WHO WANTS TO DISCUSS VOTE CHOICES WITH OTHERS?
POLARIZATION IN PREFERENCES FOR DELIBERATION

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Abstract   Should people discuss their vote choices with others? On one hand, many people argue that openly deliberating with others can lead to better decision-making. On the other hand, institutions like the secret ballot imply that keeping these choices secret has value, perhaps as a means of insulating people from unwanted social pressures. This paper examines public attitudes about whether it is best to discuss one's choices with others or to treat them as personal matters. We find that the American public is evenly divided on this issue. We also find that those who are least confident in their political capabilities—those who arguably could benefit most from deliberating about their vote choices—are most likely to say that choices should be treated as personal matters. Our findings have implications for understanding the role of political deliberation in the United States.

De Tocqueville argued that one of the strengths of American democracy was that Americans "find neither peril nor advantage in the free interchange of their thoughts" (2007, p. 448). Many contemporary scholars concur with

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Tocqueville and argue that political deliberation is essential to a properly functioning democracy (e.g., Fishkin 1995; Mansbridge 1980; Page 1996). At the same time, open discussions of one's Election Day choices may expose people to formal and informal pressures that may influence these decisions (Gerber et al. 2012b; Karpowitz et al. 2011). Thus, it is not clear how people view the prospect of discussing their vote choices with others. People may view discussion of vote choices as an opportunity to articulate their views or acquire new information; or people may feel that these discussions are likely to generate unwanted social pressure or uncomfortable disagreement. How many, and which, citizens view discussion of vote choices as an opportunity or as a hardship has direct implications for understanding the likely consequences of efforts to encourage people to discuss their political preferences.

We use data from a national survey to examine whether members of the mass public believe it is desirable to discuss their vote choices with others or if, instead, they believe it is best to treat their vote choices as private.[1] We report three main findings. First, we find that approximately half of the respondents in our sample do not believe that openly discussing vote choices is good for democracy. Second, we provide evidence that assessments of whether democracy works best when people discuss their choices with others are closely connected to perceptions about the potential costs (in the form of social pressure) and benefits (in the form of information) of discussing one's choices and that, for many people, the costs of discussing vote choices with others outweigh the benefits. Third, we find that those who *a priori* may be expected to benefit most from discussing their choices—people who are least engaged with and knowledgeable about political matters (i.e., have fewer political resources) and those who have ready access to discussants whose preferences diverge from their own—are least likely to support open discussion of political choices. For these individuals, the prospect of encountering pressure in the course of discussing political choices seems to trump the potential for these discussions to serve as opportunities to learn more about political matters. Overall, our findings suggest that political discussion may be best thought of as a consumption good, where those who find politics to be an engaging and enjoyable topic of conversation are most likely to see deliberation about their vote choices as valuable.

Public Attitudes about the Discussion of Vote Choices

Our work extends two related fields of research. The first examines how frequently people discuss politics (e.g., Cook, Delli Carpini, and Jacobs 2007;

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1. Similar work focuses on the decision of whether to participate in a deliberation session about "important issues" or "immigration policy" (Esterling, Neblo, and Lazer 2011; Neblo et al. 2010), on the policymaking process (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), and on rates of participation in deliberative activities, such as talking with others, but again with a focus on policy issues (Cook, Delli Carpini, and Jacobs 2007).

Gerber et al. 2012a). However, to our knowledge no research has measured whether people think these political discussions are desirable components of democratic decision-making. Our focus on attitudes about the discussion of vote choices is distinct from this previous work because whether an individual has discussed her vote choices with others does not describe her attitudes about the value of those discussions. How frequently individuals discuss their vote choices may be a function of both their preferences and their social environment—for example, whether they commonly find themselves in situations where they are expected to divulge their choices.[2]

The second line of related research examines the extent to which people say they would like to have more direct opportunities to participate in the policymaking process (e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002) or engage in structured deliberative democracy sessions to discuss policy issues (e.g., Neblo et al. 2010). For example, recent work suggests that a "large majority of people (83%)" report being interested in participating in events where they would have an opportunity to deliberate policy matters with other citizens and provide "input into the policy process" (Neblo et al. 2010, p. 573). Attitudes about whether discussing one's vote choices is a good idea may, however, differ from attitudes about structured discussion of policy matters in two important ways.

First, attitudes about policy matters are often multidimensional and individuals can support non-exclusive solutions.[3] In contrast, vote choices are largely dichotomous (and zero-sum) in the United States. Individuals may therefore see discussions of vote choices as particularly likely to lead to conflict—a possibility suggested by previous work that finds that 47 percent of people report having tried to win someone over to their position on a policy issue, whereas only 31 percent say they have tried to persuade someone to vote for their preferred candidate (Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009, p. 37). Second, very few citizens have experience engaging in structured deliberation, whereas the vast majority of Americans have experience being asked about their vote choices (over 90 percent in a 2008 survey; see Gerber et al. [2012b]). Whereas attitudes about participating in formally structured deliberative sessions may be shaped by the appeal of civilized discourse, attitudes about discussing vote choices are likely to be informed by personal experience with such discussions. Thus, understanding how citizens view discussion of their vote choices is important for understanding the dynamics surrounding the more common deliberation about candidate choices.

2. This distinction is highlighted by the fact that well over half of the respondents in our survey who said that it is best to treat vote choices as personal matters nonetheless said that some or most of their friends and family members know who they voted for in the last election.
3. For example, although people may attach different value to specific components of an immigration policy, there is likely to be room to find common ground—individuals may disagree about the merits of building a fence on the border with Mexico, but agree that a guest worker program is a good idea.

