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Abstract

Public scientific controversies are often the enemy of deliberation, because debating and winning take precedence over an open-minded examination of options. Nevertheless, forms of deliberation do occur throughout controversies, including what can be called "partisan deliberation" in which campaigners on each side of an issue refine and coordinate their respective positions. As well, there are other opportunities for deliberation created by controversies, though the conditions are far from ideal.

Keywords: scientific controversy, deliberation, vaccination, fluoridation

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Controversia Pública y Deliberación Partidista

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Abstract

Las controversias científicas públicas son a menudo el enemigo de la deliberación, porque el debate y gane toma prioridad con respecto a la examinación de opciones de una mentalidad muy abierta. Sin embargo, las formas de deliberación se producen a lo largo de controversias, incluyendo lo que se puede llamar "la deliberación partidista" en las cuales los activistas en cada lado del asunto clasifican y coordina su respectiva posición. Además, hay otras oportunidades de deliberación creadas por controversias, aunque las condiciones están lejos de ser ideal.

Palabras clave: controversia científica, deliberación, vacunación, fluoración

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Scientific controversies with a public dimension, for example over climate change, fluoridation, genetic engineering, or nuclear power, seem almost the antithesis of deliberation. In an ideal process in which a group of individuals deliberates on an issue, there is exposure to a range of information, respectful airing of viewpoints, examination of commonalities and differences, and a genuine search for consensus. However, campaigners in public scientific controversies, rather than seeking to resolve their differences through thoughtful engagement, instead seek most of all to win the debate, often less through evidence and logic and more through winning support and using power to influence policy.

Public controversies typically involve a mixture of issues, including science, politics, and ethics (Kleinman et al., 2005, 2008, 2010; Martin, 2014; Nelkin, 1979). For example, the debate over fluoridation of public water supplies involves claims about benefits (prevention of tooth decay) and risks (adverse health effects), about ethics (compulsion), and about politics (how decisions should be made). Although such debates are sometimes characterized as a coalescence of a scientific controversy and a social controversy (Engelhardt & Caplan, 1987), in practice it is often difficult to separate these elements. For example, in the debate over nuclear power, assessments of the evidence about the effects of low-level ionizing radiation are themselves affected by views about nuclear power (Diesendorf, 1982).

Public controversies often generate a polarization of viewpoints, typically with two opposing views being at loggerheads in several different areas. In the fluoridation debate (Freeze & Lehr, 2009; Martin, 1991), proponents assert that the benefits are large, the risks small or non-existent, the benefits greatest for disadvantaged segments of the population (an ethical argument), and that decisions should be made by experts, whereas opponents question the scale of the benefits, emphasize evidence for health risks, oppose compulsory medication at an uncontrolled dose, and argue for public participation in decision-making. It is rare to find prominent figures who take an intermediate stance, for example that fluoridation is completely safe but should be opposed because it is mandatory medication. What happens in polarized debates is that each side adopts positions that attack the opponent's claims and defend

against the opponent's counter-attacks. Adopting an intermediate position means surrendering an argument: the opponent will exploit any concession made. The result is that those with complex positions or with reservations about claims receive little support from either side, and usually drop out of the debate.

For these and other reasons, public controversies seem at first sight to offer poor prospects for careful deliberation involving open-minded and respectful examination and testing of evidence and arguments. Yet there are some surprising opportunities that can be pursued. In the next section, the obstacles to deliberation posed by the dynamics of public controversies are outlined. In the following sections, several openings for deliberation are described: deliberation within each side's campaign networks, called partisan deliberation; individual assessments; public debates; citizens juries; and government bodies. This examination shows that there can be deliberative elements even in inhospitable terrains. Furthermore, examining the obstacles to deliberation, and ways around them, can point to insights applicable to deliberation in seemingly less constrained circumstances.

