Should E-Government Design for Citizen Participation? Stealth Democracy and Deliberation

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ABSTRACT

Cyberoptimists have heralded an age of citizen engagement enabled by electronic technologies that allow widespread citizen input in government decision making. In contrast, influential political scientists maintain that the preponderance of citizens quite reasonably wish to avoid political participation and that involving citizens could have very negative consequences for governance. In their widely-read book, *Stealth Democracy*, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse seek to show that much of the American public desires "stealth democracy"—a democracy run like a business by experts with little deliberation or public input. The authors maintain that stealth democracy beliefs are due to reasonable apathy rationales and that a more engaged democracy is simply of no interest to the public. This paper introduces an opposing "parochial citizens thesis" that suggests that stealth democracy beliefs may be driven by socially problematic beliefs and orientations, including reverence for authority and an incapacity to take other political perspectives. These views are rooted in simplistic conceptions of human agency and political leadership that might be ameliorated through deliberation. This paper examines survey and experimental data from the National Science Foundation / Information Technology Research funded Virtual Agora Project. The data comprise a representative sample of 568 Pittsburgh residents, who participated in face-to-face and online deliberations. Using OLS regression with cluster-robust standard errors, the paper finds that stealth democracy beliefs are explained by beliefs and orientations consistent with the parochial citizens thesis. It also finds that *online* democratic deliberation significantly ameliorates key stealth democracy beliefs and some of the factors that lead to these beliefs. Contrary to the stealth democracy thesis, e-government efforts to stimulate citizen deliberation may have positive consequences.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.4.0 [**Computers and Society: General**]

General Terms

Management, Performance, Experimentation, Human Factors.

Keywords

Political Apathy, Stealth Democracy, Political Participation, Political Discussion, Democratic Deliberation, Online Deliberation, Human Agency.

1.INTRODUCTION

Cyberoptimists hold that information technology (IT) will appreciably reduce political ignorance and apathy and enable citizens to provide substantial input into government decision making [1, 4, 11, 23, 27]. Researchers and enthusiasts express the hope of benefits from using electronic technologies for more deliberative input into government decision processes [17, 30]—input involving discussion between citizens. While IT enthusiasts and researchers embrace the prospect of greater citizen engagement and deliberation through technology, many political scientists have cobbled together a conception of the public that recommends against civic engagement efforts. In this view, the public has a strong and reasonable desire to not trouble itself with political matters and efforts to involve the public, particularly in deliberation, could quite adversely affect governance, perhaps delegitimizing the political system.

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse [9] find that 93.5% of a representative survey sample of the American public agree with one or more of three statements describing what they call "stealth democracy" beliefs. These are statements that express intense impatience with debate and compromise among political leaders and a desire to have government run by successful business leaders or unelected independent experts.

In addition, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse shape their various findings into a book-length argument against prescriptions to engage the public more deeply in politics, particularly prescriptions for deliberative involvement. Their "stealth democracy" thesis holds that much of the public is uninterested in politics, dislikes conflict, and believes that there is wide consensus on political goals. Because the public believes there is wide consensus, it does not see the point of disagreement and conflict in politics. The authors maintain that more deeply involving such a public in political life is a prescription for frustration, distrust, and delegitimization of the political system.

The stealth democracy thesis has been well received by many political scientists. The book received favorable reviews by such luminaries as Robert Shapiro [28] and has become a mainstay of many college courses in political science and public opinion—

Google finds 324 web documents that mention the book in relation to the word "course." Google Scholar also finds 166 references to the book and related academic papers, and references to "stealth democracy" occur in 37 papers presented at the 2005 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. The concept has also come into use outside academia, as indicated by a Google search finding 503 references to the term "stealth democracy" exclusive of references to courses. Some lines of inquiry within mainstream political science are more favorable to deliberation—such as Putnam's social capital approach [21] or Fishkin and Luskin's Deliberative Polling work [12]. Nevertheless, the stealth democracy thesis has made significant inroads in the mainstream of the profession in the few years since the book was published.

An important aspect of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's position is normative. Their overarching concern is with insuring the stability and legitimacy of the political system. Consequently, in their chapter of prescriptions, they do not recommend ways to reverse political disinterest or conflict aversion, which they do not see as injurious to system legitimacy. The book depicts political ignorance and disinterest as "perfectly understandable" (p. 134) and discomfort with conflict in political discussion as "avoiding a distasteful activity," a dislike that makes "perfect sense" (p. 10). People are described as naturally more interested in their everyday lives than in politics.

