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Benefits of Hearing the Other Side

Theorists extol the virtues of political talk, foundations spend millions of dollars to encourage people of opposing views to talk to one another, and civic journalism advocates plan special meetings to foster more political conversations across lines of difference. Yet what do we really know about beneficial outcomes of political talk as it occurs in day to day life? More to the point, do we have convincing evidence that hearing the other side improves individuals or societies in some tangible way?

For the most part, arguments for the centrality of political discussion among ordinary Americans have been highly theoretical in nature. This is true in two senses. Not only are these expectations derived from various brands of political theory as outlined in Chapter 1, but with few exceptions they remain entirely hypothetical expectations. The same is true with respect to the benefits of hearing the other side, a subset of the many claims about the benefits of political talk.

As deliberation and deliberative democracy have become buzzwords for what democracy needs, scholars have become increasingly interested in documenting and harnessing this supposedly beneficial force. A spate of recent studies has attempted to manipulate deliberation by bringing people together to talk in small groups.¹ These studies

have provided many new insights on what happens when people are compelled to talk to one another about controversial issues, but the broad and variable nature of their interactions has made it difficult to determine which aspects of the experience are producing the observed effects. Deliberation is a conglomeration of many variables, and disentangling their effects when they are varied simultaneously is often impossible.

Some of the earliest and best-known examples of empirical research on deliberation are from Fishkin’s specially organized deliberative forums. “Deliberative polling,” a registered trademark for Fishkin’s particular version of a national town meeting, involves a random sample of citizens who are initially interviewed by telephone about the public policy issues that will form the theme of the deliberative poll. Respondents are then invited to gather somewhere in the country for a weekend in order to discuss the issues, with all expenses paid by the organizers. Participants who agree are sent briefing materials on the topic of the deliberative poll in advance. The weekend gathering then gives participants opportunities to talk to experts and to political leaders, as well as to one another. At the end of the weekend, participants are surveyed again.²

Deliberative forums have the advantage of allowing pretest and posttest measures of likely effects, and of providing an unusual degree of control over the types of interactions in which citizens engage. Researchers know precisely who talks to whom and what they both say. So far so good from the perspective of a strong research design. Unfortunately, even studies of deliberative polls have significant shortcomings as tests of deliberative theory. To be fair, many of these problems are not unique to studies of deliberative events. The well-worn axiom that all research designs are flawed in some respect is as valid here as in any other area. But what is especially troubling about tests based on deliberative polls is that they are often lacking both in the strength of causal inferences that may be drawn from them (i.e., internal validity) and in the extent to which they can be generalized to deliberation as it occurs naturally (i.e., external validity). Given the tremendous effort and expense that such events require, one would hope that they

could provide good leverage on at least one of these two important dimensions.\(^3\)

One difficulty with drawing causal inferences about the power of deliberation from deliberative polling is that several independent variables are manipulated at the same time. Those who agree to participate are sent briefing materials in advance, for example. They are exposed to still more information from experts and politicians at the event itself. Ultimately, one cannot determine whether the benefits that accrue are due to information passed on by the political elites, informational materials distributed by organizers in advance of the events themselves, and/or the deliberation that takes place among participants during the weekend. In essence, “deliberation” has been redefined as an entire package of interventions, some of which are part and parcel of deliberative theory and others of which are not.

One might ask, “Who cares whether the manipulations are confounded, so long as they work?” But knowing which element or elements in this package of treatments has an impact results in strikingly different interpretations. For example, if the educational materials that are mailed out are responsible for desirable effects, then what we have is an argument in favor of public information campaigns. On the other hand, if the presence of political experts and issue elites at the deliberative sessions is what drives the desirable outcomes, then we have an argument for a more top-down view of how democracy might operate most beneficially. Finally, if positive outcomes are a function of participants’ talking to others of equal status in a civil setting, then we would have evidence in support of deliberation as a means to enrich citizens. Unfortunately, it is unclear from research to date whether results are due to the educational efforts associated with the polls, the direct personal attention political elites give to ordinary Americans during these events, the deliberation among citizens, the extent of cross-cutting conversation in those deliberations, or some other aspect of the forums.

Potential confounding is problematic for the interpretation of findings, and the design of deliberative polls exacerbates the problem.

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\(^3\) For a recent example of a study of the effects of deliberation on opinions, see Barabas (2004).
Participants are interviewed before the deliberative weekend, as well as after it, and any change that occurs from one time to the next is attributed to deliberation. Even if one is willing to treat the entire package of activities associated with these events as "deliberation," a one-group pretest-posttest design does not easily permit causal claims. Without a control group of some kind who did not deliberate, it is easy to see how such changes might come about with or without deliberation. Consider deliberative polling that takes place before an election. With or without such an event, one would expect political interest at time 2 to be higher than at time 1, if only because the election is closer at hand.

Some studies of deliberative events have constructed "control groups" after the fact, using those who refused to participate in the deliberative weekend, or concurrent random samples of the population. But self-selection and the resulting noncomparable groups make this solution less desirable. Unfortunately, the real solution—a study in which those who are willing to participate are randomly assigned to attend or not—has yet to be done. Some recent work comes much closer to this goal, but we have yet to disentangle the effects of informational materials, expert advice, and deliberation itself successfully.

Deliberative polls also face problems of external validity. Even if the beneficial effects could safely be attributed to a deliberative weekend, what would that say about deliberation as it happens in the naturally occurring world? How similar is this experience to the one people might have in day to day life? Americans report that they are very unlikely to talk about politics at public meetings. But those who accept an invitation to a deliberative poll are obliged to do so. Although they are, nonetheless, a demographically representative sample, the generalizability of findings from specially orchestrated forums to everyday political life is an open question. As noted, the presence of briefing materials, expert panels, group moderators, and the like, "make the formal on-site deliberations very different from naturally occurring discussion in the real world." Unless a significant proportion of the American

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4 Cook & Campbell (1979, p. 99).
7 Farrar et al. (2003, p. 4).
population participated in a deliberative event for each political choice they were asked to make, we would not expect deliberative polling, or deliberative meetings more generally, to have a large impact on the quality of mass opinion. The expense of such an undertaking would be well beyond the realm of the practical. Moreover, by some definitions participation of this kind would not count as deliberation, which is supposed to be something citizens do for and among themselves, rather than something elites induce them to do.

