven of ten on affirmative action, and eight of ten on civil unions. Among the twenty five group-issue combinations on which a consensus was reached, nineteen groups (76%) reached a consensus decision that was more extreme than the mean pre-deliberation individual opinion of group members (the same figure holds for median pre-deliberation responses).

### **3. Explanations and Implications**

On Deliberation Day, liberals grew more liberal, and conservatives grew more conservative; within groups, internal diversity was diminished; and the gap between liberals and conservatives grew. Why did this happen?

#### **A. Conformity, Ideological Amplification, and Group Polarization**

1. *Consensus and polarization in general.* When people discuss their beliefs and preferences in groups, consensus is almost certain to increase. The increase in conformity occurs for two reasons. The first involves basic conformity or herding habits, which lead people to defer to the opinions of others (whether or not they actually agree with them).<sup>10</sup> The second involves the fact that people learn from the information and views of others; as a result, discussion leads to changes in points of view.<sup>11</sup> Of course mere deference, in public, to the views of others would not be expected to affect anonymous statements of opinion, and indeed we observe greater diversity in those statements than in the views of groups as such. But when a group member has signed onto an official view, the private statement might well be affected, simply because it is

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<sup>10</sup> Solomon Asch, Opinions and Social Pressure, in READINGS ABOUT THE SOCIAL ANIMAL 13 (Elliott Aronson ed., 7th ed. 1995); Leon Festinger, A Theory of Social Comparison Processes 1954; 7 HUM. REL. 117, Muzafer Sherif, An Experimental Approach to the Study of Attitudes, 1 SOCIOMETRY 90 (1937). A good outline can be found in LEE ROSS & RICHARD NISBETT, THE PERSON AND THE SITUATION 28-30 (1991).

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Gigone & Reid Hastie, Proper Analysis of the Accuracy of Group Judgment, 121 PSYCHOL. BULL. 149, 161-62 (1997); Reid Hastie, Review Essay: Experimental Evidence of Group Accuracy, in INFORMATION POOLING AND GROUP DECISION MAKING 129, 133-46 (Bernard Grofman & Guillermo Owen eds., 1986).

jarring to maintain a view in private that diverges from what one has said in public.<sup>12</sup> In any event group members who learn from one another are likely to be affected in their anonymous statements as well as their public ones, and hence we observe a significant increase in internal consensus as a result of deliberation. That phenomenon is familiar in groups of many different sorts, including political parties, religious organizations, university faculties, labor unions, and corporate boards.

More strikingly, a well-known effect of discussion is group polarization, by which deliberating groups end up in a more extreme position in line with their pre-deliberation tendencies.<sup>13</sup> On Deliberation Day, group polarization occurred in the particular form of ideological amplification. Indeed, we find unmistakable evidence of that phenomenon in the political domain.

This is a noteworthy finding, because few studies of group polarization involve politics at all. The original experiments involved risk-taking behavior, with a demonstration that risk-inclined people became still more risk-inclined as a result of deliberation.<sup>14</sup> With respect to business-related decisions, groups seemed to be willing to take risks that their individual members would avoid.<sup>15</sup> Later studies showed that under some conditions the “risky shift” could be a “cautious shift,” as risk-averse people become more averse to certain risks after they talk with one another.<sup>16</sup> It was readily apparent that the direction of the shift – toward greater risk-taking or greater caution -- was related to the domain of experience in which the risky choice was embedded. The principal examples of “cautious shifts” involved the decision whether to marry and the decision whether to board a plane despite severe abdominal pain, possibly requiring medical attention.<sup>17</sup> In these cases, deliberating groups moved toward caution, as did the members who composed them.

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<sup>12</sup> On the general phenomenon, see Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies* (1997).

<sup>13</sup> See ROGER BROWN, *SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: THE SECOND EDITION* (1985); Cass R. Sunstein, *The Law of Group Polarization*, 10 *J. POL. PHIL.* 175 (2002).

<sup>14</sup> See Stoner, J. A. F., *A Comparison of Individual and Group Decision Involving Risk* (1961) (unpublished Master's thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> Serge Moscovici & Marisa Zavalloni, *The Group as a Polarizer of Attitudes*, *J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL.* 12, 125-135 (1969).

<sup>17</sup> See *id.*

More careful analysis demonstrated that the best predictor of the direction of the shift turned out to be the pre-deliberation median.<sup>18</sup> Where group members were disposed toward risk, a risky shift was observed. Where members were disposed toward caution, a cautious shift was observed. Hence group polarization refers to the tendency of deliberating groups to shift in a more extreme position in line with their pre-deliberation tendency. Ideological amplification, as we use the term here, is best understood as a special case of group polarization.