PUBLIC DELIBERATION AND ATTITUDES ABOUT THE DISCUSSION OF VOTE CHOICES

Advocates of democratic deliberation argue that it is not only likely to lead to better policy outcomes, but that is also personally rewarding for participants (for a review, see Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs [2004]). Although the public deliberation literature focuses largely on the deliberation and discussion of policy issues, a wide range of studies focus on the individual effects of general political discussion. For example, research finds that engaging in political discussion is associated with greater political knowledge and tolerance (e.g., Esterling, Neblo, and Lazer 2011; Fishkin and Luskin 1999; Mutz 2002). Additionally, these political discussions can increase the likelihood that an individual participates in politics (Lake and Huckfeldt 1998; McClurg 2006) and alter their preferences (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1991; Beck 2002).

Despite evidence that those who discuss politics or deliberate with greater frequency tend to be more politically engaged,[4] this work has not considered the possibility that people vary in how they view the costs and benefits of political deliberation. For example, advocates of deliberative democracy see its key benefits as including the opportunity for participants to engage with new information, clarify their own thinking, and revise their attitudes in light of new information. (For a summary, see Mendelberg [2002], p. 154.) For others, however, public discussion may be more uncomfortable than valuable. Some argue that the emotional dynamics that accompany political deliberation can have adverse consequences (e.g., Thompson and Hoggett 2001). More broadly, existing research finds that many people simply prefer to avoid the conflict that often accompanies political discussions (e.g., Rosenberg 1954; Mansbridge 1980) and that people who prefer to avoid conflict are less likely to participate in politics (e.g., Ulbig and Funk 1999). This tendency for people to avoid situations where conflict is likely may help explain why people tend to socialize with those who share their political views (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987) and why political diversity is greater in settings where people have little choice about who they spend time with (Mutz and Mondak 2006).

In addition, people may believe that the information they are exposed to through political discussions may be biased or be accompanied by unwanted social pressure. Previous research finds that social pressure can strongly affect behavior and attitudes (e.g., Asch 1955; Cialdini and Goldstein 2004) and that,

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4. We use the phrase "tend to be" because very few of the studies cited above are experimental (Esterling, Neblo, and Lazer [2011] and Neblo et al. [2010] are notable recent exceptions). As a result, it is difficult to disentangle the effect of deliberation on, for example, tolerance, from the possibility that people who are more tolerant may simply be more willing to discuss political matters in the first place. Neblo et al.'s innovative research design solves some of these problems of causal inference, but their work focuses on the discussion of policy issues, not discussing vote choices.

in some situations, communication can degrade, rather than enhance, the quality of the choices people make (Ryan 2011). Because political discussions can entail asymmetries in political knowledge, the discussant with less information may be particularly susceptible to social pressures. People may sense that better-informed discussants will expect others to defend their choices or will use their knowledge to sway others.

Hypotheses: Individual-Level Factors and Attitudes about the Discussion of Vote Choices

As this is the first analysis of preferences over the desirability of discussing vote choices with others, we focus our attention on standard predictors of political participation. Previous work finds a strong association between socioeconomic status (SES) and political participation (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). This relationship is often explained with the argument that those with greater economic and educational resources are better prepared to engage in the political realm. Most notably for our purposes, those who are better educated and wealthier tend to be more knowledgeable about the political process and contemporary issues, more interested in politics, and more confident in their ability to form, defend, and act on their political preferences (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Attitudes about whether discussing vote choices is a good idea in the first place are likely to be closely connected to individuals' assessments of whether they see these discussions as beneficial to them, which may vary by an individual's engagement with politics and political resources. Here, we focus on three closely related political resources: 1) self-assessed ability to participate in politics effectively (i.e., internal political efficacy), 2) knowledge about political matters, and 3) interest in politics. Variation in these political resources may be associated with attitudes about whether choices should be treated as private.[5]

One possibility is that those who know little, and therefore arguably have the most to gain from political discussion, will be most likely to view discussion as desirable. From the standpoint of democratic deliberation, this would be especially welcome because one argument for deliberation is improved civic engagement. However, those who are less informed and confident in their political capabilities, in addition to being disengaged, are also likely to be vulnerable to persuasion (Zaller 1992). Thus, these individuals may be particularly concerned that informed discussants may selectively use information to persuade them to cast votes for candidates that do not best represent their true preferences.

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5. We recognize that a variety of other factors, from personality traits (Gerber et al. 2012a; Hibbing, Richie, and Anderson 2011; Mondak 2010) to partisanship (e.g., Cook, Delli Carpini, and Jacobs 2007), may also be associated with attitudes and behaviors related to political discussion.

Consistent with this line of argument, Neblo et al. (2010) find that higher levels of political efficacy and interest are associated with greater willingness to participate in deliberative democracy sessions. Here, we focus on *internal* political efficacy as a measure of political resources, rather than a broad measure that encompasses both internal and external political efficacy. We do so because internal political efficacy more directly measures whether a person believes she can participate in politics, whereas external efficacy taps a person's belief about whether political actors are responsive to her demands (Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990; Morrell 2003).

The second individual-level factor we examine is strength of political preferences. We expect those with strong preferences to obtain greater expressive benefits from discussing their choices with others. Relative to those with weaker preferences, individuals with strong preferences are likely to enjoy sharing their choices and relish opportunities to persuade others. Additionally, because their own preferences are strongly held, they may see themselves as less susceptible to the pressures that may arise during political discussions. Thus, these individuals may be less concerned about social pressure when forming attitudes about whether vote choices should be discussed openly. Prior evidence is mixed on this possibility. Neblo et al. (2010) do not find any statistically significant association between strength of partisanship and willingness to participate in deliberative sessions. Cook, Delli Carpini, and Jacobs (2007), however, do find a positive association between partisan affiliation and certain types of political discussion.