Beyond deliberative forums and deliberative polls, still other strategies have been used to gauge the impact of political conversation in other settings, particularly in dyads or small groups. In an extensive review of this literature, Mendelberg sounds a note of caution about expecting consistently positive outcomes from deliberation.\(^8\) Instead, her overview suggests that beneficial effects are highly contingent. Attempts to deliberate can sometimes be helpful, and sometimes not, depending upon a host of other factors. These findings are also mixed and inconclusive because of differences in what one “counts” as deliberation, and in what kinds of outcomes are deemed beneficial. Opinion change, for example, is often cited as evidence that deliberation “works,” but it is unclear under what conditions one should deem this change beneficial versus harmful.

In order to understand which aspects of the deliberation “package” are important, they need to be unpacked into smaller, more specifiable components. This appears to be the only strategy with the potential to make sense of these inconsistent findings. And although it would be naive to expect scholars to reach agreement on a single definition of the necessary and sufficient conditions for deliberation, I think it is realistic to expect that scholars may come to understand the beneficial roles played by different elements of political and social interaction. For these reasons, in examining potential beneficial effects, I focus strictly on one dimension of deliberative experience – the extent to which political conversations expose people to “the other side.” Overall, this chapter suggests that despite the disappointing frequency of cross-cutting conversations illustrated in Chapter 2, hearing the other side does – even in its highly imperfect manifestations – have some beneficial consequences for citizens of a democracy.

\(^8\) Mendelberg (2002).
Exposure to diverse political views is obviously tied to a wide range of outcomes that are valued in democratic systems. But it would be an overly simplistic reading of deliberative theory to suggest that it assumes only good can flow from cross-cutting interactions; conversations among those of differing views also have been acknowledged to hold the capacity to promote bitter arguments, violence, and/or a hostile silence. A level of civility or politeness in conversations across lines of political difference is assumed to be essential to its assumed benefits. As Kingwell points out, in order to obtain benefits and sustain relationships that make cross-cutting discourse possible, discussants must at times refrain from saying all they could say in the interest of smooth social interaction. This type of civility via “not-saying...contributes to smooth social interaction, makes for tolerance of diversity and conditions a regard for the claims and interests of others.” So although exposure to differing views holds the potential for tremendous benefits, to realize these benefits, exposure must occur in a context where the collective project of getting along with one another in society is primary, and the elucidation of differences secondary.

The Social Psychological Plausibility of Beneficial Consequences

There are obviously dozens of empirically testable hypotheses embedded in the assertions of deliberative theory. Unfortunately existing survey data provide few opportunities to test them. As discussed in Chapter 2, the kinds of items needed to study political talk and exposure to disagreement in particular are included in several network surveys, but measures of the outcomes that theoretically ought to be related to them are typically absent. Most social network studies are designed to evaluate attitude change due to pressures within social networks. Will people feel compelled to vote the way their friends and neighbors do, for example? The formation of political opinions – the focus of the earliest political network studies – tends to remain the focus today. And as a result we lack the evidence needed to evaluate most of these ideas.

For these reasons, I commissioned an original national survey to include indicators of people’s exposure to politically like-minded and differently minded people, and the kinds of beneficial outcomes this contact is assumed to engender – an awareness of oppositional perspectives, a deeper understanding of reasons behind one’s own views, and support for the civil liberties of groups whose politics one dislikes. Funded by the Spencer Foundation, this survey made it possible to examine three independent beneficial effects of cross-cutting networks. Communication environments that expose people to non-like-minded political views were hypothesized to promote (1) greater awareness of rationales for one’s own viewpoints, (2) greater awareness of rationales for oppositional viewpoints, and (3) greater tolerance.

How plausible are such benefits from the perspective of what is known about the social psychology of human interaction? The first benefit rests on the assumption that confronting differences prompts people to reflect on the reasons for their own beliefs. This process is assumed to occur either in preparation for defending one’s own positions or as a result of an internal need to rationalize or explain why one’s own views differ from others’. Studies of cognitive response generally support the plausibility of such a reaction; exposure to counterattitudinal advocacy enhances the production of counterarguments, particularly for highly involving topics. Consistent with this argument, Green, Visser, and Tetlock found that people became more aware of and able to balance valid arguments on both sides of an issue when they were exposed to strong arguments on both sides of an issue and anticipated having to justify their views to opinionated representatives of the conflicting sides, an experimental condition simulating a cross-cutting personal network.

The second proposed benefit, that cross-cutting exposure promotes greater awareness of oppositional viewpoints, simply assumes that exposure to dissimilar views imparts new information. Psychologically this effect demands nothing more than a straightforward learning process whereby rationales are transmitted from one person to another. The greatest limitation on its plausibility is the infrequency with which

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13 Green, Visser, & Tetlock (2000).
political conversations are likely to reach the level of depth in which rationales are articulated. But a good deal of this process may occur at the intrapersonal rather than the interpersonal level. In other words, when exposed interpersonally to political views noticeably different from their own, people may be prompted to think about the reasons that may have led those others to hold such views.\textsuperscript{14} This mental rehearsal of thoughts and search for rationales may occur even when the discussants do not explicitly articulate such reasons themselves.\textsuperscript{15}