In the behavioral laboratory, group polarization has been found for a remarkably wide range of questions. Group deliberation produces more pronounced views on the attractiveness of people shown in slides; it also occurs for obscure factual questions, such as how far Sodom (on the Dead Sea) is below sea level.<sup>19</sup> Even burglars show a shift, in the cautious direction, when they discuss prospective criminal endeavors.<sup>20</sup>

In the domain of law, there is considerable evidence of group polarization as well. Group polarization occurs for judgments of guilt and sentencing in criminal cases.<sup>21</sup> In punitive damages cases, deliberating juries have been found to polarize, producing awards that are often higher than those of the median juror before deliberation begins.<sup>22</sup> With respect to legal questions, panels of appellate judges polarize too; both Republican and Democratic appointees show stronger ideological tendencies when sitting on panels consisting entirely of judges appointed by presidents of the same political party.<sup>23</sup> There is also evidence of group polarization in issues that bear directly on politics. As a result of deliberation, French people become more distrustful of the United States and its intentions with respect to foreign aid.<sup>24</sup> So too, feminism can become more attractive to women after internal discussions.<sup>25</sup> White people who are not

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<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> Paul Cromwell et al., Group Effects on Decision-Making by Burglars, 69 *PSYCHOL. REP.* 579, 586 (1991).

<sup>21</sup> Martin F. Kaplan, Group-Induced Polarization in Simulated Juries, 2 *PERSONALITY AND SOC. PSYCHOL. BULL.* 63 (1976); Martin F. Kaplan, Discussion Polarization Effects in a Modified Jury Decision Paradigm: Informational Influences, 40 *SOCIOMETRY* 262 (1977).

<sup>22</sup> See David Schkade et al., Deliberating About Dollars: The Severity Shift, 100 *COLUM L. REV.* 1139 (2000).

<sup>23</sup> See CASS R. SUNSTEIN, DAVID SCHKADE, LISA ELLMAN, & ANDRES SAWICKI, ARE JUDGES POLITICAL? AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE FEDERAL JUDICIARY (2006); Cass R. Sunstein, David Schkade, & Lisa Ellman, Ideological Voting on Federal Courts of Appeals: A Preliminary Investigation, 90 *VA. L. REV.* 301 (2004).

<sup>24</sup> BROWN, *supra* note, at 224.

<sup>25</sup> Norbert L. Kerr et al., Bias in Judgment: Comparing Individuals and Groups, 103 *PSYCHOL. REV.* 687, 689, 691–93 (1996).

inclined to show racial prejudice show less prejudice after deliberation than before; but white people who are inclined to show such prejudice show more prejudice after deliberation.<sup>26</sup>

2. *Sorting vs. mixing.* On our Deliberation Day, people were sorted into like-minded groups, and geography greatly simplified this sorting. Such sorting was a central part of our design, because we were interested in the effects of deliberations within and across like-minded groups. As we have suggested, actual sorting appears to be increasing in geographical terms, as communities within the United States are becoming more uniform in their political commitments.<sup>27</sup> In addition, virtual sorting, across political lines, is far easier with the rise of more specialized communications options, and there is evidence that such sorting is also occurring.<sup>28</sup>

But it is natural to ask what would have happened if there had been a degree of mixing – if people from Colorado Springs had participated in groups with people from Boulder. Mixing might have occurred, as it often does occur, voluntarily. Alternatively, mixing might have been engineered by the experimental design. In terms of ultimate outcomes, existing work suggests two possibilities. First, and most likely, the pre-deliberation median would have been predictive here as well, in the sense that it would predict both the group’s decision and the shift in individual views.<sup>29</sup> Suppose, for example, that a group of five people tended to oppose civil unions for same-sex couples, because four members sharply opposed them and two members were mildly in favor of them. In that event, the group would probably move in the direction of greater opposition, notwithstanding a degree of internal heterogeneity. What matters is the pre-deliberation median, not the existence or extent of such heterogeneity.<sup>30</sup> Note in this regard that many of our groups began with some antecedent heterogeneity, and they nonetheless moved in the way predicted by previous group polarization research. As we shall shortly see, this conclusion follows from an understanding of the sources of polarization.

The second possibility is that positions will be entrenched, with group members showing a reluctance to listen to those with identifiably competing positions. Polarization may not be

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<sup>26</sup> See *id.*

<sup>27</sup> See note *supra*.