Finally, we assess whether homogeneity of preferences within one's social network is associated with attitudes about whether vote choices should be openly discussed. One of the most often cited benefits of democratic deliberation is that it provides participants with opportunities to engage with people who have different preferences (e.g., Fishkin 1995; Mansbridge 1980). From this perspective, we might assume that those who have diverse social networks where many of their potential political discussants hold opinions that differ from their own would be likely to see discussion of vote choices as desirable. However, engaging in political debates with people of divergent preferences may also involve conflict. This conflict may have several negative repercussions. For example, a question included on the survey we use in our analysis revealed that about 12 percent of people have lost friends due to political disagreements.[6] Thus, rather than viewing access to friends and family with differing political opinions as an opportunity to engage with opposing viewpoints, individuals in diverse social networks may conclude that keeping

6. Respondents were asked, "Has a disagreement over [topic] ever resulted in you losing a friend?" where one of three topics—politics, religion, or sports—was randomly inserted into the question. The 12-percent figure for politics is similar to the percentage who reported losing a friend over a disagreement about religion (12.5 percent) and substantially larger than the proportion who reported having lost a friend over a disagreement about sports (2.6 percent).

one's opinions to oneself is the best approach (see Gerber et al. 2012a). When thinking about the costs and benefits of discussing one's vote choices, these individuals may be particularly attuned to potential social costs of unpleasant or combative interactions, rather than the possibility that these interactions will be informative.

Data and Analysis

Our data are from an opt-in, Internet-based survey fielded in December 2010 by YouGov/Polimetrix. Of the 8,632 individuals invited to participate, 3,507 completed interviews for a within-panel participation rate (RR1) of 40.6 percent.[7] YouGov/Polimetrix uses a combination of sampling and matching techniques to approximate a random-digit-dialing sample.[8] The final sample ($N = 3,000$) is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population (age 25 and over). The items we use in the analysis presented below were answered by a random subset of 40 percent of this sample (1,185 respondents). Of these respondents, 86 did not provide useable responses to the items we use below and are excluded from the analysis, leaving a final sample size of 1,099. All the descriptive statistics and analyses presented below use the sampling weights provided by YouGov/Polimetrix.

ATTITUDES ABOUT THE DISCUSSION OF VOTE CHOICES

Our analysis focuses on three items designed to measure respondents' feelings about the costs and benefits of discussing their vote choices with others. The first item asked respondents which of two statements they most agreed with: "Democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others" or "Democracy works best when people treat their vote choices as personal matters." It is important to note that the second option is not a direct inversion of the first. The first option implies support for the idea—often advocated by supporters of deliberative democracy—that people should be broadly willing to share and discuss their choices with others and that democracy benefits from this type of open exchange of ideas and preferences. We posited that relatively

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7. See AAPOR Task Force (2010) or Callegaro and DiSogra (2008), who refer to this as a "completion rate" rather than a "participation rate." There were 148 partial completes, 46 deemed ineligible, and 4,931 who did not respond.

8. The complete details of the sampling methodology are described in the appendix. There are a variety of concerns about using opt-in surveys, especially those fielded on the Internet (AAPOR Task Force 2010). One concern is that opt-in participants are more interested or informed than an average citizen. For example, 94 percent of respondents (2,821 of 3,000) indicated that they were registered to vote. However, many of the basic findings we report come from comparisons across groups recruited and interviewed in this common format. The pattern of differences would have to differ in a large fashion between our respondents and other members of the population before the substantive conclusions of our results would be threatened.
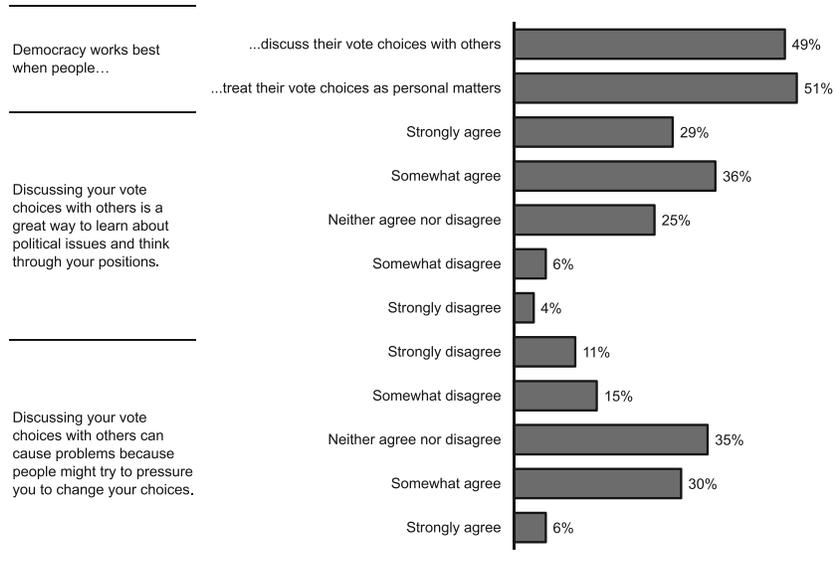
Figure 1. Preferences for Deliberation of Vote Choices. $N = 1{,}099$. Complete question wording included in the appendix. Response categories for the third question are reverse-ordered so that they follow the direction of most open to discussion (top) to least open (bottom). (Source: December 2010 YouGov/Polimetrix Survey. Weighted analysis).

few individuals would view vote choices as absolute secrets to be shielded from spouses and close friends, thus the second option does not state that people should not share their choices with anyone. Rather, it describes a polity where people are guarded with their choices, sharing them only selectively.