The third proposed benefit embedded in arguments about the importance of cross-cutting exposure is that it should lead to greater political tolerance. On initial consideration, this assertion sounds very similar to Allport’s classic intergroup contact hypothesis, which suggests that face-to-face interaction among members of different groups can, under certain conditions, reduce prejudice.\textsuperscript{16} At some points in its long research history, the contact hypothesis has been said to produce mixed evidence at best,\textsuperscript{17} but more recent assessments suggest that intergroup contact usually does have positive effects, even when the situation does not meet all of the conditions enumerated by Allport and subsequent researchers.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, many of the additional necessary conditions tacked on in subsequent research turn out to be facilitating, but not essential, conditions.\textsuperscript{19}

The hundreds of studies on intergroup contact have also resolved the question of causal direction by incorporating experimental studies in which contact is systematically manipulated. These studies unambiguously demonstrate that contact reduces prejudice, but not surprisingly, prejudice also lessens the amount of intergroup contact people have outside the laboratory. In a 2005 review of intergroup contact studies, Brown and Hewstone conclude that “there is now ample evidence to support his [Allport’s] basic contentions.”\textsuperscript{20}

Given that intergroup contact theory has not generally been applied to contacts involving those of differing political views, the plausibility of this framework for understanding more fluidly defined groups

\textsuperscript{14} Mutz (1998).
\textsuperscript{15} Burnstein & Sentis (1981); Burnstein, Vinokur, & Trope (1973).
\textsuperscript{16} Allport (1954).
\textsuperscript{17} Amir (1975).
\textsuperscript{18} Pettigrew (1998); Pettigrew & Tropp (2000).
\textsuperscript{19} Pettigrew & Tropp (2000).
\textsuperscript{20} Brown & Hewstone (2005, p. 256).
is worth considering. Accumulated research suggests that among the various types of "groups" that one might consider in studies of intergroup contact, contact among those of differing political views is a type ideally situated to produce beneficial effects from cross-cutting exposure. This is because the ideal sequence of events for purposes of promoting beneficial effects is one in which people first get to know one another as individuals and only later recognize each other as members of a disliked group. People's political views are seldom obvious upon first meeting, and conversations about politics do not occur with sufficient regularity that people always know when they are in the company of people who hold cross-cutting views. Thus a person may easily develop a liking for another person long before discovering their differences of political opinion.

Intergroup contact findings also support the possibility that exposure to everyday differences of political opinion may translate to an appreciation of the need to tolerate differences of political opinion among disparate groups within the larger society. In linking cross-cutting exposure to political tolerance, it must be acknowledged that the kind of individual or group whom a given person might be asked to tolerate on civil libertarian grounds—perhaps an atheist, socialist, homosexual, and so forth—would seldom turn out to be exactly the same kind of person of opposing views whom one had encountered at work or in the neighborhood. This would seem to limit potential beneficial effects of cross-cutting political networks on political tolerance.

But within the large literature on intergroup contact, a smaller group of studies of "generalized intergroup contact" confirms that contact across group lines can generalize to reduce prejudice even toward outgroups that are not part of the intergroup contact. In other words, people who have had to learn how to "agree to disagree" in their daily lives better understand the need to do so as a matter of public policy. For example, in support of the generalizability of contact effects, the extent of interpersonal contact across lines of religion, race, social class, culture, and nationality has been found to predict nonprejudicial attitudes toward groups not involved in the contact, even when taking into account potential reciprocal influences. Moreover, the extent of

22 Reich & Purbhoo (1975); Cook (1984); Pettigrew (1997); Weigert (1976).
contact across lines of difference also generalizes to immigration policy preferences, a more policy-oriented outcome similar to tolerance measures. Although studies of intergroup contact have tended to use prejudicial attitudes as their dependent variables, their findings also appear to generalize to perspective-taking ability. In other words, cross-cutting contact improves people's abilities to see issues from the perspectives of others, even when they personally do not agree. Reducing prejudice is clearly not the same as increasing levels of tolerance: reducing prejudice involves altering negative attitudes toward groups, whereas encouraging political tolerance involves increasing support for their civil liberties in spite of ongoing negative attitudes. Nonetheless, there is sufficient conceptual overlap for these literatures to be relevant to one another.

Beyond the assumptions of political theory, and the psychological studies of intergroup contact, quite a few empirical relationships have been attributed to exposure to non-like-minded political perspectives. For example, in his classic study of tolerance, Stouffer suggested that exposure to conflicting viewpoints was the main reason that education and tolerance were so closely connected:

Schooling puts a person in touch with people whose ideas and values are different from one's own. And this tends to carry on, after formal schooling is finished, through reading and personal contacts... To be tolerant, one has to learn further not only that people with different ideas are not necessarily bad people but also that it is vital to America to preserve this free market place... The first step in learning this may be merely to encounter the strange and the different.

Although other explanations for the education–tolerance relationship have been proposed in subsequent research, most later studies also reference the idea that education "increase(s) awareness of the varieties of human experience that legitimize wide variation in... values." The extent to which people are exposed to differing views also has been invoked in explanations for why women tend to be less tolerant than men, and why those in urban environments are more tolerant than

24 Reich & Purkhoo (1975).
25 Stouffer (1955, p. 127), emphasis in original.
26 Nunn, Crockett, & Williams (1978, p. 61).
FIGURE 3.1. Potential cognitive and affective mechanisms for effects of exposure to oppositional political views on political tolerance.

those in rural areas. In both cases, the assumption is that exposure to people of differing views causes urban dwellers (who live in more diverse residential environments) and men (who are more likely to work outside the home) to be more tolerant of differences.

Interpretations of political tolerance levels have stressed the diversity of people's contacts, but the extent to which people experience political conversations across lines of difference has seldom been measured in these studies. Nonetheless, closely related concepts support the likelihood of such an impact. For example, a personality dimension known as openness to experience is strongly positively related to tolerance, and authoritarians have been found to live relatively sheltered lives with little exposure to alternative lifestyles and beliefs.

In a 1999 study of Russian social networks, Gibson also found that support for democratic institutions was correlated with the number of "weak ties" (i.e., nonrelatives) in a person's social network.