<sup>28</sup> See note *supra*.

<sup>29</sup> See BROWN, *supra* note.

<sup>30</sup> See Schkade et al., *supra* note (finding that the pre-deliberation median predicts movements, even when there is considerable internal diversity).



found when the relevant group consists of individuals drawn equally from two extremes,<sup>31</sup> and “familiar and long-debated issues do not depolarize easily.”<sup>32</sup> We have said that ideological amplification generally occurs on the federal judiciary. But on two issues -- capital punishment and abortion -- Republican appointees are not affected by sitting with two Democratic appointees, and Democratic appointees are impervious to the influences of two Republican appointees.<sup>33</sup> Within deliberating groups, entrenchment is more likely if group membership is specifically announced or otherwise made salient. For most political issues, on which people do not have rigidly determined positions, social influences and hence polarization are more typical.

Mixed groups have, however, been shown to have two desirable effects. First, exposure to competing positions generally increases political tolerance.<sup>34</sup> After hearing a variety of views, including those that diverge from their own, many people are more respectful of alternative positions and more willing to consider them to be plausible or legitimate. An important result of seeing a political conflict as legitimate is a “greater willingness to extend civil liberties to even those groups whose political views one dislikes a great deal.”<sup>35</sup> Second, mixing increases the likelihood that people will be aware of competing rationales and see that their own arguments might be met by counterarguments.<sup>36</sup> This effect is far more pronounced, however, for those who antecedently show a “civil orientation toward conflict,” in the sense that they are committed to a degree of social harmony and are willing to acknowledge, in advance, that dissenting views should be expressed.<sup>37</sup> These desirable effects of deliberation within mixed groups will not be realized on any Deliberation Day in which people are sorted, or sort themselves, into politically homogeneous groups.

## **B. Explaining Polarization**

Why does group polarization occur? There are several reasons.<sup>38</sup> The first and perhaps most important stems from the fact that group members offer information. In Colorado, as

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<sup>31</sup> See H. Burnstein, *Persuasion As Argument Processing*, in *GROUP DECISION MAKING* (H. Brandstetter, J.H. Davis, & G. Stocker-Kreichgauer eds., 1982).

<sup>32</sup> BROWN, *supra* note, at 226.

<sup>33</sup> See SUNSTEIN ET AL., *supra* note.

<sup>34</sup> See Mutz, *supra* note, at 76-77.

<sup>35</sup> Mutz, *supra* note, at 85.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 74-76.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at 75.

<sup>38</sup> See BROWN, *supra* note, at 212-22, 226-45; Robert Baron et al., *Social Corroboration and Opinion Extremity*, 32 *J. EXPERIMENTAL SOC. PSYCHOL.* 537 (1996).

elsewhere, group members show a willingness to consider both the conclusions and the arguments that are offered in the course of deliberation. With respect to same-sex marriage, for example, skeptics made slippery slope arguments, worrying about the risk that if marriage is not limited to one man and one woman, further changes in the institution will be difficult to prevent. For purposes of understanding shifts in views, the key point is that in any group with some initial inclination, the views of most people in the group will inevitably be skewed in the direction of that inclination. Suppose, for example, that most people in a group believe that an international treaty to control global warming is a bad idea. As a statistical matter, the arguments favoring that initial position will be more numerous than the arguments pointing in the other direction. Individuals will have heard of some, but not all, of the arguments that emerge from group deliberation; perhaps they will not have heard concerns about the expense of international controls, the dangers of ceding controls over energy policy, the possibility that global warming will have only modest negative effects for the United States. As a result of hearing the various arguments, deliberation will lead people toward a more extreme point in line with what group members initially believed. Through this process, many minds can polarize, and in exactly the same direction. Informational influences had an evident influence on Deliberation Day in Colorado.

The second explanation stresses the close links between confidence, extremism, and corroboration by others.<sup>39</sup> If people lack confidence, they will tend toward the middle, and hence avoid the extremes. As people gain confidence, they usually are willing to become more extreme in their beliefs. Agreement from others tends to increase confidence, and in this way like-minded people, having deliberated with one another, become more sure that they are right and thus more extreme. In a wide variety of experimental contexts, people's opinions have been shown to become more extreme simply because their views have been corroborated, and because they have become more confident after learning that others share their views.<sup>40</sup> A process of this kind undoubtedly occurred in Colorado. Within both liberal and conservative groups, some people began with a degree of tentativeness, in a way that moved them toward the middle of the relevant scale. After hearing both conclusions and arguments that fortified their original inclinations, they moved, with remarkable regularity, to a more extreme position.