Thus, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse do not consider stealth democracy anti-democratic but simply realistic in light of the public's reasonable preference to be politically uninvolved. Only one matter disturbs the authors—the public's false belief in a political consensus—because they fear false perceptions of consensus may delegitimize the political system. False consensus beliefs create unrealistic expectations that leaders can readily act with little debate or compromise. The authors recommend such beliefs be addressed with an intensive educational effort.

To the stealth democracy thesis, this paper opposes the "parochial citizens thesis." This thesis claims that many people have simplistic understandings of human agency. These understandings result in an inability to conceptualize complex systems of governance and an inability to take alternative political perspectives. Such underdeveloped reasoning about politics leads people to falsely believe in political consensus and to embrace undemocratic forms of governance, specifically authority-driven stealth democracy.

Contrary to the stealth thesis, the parochial citizens thesis suggests deliberation could be beneficial. Educational experiences might ameliorate such "parochial reasoning" by calling on people to refine their thinking about politics. Deliberation in particular could both help clarify that reasonable people hold a diversity of views and exposes discussants to complex processes of decision making that might undermine stealth democracy beliefs. With such deliberative methods as the National Issues Forums and Deliberative Polling, it is commonplace for practitioners and researchers to find that participants engage in respectful and thoughtful discussions of the issues as well as their differences [8, 19]. Online deliberation in particular may be beneficial because the deindividuating effects of online environments could encourage people to think more as individuals, generating more disagreement [18].

While this paper cannot address every aspect of the parochial citizen thesis, it will test: a) whether stealth democracy beliefs are grounded in unreasonable and socially-problematic views and orientations as predicted by the thesis and b) whether online deliberation helps to ameliorate stealth democracy beliefs and some of the problematic views and orientations that contribute to these beliefs. This paper examines these hypotheses with data from a National Science Foundation-funded study of democratic deliberations involving 568 Pittsburgh residents selected by random digit dialing. The findings are consistent with the parochial citizens thesis, suggesting that e-government efforts to encourage citizen participation, particularly deliberative participation, will not run contrary to a reasonable public desire to be politically uninvolved and may have positive benefits in cultivating a more civically-minded public.

2.PAROCHIAL CITIZENS—A THEORY

The idea of parochial citizens was inspired by the implications of linear reasoning, a particular type of causal reasoning, for political understandings. Linear reasoning is a concept from Rosenberg's [24, 25] cognitive developmental theory and research. The reader need not fully subscribe to this cognitive developmental theory, but only recognize that linear reasoning provides a coherent description of a type of reasoning that people might exhibit on certain topics, particularly political topics about which they have limited understandings.

Rosenberg's [24, 25] cognitive developmental theory and research suggests that many adults understand their world through "linear reasoning." In linear reasoning, people understand causality by focusing on an anchoring entity from which effects flow in a simple, direct manner. Linear reasoners conceptualize causal systems as simple linear chains involving single causes for any given effect. Unlike Rosenberg's systematic reasoners, linear reasoners do not adequately understand systems, which have multiple causes to an effect, feedback loops, and systemic properties such as system goals and principles of operation.

Whether or not the explanation of the public's reasoning about politics has a cognitive developmental component, most Americans' attention to and understanding of political matters are so limited [5, 7, 10, 16] that it would be surprising to find systemic understandings of politics. Linear reasoning might appear when people's knowledge of a topic is insufficient to rise to a systemic level.

The logic of their reasoning has implications for how linear reasoners understand human and political agency [14], and these implications give rise to the parochial citizen worldview. A linear thinker can only conceptualize government as under the control of a single strong leader. The parochial worldview must further accommodate itself, in the West, to the knowledge that the political system is democratic. I propose it does so by stipulating a monolithic public opinion that is interpreted by a strong leader with special knowledge of the public, such as the President, who in turn directs the government to carry out the wishes of "The Public."

The parochial worldview also involves ethical judgments that evoke emotion and motivation. An organization under the full control of a monolithic will is a direct indicator of the moral qualities of its leader. Given that an undifferentiated will directly manifests itself in the actions of government, good actions must indicate that the will is all good and bad actions must indicate it is all bad. The logic of the parochial worldview leads to a morally totalizing comprehension of government—government is either

all good or all bad. Parochial citizens, then, view government in black or white terms, usually forming an entirely positive normative stance toward the government.

The parochial cognitive model of government poorly reflects reality and must therefore be maintained in the face of contradictory information. Parochial citizens will be motivated to defend their cognitive model because of its all-positive normative content and their inability to see any conceptual alternative. For example, a challenge to the belief in the monolithic quality of the public will is also a challenge to the possibility of democracy, because no other kind of democracy can be conceived. To the extent that they become aware of conflicting views in the public, and surely they must be aware of some conflict, they may dismiss it as representing "un-American" (or "un-British", "un-French", etc.) viewpoints—that is, by redefining the "true" public to not include the dissenting views. Similarly, parochial citizens will be motivated to reject negative information on a government they view favorably.