The other two items, the order of which was randomly assigned, measured respondents' beliefs about specific potential costs and benefits associated with discussing one's vote choices. We asked respondents how much they agreed with the statement "Discussing your vote choices with others is a great way to learn about political issues and think through your positions." The other item measured respondents' assessments of the risks associated with divulging their choices. We asked respondents how much they agreed with the statement "Discussing your vote choices with others can cause problems because people might try to pressure you to change your choices." We present the distribution of responses for each of these three items in figure 1.

Respondents were evenly divided in their assessments of whether democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others (49 percent) or when people treat their vote choices as personal matters (51 percent). Responses to this question suggest that increasing opportunities for deliberation about vote choices is not universally viewed as desirable. However,

responses to the item that asked respondents whether discussing vote choices "is a great way to learn about political issues and think through your positions" suggest that most individuals do recognize the potential informational benefits associated with discussing vote choices. About two-thirds of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed with this statement, and less than 10 percent of respondents disagreed (somewhat or strongly). Finally, responses to the item that asked respondents whether discussing vote choices "can cause problems because people might try to pressure you to change your choices" suggest that many people are concerned about unwanted social pressure. About 36 percent of respondents agreed (somewhat or strongly) with this statement, and only 26 percent disagreed (somewhat or strongly).

When broken down by responses to each of the other two items, an examination of the proportion of respondents who indicated that democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others suggests two conclusions. First, those who see an informational benefit to discussing vote choices are more likely to believe that discussing vote choices is better for democracy. Among those who agreed (strongly or somewhat) that discussing your vote choices is a great way to learn, 63 percent indicated that democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others; among those who disagreed (strongly or somewhat), almost 90 percent of respondents instead said that democracy works best when people treat their choices as personal matters.

Second, those who thought discussing vote choices was unlikely to cause problems were more likely to agree that democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others. About 69 percent of those who disagreed that discussing vote choices can cause problems agreed that democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others. In contrast, only 35 percent of those who agreed that discussing vote choices can cause problems felt that democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others. In other words, individuals who viewed discussing vote choices with others as less costly were more likely to think discussing vote choices is desirable.

Taken together, responses to these three questions suggest that many people see political discussion of their vote choices as a double-edged sword. On one hand, most people (almost two-thirds) believe that these discussions can be informative; on the other hand, many people fear that divulging one's choices may expose them to social pressures, unwelcome influence, or potential conflict. Those who think pressure is unlikely to occur as a result of discussions, but that learning is likely to occur, are more likely to think that democracy works best when people discuss their vote choice with others.[9]

9. Our survey also included questions about whether others knew who respondents voted for. Analysis of these questions is reported in the online appendix and shows that those who think vote choices should be treated as personal matters are substantially less likely to report that others know their vote preferences than those who think democracy works better when people discuss these choices. This suggests that attitudes about how vote choices should be treated have behavioral consequences.

THE CORRELATES OF ATTITUDES ABOUT THE DISCUSSION OF VOTE CHOICES

We posited that three factors would be particularly relevant in shaping a person's preferences about the desirability of discussing vote choices: 1) their level of political resources, 2) the strength of their political preferences, and 3) the extent to which there is agreement in their social network. To measure these three factors, we rely on six characteristics of the individual. Complete question wording and coding details for all items are included in the appendix.

First, we construct three measures of an individual's level of political resources: measures of their 1) internal political efficacy (measured using a single item); 2) political knowledge (an index of four items that asked respondents which party controlled a) the U.S. House of Representatives, b) the U.S. Senate, c) their state house, and d) their state Senate); and 3) interest in political affairs (a single item). Each of these measures was standardized (M = 0, SD = 1) and scored so that higher values represent greater political resources. These three items should each be positively associated with a preference for discussing vote choices with others if those with greater resources assign greater value to discussing vote choices and view the potential costs of doing so as more modest than those with fewer resources.

Second, we measure the strength of an individual's political preferences with a single variable that is an index of standardized (M = 0, SD = 1) measures of strength of party identification and strength of political ideology. This item is scored so that higher values indicate holding stronger political preferences. This item should be positively associated with a preference for discussing vote choices with others if our hypothesis that individuals with strong political preferences assign less weight to concerns about social pressure is correct.

Third, we measure social network agreement with two items—one measuring an individual's reported level of political agreement with her family members and the other measuring an individual's reported level of political agreement with her friends and neighbors.[10] Both of these items are standardized (M = 0, SD = 1) and scored so that higher values represent greater agreement between a respondent and her social network. Therefore, if individuals

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10. The survey items we use refer to "friends and neighbors" together. Family members are clearly distinct from friends and neighbors in that individuals cannot choose their family members but can, at least to some extent, choose their friends and neighbors. Friends and neighbors can be distinguished along the same dimension, however, as people have a great deal of discretion to choose their friends, but less control over who their neighbors are. Thus, perceptions about the costs and benefits of divulging one's choices to members of each of these groups may differ. However, our question wording does not allow us to examine this distinction. Future research could separately solicit measures of agreement with friends and neighbors. It should also be noted that our measures of social network agreement diverge from the predominant means by which social network agreement is typically measured—name generators (e.g., Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987; see Klofstad, McClurg, and Rolfe [2009] for a comparison of two name generator approaches). One limitation of our approach is that we cannot control for the frequency with which a respondent has (political) discussions with someone in their social network.

