

How does visual information influence social interactions?

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ABSTRACT Though political deliberation benefits those often excluded from politics, many individuals avoid such situations in an age of hyper-partisanship and affective polarization. Existing literature on this topic argue that individuals often seek to avoid uncomfortable situations that are caused by disagreement about politics. The outcomes of such motivations are often thought to increase affective polarization and to have negative participatory impacts for those who are often excluded or feel unwelcome in politics. Much of this work assumes that people know the partisanship of potential discussion partners and avoid those who are known to be out-partisans. For those that are strangers, we often can rely on cultural stereotypes of the other party to help us assume the partisanship of this potential discussion partner. This project argues that even more simple visual information can and is used by individuals to decide whether or not to engage in a discussion with another and can shape the outcomes of a conversation. It lays out a cognitive mechanism explaining how individuals make decisions to engage in a conversation and the limits by which deliberation may buffer political polarization.

Introduction

For many folks, participating more in politics and buffering affective polarization share one requirement in common: talking to others (**brady_et-al_1995**; see Levendusky and Stecula 2021). While this sounds like a relatively simple fix for an era of American politics seeing more hyper-polarization (**iyengar__westwood_2015**) and more efforts to disenfranchise large groups of voters, organic political deliberation can be relatively hard to come by for the folks that may benefit from it the most.

References

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