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<sup>39</sup> See Baron et al., *supra* note, at 557–59 (showing that corroboration increases confidence and hence extremism).

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 541, 546–47, 557 (concluding that corroboration of one's views has effects on opinion extremity).

The third explanation involves social influences.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes people's publicly stated views are, to a greater or lesser extent, a function of how they want to present themselves. People usually want to be perceived favorably by other group members. Once they hear what others believe, some will adjust their positions at least slightly in the direction of the dominant position, to present themselves in the way that they prefer. In a liberal group, for example, movements in the liberal direction will be favored and, for this reason, all members might end up leaning somewhat more to the left. This explanation fits well with the changes that we observed.

A great deal of work suggests that group polarization is heightened when people have a sense of shared identity, and this point helps to suggest yet another explanation of polarization.<sup>42</sup> People may polarize because they are attempting to conform to the position that they see as typical within their own group. If their group's particular identity is especially salient or important, the in-group norms "are likely to become more extreme so as to be more clearly differentiated from outgroup norms, and the within-group polarization will be enhanced."<sup>43</sup> When Democrats or Republicans become polarized, the desire to ensure intergroup differentiation is likely to be a motive. In our own experiment, involving global warming, affirmative action, and civil unions, many groups were all the more prone to polarization when their internal discussions referred to some group with whom they disagreed, such as "the liberals."

### **C. The Limits of Polarization**

We have traced four social-cognitive processes that feed into the the polarization effect: informational pressure, conformity effects, social influences, and group membership. An understanding of these processes suggest that ideological amplification is highly likely to occur on Deliberation Day. It also suggests the circumstances in which ideological amplification might be dampened or prevented. In particular, interventions that involve external administrators, or independent flows of information, might produce different kinds of shifts.

In highly influential work, for example, James Fishkin has pioneered the idea of a "deliberative opinion poll," in which small groups, consisting of highly diverse individuals, are

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<sup>41</sup> See *id.*

<sup>42</sup> See BROWN, *supra* note, at 209–11; JOHN C. TURNER ET AL., REDISCOVERING THE SOCIAL GROUP: A SELF-CATEGORIZATION THEORY 159–170 (1987); Joel Cooper et al., Attitudes, Norms, and Social Groups, in BLACKWELL HANDBOOK OF GROUP PSYCHOLOGY: GROUP PROCESSES 259, 269–70 (Michael A. Hogg & R. Scott Tindale eds., 2001).

asked to come together and to deliberate about various issues.<sup>44</sup> Fishkin has conducted deliberative opinion polls on numerous questions and in several nations, including the United States, England, and Australia. Fishkin finds some noteworthy shifts in individual views, in a way that suggests that deliberation is having a significant effect; but he does not find a systematic tendency toward ideological amplification. In his studies, individuals shift both toward and away from the median of pre-deliberation views. In England, for example, deliberation led to reduced interest in using imprisonment as a tool for combating crime.<sup>45</sup> The percentage believing that “sending more offenders to prison” is an effective way to prevent crime went down from 57% to 38%; the percentage believing that fewer people should be sent to prison increased from 29% to 44%; belief in the effectiveness of “stiffer sentences” was reduced from 78% to 65%.<sup>46</sup> Similar shifts were shown in the direction of greater enthusiasm for procedural rights of defendants and increased willingness to explore alternatives to prison. In other experiments with the deliberative opinion poll, shifts included a mixture of findings, with larger percentages of individuals concluding that legal pressures should be increased on fathers for child support (from 70% to 85%) and that welfare and health care should be turned over to the states (from 56% to 66%).<sup>47</sup>

On some issues, the effect of deliberation was to create an increase in the intensity with which people held their pre-existing convictions.<sup>48</sup> These findings, a form of ideological amplification, are consistent with the prediction of group polarization. But in deliberative opinion polls, this was hardly a uniform pattern. On some questions, deliberation increased the percentage of people holding a minority position (with, for example, a jump from 36% to 57% of people favoring policies making divorce “harder to get”).<sup>49</sup> These changes are very different

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<sup>43</sup>Brown, *supra* note, at 210.

<sup>44</sup> See JAMES S. FISHKIN, *THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE: PUBLIC OPINION AND DEMOCRACY* (1995).