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, there are at least two mechanisms by which exposure to oppositional political viewpoints may lead to
political tolerance. First, cross-cutting interactions may convey information about dissimilar others. Through what psychologists have dubbed the process of deprovincialization, people learn that their norms, customs, and lifestyles are not the only ones.\textsuperscript{31} To the extent that cross-cutting exposure leads to greater awareness of rationales for oppositional views, such awareness should give people good reasons for upholding the civil liberties of those with whom they personally disagree; one sees that there are at least legitimate reasons for such views, even if one personally finds them unconvincing. The top half of Figure 3.1 illustrates this proposed chain of events whereby exposure to people of differing political views increases awareness of rationales for differing viewpoints and thus increases political tolerance. This link is further supported by theorists such as Mead and Piaget who stressed the importance of perspective-taking ability to attitudes and behaviors that subordinate the self's perspective to the larger society\textsuperscript{32} – as political tolerance clearly does.

In addition to this cognitive mechanism for translating cross-cutting exposure to political tolerance, a second potential mechanism emphasizes affect over cognition. To paraphrase Stouffer, one can learn from personal experience that those different from one's self are not necessarily bad people.\textsuperscript{33} According to this mechanism, the content and extent of people's political discussions are less important than the quality of the personal relationships that develop. It is not important that they learn about the rationales for one another's political views, but it is important that they develop close relationships with those they know to hold quite different political viewpoints. Once formed, these cross-cutting relationships make people less likely to support restrictions on the civil liberties of those with differing views. The bottom half of Figure 3.1 illustrates how exposure to people of differing political views may lead to more intimate cross-cutting associations, and thus greater tolerance.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Pettigrew (1997, p. 174).
\textsuperscript{32} Mead (1934); Piaget (1932).
\textsuperscript{33} Stouffer (1955).
\textsuperscript{34} Similar distinctions have been made in the past between "cognitive and affective bases of political tolerance judgments" (see Kuklinski, Riggle, Ottati, Schwarz, & Wyer 1991; Theiss-Morse, Marcus, & Sullivan 1993), but in their experiments a cognitive basis means that people are induced to think about their tolerance judgments, as opposed to thinking about rationales for the opposing view, as suggested by the cognitive mechanism in this study.
Evidence from Social Networks

To summarize, interactions involving exposure to conflicting views have been assumed to benefit people largely (1) by encouraging a deeper understanding of one's own viewpoint, (2) by producing greater awareness of rationales for opposing views, and (3) by contributing to greater tolerance. If exposure to cross-cutting political views increases tolerance via its effects on awareness of rationales for oppositional points of view, then this would lend credibility to the cognitive interpretation of the benefits of cross-cutting contact. If close personal relationships across lines of political difference influence tolerance levels, then this would provide support for the affective mechanism.

Evidence from Social Networks

To examine these possibilities, I first used the same political network surveys shown in Chapter 2. Given that the extent of discussion with politically dissimilar and similar discussion partners is not a zero-sum situation whereby more discussion with agreeable partners must lead to less discussion with partners who disagree, I created separate measures of the frequency of discussion with politically like-minded and non-like-minded partners.35

Although the impact of discussions with like-minded others is not my central focus, I included this variable in my analyses in order to sort out effects that may be attributed to political discussion in general, as opposed to discussions that cross lines of political difference in particular. Moreover, since political discussion of all types is likely to occur among those more politically interested, knowledgeable, and involved, controls are also included for these predispositions. To the extent that the effects of exposure to dissimilar political views are unique and not attributable to contact that involves political agreement or to political interest and involvement more generally, then the benefits suggested by so many theorists gain support. In order to evaluate the affective mechanism, the survey also included items that made it possible to tap the level of intimacy within dyads. For each respondent, separate measures represented levels of intimacy with politically like-minded and non-like-minded discussion partners.

To serve as dependent variables for tests of the effects of cross-cutting exposure on awareness of rationales for own and for opposing political

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35 These measures are only weakly positively correlated.
perspectives, open-ended questions were used to solicit issue-specific rationales for three separate controversies. These included preferences among the 1996 presidential candidates, opinions about affirmative action for women and minorities, and opinions about state versus federal control of the welfare system. Based on a pretest, these issues were chosen because they were current at the time the survey was done, and thus formed a likely basis for tapping awareness that could result from recent political discussions. They are also issues for which substantial controversy exists and thus ensured participation of respondents with differing views on both sides of the issues. Respondents were asked what reasons they could think of for each of the various viewpoints ("Regardless of your own views, what reasons can you think of for . . .?"). In other words, they were asked to view the issues through the eyes of the opposition, as well as from their own perspective. The order in which own and opposing view questions appeared was randomized to prevent potential order effects. The open-ended responses were later coded into individual rationales by two independent coders.

Volunteered rationales for own and opposing views were not evaluated by any external standards of sophistication. But coders did eliminate from the counts the rationales that served to delegitimize the other viewpoint. For example, if a respondent explained why others supported Bill Clinton with reference to negative personal traits of the opinion holder ("Other people might vote for him because they are stupid") or negative traits of Clinton ("He’s so slippery and slick and a good puppet"), then these were not counted as acknowledgments of a legitimate basis for the oppositional viewpoint.36

As shown in Figure 3.2, the number of rationales that people could give for their own positions were, not surprisingly, significantly higher than those they could give for opposing views. The means were significantly different, and the measures of rationales for the two sides of a given issue were, also not surprisingly, significantly correlated with one another, thus indicating general knowledge of or interest in politics or perhaps in these specific issues. Three different issues were used to get a broader sense of a given person’s knowledge of dissimilar viewpoints than one issue alone would make possible, but these were then combined into two additive indices representing a person’s overall

36 The reliability of coding was quite high. See Mutz (2002b) for details.
FIGURE 3.2. Awareness of rationales for own and opposing political views. (Note: At the individual level, rationales for own and opposing views are consistently significantly correlated with one another \( p < .001 \) in all cases. However, the group means are also consistently significantly different from one another \( p < .001 \) in all cases).

awareness of rationales for oppositional views and overall awareness of rationales for his or her own viewpoints.