Public Controversy as the Enemy of Deliberation

In public controversies, the aim of many campaigners is to win, which includes winning arguments and, more importantly, ensuring that desired outcomes are achieved. Campaigners against nuclear power, for example, would like to win arguments about the seriousness of the hazards of reactor accidents and long-lived radioactive waste, and the meta-argument that these hazards warrant more weight than the putative benefits of nuclear power, but more important is that nuclear developments are thwarted and that existing nuclear facilities are closed down. Pro-nuclear campaigners have an analogous set of contrary arguments and goals. When the aim is to win, interactions with opponents become not an opportunity to find common ground but simply another arena to continue the struggle. The result is that wide-ranging deliberation becomes elusive, at least for ardent campaigners.

Due to the dynamics of public debate, there are pressures on each side to make their arguments coherent, so that each element supports their preferred position (Martin, 1991, pp. 37–55). As noted above, fluoridation campaigners consistently take either a pro or anti position on each of the facets of the

debate: benefits, risks, ethics and politics. Adopting a non-standard position is to open your side to attack. For example, pro-fluoridation campaigners are unwise to admit that any health risks are significant, or even exist. If a single credible figure — a health official or a researcher — makes such an admission, it will be taken up by opponents and repeated forever after. The side with less epistemological credibility is especially likely to trumpet concessions by authority figures within the orthodoxy. As a result, debaters are reluctant to reveal any weaknesses in their arguments. If imported into a deliberative forum, this reluctance undermines the prospects for open discussion of viewpoints: partisans will remain guarded.

Within many public controversies, one or both sides seek to win over authorities and to use the exercise of power to resolve the debate. For example, fluoridation proponents have sought to convince governments to implement the measure. In some instances, when local governments refuse, proponents seek mandates from state governments in order to override local resistance. Some US anti-fluoridation campaigners have gone to courts seeking a halt to fluoridation on various grounds. Though they have hardly ever been successful, this illustrates their willingness to draw on the power of authorities to resolve the policy debate in their favor.

Activists — even those sympathetic to public participation in decision-making — may have reservations about deliberative mechanisms, for example being worried that they are an elitist discourse, that radical claims may be submerged in "reasonableness," and that deliberation cannot adequately address a clash of interests (Levine & Nierras, 2007). In polarized controversies, these reservations are likely to be accentuated.

Seeking to use the power of the state, sometimes via the state's regulation of the market, to decide the outcome is to override processes of deliberation. The aim with these sorts of administrative or legal interventions is to achieve goals directly, without the necessity of convincing opponents or shifting public opinion.

Another factor hindering deliberation is verbal attacks on opponents. Critics of vaccination have been described in various derogatory ways, for example as crazies or baby-killers. Some opponents have returned fire with uncomplimentary labels for proponents. Such hostile labeling is contrary to the mutual respect that is an important basis for many deliberative processes.

Public debates have one more important limitation so far as deliberation is concerned: they can distract attention from potential solutions and from areas of agreement. Fluoridation is just one of many ways to get fluoride to people's teeth. Others include fluoridated toothpaste, fluoride mouthwashes, and fluoride applied by dentists, none of which arouse much debate, because they are voluntary. On a wider canvas, there are other ways to address tooth decay, including dental hygiene (brushing and flossing teeth), eating fewer sugary foods, and improving nutrition. However, these sorts of options are sidelined by the vociferous debate over fluoridation.

In summary, public controversies have several features that reduce the prospects for deliberation, including polarization of views, coherence of arguments, a focus on exercising power to impose favored policies, and distraction from alternative solutions to agreed concerns. These features help to explain why some controversies are so long-lived. The fluoridation controversy emerged in the 1950s and has continued in much the same form ever since. Despite the obstacles, though, there are a few openings within controversies that can enable elements or pockets of deliberation. These include deliberation within each side's groups or networks, individual assessments, citizens juries, and formal processes. These are addressed in the following sections.