3.STEALTH DEMOCRACY AND THE PAROCHIAL CITIZEN

The parochial citizen should be predisposed toward stealth democracy beliefs. To the extent that they view the political system as having any good effects, those with the parochial worldview are inclined to believe that all aspects of the political system are good. Dissent, then, goes against the single, all-good will that constitutes the political system. Elites are seen as essential interpreters of the "true public will." Thus, parochial citizens should be inclined to prefer a political system without debate or compromise run by elites who interpret and implement a common public will—hallmarks of stealth democracy beliefs.

Between the abstract logic of linear reasoning on the one hand and stealth democracy beliefs on the other are a range of intermediate attitudes that should be characteristic of parochial citizens—false beliefs in a public consensus, fear of conflict, reverence of authority, incapacity for social perspective taking, and passivity with respect to cognition. Linear reasoning inclines people toward these attitudes and these attitudes in turn stoke stealth democracy beliefs. Parochial citizens' belief in a monolithic public will naturally lead to a false belief in public consensus on policy. As already noted, however, parochial citizens may be somewhat conflicted between their desire to believe in a mythic consensus and awareness of dissent in the real public. Parochial citizens may be especially troubled by dissent precisely because it conflicts with their notion of democracy. Paradoxically, the parochial citizen may therefore be driven to embrace stealth democracy both out of a belief in an abstract public consensus *and* out of fear of concrete conflict (this will be presented as the variable Expect Conflict in data analyses later in this paper).

The parochial citizen also embraces hierarchy in government, a hierarchy dominated by strong leaders. Parochial citizens do not understand systems of checks and balances, which are guided by system principles and goals. Moreover, parochial citizens feel a strong normative call to defend or revile groups and organizations they understand in black and white terms. Thus, parochial citizens are drawn to positive views of social hierarchy and authority, perhaps including vertical collectivism (the variable VC, belief that individuals should suppress their wishes and goals on behalf of their group-oriented roles), right-wing authoritarianism (RWA, obedience to authority and punitive attitudes toward the disobedient—I have removed the traditionalism component), and social-dominance orientation (SDO, belief that some social groups are better than others and should dominate). An extensive literature links these authority attitudes to socially problematic outcomes such as prejudice, irrationally punitive political attitudes, and close-mindedness [2, 13, 31].

Because they are apt to value a monolithic public will, parochial citizens should be disinclined toward *political empathy*—taking the political perspective of other racial and class groups and of those who disagree with themselves politically. Likewise, they should be inclined toward *naive realism*—an incapacity to understand political disagreement because of an inability to take the perspective of the dissenter. Naive realists see their own perspective as self-evident and those of dissenters as incomprehensible. Consequently, they rationalize disagreement as due to lack of effort by dissenters or due to their irrationality or ill-intent. Those low in political empathy and high in naïve realism should be particularly susceptible to belief in a false consensus and may therefore be more amenable to stealth democracy.

The parochial citizen may also possess certain cognitive dispositions. The parochial worldview involves a serious oversimplification of reality, which means consistency is only possible by ignoring many facts, and it reinforces an unquestioning attitude by reviling dissent itself. Thus, parochial citizens should be inclined toward moderately low need for cognition (NFC, a self-report measure of enjoyment of thinking) and toward high need for structure-order (NFS, a desire for certainty and order). Those low in NFC and high in NFS might prefer a stealth democracy because these dispositions play into authority attitudes, false consensus beliefs, and political perspective taking. They might also directly prefer such a democracy because they expect the public, like themselves, to prefer not to exercise their cognition or address uncertainty.

4.METHOD

4.1Participants

Knowledge Networks (KN), an outside firm noted for its sampling work on academic deliberation projects, conducted the recruitment for this study. Of a sample of 6,935 Pittsburgh city residents (defined by zip code area) who could be reached via random digit dialing (RDD), 22% agreed to participate in this research and took a phone survey. Sampling differed from KN's typical methodology on other deliberation projects in that it did not utilize quota sampling to make demographic statistics more representative of the population as a whole. Thus, the sample accurately reflects who would come to this deliberation without demographic oversampling. The sample better generalizes to what it would be if deliberation were a more widely used process of government, because cost and legal requirements would likely prevent quota sampling. Also, it avoids the concern that those who come to a deliberation after extensive oversampling may be atypical of their demographic.