Political tolerance was measured by using Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus's content-controlled method, whereby respondents first volunteer their "least-liked" group and are then asked a series of six questions about extending civil liberties to these particular groups, including the extent to which they should be banned or outlawed, be allowed to hold rallies in their city, be allowed to teach in public schools, and be subject to government phone tapping.\(^{37}\)

Effects on Awareness of Rationales for Own and Oppositional Views

The first hope of advocates of greater network diversity is that exposure to conflicting views will benefit citizens either by familiarizing them with legitimate reasons for holding opposing viewpoints or by

\(^{37}\) Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus 1982.
deepening their understanding of their own views by needing to defend them to others and/or to themselves. Multivariate regressions examined these two questions, one equation predicting awareness of rationales for one's own side of the issues, the second predicting awareness of rationales for the opposing viewpoints. In addition to the variables included to control for general levels of political interest, knowledge, and extremity of opinions, I included the variable representing awareness of rationales on the other side of these same issues. Those with high interest in these three particular issues are obviously likely to score high on both measures. So in analyses predicting awareness of rationales for oppositional views, awareness of rationales for one's own views also was included, and for the analysis predicting rationales for own views, awareness of rationales for opposing views was included. I did not assume a specific causal direction between awareness of rationales for own and awareness for others' views, but I included these variables so as to conduct a more stringent test.\textsuperscript{38} Because awareness of rationales for oppositional perspectives and awareness of rationales for one's own views are highly correlated (because of issue-specific interest and knowledge), each of these variables served as a powerful control for the equation in which the other was the dependent variable. Also as expected, political knowledge was a positive predictor of political awareness of either variety, and extremity of political views had predictable effects, increasing awareness of rationales for one's own views, while reducing the number of rationales that could be offered for others' views.

For purposes of evaluating the claim that cross-cutting exposure contributes to a deeper understanding of one's own views and/or to a greater awareness of rationales for oppositional views, Figure 3.3 shows the independent effects of exposure to agreement and disagreement on awareness of rationales for one's own and oppositional political perspectives. The left-side panel of Figure 3.3 illustrates the impact of political disagreement. As shown by the top line in Figure 3.3, counter to what theorists such as Mill have proposed, there was no compelling evidence that exposure to non-like-minded views

\textsuperscript{38} Including these variables was important in order to eliminate potential confounding with characteristics linked to issue-specific knowledge for the three issues used to create measures of awareness of rationales for own and others' views.
had an impact on awareness of rationales for people's own political perspectives. Even when examined among the most likely subgroups within the population (such as those who have strongly held views or high levels of education), there is no evidence that those with more diverse political networks have thought through their own positions more thoroughly as a result of exposure to oppositional views.
However, consistent with the idea that people learn about \textit{oppositional} views from cross-cutting contact, the bottom line on the left-hand side of Figure 3.3 shows that, all else being equal, exposure to oppositional viewpoints significantly increases awareness of legitimate rationales for opposing views. The steep lower line in Figure 3.3 shows that exposure to oppositional viewpoints is particularly important for purposes of familiarizing people with legitimate reasons for viewpoints that differ from their own. All else being equal in terms of political interest, knowledge, attitude extremity, and so forth, as exposure to disagreement increases, so does awareness of rationales for perspectives other than one's own. Noticeably, at the highest levels of exposure to disagreement, respondents were aware of virtually as many rationales against their own position as for it. In theory, this should be an ideal state for a deliberative democratic citizen: he or she is thoughtfully considering a controversial political topic. Those with high levels of exposure to political disagreement would thus have more balanced judgment.\textsuperscript{39}

How large is the effect of exposure to dissimilar views on awareness of legitimate rationales for oppositional views? From the lowest to the highest levels of disagreement reported, awareness of rationales for oppositional views more than \textit{triples}. Given that the mean number of oppositional rationales that people could think of was 1.46, the increase due to cross-cutting networks could have quite significant consequences for the perceived legitimacy of political outcomes.

But in order to make a convincing case for this effect, it is important to establish that it is exposure to political \textit{disagreement}, and not just political discussion in general, that is driving awareness of rationales for oppositional views. The right-hand side of Figure 3.3 thus allows us to compare the predictive power of exposure to agreement as opposed to disagreement. Exposure to agreement is not a significant predictor of awareness of rationales for own or of rationales for oppositional views. In its capacity to educate about oppositional perspectives, exposure to disagreement appears to be unique.

With cross-sectional data, how confident can one be that exposure to cross-cutting political views actually brings about greater awareness

\textsuperscript{39} See Sniderman (1981) for further discussion of what it means to have "balanced judgment."
of rationales for opposing views? These analyses rule out the most obvious spurious influences. For example, because a person knows a lot about politics, he or she may be more confident of defending his or her own views and thus be more willing to engage in cross-cutting interactions as well. Because the relationships survive controls for general political knowledge, interest, and awareness specific to these issues, spuriousness is less of a concern.

Nonetheless, reverse causation remains a distinct possibility. Awareness of rationales for oppositional views might lead one to feel more confident engaging in political discussions with those of opposing perspectives. The problem with this rival interpretation is that, if true, it ought to apply equally well, if not more so, to the analysis involving awareness of rationales for one’s own views; the more deeply committed one is to his or her position, and the more supportive rationales one has in one’s arsenal, the less threatened one should be by oppositional viewpoints. But awareness of rationales for one’s own views is not related to exposure to conflicting views in one’s personal network. Although the absence of this relationship represents a null finding with respect to one of the three proposed benefits, ultimately this pattern strengthens the case for the idea that exposure to conflicting views contributes to greater awareness of legitimate rationales for opposing views.