Partisan Deliberation

In public controversies, deliberation involving partisans from opposite sides may be difficult, but within each side's groups and networks, there are various opportunities for assessing evidence, rehearsing arguments, choosing rhetoric, and deciding strategy. This can be called partisan deliberation: it is deliberation within a set of constraints, most commonly the goal of winning the debate and achieving preferred outcomes. This might also be called constrained deliberation because it occurs within constraints imposed by the debate itself, as well as by other factors.

Within thinking about deliberative democracy, partisan groups in public controversies are one type of enclave. In the continuum of inclusiveness, the highest level is the entire public sphere. Below this are mini-publics, for example a group of individuals randomly drawn from the entire population. Then there are sector mini-publics, for example individuals randomly drawn

from a sector of the population such as youth or people with disabilities. Below sector mini-publics are enclaves, which are homogeneous groups of individuals (Raisio & Carson, 2014). The type of enclave most frequently encountered in public scientific controversies is a group or network of individuals who share the same viewpoint (Karpowitz et al., 2009, p.582). The composition of deliberative bodies, and the likely domains of discussion, are illustrated in Table 1 in relation to the vaccination debate.

Table 1. *Deliberative bodies and typical vaccination issues addressed at different levels of inclusiveness*

Level of inclusiveness	Composition of deliberative forum	Typical issues addressed
Public sphere	All citizens	Vaccination in the context of initiatives for child health
Mini-public	Representative sample of citizens	Vaccination policy
Sector mini-public	Representative sample of people involved with the vaccination issue	Vaccination policy
Enclave	Group members supporting or critical of vaccination	Campaigning priorities and strategies

Partisan deliberation can occur in various ways and locations, including within key campaigning organizations, in networks of committed professionals, among politicians, and in government departments. In each of these circumstances, most or all participants agree about their goals but find a need to discuss how best to achieve them. In some situations, it is possible that deliberation may take a wider ambit, including some open-minded discussion of the other side's position. The focus here is on the discussions that are more highly circumscribed by the polarization common in bitter public controversies.

Partisan deliberation in scientific controversies can be hard to study because most of it occurs in arenas closed to outside scrutiny. Campaigners seldom want to make their planning discussions open to the public, or indeed to anyone they do not trust, because comments indicating uncertainty or

weakness might be taken up by the opposition. For example, in 1951 Francis Bull, a prominent proponent of fluoridation, gave a candid talk at a dental conference on how to sell the measure. Unbeknownst to Bull, his talk was transcribed; opponents obtained a copy and used quotes from it to condemn fluoridation advocacy (Martin, 1991, pp. 64–67). The best insights into partisan deliberation in practice are by participants, but candid accounts are seldom publicly available.

To illustrate some of the features of partisan deliberation and the difficulties in studying it, I will use the example of the Australian vaccination debate, in which some discussions are publicly accessible. In Australia, as in most countries, vaccination is supported by most researchers, doctors, and policy-makers; it is endorsed and promoted by government health departments. In the face of this dominant orthodoxy there are some citizen groups critical of vaccination, supported by a small number of doctors and researchers. One of the vaccine-critical groups, set up in the 1990s, was the Australian Vaccination Network (AVN);[1] it became the largest and most prominent in the area. In 2009, a pro-vaccination group, called Stop the Australian Vaccination Network (SAVN),[2] was set up with the explicit goal of shutting down the AVN (Martin, 2011, 2012). Both the AVN and SAVN have presences on the Internet, so it is possible to gain a fair bit of insight into their treatment of the issues.