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* at 206-07.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> James S. Fishkin & Robert C. Luskin, *Bringing Deliberation to the Democratic Dialogue*, in *THE POLL WITH A HUMAN FACE* 3, 29-31 (Maxwell McCombs & Amy Reynolds eds., 1999).

<sup>48</sup> See *id.* at 22-23 (showing a jump, on a scale of 1 to 4, from 3.51 to 3.58 in intensity of commitment to reducing the deficit); a jump, on a scale of 1 to 3, from 2.71 to 2.85 in intensity of support for greater spending on education; showing a jump, on a scale of 1 to 3, from 1.95 to 2.16, in commitment to aiding American business interests abroad).

<sup>49</sup> *Id.* at 23. See also *id.* at 22 (showing an increase, on a scale of 1 to 3, from 1.40 to 1.59 in commitment to spending on foreign aid; also showing a decrease, on a scale of 1 to 3, from 2.38 to 2.27 in commitment to spending on social security).

from what we observed in Colorado, and they are not what would be predicted by group polarization.

At least three factors distinguish the deliberative opinion poll from our Deliberation Day. First, Fishkin's groups were overseen by a moderator, concerned to ensure a level of openness and likely to alter some of the dynamics discussed here. Second, and probably more important, Fishkin's studies presented participants with a set of written materials that attempted to be balanced and that contained detailed arguments supporting sides. The likely consequence would be to move people in different directions from those that would be expected by simple group discussion, unaffected by external materials inevitably containing a degree of authority. Indeed, it would be easy to produce a set of such materials that would predictably shift people's views in the direction favored by the experimenter. And even without a self-conscious attempt at manipulation, or a general effort to be neutral and fair, the materials will undoubtedly affect the direction that deliberation will take group members. Third, Fishkin's participants did not deliberate to a group decision, and the absence of such a decision probably attenuated the influences discussed here. We have suggested that when individuals commit themselves to a group judgment, it is likely that their individual responses, even if subsequent and anonymous, will be affected by the commitment. To indicate a private judgment that diverges from one's own public judgment is certainly possible, but it produces a degree of dissonance. To be sure, group polarization has been found after mere exposure to the views of other group members, but it is typically smaller than after discussion and group judgment.<sup>50</sup>

These three factors undoubtedly contribute to Fishkin's results. It is difficult to know, in advance and in the abstract, how any particular group will respond to any particular set of materials, even one that attempts to be balanced; everything depends on the nature of the group and the nature (and labeling) of the materials. And it would be valuable to attempt to conduct deliberative opinion polls with testable hypotheses – suggesting, for example, that deliberating groups might reach the right answer on questions that have answers that can be shown to be right. Our only suggestion here is that on political issues, the likely result for deliberating groups, unaccompanied by an external moderator or a set of independent arguments, is amplification of preexisting views, especially if group members are asked to reach a collective decision.

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<sup>50</sup> See Brown, *supra* note.

## D. Implications

Does ideological amplification lead to accurate or inaccurate answers? Do deliberating groups err when they polarize? No general answer would make sense. A great deal will turn on the relationship between the correct answer and the group's pre-deliberation tendencies. If the group is leaning toward the right answer, polarization might lead them directly to the truth. But there are no guarantees here. When individuals are leaning in a direction that is mistaken, the mistake will be amplified by group deliberation.

Consider some results from domains in which mistakes and biases can be identified without taking a controversial stand on normative issues. With respect to questions with correct answers, deliberating groups tend to do about as well as or slightly better than their average member -- but not as well as their best members, and they do not reliably answer correctly.<sup>51</sup> Group polarization occurs when jury members are biased as a result of pretrial publicity; the jury as a group becomes more biased than individual jurors were.<sup>52</sup> This is polarization in action, and it produces large blunders. When most people are prone to make conjunction errors (believing that A and B are more likely together than A or B alone), group processes lead to more errors, not fewer.<sup>53</sup> Hence it is possible to show that in many domains, the consequence of deliberation is to perpetuate and even to amplify individual mistakes.<sup>54</sup> When individuals show a high degree of bias, groups are likely to be more biased, not less biased, than their median or average member.<sup>55</sup>

More generally, a comprehensive study demonstrated that majority pressures can be powerful even for factual questions on which some people know the right answer.<sup>56</sup> The study involved 1200 people, forming groups of six, five, and four members. Individuals were asked true-false questions, involving art, poetry, public opinion, geography, economics, and politics.