Of recruits who agreed to participate, 37% or 568 people showed for the Phase 1 on-campus deliberation. Knowledge Networks succeeded in phone-interviewing 463 of the 568 study participants before they came to their on-campus day of deliberation. A modest response rate was expected because recruits were asked to participate in a series of online deliberations that would take most participants eight-months to complete and which they could join

only by coming to the initial on-campus, all-day deliberation. The final participation percentages are not, however, incomparable to that of another substantial long-term deliberation study, Vincent Price's Electronic Dialogue Project at the Annenberg School of Communication [19, 20]. This project started with an effective sample of the population from which its discussants were drawn of about 3,686 [20]. The number of people who ever participated in any discussion over the course of the year is 543, and the average number of people who participated in a given discussion was 305 [19]. Ultimately, the response rates are modest. Comfort can be drawn from several considerations: a fair similarity to population demographics, the fact that the sample represents people who might be expected to participate in longer-term deliberations, and the objective of this research which is experimental and focused on psychological processes that should be universal.

Despite a strict RDD sample and modest response rate, the participants in this project reasonably matched the Pittsburgh city population on most demographic criteria. The sample was 77% Caucasian and 18% African-American, compared with CPS population benchmarks for the relevant zip codes of 75% and 20%, respectively. Fifty-six percent of the sample was female, compared with 53% for the population. Twelve percent of the sample was 18-29 years old, 22% 30-44 years old, 26% 45-59, and 27% 60+. This compares with population values of 26%, 20%, 26%, and 27%. The elderly and thirty-somethings are accurately represented, the young are underrepresented, while mid-life adults are overrepresented. Average age, however, is the same as for the population. Perhaps the greatest departure from population values is for education, which, as expected, is greater than for the population. Median education is "Some College" for both the sample and the population. Lower educational categories, however, are underrepresented, with 10% of the sample having less than a high school education and 14% having just a high school education, compared with 16% and 31% for the population. Nevertheless, the sample does contain the full range of educational levels.

Phase 2 of the project, the eight-month at-home online deliberations, was intended to include 410 of the original 568 participants who were selected to receive a computer. Substantial participant drop-off occurred by Phase 2 of the project, with response rates to questionnaires in the early part of Phase 2 dropping to about 230. Drop-out was perhaps driven in part by participant frustration with software and hardware problems and disappointment with the quality of the computer equipment provided as an incentive. The project's capacity to purchase high quality equipment and to address other problems was constrained by the resources allotted for social research on the project.

Pittsburgh is an ethnically and class diverse community with a city population of 334,583 and over one million including surrounding areas, according to the 2000 Census. Neighborhoods range from suburb-like residential areas to areas of urban poverty. Although Pittsburgh is known to have a moderately high quality of life for a city its size, people intimately involved with public life in the city do not believe this leads to either an especially high level of political involvement or non-contentious public dialogue.

4.2Materials and Procedures

Knowledge Networks obtained phone numbers for households in the City of Pittsburgh from a random digit dial (RDD) sample. Where numbers appeared in a reverse directory, the household was sent an advance letter on Carnegie Mellon University stationery describing the study and indicating that the household would be contacted shortly. A Knowledge Networks phone center called households in the RDD sample and requested the household member with the most recent birth date. Both the letter and the call center indicated that in exchange for participation in the study, participants would have a four out of five chance of receiving a Windows computer and eight months of ISP service. The remainder would receive $100. Those who received a computer would be expected to participate in a longer-term online deliberation from home that would require six hours of discussion over eight months. People who agreed to participate were given a short phone-based survey of their demographics and a few policy attitudes, and they were scheduled for a one-day, eight hour on-campus deliberation. Participants were asked to come to a randomly-chosen day from the deliberation schedule, which spanned three weeks in July, including many weekends and weekdays.

Deliberations were held with up to 60 participants daily. After informed consent and a brief training session, participants took a web-based pre-survey. Next, they were given a 40 minute "library session" to learn more about the four policy topics, a break, 90 minutes for "deliberation" (face-to-face, online, or individual contemplation, depending on condition), and lunch. The library session, break, and deliberation (same condition as before) were repeated in the afternoon, and this was followed by the second survey. In addition to the experiment with type of deliberation, another experimental condition involved either receiving or not receiving reminders of citizenship. In the citizenship condition, participants were reminded to think like citizens in a brief "talking-head" ahead of their deliberations (the non-citizen condition involved a different talking-head), their rooms had an American flag, and they were given name tags with American flags and the word "Citizen" preceding their names.