The AVN, like other vaccine-critical groups, highlights the adverse effects of vaccination, the decline in most infectious diseases prior to mass vaccination, and the importance of informed parental choice in children's vaccination. Sympathetic contributors to the AVN discussion sites seldom review the evidence in support of vaccination. Instead, the primary emphasis is on presenting information to question or complement the government's official endorsement of vaccination. In so much as AVN online discussions have a deliberative element, they operate within a set of assumptions, including that individual choice is crucial, adverse effects of vaccination are important, and that the evidence for the benefits of vaccination is not conclusive. Within these assumptions, various evidence and arguments are canvassed. A key constraint is that evidence and arguments are likely to be challenged by supporters of vaccination, including government officials, pro-vaccination campaigners (including SAVN), and doctors that AVN members consult. Because the AVN has come under such sustained attack by SAVN,

what appears online on the AVN's website is bound to be a limited reflection of the sorts of discussions AVN members might have privately. Not only are SAVN contributors blocked, but many AVN supporters are reluctant to post comments because they might be targeted by SAVN.

More revealing by far are SAVN discussions. SAVN, a network of concerned citizens not formally connected to any professional organization, operates largely through a Facebook page, supplemented by the blogs of many individual SAVNers. There are hundreds of comments on the Facebook page every day, from a wide range of contributors. It is apparent that positions on various issues are negotiated through these discussions. Endorsement of the government's vaccination policy is taken for granted. Research findings are often cited but, in the face of critical queries, SAVNers seldom claim expertise themselves, instead saying people should consult with their doctors.

A primary focus on SAVN discussions is on shutting down the AVN and any other critics of vaccination who have a public profile. Quite a few SAVNers make nasty comments about the AVN. Meryl Dorey, the founder and for many years the most prominent AVN figure, was a special target for hostile comment (Martin & Peña, 2014). SAVNers have made numerous complaints to government departments about the AVN. When journalists quote Dorey, SAVNers complain to the media organization. When Dorey was scheduled to give a public talk, SAVNers organized to try to have her invitation withdrawn (Martin, 2015). SAVNers are quite open about their efforts to censor vaccine critics. However, there are limits. When actions against the AVN become too strong, SAVN Facebook page administrators draw the line. For example, they condemned the sending of pornography to Dorey and others in the AVN.

In the SAVN online discussions, the Facebook page administrators play an important role. They initiate, through posts, most of the extensive discussions, thus performing a role within SAVN analogous to the agenda-setting role of the mass media in wider society. Other SAVNers can introduce topics in the section "Visitor posts." Some of these generate considerable comment; others attract likes but little comment; quite a few fail to stimulate any response.

There are several ways to characterize SAVN discussions; the focus here is on deliberative elements. The most salient facets that involve deliberation address the appropriate goals and methods for SAVN. The primary focus of SAVN has been the AVN, including highlighting shortcomings of AVN

claims, making fun of comments by AVN members, and taking action to discredit and hinder the AVN. However, many SAVNers see this project as part of a wider campaign against alternative medicine. In 2015, after the influence of the AVN had dramatically declined, SAVN administrators turned more of their attention to attacking chiropractic and other modalities such as naturopathy and homeopathy.

Then there is the question of what to think about various issues. If there is a new claim or initiative by vaccine critics, or some new event such as a policy announcement or statistics published about a particular infectious disease, SAVNers will discuss its significance and how to respond. In many discussions, SAVNers offer information or perspectives or viewpoints. These may be supported, qualified, opposed, or ignored. The ongoing interactions thus provide a sort of running de facto deliberation about information, activities, attitudes, methods, and goals. This is constrained by the overall aim of SAVN to discredit and censor anyone who publicly challenges orthodox views about vaccination.

The following thread, from July 2015, illustrates some of the typical elements of SAVN discussions, showing responses to a post critical of vaccination.[3] I chose this thread — a post followed by a dozen or so comments — because it is a self-contained topic rather than part of an ongoing discussion.