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<sup>51</sup> See Gigone & Hastie, *supra* note, at 161-62 (summarizing findings that groups do not perform as well as best members); Hastie, *supra* note, at 133-46. To the same effect, see also Garold Stasser & Beth Dietz-Uhler, *Collective Choice, Judgment, and Problem Solving*, in *BLACKWELL HANDBOOK OF GROUP PSYCHOLOGY: GROUP PROCESSES* *supra* note 31, at 31, 49-50 (collecting findings).

<sup>52</sup> Robert J. MacCoun, *Comparing Micro and Macro Rationality*, in *JUDGMENTS, DECISIONS, AND PUBLIC POLICY* 116, 127-28 (Rajeev Gowda & Jeffrey C. Fox eds., 2002).

<sup>53</sup> Kerr et al., *supra* note, at 692.

<sup>54</sup> William P. Bottom et al., *Propagation of Individual Bias Through Group Judgment: Error in the Treatment of Asymmetrically Informative Signals*, 25 *J. RISK & UNCERTAINTY* 147, 152-54 (2002).

<sup>55</sup> See MacCoun, *supra* note.

<sup>56</sup> Robert L. Thorndike, *The Effect of Discussion Upon the Correctness of Group Decisions, When the Factor of Majority Influence Is Allowed For*, 9 *J. Soc. Psychol.* 343, 348-61 (1938) (exploring effects of both correctness and

They were then asked to assemble into groups, which discussed the questions and produced answers by consensus. The clearest result was that the views of the majority played a big role in determining the group's answers. When a majority of individuals in the group gave the right answer, the group's decision followed the majority in no less than 79% of the cases. The truth played a role too, but a lesser one. If a majority of individuals in the group gave the wrong answer, the group decision nonetheless moved toward the majority position in 56% of the cases. Hence the truth did have an influence—79% is higher than 56%—and this is a definite point in favor of deliberation. But the majority's judgment, and not the truth, was the dominant influence. And because the majority was influential even when wrong, the average group decision was right only slightly more often than the average individual decision (66% vs. 62%).

We do not contend that every Deliberation Day will have the same results as Deliberation Day in Colorado. But in any nation that shows political segregation along geographic lines, similar outcomes should be expected. It is plausible to suggest that some nations, including the United States, operate to some extent as a collection of special interest enclaves<sup>57</sup> in which people are especially likely to associate and deliberate with others who agree with them. To the extent that migration patterns are now producing more homogeneous subcultures,<sup>58</sup> routine exposure to diverse opinions may become less likely. Similar results might be produced by the rise of highly specialized sources of information, above all the Internet, which makes it increasingly easy for people to avoid opinions that differ from theirs.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, there is a well-documented tendency for people to seek information that confirms their existing beliefs and to avoid or devalue disconfirming information (“confirmation bias”).<sup>60</sup> The ease of finding confirmatory evidence is likely to accelerate the balkanization of opinion.

As Fishkin's studies suggest, it should be possible to structure deliberation in such a way as to diminish the likelihood of polarization; neutral arbiters, providing information and helping to manage discussion, might have a substantial effect. Various efforts to “prime” participants might influence the effects of deliberation. If participants are reminded of the attacks on 9/11, or of events that cast a favorable or unfavorable light on certain positions or even officials, they are

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majority pressure on group judgments).

<sup>57</sup> See note supra; Alan I. Abramowitz, Brad Alexander & Matthew Gunning, [Incumbency, Redistricting, and the Decline of Competition in U.S. House Elections](#), 68 J. OF POL. 75 (2006).

<sup>58</sup> See note supra.

<sup>59</sup> See note supra; CASS R. SUNSTEIN, REPUBLIC.COM (2000) for discussion.

likely to be affected, perhaps in a way that will diminish the effects found here. But whatever the effects of such priming, Deliberation Day in Colorado offers important cautionary notes about the consequences of deliberation on political judgments.

#### **4. Conclusion**

On Deliberation Day, liberals became more liberal and conservatives became more conservative. On some of the largest issues of the day, discussions by like-minded people fueled greater extremism, and also increased divisions between liberals and conservatives. At the same time, both liberal and conservative groups became more homogeneous; deliberation reduced internal diversity. There is every reason to believe that results of this kind occur not simply in experimental settings, but in many domains in which citizens engage in political discussions with one another – especially to the extent that they sort themselves into actual or virtual groups of the like-minded. Those who seek to foster broader deliberation, or to celebrate deliberative conceptions of democracy, might do well to keep these points in view.

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<sup>60</sup> See Raymond S. Nickerson, Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises, 2 REV. GEN. PSYCHOL. 175 (1998).