Table 1. Percentage Agreeing with the Statement "Democracy Works Best When People Discuss Their Vote Choices with Others" by Selected Individual Characteristics

	Low %	Middle %	High %	p-value of difference (high–low)
Internal efficacy (Low = 1 SD < Mean, N = 194; High = 1 SD > Mean, N = 233)	33.5	47.6	65.6	< .001
Political knowledge (Low = 1 SD < Mean, N = 208; High = 1 SD > Mean, N = 478)	33.6	47.8	56.5	< .001
Political interest (Low = "Hardly at all" or "Only now and then," N = 146; High = "Most of the time," N = 708)	31.3	40.3	55.7	< .001
Strength of preferences (Low = 1 SD < Mean, N = 206; High = 1 SD > Mean, N = 180)	46.2	47.0	59.8	.008
Agreement with family (Low = "Less than half" or "Almost none or none," N = 139; High = "All or almost all," N = 370)	52.6	44.6	54.6	.687
Agreement with friends/neighbors (Low = "Less than half" or "Almost none or none," N = 151; High = "All or almost all," N = 132)	50.2	46.7	61.8	.055

Note.—For each characteristic, cell entries represent the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement "Democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others." Total number of observations is 1,099. p-values are two-tailed. Complete question wording included in the appendix.

Source.—December 2010 YouGov/Polimetrix Survey. Weighted analysis.

embedded in social networks where many potential discussants disagree with them conclude that keeping one's opinions to oneself is the best approach, then these items should be positively associated with a preference for discussing vote choices.

We begin by simply presenting bivariate relationships between each of these six measures and attitudes about discussing vote choices. In table 1, we present the distribution of responses to the question about whether democracy works best when people discuss their choices or treat them as personal matters broken down by groups with varying political resources (top half of table 1) and by strength of political preferences and political agreement within

respondents' social networks (bottom half of table 1). For each characteristic, we present the percentage of respondents who thought that "democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others" for those scoring low, high, and in between ("middle") on each characteristic. (The cutoffs and sample size for each category are noted in the table.)

The distribution of responses in the top half of table 1 is preliminary evidence that those with greater political resources are more supportive of the idea that discussing one's vote choices with others is desirable, whereas those with lower levels of resources are more likely to believe that vote choices should be treated as personal matters. Just over 33 percent of those who reported low levels of internal political efficacy agreed that democracy works best when people discuss their choices with others. In contrast, over 65 percent of those who report high levels of internal political efficacy supported this statement— a statistically significant difference of thirty-two percentage points ($p < .001$; all hypothesis tests are two-tailed). We find a similar pattern when we compare those with high and low levels of political knowledge and interest in politics. Among those with the lowest levels of political knowledge, 34 percent said democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others; 57 percent of those with the highest level of political knowledge said the same. Similarly, among those who reported low levels of political interest, 31 percent said it is best to discuss vote choices with others; 56 percent of respondents who reported paying attention to politics "most of the time" gave this response. Each of these differences is statistically significant at $p < .001$.

In the bottom half of table 1, we present these distributions broken down by strength of preferences and political agreement within respondents' social networks. In each case, the pattern of responses is in the expected direction, but the magnitude of the differences is smaller than for the three political resource items in the top half of table 1. Those with strong political preferences were about fourteen percentage points more likely to say democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others than were those with weak preferences ($p < .01$). Respondents who indicated high levels of agreement with their family members and high levels of agreement with their friends and neighbors were two and eleven percentage points more likely, respectively, to say it is best to discuss vote choices with others than those who reported low levels of agreement. The small two-percentage-point difference between those high and low on agreement with family is not statistically significant ($p = .687$), but the difference for agreement with friends and neighbors is statistically significant at $p < .10$.

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES ABOUT THE DISCUSSION OF VOTE CHOICES

Because the individual-level factors we discussed in the previous section are correlated with one another, as well as with a variety of other demographic

characteristics, we also examine the relationships between these individual-level characteristics and the three outcome items presented in figure 1 in a multiple regression framework.[11] In the odd numbered columns of table 2, we present our basic model specification, including a series of demographic variables, state-level fixed effects, an index of the three political resource items (Political Resources Index; Cronbach's alpha = 0.701), the measure of strength of preferences, the measure of political agreement with family members, and the measure of agreement with friends and neighbors. For these last two items, we code respondents who indicated that they did not know at the mean and include separate indicators for these respondents in the model.

We do not find statistically significant relationships between the demographic variables and any of the three outcomes we examine, and the items associated with SES (education, income, and income missing) are not jointly significant in any of the models ($p > .10$). The most striking finding across the models is the statistically significant relationship between political resources and more favorable dispositions to discussing one's vote choices. In column (1), we find that a two-standard-deviation increase in the Political Resources Index is associated with a 17-percentage-point increase in the likelihood of indicating that democracy works best when people discuss their choices ($p < .001$). We find similar relationships in columns (3) and (5), where higher political resources are associated with greater levels of agreement that discussing one's vote choice can have information benefits and lower levels of agreement with the statement that discussing one's vote choices can leave one open to unwanted pressure, respectively. In each of the three models, a two-standard-deviation increase in political resources is associated with a change of one-third of a standard deviation in the outcome.[12]

Although the coefficient on strength of preferences is positive across all models, it falls short of conventional levels of statistical significance in each case. Thus, we do not find support for our expectation that those with stronger preferences would be more supportive of the idea of discussing vote choices with others.[13]

In column (1), we find that the relationship between agreement with family members and whether it is better to discuss one's choices or treat them as personal is essentially zero. The evidence suggests that greater levels of agreement

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11. See table S1 of the online appendix for the correlations between these items. Analysis mirroring that presented here, but using logit or ordered logit specifications, is presented in table S2 of the online appendix and yields substantively similar results.

