

**CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT:
HOW TO CHANGE NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES**

*Martin Carcasson, Director, CSU Center for Public Deliberation
Professor, Department of Communication Studies*



CENTER FOR
PUBLIC DELIBERATION
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

*Dedicated to enhancing local democracy through improved public
communication and community problem solving*

*EMAIL: cpd@colostate.edu
Twitter: [@mcarcasson](https://twitter.com/mcarcasson)
Website: www.cpd.colostate.edu*

CPD Projects, 2006-2016

- Civic mission of schools
- Grade configuration of Poudre School District schools
- Statewide dropout rate
- Colorado Health Care Reform
- Student housing
- Improving higher education
- Childhood obesity
- Bicycle safety
- Diversity Dialogues at CSU Diversity Conference
- STEM education in K-12
- Arts Engagement Summit
- UniverCity Connections (CSU/Old Town collaborative project)
- School budgeting issues/school closures
- Medical Marijuana
- Regional visioning process
- Water and growth issues
- Poverty in Larimer County
- PSD Student Think Tank facilitator group
- K-12 school improvement
- Improving higher education through student-faculty reciprocity
 - Politics of food
- Issues surrounding aging
- Early childhood education
- On campus stadium proposal
- Senior transportation
- Campus smoking
- School safety
- Bullying
- Mental health
- Nature in the City
- Larimer County Landfill/Wastehed
- Diversity and Inclusion in Fort Collins
- CSU Innovation and Economic Prosperity
- CSU parking and affordable housing



Overview

- Why are we so polarized?
 - Human nature
 - Negative interactions
 - Counterproductive public processes
- How do we change the conversation?
 - Adopting a wicked problems mindset
 - Tapping into the positives of human nature
 - Building capacity for deliberative engagement



What Are We Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

The Problematic

- We crave certainty and consistency
- We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative



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- We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Stages of motivated reasoning

What and who we expose ourselves to	<i>selective exposure / echo chambers / filter or media bubbles</i>
How we interpret new evidence	<i>confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance</i>

How we interpret new evidence

“when we want to believe something, we ask ourselves, ‘Can I believe it?’ Then...we search for supporting evidence, and if we find even a single piece of pseudo-evidence, we can stop thinking... In contrast, when we don’t want to believe something, we ask ourselves, ‘Must I believe it?’ Then we search for contrary evidence, and if we find a single reason to doubt the claim, we can dismiss it“

- Jonathan Haidt and Tom Gilovich

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

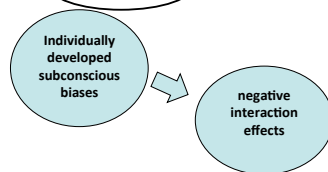
Stages of motivated reasoning

What and who we expose ourselves to	<i>selective exposure / echo chambers / filter or media bubbles</i>
How we interpret new evidence	<i>confirmation bias, backfire effect, cognitive dissonance</i>
How we make attributions and tell stories	<i>egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias</i>
How we make decisions	<i>heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof</i>
What we remember	<i>availability bias</i>

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The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization



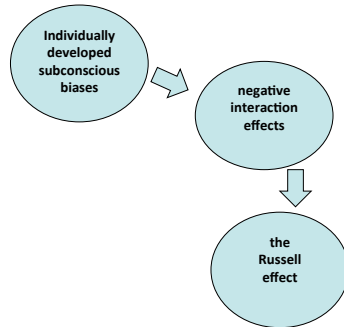
Negative Interaction Effects (i.e. Bad Process)

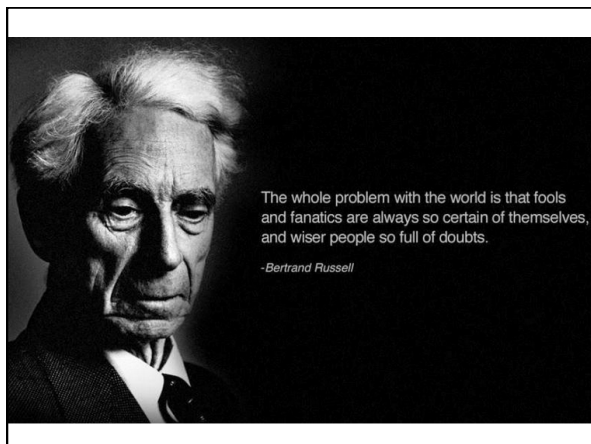
Kathryn Schultz – *Being Wrong*

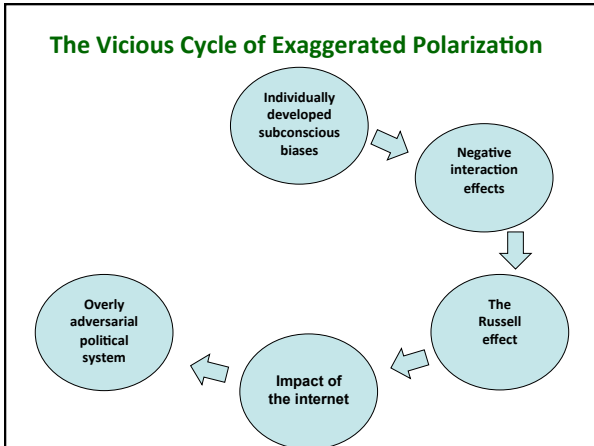
- First step: Ignorance assumption
- Second step: Idiot assumption
- Third Step: Evil assumption