In one sense, the significant impact of these measures of cross-cutting exposure is surprising because they do not incorporate the more specific requirements many theorists deem necessary, such as a level of mutual respect or civility. In Figure 3.4, I use this same model to see whether an additional stipulation of this kind makes any difference. Does civility in interaction help generate more beneficial outcomes from cross-cutting political dialogue? Drawing on scales widely used to classify long-term patterns of communication within families, a civil orientation to conflict was defined as one that combines an acknowledgment of the importance of expressing dissenting views with an emphasis on social harmony. In other words, a civil orientation is one that does not duck conflict entirely, but that simultaneously embraces the importance of maintaining harmonious social relationships.

As shown in Figure 3.4, people who have a civil orientation toward conflict are particularly likely to benefit from exposure to

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FIGURE 3.4. Effects of exposure to oppositional views on awareness of rationales for oppositional viewpoints, by orientation to conflict.

non–like-minded views. Taking this interaction into account strengthens the overall explanation of awareness of oppositional perspectives. The size of the effect among members of this group is more than twice the size of the effect on those without a civil orientation. Those who value both frank opinion expression and social harmony get the most out of their cross-cutting interactions. Just as theorists have suggested, civility clearly makes a difference in extracting maximal benefits from cross-cutting networks, though civility does not appear to be a necessary condition for benefits to occur.

Consequences for Political Tolerance

Figure 3.1 proposed two mechanisms for translating exposure to oppositional political views into political tolerance. If the affective ties between people of opposing political views are what is important for purposes of translating cross-cutting ties into political tolerance, then one would expect closeness within politically heterogeneous relationships to be particularly important to political tolerance. If the cognitive
benefits are primary, then people’s awareness of rationales for others’ views should be most predictive of political tolerance.\(^{41}\)

In evaluating this model, I also took into account the possibility that tolerance might have reciprocal effects with each of these key predictors. More tolerant people may be more likely to form close relationships with those of differing political views and/or may be more likely as a result of their tolerance to be open to learning about reasons for others’ views. But even taking those possibilities into account, I found both the cognitive and affective mechanisms shown in Figure 3.1 to be at work translating exposure to dissimilar views into greater political tolerance. Closer relationships across lines of difference and greater knowledge of rationales for these differences predicted tolerance, even after controlling for political knowledge, political interest, extremity of issue opinions, and so forth. Interestingly, awareness of rationales for one’s own views did not contribute significantly to political tolerance. Despite the fact that the two measures were highly correlated, awareness of rationales for own and opposing views represent distinctly different types of knowledge with very different consequences.

As shown in Figure 3.5, the size of the cognitive and affective effects on tolerance was modest, and the two effects were very similar in size. But together they produced a sizable effect on tolerance. If one generally perceives those opposed to one’s own views to have some legitimate, if not compelling reasons for being so, then one will be more likely to extend the rights of speech, assembly, and so forth, to disliked groups. Likewise, close ties with those who hold differing political views increase tolerance. These effects are not merely a function of attitude extremity or general or issue-specific forms of political knowledge, as all of these considerations were accounted for in the model.

What then is the size of the net impact of cross-cutting exposure on political tolerance? Considered separately, the cognitive mechanism suggests that if all else remained constant, a person who had the highest levels of exposure to oppositional views would score just over 4 percent higher on the tolerance scale than someone who had the lowest

\(^{41}\) For details on this analysis, see Mutz (2002b). As it turns out, the coefficients are virtually identical when reciprocal causation is taken into account.
levels of exposure to oppositional views. Thus the magnitude of the cognitive mechanism is small by most standards. When considered on its own, the corresponding size of the affective mechanism is just over an 11 percent increase in tolerance from those least to most exposed to cross-cutting political views. Given that these effects are simultaneous, the total impact from cross-cutting exposure is to raise tolerance by just over 15 percent. These findings thus lend some credibility to the many claims of democratic theorists about the benefits of cross-cutting exposure.

Although the size of these relationships is modest, they are more impressive if one takes into consideration the large amount of noise in the operational measures relative to the concepts they represent. Ideally, for example, one would want a measure of awareness of legitimate rationales for oppositional views that takes into account all potential controversies. Instead, this larger concept is represented here by only three political controversies. Likewise, the measure of the extent to which people's networks involve cross-cutting exposure has been limited by constraining respondents to only three discussants, when a more extensive network battery might include a greater number of weak ties.
The type of contact examined in this book is by its very nature infrequent and often fleeting, and thus quite difficult to measure.

I also abandon stringent assumptions about the kind of exposure to cross-cutting views that is important. I do not assume that when exposed to conflicting views people must truly “deliberate” according to any particular theoretical definition; nor do I assume that when people are exposed to conflicting views the context is one in which people have equal status, reciprocity, and so forth. Exposure to oppositional political views requires only that people talk politics with someone who has political views that are to some recognizable degree different from their own (and vice versa for exposure to like-minded views). Even though this is a far cry from what theorists and others envision as the most beneficial, exposure to conflicting views – even at the minimal level defined here – appears to have the capacity to produce some beneficial effects.

Replication of these analyses on other data sets would be a natural next step to increase confidence in the findings. But unfortunately, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are no other national surveys addressing both the constitution of Americans' political networks and levels of political tolerance. The General Social Surveys have at times included both tolerance measures and social network measures, but there is no information available about political agreement or disagreement among discussion partners. Other social network data sets make it possible to examine the extent of political agreement and disagreement within networks, but they do not include tolerance judgments.

An Experimental Confirmation

Given the lack of other data for purposes of replication, and recognizing that statistical techniques can only go so far in strengthening causal inferences, I subjected one key part of this model to an additional experimental test. Ideally, I would test all of the relationships shown in Figure 3.1 in a controlled laboratory environment, manipulating exposure to cross-cutting political views and observing the consequences.