4.3Measures

4.3.1Apathy Rationales

The apathy rationales were each measured with multiple questions. Apathy rationale questions appeared in random order. All question responses were measured on 7-point Likert scales. A sample question is: Conflict Averse (Phase 1 post-deliberation survey)—"When people argue about politics, I feel uneasy and uncomfortable." Note that conflict aversion involves a slight rewrite of the Hibbing and Theiss-Morse question so it would fit better into a set of Likert questions. It was joined by a companion reversed question.

One apathy rationale occurred in the pre-deliberation questionnaire, false consensus. False Consensus—"Thinking about the American people, what portion of Americans do you believe think 'MostImpProblem' is the single biggest problem facing the country today?" and "What portion of Americans do you believe basically agree with you on what should be done about 'MostImpProblem'?". The survey system replaced MostImpProblem with the most important problem facing America that the participant had earlier identified. The 11-point response scale had labels: No Americans, Half of All Americans, All Americans. This response scale has an objective interpretation, unlike Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's "very few, some, most" Americans scale. I also added another pre-deliberation measure of expected unproductive conflict: Expect

Conflict—"Overall, what portion of discussion in your discussion group do you anticipate will involve unproductive conflict?" (11-pt. scale anchors: None of the Discussion / Half of the Discussion / All of the Discussion).

4.3.2Authority Attitudes and Cognitive dispositions

Most of these were measured using short versions (4-6 items) of scales widely used and accepted by political and personality psychologists and can readily be found in a search of PsychInfo. This includes social dominance orientation (SDO)[31], right-wing authoritarianism (RWA)[2], vertical collectivism (VC)[33], need for cognition (NFC)[3], and need for structure-order (NFS)[15]. One novel measure is naive realism, the idea for which was suggested by Ross [26]. It involves such questions as: "I can understand why people who disagree with me politically believe what they believe." and "People who disagree with me politically seem to have an agenda." The second novel measure is political empathy. The measure involved rewriting the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) questions pertaining to empathic perspective taking [6] so that they focused on politically-relevant rather than interpersonal perspective taking. These include questions such as: "If I'm sure I'm right about a political issue, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments." and "I sometimes find it difficult to see political issues from the point of view of people in other social classes."

5.RESULTS

5.1The Contentious Nature of the Issues

The topic of deliberation was Pittsburgh public school consolidation and three related policies. Because of population decline, Pittsburgh public schools had a substantial and expensive excess of seating capacity in schools. The issue is contentious, pitting parents against taxpayers and neighborhoods against the School Board. Fifty-four percent of participants reported that the issues directly affected them or their families.

5.2Explaining Stealth Democracy

Table 1 shows regressions of stealth democracy on three models. All analyses are conducted with robust errors that account for discussion group error covariance, because deliberation in groups may have affected some of the variables involved. The model in the first column after the variable names (henceforth Column 2) seeks to reproduce Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's regression, except that rather than creating a single indicator called "negative view of disagreement" that averages false perceptions of a public consensus, aversion to conflict, and political interest, these three variables are each entered separately. Averaging these questions runs contrary to the authors' theoretical discussion and obscures important differences in the effects of the variables. Column 2 shows that political (dis)interest plays no significant role in explaining stealth democracy beliefs, while false consensus perceptions have 2.4 times the effect of aversion to conflict. Note that continuous variables were put on seven-point scales to insure comparability of coefficients. With addition of yet other control variables in Column 3, conflict aversion proves non-significant, suggesting that it may have merely a spurious or indirect relationship with stealth democracy beliefs. Despite their central role in the stealth democracy thesis, personal discomfort with conflict and political disinterest are not the dominant factors in explaining stealth democracy beliefs.

Table 1. OLS Regressions of Stealth Democ. on Three Models

Independent Variables	All non-dichot. vars on 7-pt scales. Unstandardized Coef. (Cluster-Robust s.e.)		
Parochial Cit.			.43***(.06)
VC		.21*** (.05)	
RWA		.17** (.06)	
SDO		.06 (.05)	
False Consen.	.22***(.04)	.17***(.04)	
Exp. Conflict		.13*** (.04)	
Naïve Realism		.17** (.06)	
Social Empthy		-.05 (.07)	
NFC		.02 (.07)	
NFS		-.06 (.06)	
Conflct Avers.	.09** (.03)	.05 (.03)	.04 (.03)
Political Inter.	-.04 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	.03 (.04)
Liberal	-.12*** (.04)	-.02 (.04)	-.07* (.04)
Democrat	-.16 (.11)	-.16 (.10)	-.16 (.10)
Republican	-.11 (.18)	-.24 (.17)	-.31* (.16)
Education	-.27*** (.04)	-.20*** (.04)	-.20***(.04)
	All analyses also control for income, ethnicity, gender, age, & constant (not shwn)		
R^2; s.e.	.25; 1.09	.34; 1.03	.29; 1.06

Note: N=558 throughout (loss of 10 observations due to non-response). All F-values<.0001. *** is p<.001; ** is p<.01; * is p<.05; † is p<.10 All p-values are robust and account for non-independence of errors by discussion group. P-values reported are one-sided for all non-demographic variables with coefficients in the expected direction.