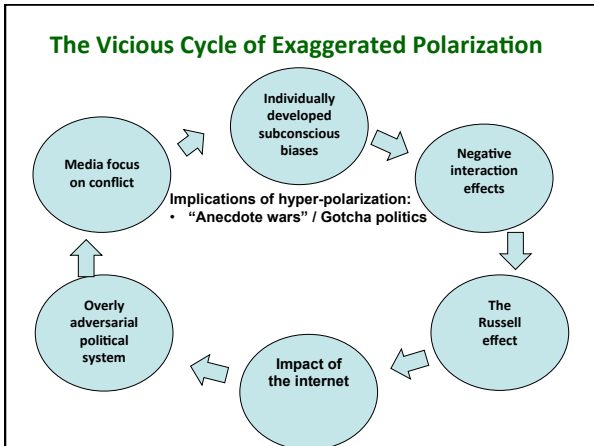
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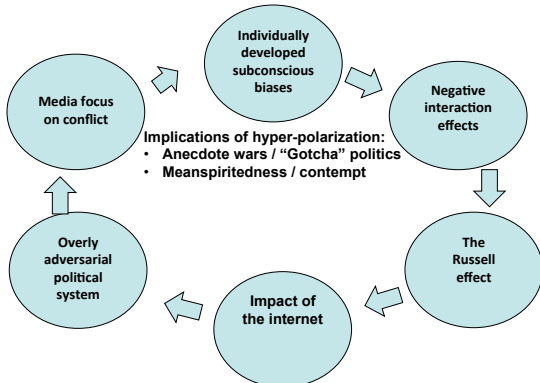
- ### Drawbacks of an Overly-Adversarial Political System
- Often focuses on “winning” vs. solving problems
 - Zero-sum game incentivizes “bad” communication, strategic research, and problematizes implementation
 - Often focuses on blaming (them) vs. taking accountability (us)
 - Relies on narrow value frames (thus avoids tensions)
 - Plays into flaws of human nature
 - Attracts/privileges organized, entrenched voices
 - Negative side effects like polarization, cynicism, and apathy (which then cause even worse communication)
 - Assumes a narrow role for citizens (citizens as voters, consumers, or spectators)
- 



Bush: 'Too often we judge other groups by their worst examples, while judging ourselves by our best intentions'

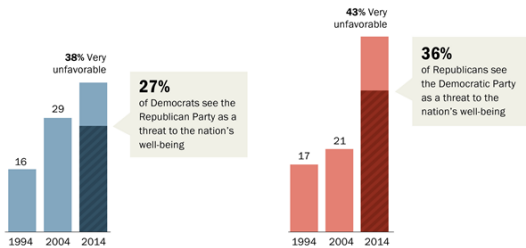


The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization



Beyond Dislike: Viewing the Other Party as a 'Threat to the Nation's Well-Being'

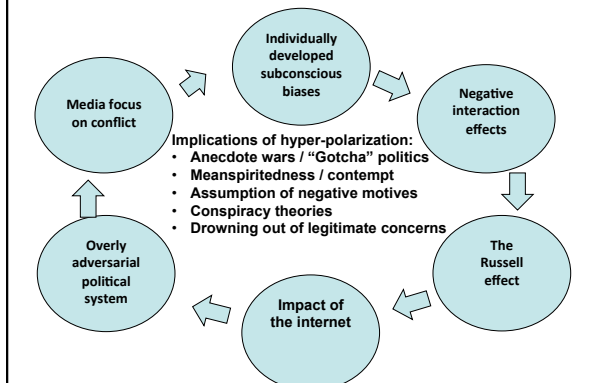
Democratic attitudes about the Republican Party **Republican attitudes about the Democratic Party**



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public
 Notes: Questions about whether the Republican and Democratic Parties are a threat to the nation's well-being asked only in 2014. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization



What We Are Learning from Brain Science

The Problematic

- We crave certainty and consistency
- We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative
- We are "groupish" (prefer to gather with like-minded)
- We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views
- We struggle with tough choices and value dilemmas



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Consider our Typical Public Processes