43 See Gibson (1999) for similar data on social networks and tolerance in Russia.
However, for the bottom half of Figure 3.1, that is, the affective mechanism, an experimental design is simply not feasible. At least within the context of a short-term laboratory experiment, one cannot prompt people to forge cross-cutting friendships and evaluate the effects of their intimacy.

But the cognitive mechanism shown in the top half of Figure 3.1 is amenable to experimentation. Although it is not possible to simulate the effects of ongoing, accumulated exposure to cross-cutting political viewpoints in a laboratory setting, even a large, one-time exposure to the rationales behind many perspectives different from one's own could simulate this experience. If one learns from such an experience that those who have views different from one's own have their reasons, despite the fact that one may disagree with them, such exposure should promote support for the general principle of tolerance.

For these purposes, I used a three-group experimental design in which eighty-two student subjects were randomly assigned to receive a large dose of political views that were either consistent with their preexisting views, contrary to their preexisting views, or irrelevant to their political views (the control group). While waiting to participate, all subjects filled out a pretest questionnaire that asked for demographic and political information as well as opinions on eight different controversial issues. These included the death penalty, same sex marriage, the use of mammals in medical research, affirmative action for women and minorities, the emphasis in sex education programs on abstinence versus birth control and sexually transmitted disease prevention, vouchers for private and parochial schools, stricter environmental policies, and hate crime laws. In addition, scales were included to tap individuals' personality characteristics including perspective-taking ability and dogmatism.44 Dogmatism is a stable personality trait known to predict political tolerance. Although perspective-taking ability has not been studied in relation to political tolerance, measuring it in this theoretical context makes sense because it represents the capacity to entertain others' points of view, as suggested by the purely cognitive mechanism in the upper half of Figure 3.1. The perspective-taking scale represents a cognitive, nonemotional form of empathy and is not related to

44 See Davis (1983).
45 See Altemeyer (1997).
empathy’s emotional components.\textsuperscript{46} Both Piaget and Mead stressed the importance of perspective-taking capability for behavior that subordinates the self’s perspective to the larger society, as tolerance certainly does.\textsuperscript{47} This capacity should condition people’s ability to appreciate the legitimacy of conflicting political perspectives. Exposure to cross-cutting political perspectives combined with perspective-taking ability should provide a particularly good reason for upholding others’ rights to speech, assembly, and so forth.

After the pretest, each subject was exposed to rationales for oppositional or like-minded views, or to nothing at all. Because the cognitive mechanism in Figure 3.1 hypothesizes a purely informational effect from cross-cutting exposure on tolerance, the manipulation was limited to conveying information about arguments behind oppositional or like-minded positions, without any face-to-face contact with another human being. Further, because this theory concerns the effects of generalized exposure to contradictory views on tolerance, and not effects of exposure to any one topic or area of controversy, all subjects were exposed to either multiple rationales for multiple political viewpoints that matched their own, rationales for views they were known to oppose, or no new information in the control group. To strengthen the manipulation, exposure to like-minded or non–like-minded views was carried out by exposing respondents to consistently agreeable or disagreeable arguments for three separate issues. In order to make certain results would not depend upon arguments surrounding any one issue or controversy, a randomized schedule dictated for which of the eight different pretest issue controversies each subject received stimuli (either agreeable or disagreeable) and the order in which the issues were received.\textsuperscript{48}

In both experimental conditions, three brief “assignments” provided a pretext for exposing people to rationales in support of, or in opposition to, their own views. For each assignment, subjects were given a stack of five index cards, each bearing a rationale in support of one particular issue position. The first assignment asked subjects to order the

\textsuperscript{46} Davis (1983).

\textsuperscript{47} Piaget (1932); Mead (1934).

\textsuperscript{48} If a subject chose the midpoint on the scale, another issue was substituted according to a random schedule.
cards by strength of argument from strongest to weakest, and then to copy them onto a separate sheet of paper; the second assignment asked the subject to imagine himself or herself as a speechwriter for a political candidate endorsing that particular issue position and to embed the arguments into a speech written for the candidate; the third assignment simply replicated the first one but with a third issue. So in total each experimental subject in a treatment condition was exposed to fifteen arguments concerning three different issue positions, all of which were either systematically consistent with or inconsistent with some of the many political views the subject had expressed in the pretest. The goal of the assignments was to encourage subjects to process all of the rationales on the cards fully, and copying them and thinking about them are known to facilitate this process. After completing the assignments, a posttest was administered that included a “content-controlled” measure of political tolerance virtually identical to the one administered by telephone in the social network survey.

The raw mean comparisons resulting from this experiment were in the expected direction with lower tolerance in the control condition relative to the oppositional views condition, but none of the differences among the three groups was significant. However, when the efficiency of the comparisons was improved by taking into account subjects’ political perspectives, perspective-taking ability, and levels of dogmatism, there were significant effects on tolerance among those respondents who had high perspective-taking ability. This single dose of oppositional perspectives alone was not enough to produce across-the-board effects on the sample. But as predicted, perspective-taking ability served as an important contingent condition for the effects of cross-cutting exposure. High perspective-taking ability directly encouraged greater political tolerance, so we know that those accustomed to thinking about controversies from more than one perspective also tended to be more tolerant. But more important to the purposes of the experiment, as illustrated in Figure 3.6, the experimental manipulation of exposure to rationales for oppositional views also increased political tolerance among those high in perspective-taking ability. In contrast, analyses comparing tolerance in the control group to that in the group

49 For the specific wording of these assignments, see Mutz (2002b).
FIGURE 3.6. Experimental effects of exposure to oppositional views. (Note: All means are statistically indistinguishable except for those exposed to rationales for opposition views among the group high in perspective-taking ability. A two-factor analysis of variance confirmed a main effect for perspective-taking ability \[ F = 5.90, p < .05 \] and a significant interaction between experimental manipulation and perspective-taking ability \[ F = 3.96, p < .05 \].)

exposed to like-minded rationales showed no significant main effects or interactions.