Column 3 of Table 1 displays the full model derived from the parochial citizen thesis, along with the Hibbing and Theiss-Morse model. The Column 3 model is superior to the Column 2 model in terms of R^2 and standard error. The only variable from the Hibbing and Theiss-Morse theoretical model that remains significant in Column 3 is false consensus beliefs. The most potent variable in the table is vertical collectivism (VC) and the combination of VC and RWA, both authoritarian beliefs, dominates the effects. As predicted by the parochial citizen thesis, both false beliefs in an abstract public consensus and expectations of unproductive conflict in the concrete deliberations contribute to stealth democracy beliefs. This poses a paradox for the stealth democracy thesis.

Column 4 of Table 1 tests the possibility that a single composite indicator combining all the views and orientations of the parochial citizen mentality might do well in explaining stealth democracy beliefs. The composite is simply a weighted average of the variables, with weights determined by an exploratory factor analysis fitting these variables to one factor. The composite quite potently explains stealth democracy beliefs. While the amount of explained variance is lower than for Column 3, this may be related to simply having fewer variables with which to overfit the dependent variable.

5.3Effects of Online and F2F Deliberation

Table 2 presents results indicating that deliberation helps ameliorate stealth democracy beliefs and some of the variables feeding into stealth beliefs. Only two of the nine variables underlying the parochial citizen thesis were available for consideration. A decision was made to not include pre- and post-deliberation measures in Phase 1 for most indicators because of concern that pre-measures administered the same day as post-measures would prove reactive. Instead, it was anticipated that

post-measures would be collected during Phase 2. Regrettably, Phase 2 experienced considerable respondent drop-out, for reasons previously discussed. In addition, Phase 2 began later than expected because of software issues, creating a remove of several months between measures collected in both Phases. Therefore, change between Phases 1 and 2 will, with the exception of the crucial stealth democracy beliefs variable, not be considered because of small sample size (hence low statistical power), possible weakening of effects over time, and the possibility that intervening events may have influenced the variables.

One of the nine parochial citizen variables was collected post-discussion in Phase 1: vertical collectivism (VC). It is therefore possible to determine whether VC was significantly larger for those who deliberated than those who did not. Column 2 of Table 2 (the first column of results) shows an ANOVA-equivalent regression. The constant indicates the constant for VC in the excluded condition: Control X No Citizen—that is, no discussion and no reminders of citizenship. Coefficients for the other conditions indicate deviation from this overall constant. Thus, for example, the mean level for Online X Citizen is .73-.33 or .40. Column 2 shows that the two online discussion conditions had very significantly lower levels of post-discussion VC than the Control X No Citizen condition (they are also significant if the contrast condition is *both* control conditions—p=.03, .01). Lower levels of VC were expected to be most noticeable for the Online X No Citizen condition, but it appears that both online conditions contributed equally to reduce VC. The findings on VC are quite definitive—deliberation reduces vertical collectivism, which is one of the primary contributors to stealth democracy beliefs.

Table 2. OLS Regressions Showing Effects of Deliberation on Outcome Variables

	Dependent Variables		
	VC (post-delib.)	Change in Exp. Confl.	Change in Stealth Bel's[a]
Independent Variables	All non-dichot. vars on 7-pt scales. Unstandardized Coef. (Cluster-Robust s.e.)		
Online X Citiz.	-.33** (.13)	-.74† (.54)	-.45†(.34)
OnlineXNo Cit	-.32** (.11)	-1.23** (.46)	-.60* (.34)
F2F X Citiz.	.07 (.15)	-.78† (.52)	-.69* (.30)
F2F X No Cit.	-.01 (.15)	-1.14* (.62)	-.54* (.32)
Ctrl X Citiz.	-.20 (.14)	-.41 (.52)	-.51 (.44)
Ctrl X No Cit.	See Cons.	-.32 (.47)	-.35 (.26)
Education	-.14***(.03)	.12 (.09)	.09 (.07)
Income	.05 (.03)	-.15† (.08)	-.03 (.07)
Age	.10* (.04)	-.28** (.10)	.05 (.07)
African-Amer.	.10 (.11)	.82** (.29)	-.18 (.25)
Male	.22* (.09)	.23 (.18)	-.18 (.25)
Constant	.73***(.17)	N / A	N / A
N; R^2; s.e.	556; .08;.98	559; .22; 2.4	229; .05; 1.3

Note: All F-values<.0001. *** is p<.001; ** is p<.01; * is p<.05; † is p<.10 All p-values are robust and account for non-independence of errors by discussion group. P-values reported are one-sided for all non-demographic variables with coefficients in the expected direction.