> **Sumner Raphael Berg**
> For the older ones who got the polio vaccine back in the 50-60s we got with it SV40 which comes from a Rhesus monkey and is a carcinogen. Aren't we lucky?
>
> **Mike Both (yawn)**...
> http://scienceblogs.com/.../a-zombie-meme-rises-from-the.../
> A zombie meme rises from the grave: Maurice Hilleman, the polio vaccine, SV40, and cancer
> The Internet has produced a revolution with respect to information. Now, people anywhere, any time, can find almost any information that they want, as long as they have a connection to the global network and aren't unfortunate enough to live in a country that heavily censors the Internet connections…SCIENCEBLOGS.COM
> July 13 at 8:39pm; 15 likes

Ray Sarah Elliott And not only did you not have a carcinogenic vaccine, but you never suffered the nastiness of polio and have lived in good health to tell the tale. Yes you are very lucky indeed.
July 13 at 9:18pm; 17 likes

Anne Blake Not only gullible enough to swallow such arrant nonsense but foolish enough to post it here and expose his trolling ignorance to the ridicule it richly deserves.
July 13 at 11:09pm; 9 likes

Peter Tierney Quick. Everyone grab their calipers. Oh, no wait.
July 13 at 11:11pm; 11 likes

Annie Taylor I'm glad I got the vaccine!!! Unlike my Neighbour. She got the Polio instead. Wake up Pal. You are obviously NOT in my age group. Those who are saw first hand Polio will never buy your Bullshit Lies.
July 13 at 11:12pm · Edited; 7 likes

Annie Taylor Oh you ARE my age .then you should know better. For the sake of your grandchildren may the likes of you soon all begone.
July 13 at 11:15pm · Edited; 3 likes

Maddy Jones Clean up to aisle 6, mop and bucket to isle 6, we have a drive by mess to clean up
July 13 at 11:20pm; 4 likes

Annette Bannon I didn't know a rhesus monkey was a carcinogen!.....oh wait!
July 13 at 11:55pm; 4 likes

Paul Jones Vroooooooooommm!!!
July 14 at 12:06am

Meleese Pollock Yes we are lucky. Polio crippled my grandmother when she was 2 and my parents had a polio scare with my brother.
July 14 at 6:24am · Edited; 4 likes

> **Allison Hagood** A list of studies finding no link between SV40 and cancer rates:
> http://europepmc.org/.../reload=0;jsessionid..... [4 other links omitted]
> Potential exposure to SV40 in polio vaccines used in Sweden during 1957: no impact on cancer.....
> Abstract: U.S. polio vaccines produced during the 1950s were potentially contaminated by simian virus 40 (SV40). Recently DNA from SV40 has been detected...EUROPEPMC.ORG|BY EUROPE PUBMED CENTRAL (EUROPE PMC)
> July 14 at 6:27am; 8 likes
>
> **Judi Wood** We are tremendously lucky. I remember watching a newly graduated doctor on his first third world posting anxiously feeling his own face and limbs. 24 hours later he was on his way back to Australia. I next saw him several years later in a wheelchair at his own wedding. It was during the time I was getting my childhood polio vaccines, a course of injections. Some of my peers who didn't get the vaccine in time died or were massively crippled. So yes, I think I'm lucky.
> July 14 at 7:42am; 3 likes
>
> **Peter Bowditch** Me in Australasian Science magazine.
> http://ratbags.com/rsoles/comment/ausscience1304_polio.htm
> The girl in the iron lung RATBAGS.COM
> July 14 at 8:10am; 3 likes
>
> **John Andrews** You gotta hand it to Big Pharma. In the 50s and 60s he had already forward planned the cashcow cancers of the 90s and 2000s.
> July 15 at 9:22pm; 1 like

The initial post refers to the well-documented contamination of early polio vaccines, given to millions of people in the 1960s, by the monkey virus SV40, which has subsequently been linked by some scientists to particular cancers, but contested by others (Bookchin & Schumacher, 2004). SAVNer comments span a range of approaches. Some make fun of the post and poster, reflecting

a typical SAVNer attitude involving humor, superiority, contempt, and dismissal. Other comments introduce information to counter the alleged SV40-cancer link; as in many other threads, SAVNers provide pro-vaccination information. Yet other comments assert or imply that the benefits of polio vaccines outweigh any possible risk. A recurring theme in SAVN discussions is that the benefits of vaccination greatly outweigh any risks — a popular SAVN slogan is "Vaccination saves lives" — and indeed SAVNers frequently question or criticize claims about risks.

