Pre-Analysis Plan

Christina Ladam[1]

Title: Making Deliberation Work: Reason-giving and Information Processing

Project Description: Despite growing interest in deliberative initiatives, there remains a gap between theoretical work on deliberation and the empirical findings. One area that deserves greater attention is how people process information within a deliberative setting. When processing information provided by others within a political conversation, participants may exhibit biased motivated reasoning whereby they denigrate opinions that do not confirm their previously held beliefs and accept those opinions that confirm their beliefs. While the growing empirical literature on deliberation has noted the presence of certain biases, this work does not always speak to insights garnered from public opinion and political psychology demonstrating the existence of situations wherein people may be accuracy motivated in their reasoning.

Reason-giving rules within a deliberative session require participants to provide the reasoning behind their stated political opinions within a structured conversation. The use of a trained discussion facilitator helps to administer those rules. I argue that these rules as enforced by a trained discussion facilitator promote political learning as well as accuracy-oriented motivated reasoning. Additionally, I argue that people will be more likely to discuss their experiences with deliberation when deliberation includes reason-giving rules. Using experimental deliberative sessions varying the use of a trained facilitator, I demonstrate that deliberative institutions can be structured in ways so as to overcome biased reasoning. Additionally, I argue that participants will be more likely to discuss their experience within their discussion networks when reason-giving rules are enforced. This project sheds light on one potential mechanism to encourage the formation of qualified policy preferences, helping to overcome the starkly partisan thinking evidenced in a polarized political climate. Moreover, the findings will help to open up the "black box" of deliberation, addressing the theoretical and empirical divide within deliberation research.

Expectations:

- Participants will be more likely to moderate their opinions when deliberative sessions require reason-giving enforced by a trained facilitator.
- Participants will experience greater political learning when deliberative sessions require reason-giving enforced by a trained facilitator.
- Participants will be more likely to discuss their experience in the deliberative session when those sessions require reason-giving.

Sample: The sample for this experiment will be drawn from the undergraduate student population at the University of Colorado Boulder in the spring of 2018. I will recruit ap-

[1]PhD Candidate, University of Colorado Boulder, christina.ladam@colorado.edu

proximately 160 students to take part in the experiment for about 80 students per treatment condition. Each participant will be paid a total of $10 for completed participation.

Experimental Design: After completing a pre-test survey, participants will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions to take part in a small-group discussion about a political issue — here, gun policy. The treatment condition features a trained facilitator enforcing reason-giving rules during the discussion. Under the control condition, a person simply observes the session without engaging with participants or enforcing any rules. Both groups will discuss the same issue and will be provided with the same information, though the prompt given to the treatment condition states that participants should provide reasons for their stated opinions. After the discussions, participants will complete a post-test survey. Two weeks later, participants will be asked to complete a follow-up survey. Additionally, each of the discussions will be filmed to better understand the "black box" of what actually happens during deliberative sessions.

Analysis: To test my expectations, I will focus on multiple measures and multiple data sources:

- A main aspect of the analysis will focus on differences in pre- and post-test opinions on views on gun policy. Based on my first hypothesis, I expect to see greater moderation in opinion under the treatment condition.

- I also expect to see increased discussion within participants' networks under the treatment condition. This will be measured comparing differences in pre- and follow-up survey measures of political discussion within participants' discussion networks.

- Addressing the "black box" of deliberation, I will analyze the recordings of the discussion sessions themselves. I will look for behaviors consistent with accuracy motivated reasoning to better understand the causal mechanism, such as the patterns of conversation and expressions of agreement or disagreement.