As Figure 3.6 shows, among those high in perspective-taking ability, mean levels of tolerance were higher when subjects were exposed to rationales for oppositional views. However, among those low in perspective-taking ability, tolerance levels were lower when subjects were exposed to oppositional views. This pattern may result from the fact that exposing people to counterattitudinal arguments when they are not able to see things through another’s eyes causes them to counterargue and strengthen their resolve, believing perhaps even more ardently that those who disagree with them are unworthy, benighted opponents.

To put the size of these effects in perspective, among those who had high perspective-taking ability, receiving exposure to rationales
for non-like-minded views on three issues caused them to score about 14 percent higher on the tolerance scale. Although the small, relatively homogeneous student sample used in this experiment is by no means a representative one, that an effect of this size was generated by one single, disembodied exposure to cross-cutting political views is impressive. And again, as in the social network survey, exposure to like-minded viewpoints produced no such effects, thus confirming that is exposure to dissimilar views that is encouraging tolerance, rather than exposure to political argument more generally.

Benefits of Hearing the Other Side

Exposure to dissimilar views has been deemed a central element — if not the sine qua non — of the kind of political dialogue that is needed to maintain a democratic citizenry: “Democratic public discourse does not depend on pre-existing harmony or similarity among citizens... but rather on the ability to create meaningful discourses across lines of difference.”\(^5\) The extent to which people are exposed to cross-cutting political viewpoints has become of increasing concern to observers of American politics as a result of trends toward increasing residential balkanization.\(^5\) If people self-select into lifestyle enclaves with similar-minded others, their exposure to dissimilar political views should suffer.

Collectively these results suggest that hearing the other side plays an important role in encouraging democratic values by familiarizing people with legitimate rationales for opposing viewpoints. Interestingly, this impact is particularly pronounced among people who care about maintaining social harmony; that is, those who engage in cross-cutting conversations, but who would remain silent rather than risk conflict that might end the association altogether.

To the extent that a trend toward residential balkanization translates into a decline in conversations across lines of political difference, one of its adverse effects may be fewer opportunities for people to learn about legitimate rationales for oppositional viewpoints. Particularly when policies or candidates other than one’s own top preferences

Benefits of Hearing the Other Side

carry the day, the findings in this chapter suggest that the perceived legitimacy of the winning candidates and policies may be hindered by a lack of awareness of legitimate rationales for opposing views. If people are surrounded by others who think much as they do, they will be less aware of the legitimate arguments on the other side of political controversies.

Hearing the other side is also important for its indirect contributions to political tolerance. The capacity to see that there is more than one side to an issue, that a political conflict is, in fact, a legitimate controversy with rationales on both sides, translates to greater willingness to extend civil liberties to even those groups whose political views one dislikes a great deal.

In addition to simply becoming aware of oppositional arguments, this mechanism is augmented by influence that flows through the affective ties that people maintain across lines of political difference. If my best friend is politically very different from me, this personal tie will contribute to greater political tolerance, even if our conversations seldom include political arguments. It is interesting to note that from this perspective, the fact that Americans seldom discuss politics in any great depth is probably a feature rather than a liability. Because politics is such a small part of most people’s day-to-day lives, when they come into contact with people of opposing views, it is relatively easy to ignore this dimension of difference, or to discover it late enough that a friendship of some kind has already been initiated or well established. Political views need not be at the forefront of daily life or daily conversation in order to produce beneficial consequences.

Moreover, the positive role played by affective ties to politically dissimilar others suggests a need to reconsider the role of emotion in democratic judgment. Particularly in research on political tolerance, there is a tendency to think of emotion as something that promotes intolerance and prejudicial reactions to others.⁵² Although evidence on this point remains inconclusive, the emotional versus deliberative citizen dichotomy often fails to acknowledge that through social interaction people form relationships that have affective components, as well as forming cognitions about information that is conveyed.

⁵² cf. Kuklinski et al. (1997); Theiss-Morse et al. (1993).
In the analyses in this chapter, I have attempted to separate network characteristics such as intimacy in relationships, frequency of political talk, and extent of political agreement for analytic purposes. But in the real world, the network characteristics that I have separated for analytical purposes are inextricably intertwined. People generally feel closer to those who share their values, political and otherwise, and talk more frequently with those to whom they are close. Thus efforts to increase exposure to disagreement may necessitate trade-offs in other network characteristics that are also generally valued. For example, in order to increase levels of exposure to oppositional views in the population, people will need to have a greater number of weak ties and probably less intimacy on average within their networks.

Although trust has not been directly examined here, it goes hand in hand with homogeneity of views. Dense networks of tight-knit social relationships and their characteristic high levels of trust may form at the expense of exposure to cross-cutting views. Close relationships obviously have their virtues, but large pluralistic societies such as the United States undoubtedly need citizens with a good number of weak ties in their social networks in order to sustain support for democratic freedoms in the midst of such great heterogeneity.

Ultimately, political tolerance is about formalized ways in which people agree to disagree. It is primarily about restraint and not doing, rather than political action. Thus carrying on conversations across lines of political difference, conversations in which one must agree to disagree at a microlevel, may teach important lessons about the necessity of political tolerance. After all, political tolerance is just the macrolevel, public policy rendition of agreeing to disagree.

In this book I have purposely isolated one particular aspect of the deliberative encounter, the extent of cross-cutting exposure, and examined its consequences using both survey and experimental evidence. Although advantageous in some respects, this narrowness also limits the scope of the conclusions that should be drawn from it. Does the composition of people’s social networks have meaningful consequences for political tolerance and democratic legitimacy? My answer

53 Gibson (1999); Baldassare (1985).
54 Simmel (1955); Karatnycky (1999).
to this question is yes, on the basis of evidence to date. Although these findings do not support the argument that more deliberation per se is what American politics needs most, the findings lend supporting evidence to claims about the benefits of one central tenet of deliberative theory: that the perspectives people advocate when they talk about politics must be contested.