12. Results for the odd numbered column specifications are similar in models substituting individual components of the Political Resources Index for the index. Results are available upon request.

13. The significant association between this variable and each of our outcomes in the bivariate case, but not in our multivariate analysis, may be a product of the 0.257 correlation between this measure and respondents' political resources. In models excluding the Political Resources Index, the coefficient on strength of preferences is positive and statistically significant.

Table 2. Correlates of Preferences for Discussing Vote Choices with Others (standard errors in parentheses)

	Best to discuss vote choices with others = 1		Discuss for information? (0 = strongly disagree; 1 = strongly agree)		Discuss bad because of pressure? (0 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Race: Black (1 = yes)	−0.053	−0.039	−0.033	−0.019	0.029	0.034
	(0.055)	(0.057)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Race: Hispanic (1 = yes)	−0.045	−0.037	−0.006	−0.002	0.028	0.029
	(0.064)	(0.065)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Race: other race (1 = yes)	−0.012	−0.010	−0.022	−0.022	0.005	0.006
	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.039)	(0.039)
Education (1 = no HS; 6 = post-grad)	0.011	0.011	0.008	0.009	0.002	0.002
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Income (1 =<$10k; 14 =>$150k; 15 = RF/Skipped)	0.002	0.003	0.001	0.000	0.004	0.004
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Income missing	−0.039	−0.046	−0.055	−0.057	−0.031	−0.031
	(0.063)	(0.064)	(0.032)*	(0.032)*	(0.036)	(0.036)
Female (1 = yes)	0.017	0.019	0.012	0.011	0.041	0.040
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.018)**	(0.018)**
Age (years)	−0.004	−0.004	0.002	0.002	−0.002	−0.002
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age-squared/100	0.003	0.004	−0.004	−0.004	0.003	0.003
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Political Resources Index (mean = 0, SD = 1)	0.087	0.086	0.042	0.035	0.035	0.032
	(0.019)***	(0.020)***	(0.010)***	(0.010)***	(0.011)***	(0.011)***
Strength of preferences (ideology and PID, mean = 0, SD = 1)	0.017	0.018	0.008	0.010	0.010	0.010
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Agree with family (mean = 0, SD = 1)	−0.002	−0.003	0.020	0.020	0.016	0.016
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.009)**	(0.009)**	(0.010)	(0.010)

Continued

Table 2. *Continued*

	Best to discuss vote choices with others = 1		Discuss for information? (0 = strongly disagree; 1 = strongly agree)		Discuss bad because of pressure? (0 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Agree with friends and neighbors (mean = 0, SD = 1)	0.024 (0.017)	0.024 (0.017)	0.013 (0.008)	0.012 (0.008)	−0.007 (0.010)	−0.007 (0.010)
Don't know if agree with family (DK = 1, else = 0)	0.021 (0.069)	0.018 (0.069)	−0.025 (0.042)	−0.024 (0.042)	−0.007 (0.042)	−0.006 (0.043)
Don't know if agree with friends and neighbors (DK = 1, else = 0)	−0.164 (0.053)***	−0.162 (0.053)***	−0.114 (0.033)***	−0.114 (0.033)***	−0.045 (0.030)	−0.045 (0.030)
Interpersonal trust (mean = 0, SD = 1)		−0.001 (0.018)		0.031 (0.009)***		0.013 (0.011)
Trust in government (mean = 0, SD = 1)		−0.022 (0.022)		−0.016 (0.011)		−0.006 (0.014)
External efficacy (mean = 0, SD = 1)		0.009 (0.020)		−0.011 (0.011)		−0.005 (0.013)
Constant	0.641 (0.198)***	0.653 (0.198)***	0.720 (0.100)***	0.746 (0.101)***	0.465 (0.108)***	0.474 (0.108)***
Observations	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099
R-squared	0.139	0.140	0.168	0.180	0.082	0.084
Joint significance of SES (education, income, income missing)	0.659	0.602	0.153	0.125	0.474	0.525

Note.—OLS regressions with robust standard errors in parentheses. State fixed effects included but not reported. *$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$, two-tailed. Complete question wording and coding details included in the appendix. We present limited dependent variable versions of these models in the online appendix (please see the supplementary data online).

Source.—December 2010 YouGov/Polimetrix Survey. Weighted analysis.

with friends and neighbors is associated with more support for the idea that discussing one's choices is desirable (though this relationship falls short of conventional levels of statistical significance; $p = .142$).[14] In column (3), we find evidence that greater levels of agreement with family members, as well as with friends and neighbors, is associated with more agreement that discussing vote choices can yield useful information ($p < .05$ and $p = .110$, respectively). Thus, rather than seeing discussions with people who have different political preferences as ideal venues for gathering information and refining one's own views, people appear to attach greater informational value to discussing vote choices with others who share their preferences. The results in column (5) suggest that people who report greater levels of agreement with their family members are less likely to see exposure to social pressure as a potential drawback to discussing one's choices with others ($p = .105$). We do not find a similar relationship between agreement with friends and neighbors and this outcome.[15]

Finally, we note that the coefficients on the indicator for respondents who reported not knowing whether their friends and neighbors tend to agree with them about political matters are consistently negative and substantial. This suggests that, rather than seeing their lack of information about others' political preferences as a problem to be remedied through discussion, those who are uncertain about potential discussants' political preferences are skeptical about the prospect of discussing one's vote choices with others. These individuals may be particularly concerned about the potential pressures people may face when engaging in political conversations with individuals whose political beliefs are unknown ahead of time.[16]

In the even numbered columns of table 2, we add three additional measures of individual-level attitudes that may confound the relationship between political resources and our outcomes of interest: 1) interpersonal trust, 2) trust in government, and 3) external political efficacy.[17] For example, those with low

14. The imprecision of this estimate may be due to conflicting effects for "friends" and "neighbors," who are grouped in our question. See footnote 10.