[a]A subset of two stealth democracy variables (see text)

Expectations of unproductive conflict can be compared with a post-deliberation Phase 1 measure of perceptions of conflict. Perceptions of conflict was collected from deliberators by asking about how much conflict they perceived in their discussions. This variable was collected from the control group by asking participants at the end of Phase 1 how much conflict they would anticipate in a discussion. (This "perceived conflict" variable differs, however, from the pre-deliberation expected unproductive conflict variable in that it does not use the word "unproductive." Statistical evidence from the survey indicates that the two variables are closely related. Indeed the post-deliberation survey included a perceived *unproductive* conflict question for discussion group members that is highly correlated with the post-deliberation perceived conflict question [ρ=.59].) Column 3 of Table 2 shows a regression of the *change* in perceived conflict (post-deliberation perceived conflict minus pre-deliberation expected unproductive conflict) on the experimental conditions. Coefficients of the experimental conditions indicate the amount by which post-deliberation perceived conflict changes from pre-deliberation expected conflict in that condition. Changes are quite substantial and negative, indicating large declines in perceived conflict, with significant effects in two experimental conditions. Another regression (not depicted) asked whether this change was significantly more negative in the discussion than control conditions, it was (ß=-.63, p=.01, for a variable coded 1 for discussants and 0 otherwise). (An examination of the post-deliberation perceived *unproductive* conflict variable shows highly significant decreases in this variable relative to the pre-deliberation variable for all discussion conditions (p<.012 for all). This analysis has the weakness that it does not include observations in the control conditions.)

Column 4 of Table 2 shows significant reductions in stealth democracy beliefs in three of four discussion conditions with a trend in the fourth. The stealth democracy variable here is an average of only two of the four stealth variables. Indications in correlation patterns and means suggests that there may be some difference between two stealth democracy variables that ask whether debate and compromise should be cut short in government and two other variables that ask whether government should be run by experts and business leaders. The citizen-to-citizen deliberation in the current study can be expected to have greatest effects on perceptions of debate and compromise, not the value of business leaders and experts in government. Also, 73% of participants in the current study disagreed with one or both of the questions about the desirability of a government run by business leaders and experts. If deliberation reduces stealth democracy beliefs, there would be little room to register reductions on these variables. In contrast, 82% of participants agreed with one or both questions indicating the desirability of reducing debate and compromise, allowing considerable room for improvement. Not surprisingly, deliberation has no significant effect on the business leaders and experts questions, but it does have effects on the debate and compromise questions, upon which I focus here. The change reported in Table 2 is measured as the difference between Phase 2 two-variable stealth democracy beliefs and Phase 1 pre-deliberation two-variable stealth democracy beliefs. The Phase 2 beliefs were measured shortly after the start of Phase 2. The strongest effect was in the f2f X citizen condition, followed by the online X no-citizen condition, which was expected to be the strongest effect.

6.DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Researchers and practitioners in e-government are optimistic about the benefits of communication technologies for democracy. In contrast, many political scientists entertain the stealth

democracy thesis that most of the public desires a democracy with little debate, compromise, or public input run by experts and business people. Indeed, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse find considerable agreement in the public with questions tapping stealth democracy beliefs. Their findings lead these authors to believe that encouraging public participation would either be irrelevant because of reasonable public disinterest or potentially trigger adverse consequences such as system delegitimization.

This paper proposes a different interpretation of the finding that Americans embrace stealth democracy beliefs. It stipulates that these beliefs are rooted in a "parochial citizen worldview" involving a set of socially problematic views and orientations and that this syndrome can be ameliorated by involving people in online political deliberation. The views and orientations include false consensus beliefs, fear of conflict, strong pro-authority attitudes, incapacity for social perspective taking, and dispositions to cognitive lethargy.

The paper's findings are consistent with the parochial citizen thesis. The nine parochial citizen views and orientations prove to be a far better explanatory model than Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's original model that focuses on false consensus beliefs, political disinterest, and aversion to conflict. Indeed, the latter two variables prove non-significant, challenging Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's interpretation of stealth democracy beliefs as rooted in understandable political disinterest and aversion to conflict. Strong pro-authority beliefs, associated in the literature with prejudice and irrationally punitive attitudes, are the most potent explanation of stealth democracy beliefs. Also, the Hibbing and Theiss-Morse interpretation cannot explain why participants in the present study embraced stealth democracy both out of a false belief in a consensus and fear of conflict. The parochial citizen thesis explains how the same people can both believe in an abstract consensus and fear actual conflict.