The shortcomings of this short interaction from the point of view of deliberation are apparent: a contemptuous attitude towards a contrary view, one-sided provision of information, and an assumption that the benefits of vaccination outweigh any harms. Nevertheless, it is also possible to see deliberative aspects, including the introduction of information (including via links) relevant to understanding a contentious claim, and assertion of a relevant comparison of risks.

Another qualification is that it is not apparent whether all posts are displayed. SAVN, to its credit, allows some critics of its position to post on its Facebook page, but also blocks some of them. The person who made the original post in this thread, Sumner Raphael Berg, either did not reply or had replies blocked or removed. His post received no likes.

It is even questionable whether an online, asynchronous exchange can be deliberative in any sense. Engagement in such exchanges is disjointed and seldom is part of a search for common ground, and so might better be characterized as discussion than deliberation.

Partisan deliberation can also occur within government health departments, advisory groups, and meetings of health professionals. These discussions are not public, but it seems reasonable to believe that these discussions have deliberative elements, again within constraints of overall support for vaccination. Indeed, the ambit of discussions is bound to be a bit broader. For example, decisions need to be made about proposed new vaccines and about the recall of vaccine batches in the light of reports of adverse events. Judging by official statements, there usually seems to be consensus within the pro-vaccination groups in health departments and the medical profession. Only insiders could comment about the level of disagreement about any fundamentals. It is plausible that deliberation within government and professional circles is constrained in two ways, by the need

to justify official policy and counter vaccine critics and by the need to present a united front. These two constraints are mutually reinforcing.

Individual Assessments

Controversies bring issues to professional and public attention, and this attention can stimulate some individuals to investigate further and try to make sense of apparently contradictory claims. In principle, anyone who wants to can undertake their own assessments, by reading scientific and other articles, by talking to partisans, and by publishing their ideas and obtaining feedback. This could occur for any contentious issue; the visibility of public controversies means that it is more likely to occur with them. If everyone is talking about climate change, then individuals are more likely to want to investigate it further than to study some less salient controversy, for example over the safety and benefits of raw milk. The size of the human or environmental impact of a contentious practice does not automatically translate into corresponding interest. In developed countries, vastly more people die from pharmaceutical drugs than illegal drugs, but most of the public controversy is about the illegal ones.

Consider someone who becomes interested in an issue that is publicly contentious and investigates by reading articles and thinks about the evidence and arguments. This is an internal, reflective form of deliberation (Goodin, 2000). Such an individual's initiative is analogous to the role of a judge as contrasted to the role of a jury: most of the deliberation is by one person. However, to the extent that such individuals interact with others, for example through conversations or writing blogs, there is a wider deliberative dynamic.

Journalists regularly report on public controversies; this is part of what makes them public. Many journalists focus on events and try not to pass judgment on the arguments; others are themselves partisans. There are also some who seek to understand the issues, interview experts and campaigners on both sides of the debate, and present a balanced account of the arguments. Among those who make individual assessments about controversies, journalists have a prominent place because their credibility depends in part on being seen to be fair-minded.

Whether such deliberation is recognized depends in part on whether the individual comes up with a non-standard position. Examples include

supporting the use of some vaccines but not others and supporting fluoridation but at a reduced level. On the other hand, if the individual ends up supporting one side or the other, then they will be seen as partisans. So even if the individual used a personalized deliberative process, this will be treated as simply following one of the standard lines.