- *Our two-party system*
- *Campaigns, referenda, and elections*
- *“Town halls”*
- *Interest groups and lobbyists*
- *Political debates*
- *Congressional deliberations and legislative debate*
- *Social media political engagement*
- *Citizen comment and public hearings*
- *Expert panels*
- *Letters to the editors*
- *Emails and email campaigns to policymakers*

Consider our Typical Public Processes

- *Engage too late in the process*
- *Often framed as yes/no issues*
- *Primarily provide opportunities for individual expression*
- *Caters to entrenched and organized voices*
- *Little to no effective interaction or learning/refinement of opinion*

Overview

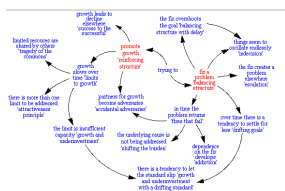
- **Why are we so polarized?**
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The Nature of Problems in the 21st Century: Tame v. Wicked Problems

Tame problems are problems that are essentially **technical** in nature and can be **solved by experts** through **scientific means**. They can be divided into **manageable** parts, and efforts to solve them are primarily judged in terms of **efficiency**. (Rittel & Webber, 1973)

Wicked problems inherently involve **competing underlying values**, paradoxes, and tradeoffs that **cannot be resolved by science**.

They call for high quality communication, creativity, and broad collaborative action to manage well.



Water in Northern Colorado as a Wicked Problem

Some things we care about:

Healthy river with healthy ecosystems

Recreational opportunities

Economic vitality

Water for homes & lawns

Open space and wildlife habitat

Low cost of living

Water for local farms

Local food economy

Freedom of choice of where to live





The “Triple Bottom Line” of

- Profit (economics, also tied to jobs and taxes)
- People (social justice, equality, fairness)
- Planet (environment)

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish **Justice**, insure **domestic Tranquility**, provide for the **common defense**, promote the **general Welfare**, and secure the Blessings of **Liberty** to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Key American Values

Preamble	Current Phrasing
Justice	Justice
Domestic Tranquility/ Common defense	Security/Safety
General Welfare	Equality
Liberty to ourselves	Freedom (for us)
Liberty for our posterity	Freedom (for future generations)

Inherent Democratic Tensions

- Freedom v. Equality
- Our Freedom v. Freedom of Future generations
- Freedom v. Security
- Justice is a tension within itself (justice as the ideal between too much and too little credit or punishment)

Some others

- Individual rights v. community good
- Individual agency v. Structural concerns
- Unity v. diversity
- Top down v. bottom up
- Cooperation v. competition
- Flexibility/Innovation v. Consistency/Tradition
- Best use of resources (money, time, people)

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What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and Brain Science

The Good

- We are inherently social and seek purpose and community
- We are inherently empathetic
- We are inherently pragmatic and creative
- We can overcome our bad tendencies and build better habits



What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Bottom line: The most powerful thing to help people overcome their biases and build community is **genuine conversation with people they respect and trust.**



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What is Deliberative Engagement?

Deliberative democracy
Community problem-solving
Collaborative problem-solving
Participatory decision-making
Slow democracy
Strong democracy
Multi-stakeholder dispute resolution
Public participation
Democratic governance
Collaborative governance
Organic or community politics
Consensus building or seeking processes
Thick engagement

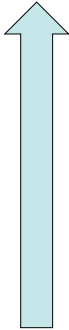
Key Components of Deliberative Engagement

- Trusted convener/host/legitimizing
- Overall deliberative framing and process design
 - Wicked problem, multiple approaches, broad range of actors, starting discussion “upstream” (before polarization)
- Discussion guides/backgrounders
 - Base of information, something to react to, framed for deliberation, not persuasion, no magic bullets
- Small, diverse, representative groups
- Deliberative facilitators



What we need public process to do

- Build capacity for **collaborative action** and co-creation
- Spark **collaborative learning** and the refinement (not just expression) of opinion
- Positively **manage or transform conflict**, build mutual **understanding**, & develop **respect**
- Support **listening** and genuine interaction
- Provide opportunities for **voice** and public input
- Inform the public

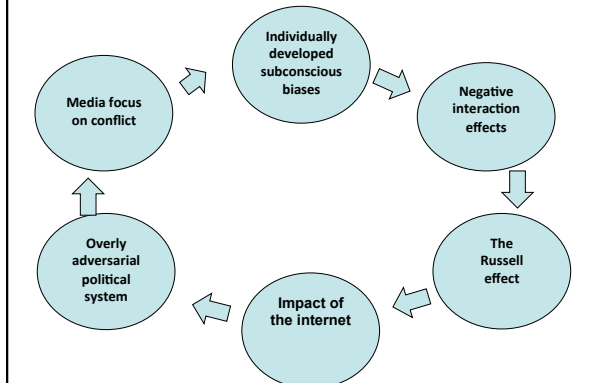




Resource Guide on Public Engagement

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization



The Virtuous Cycle of Authentic Engagement