Finally, the paper reveals that democratic deliberation mitigates two of the key components of stealth democracy beliefs and some of the views and orientations behind these beliefs. Deliberation reduces post-deliberation attitudes, including stealth democracy beliefs as well as vertical collectivism and perceptions of conflict —potent explanations of stealth democracy beliefs. While not examined here, the data on which the current paper is based clearly show that deliberation does not decrease confidence in government, alleviating concern about system delegitimization.

7.IMPLICATIONS FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

The implications here for digital government are positive. This paper introduces a theoretical and empirical response to the stealth democracy thesis—a claim widely promulgated in political science that citizens neither want nor would benefit from greater engagement. The paper suggests a counter-interpretation of stealth democracy findings as rooted in parochial citizens whose overly simple understandings of government might threaten democracy. In this interpretation, citizen engagement and discussion may be crucial to ameliorating these simplistic understandings and the socially harmful beliefs and orientations to which they give rise. Results from the present study show that, in particular, two key factors play no significant direct role in explaining stealth democracy—personal aversion to conflict and political disinterest. The stipulated relationship between these two factors and stealth democracy beliefs account for Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's conclusion that citizens do not want more engagement. Showing that a direct relationship does not exist helps undermine this conclusion. Instead, stealth democracy appears rooted in a syndrome of authoritarianism, poor socio-political perspective taking, and cognitive lethargy. This syndrome can be understood as arising from inadequately developed understandings of political agency—of leadership and the dynamics of organizations. Deliberation might directly undermine core beliefs behind this parochial citizen mentality—by demonstrating to participants that reasonable and patriotic people can disagree on the issues and that the public can amicably and intelligently arrive at a solution without political leaders imposing a "consensus." Deliberation should and does undermine stealth democracy beliefs and some of the factors that lead to these beliefs. The theory and findings here strongly indicate that, yes, government should design for citizen participation, especially deliberative participation.

Moreover, the findings in particular indicate that e-government deliberative initiatives would be worthwhile. A common perception about deliberation practitioners (at the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, personal communications) is that face-to-face (f2f) deliberation is vastly superior to online deliberation. The Kettering Foundation, for example, has long refused to entertain online deliberation because of a conviction that such engagement would be useless—thus resorting to very expensive f2f meetings. The findings here, however, indicate that online discussions can be as useful in undermining stealth democracy and related beliefs as f2f discussions. In particular, the only condition that consistently and significantly ameliorates all three stealth democracy and related beliefs here is the online discussion condition with no reminders of citizenship. This condition appreciably reduces vertical collectivism and perceived conflict, as well as stealth beliefs.

To closely replicate the condition here that consistently undermined stealth democracy beliefs and some of its problematic attitudinal precursors, digital government practitioners should set up audio-based online discussions using full participant names, avoid use of symbols of citizenship (flags, the word "citizen", references to the country), and appeal to participants to take the occasion to learn about what is useful to make up their own minds —avoiding mention of their role as community members. No text-based deliberations were tested here, so it is possible that audio is unnecessary for the desired effects. Indeed, text-based discussion may have stronger effects. Being online consistently matters only for reducing vertical collectivism (VC). Those online with citizen reminders may be so absorbed in the citizen role that they do not experience conflict between their own wishes and that of the group, also reducing VC. Those online with individuality reminders may become more individualistic and reject the needs of the group, undermining VC. If the latter explanation is correct, then text-based discussion, which is even more anonymous than audio, should enhance the reduction of VC because it creates greater deindividuation.

To achieve the positive effects described here, government officials need to introduce online deliberation in such enterprises as e-rulemaking. Rulemaking is among the most prominent ways in which citizens can provide input into government [29]. Current e-rulemaking systems discourage discussion by participants by structuring input as individual comment documents rather than as discussion threads. Public comments typically flood in toward the very end of the assigned discussion period for a rule, limiting

interaction. Also, public interest groups have approached rulemaking as a plebiscite by taking public comments as an opportunity to flood officials with form letters, precisely not what federal officials find helpful [29]. In future work, I hope to test several methods of online deliberation in actual e-rulemaking. Numerous freeware products already exist for real-time chat or threaded bulletin board discussions such as PHP Website, mvnForum, GroupServer, phpBB, and Deme. One particularly exciting possibility includes using Second Life, a virtual reality environment with text chat and possibilities for audio, to host online e-rulemaking deliberations. An interesting question is whether having an avatar will prove more or less deindividuating than standard textual communications.

8.ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. EIA-0205502.

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