One indication of such individual deliberation is an exposition of arguments on both sides of the debate. For example, two non-scientists attempted to make sense of the climate-change debate and wrote a book about it (Morgan & McCrystal, 2009). This may not seem to be anything special, but in many debates it is difficult to find anyone on either side who presents both the strong points on both sides and the weaknesses on both sides. (Some websites specialize in countering the arguments of opponents, but seldom highlight the weaknesses of their own side.)

To the extent that controversies trigger individuals to undertake their own assessments of the evidence and arguments, they can stimulate a form of deliberation. Although this might be just one person investigating in isolation, often such individuals interact with others, spreading their interest in independent evaluation.

Initiatives for Deliberation

In the literature on deliberative democracy (Carson & Martin, 1999; Gastil & Levine, 2005), attention is placed on a variety of mechanisms such as citizens juries, citizens parliaments, and deliberative polls, which are types of mini-publics. For example, in a typical citizens jury, twelve or more citizens, randomly selected from the community, are brought together to address an issue. They might be provided written information, hear from experts and partisans, discuss facets of the issue, and seek to explore common ground and move toward consensus. Independent facilitators are used to ensure the process is run smoothly, fairly, courteously, and expeditiously.

When a controversial issue has a high public profile, advocates of deliberative processes are likely to have greater interest in initiating such juries or other deliberative mechanisms. It is precisely when an issue is unresolved and the source of disagreement that deliberation is important. So it is not surprising that many citizens juries have been set up to address contentious topics such as energy policy and genetic engineering.

Although public controversies can stimulate this sort of interest in fostering deliberation, it is not often that formal deliberative forums have a major impact on the debate. Sometimes, when one side in the debate has the preponderance of power and/or epistemological authority, partisans may be reluctant to engage with a citizens jury, because it might give undue credibility to opponents. More seriously, dominant groups, most commonly governments, are often reluctant to share decision-making power, so while controversies can stimulate deliberative initiatives, they also act to restrict the impact of those initiatives.

As well as formal deliberative processes, there are other sorts of actions, typically taken by governments, with deliberative elements. These occur only in some controversies, typically those in which governments are caught in the crossfire of competing partisans. Seeking to avoid offending voters and lobby groups on one side or the other, governments may try to offload responsibility. In the fluoridation debate in the US, hundreds of local governments have called referendums (Crain et al., 1969), a participatory process that, while not formally deliberative, can encourage some individuals and groups to undertake their own investigations. In other instances, governments call for submissions to a formal inquiry; the submission process encourages a certain level of moderation in arguments put forward, because obviously biased submissions are more likely to be discounted. In Denmark, the Board of Technology ran consensus conferences and used other mechanisms on contentious issues such as food irradiation.

On the other hand, in some controversies governments are partisans. Nearly all governments promote vaccination and thus are unlikely to encourage participatory processes, because they might open the door to greater criticism of predetermined policy goals. On the other hand, when opposing partisans have roughly equal strength and when governments have no direct stake in decisions taken, governments may be more likely to initiate or facilitate deliberative measures.

Conclusion

Public controversies are often characterized by highly polarized and entrenched positions, with competing partisans seeking most of all to win the debate and, more importantly, for their preferred outcomes to be implemented

in policy or practice. These features make many controversies inhospitable to deliberation. Indeed, attempts at deliberation can be subverted, with partisans seeking to use them for their own ends.

Nevertheless, public controversies offer several opportunities and encouragements for deliberation. Consider first an issue that is seldom in the public eye, for example age discrimination or bee colony collapse disorder. There is not much deliberation about these issues — compared to racism or genetic engineering, for example — because there is comparatively little organized action to pursue particular goals. In contrast, when issues come to public attention and are debated vigorously, and in many cases rancorously, opportunities for deliberation are created, though within the interstices of the main confrontation.

When issues become prominent, some individuals may be stimulated to study the issues for themselves, engaging in internal-reflective deliberation. Governments, to address the competing claims, in some cases initiate inquiries and referendums, which have deliberative elements. Political parties may try to develop policies, in the process engaging members and others in searching discussions. Because of the interest generated by public debates, advocates of deliberative methods such as citizens juries are more likely to choose these controversial issues as the focus for examination.