15. In additional analysis, we examined whether the relationship between these agreement measures and our outcomes of interest is weakened for those with higher levels of political resources or stronger preferences. These predictions are not supported in interactive analysis—signs of the interactions are inconsistent across outcomes. See table S3 in the online appendix.

16. Of course, it is also possible that people's beliefs about whether vote choices should be discussed result in them being less likely to know whether their political views are in agreement with those of their friends and neighbors. Also, the kinds of people who don't know what their friends and neighbors think may also prefer to be private and to avoid political discussion. We are unable to sort out the direction of causality with these data.

17. Each of these variables is measured using a single item standardized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. See the appendix for question wording and coding details. In online appendix table S4, we present an analysis similar to the analysis presented in table 1, but for interpersonal trust, trust in government, and external political efficacy. The differences between those low (one standard deviation below the mean) and high (one standard deviation above the mean) on these measures in terms of whether people think democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others or treat them as personal matters are much smaller than the differences by our three measures of political resources (presented in the top half of table 1).

levels of interpersonal trust may report lower levels of political resources and also be less supportive of a model of democracy where people discuss their choices with others. The inclusion of these potentially confounding measures slightly attenuates the coefficient on the political resources measure in the information model (compare columns [3] and [4]), but leaves our estimates largely unchanged. We note that the coefficient on the measure of interpersonal trust is comparable to the coefficient on the political resources measure in the information benefits model (column [4]), suggesting that people who are more trusting of others are more likely to see discussion as likely to yield useful, rather than misleading, information about political matters.

Discussion

In this paper we find that, although half of the American public says that democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others, half say that democracy works best when people treat their choices as private matters. Thus, the proportion of people who find the idea of engaging in discussions about these choices with others to be appealing (just under 50 percent of our sample) falls far short of the 83 percent of persons who state that they would be interested in participating in structured deliberation about policy (Neblo et al. 2010, p. 573). Moreover, about 35 percent of the population is at best ambivalent about the informational benefits of discussing vote choices, and a similar proportion agree that discussing vote choices can cause problems by exposing one to undesirable social influence.

The results of our analysis suggest that beliefs about the potential costs and benefits of discussing vote choices vary with individual-level characteristics. For instance, we find some evidence that individuals with more political agreement in their social network are more likely to see discussing vote choices as desirable. This finding runs counter to the idea that one benefit of deliberation lies in exposure to competing viewpoints. Instead, it is more consistent with Mutz's (2006) notion of a democratic dilemma—discourse with competing viewpoints may be associated with tolerance, but for some it may also have negative consequences. Somewhat ironically, individuals who already hold strong attitudes or who would be expressing their preferences to likeminded discussants—those for whom the possibility of social pressure to change one's own views is least likely—see political discussion as more valuable.

We also find clear evidence that individuals who lack political resources are less likely to say that discussing one's choices is a good way to learn about politics and more likely to say that these discussions can be problematic. These differences in perceptions about costs and benefits of voting appear to lead those with more resources to conclude that discussing one's vote choices is more desirable than treating them as personal matters. In summary, our findings suggest that preferences for avoiding political discussions and the

potential conflict associated with those discussions are concentrated among those who could arguably benefit most from these discussions.

This result calls into question the notion that encouraging public deliberation of vote choices can serve an equalizing force, better enabling all individuals to participate effectively in the political process. Our findings are more consistent with Sanders's (1997) argument that public deliberation may exacerbate such differences by exposing more vulnerable and malleable individuals to the influence of others. Additionally, these results imply that merely giving individuals who are concerned about the negative consequences of discussing their vote choices the opportunity to do so is unlikely to increase rates of deliberation about these matters. Instead, people who prefer to discuss their choices with others can do so without any policy interventions, whereas many of those who do not already deliberate may not be looking for opportunities to do so.

Our analysis is not without its limitations. First, it should be replicated in other contexts—in terms of both the topic of discussion (specific issues instead of vote choices) and timing (our survey was fielded just after a midterm election). Additionally, although YouGov's methodology yields a sample that is representative of the national public on a variety of observable characteristics, it is ultimately based on an opt-in set of respondents. Future researchers may wish to replicate our analysis using a sample identified through traditional random sampling techniques.

We also must be cautious about making strong causal claims on the basis of correlations between measures. For example, we find that those who are less politically interested are less likely to prefer public discussion of vote choices. Our analysis cannot establish that these individuals prefer privacy *because* they are less interested. Such a concern is in some ways, however, beside the point. Rather, these data are most useful because they establish that the individuals who democratic theory would suggest have the most to gain from public deliberation are least likely to embrace it. Further, while our statistical analysis is suggestive, we take steps to control for important omitted variables (e.g., we account for likely potential confounds such as external political efficacy when examining the effect of internal political efficacy). We also note that each of our models explains a relatively small portion (less than 20 percent) of the variation in individuals' assessments of the costs and benefits of discussing one's vote choices. This suggests that future work should seek to identify additional correlates that can explain these attitudes.