As well, there is an important type of deliberation that is especially prominent in controversies, called here partisan deliberation or constrained deliberation. It is a type of enclave deliberation, with enclave members sharing a viewpoint. Campaigners, in order to forge the most effective sets of arguments, engage in discussions about science, politics, and ethics, seeking an agreed position to use to advance their cause, both to present a convincing case to supporters and neutrals and to counter claims and attacks from the other side. This sort of deliberation seldom involves significant interaction with those on the other side, because an open acknowledgment of the strengths of the opponent's position or the weaknesses of one's own can be exploited by opponents in the debate. Because of the emphasis on winning the debate, partisans are guarded in open engagements and often in private discussions too, except with others who are trusted.

The dynamics of partisan deliberation, which usually occur in private interactions between campaigners, including phone conversations and group meetings, are seldom open for public viewing. The online discussions of Stop

the Australian Vaccination Network are an exception, giving some sense of how views can be negotiated. But even these discussions give only a limited insight, because private actions and interactions are not visible.

The key shortcoming of partisan deliberation in controversies is obvious enough: the scope of the issues addressed is limited by the goals of the campaigners, and cannot encompass the perspectives and goals of opponents. But there is something to learn from controversies in this regard: every form of deliberation is constrained in various ways, and thus could be considered partisan deliberation. The question is not whether deliberation is constrained, but how. For example, deliberation within mini-publics (Raisio & Carson, 2014) and social movements (della Porta, 2009) is typically constrained by common assumptions about goals and methods.

Consider, for example, a citizens jury about container deposit legislation in Australia (Carson et al., 2002). The two main alternatives posed to the jury were either to recommend introducing container deposits — an extra payment of say ten cents for every drink can or bottle sold, refundable when the container is returned — or not to introduce such deposits. At the last moment, the packaging and beverage industries boycotted the jury, refusing to send expert representatives. Industry figures met with the state premier and reached a deal not to introduce container deposits. This is an example of how a mini-public was sabotaged: citizen deliberation was threatening to groups with vested interests.

The unedifying aftermath of this citizens jury points to the radical potential of deliberation: it promises to go beyond the partisan stands of environmental and consumer advocates favoring container deposits and of beverage manufacturers opposing them. Setting this aside, it is worth noting that the focus on container deposits meant that some wider issues were not addressed, for example changing manufacturing, sales, and/or consumer behavior so that containers are reused (rather than recycled) or that not so many are produced in the first place. Reusable bottles and cans are totally off the policy agenda, and so is reduced packaging or consumption.

This example illustrates a wider point: every topic being deliberated necessarily involves some degree of focus and hence sidelining or ignoring of various wider issues. Another way to think of this is that there is quite a bit of deliberation about any manner of issues, but not nearly so much about what should be deliberated. There seems to be little point in setting up a deliberative

process about a possibility that is currently remote, such as alternatives to well-entrenched market mechanisms and consumer behaviors, as the case of container deposit legislation illustrates. It can be argued that it is precisely such "utopian" alternatives that deserve greater attention.

To return to controversies: the polarization of views and commitment to winning make cross-position deliberation difficult, and for campaigners on each side the existence of an organized opposition means that partisan deliberation is shaped by the debate itself. Rather than being resigned to the limited and distorted forms of deliberation in such circumstances, an alternative is to think more broadly, including about commonalities between the two sides and about ignored alternatives that sidestep the debate altogether. Controversies can be so absorbing that it is easy to forget that more important issues may lie somewhere else.

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Notes

[1] In 2014, the AVN changed its name to the Australian Vaccination-skeptics Network.
[2] As of 2015, SAVN gave its name as Stop the Australian (Anti)Vaccination Network.
[3] The format of the thread has been slightly altered for ease of reading.

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