Noting these limitations, our primary conclusion is that many people do not think discussing vote choices is desirable—they feel that democracy works best when vote choices are treated as a personal matter, not a topic of discussion. Among those who support the idea of discussing vote choices, this preference appears to reflect a situation where political discussion can be thought of as a consumption good, rather than an opportunity to rethink one's positions. Those who are most likely to see democratic deliberation of their vote

choices as valuable find politics to be an interesting topic of conversation and are likely to both feel prepared to defend their positions and enjoy doing so.

Appendix

Public Opinion Sample Construction

YouGov interviewed 3,507 respondents who had taken both waves of the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). These interviews were then matched on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest down to a sample of 3,000 to produce the final data set. YouGov then weighted the matched set of survey respondents to known marginals for the citizen population of the United States age twenty-five and up from the 2006 American Community Survey (ACS). The original CCES sample was constructed by first drawing a target population sample. This sample is based on the 2006 ACS, the November 2008 Current Population Survey Supplement, and the 2007 Pew Religious Life Survey. Thus, this target sample is representative of the general population on a broad range of characteristics, including a variety of geographic (state, region, metropolitan statistical area), demographic (age, race, income, education, gender), and other measures (born-again status, employment, interest in news, party identification, ideology, and turnout). A stratified sample of individuals from Polimetrix's opt-in panel was invited to participate in the study. Those who completed the survey were then matched to the target sample based on the variables listed in parentheses above. For more detailed information on this type of survey and sampling technique, see Vavreck and Rivers (2008).

Question Wording and Coding Rules

ATTITUDES ABOUT THE DISCUSSION OF VOTE CHOICES

Item 1: Which statement comes closest to your view:
0 Democracy works best when people treat their vote choices as personal matters
1 Democracy works best when people discuss their vote choices with others
Item 2: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Discussing your vote choices with others is a great way to learn about political issues and think through your positions (rescaled to range from 0 to 1).
4 Strongly agree
3 Somewhat agree
2 Neither agree nor disagree
1 Somewhat disagree
0 Strongly disagree

Item 3: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Discussing your vote choices with others can cause problems because people might try to pressure you to change your choices (rescaled to range from 0 to 1).
0 Strongly agree
1 Somewhat agree
2 Neither agree nor disagree
3 Somewhat disagree
4 Strongly disagree

POLITICAL RESOURCES

Internal Political Efficacy (mean = 0; SD = 1): Generally speaking, do you think that you are well qualified to participate in politics or not well qualified? (Slider: I am not well qualified—I am well qualified)
Political Knowledge Index (mean = 0; SD = 1): Index of four items asking respondents which party controlled 1) the U.S. House of Representatives, 2) the U.S. Senate, 3) their state house, and 4) their state Senate
Political Interest (mean = 0; SD = 1): Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs. . . (4 = Most of the time; 3 = Some of the time; 2 = Only now and then; 1 = Hardly at all; 1 = Don't know)
Political Resources Index (mean = 0; SD = 1): Standardized index of the three items above

STRENGTH OF POLITICAL PREFERENCES

Strength of Partisan Identification: Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a. . .? (Follow-up: Would you call yourself. . ./Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic or the Republican Party?) (3 = Strong Democrat; 2 = Weak Democrat; 1 = Lean Democrat; 0 = Independent; 1 = Lean Republican; 2 = Weak Republican; 3 = Strong Republican; 0 = Not sure)
Strength of Ideology: Thinking about politics these days, how would you describe your own political viewpoint? (2 = Very liberal; 1 = Liberal; 0 = Moderate; 1 = Conservative; 2 = Very conservative; 0 = Not sure)
Strength of Preferences (mean = 0; SD = 1): Standardized index of the two items above

SOCIAL NETWORK AGREEMENT

About how many members of the following groups generally agree with you about politics—that is, when it comes to the candidates, parties, and issues of the day? (5 = All or almost all; 4 = More than half; 3 = About half; 2 = Less than half; 1 = Almost none or none; 3 = Don't know)

Groups:
Your family members
Your friends and neighbors
These two questions were used to create four variables.
Agree with Family (mean = 0; SD = 1)
Agree with Friends and Neighbors (mean = 0; SD = 1)
Don't Know if Agree with Family (DK = 1; else = 0)
Don't Know if Agree with Friends and Neighbors (DK = 1; else = 0)

OTHERS KNOW YOUR VOTE CHOICES? (REPORTED IN ONLINE APPENDIX)

For each of the following groups or individuals, please tell us whether most people in that group know who you voted for or do not know who you voted for. (Most do not know who I voted for; Some know who I voted for and some don't; Most know who I voted for)
Groups:
Your family members who generally disagree with you about politics
Your family members who generally agree with you about politics
Your friends and neighbors who generally disagree with you about politics
Your friends and neighbors who generally agree with you about politics

OTHER

Interpersonal Trust (mean = 0; SD = 1): Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? (Slider: You can't be too careful—Most people can be trusted)

Government Trust (mean = 0; SD = 1): Thinking about the federal government in Washington, how much of the time do you think you can trust the federal government to do what is right? (Slider: Never—Always)

External Political Efficacy (mean = 0; SD = 1): Generally speaking, do you think that public officials don't care at all what people like you think or do they care a great deal what people like you think? (Slider: Don't care at all—Care a great deal)

Supplementary Data

Supplementary data are freely available online at http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/.

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