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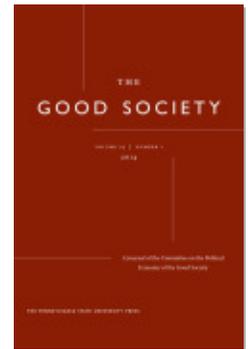
Cultural Worldviews and Contentious Politics: Evaluative Asymmetry in High-Information Environments

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Abstract

Discussions about whether citizens can learn and use the information necessary to contribute to democratic governance often focus on debates about heuristics. We argue that the debate over whether heuristics should be used misframes a central issue—the consideration of what forms of decision-making are most likely to operate in different kinds of communication environments. This article examines how people make decisions in contentious political climates, which are characterized by high-information volume, relatively strong partisan commitment, and an affective divide between the opposing camps. Our contribution takes account of the possibility that in contentious environments, political communication offers neither reasoned deliberation nor cues, but rather solidarity signals that engage people's cultural worldviews. We also posit that the use of cultural worldviews for liberals and conservatives is asymmetrical—raising important questions about democracy in a society in which a variety of worldviews have different weights for various individuals and publics. To test our perspective, we analyze public opinion data collected during the time surrounding the recall election of Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin.

Keywords: *democracy, polarization, political communication, public opinion, public sphere*

Understanding whether citizens can learn and use the information necessary to contribute to democratic governance is of crucial importance for those who seek to explain how ordinary citizens make sense of the world and choose their representatives. From Philip Converse[1] to Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter,[2] assessments of what Americans know about politics have been pessimistic. By and large, individuals hold inconsistent, unconstrained views that do not appear to be rooted in clear understandings of how the political system operates or how it affects individuals and groups.

For several decades, research on democratic representation and participation suggested that, at a minimum, the future of democracy was threatened or, at worst, was in acute peril. How could a republican democracy endure if individual opinion was so scattered that it failed to resemble a public will? As this question reached an empirical boiling point, research examining public opinion in the aggregate began revealing a fundamentally different story about collective preferences and democracy. Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro discovered that American public opinion was stable—over time—across a wide range of important issues. They found a clear, steady signal of majority preferences around which ill-informed views canceled each other out.[3] Moreover, they showed that when public opinion did change, it did so in rational response to contemporary events.

If the balance of evidence stopped there, we would not be writing this piece. But it did not. Work from Scott Althaus[4] has shown that what we can learn from aggregate public opinion surveys is severely skewed. Public knowledge is so low, he argues, that it may be impossible for polls to tell us "what the people really want" (p. 3). Somewhat ironically, at the same time that aggregate evidence was calling into question whether citizens could usefully navigate a complex democracy, other scholars were arguing that democracy could be saved at the *individual level* by understanding the role that heuristics, broadly defined, played in decision-making. Arthur Lupia and Mathew McCubbins[5] demonstrated that people could make reasoned choices with extremely limited information if they sought advice from knowledgeable, trustworthy sources that would be penalized for lying. Other scholars pointed to simple, durable heuristics used in political decision-making—like political parties—as examples of how individuals could "vote correctly" even when their overall knowledge of the system was suspect.[6] Indeed, when party labels are not available at the ballot box in

low information races, citizens are rudderless.[7] Yet others point to cultural heuristics, decision aids derived from shared cultural understanding rather than cognitive hardwiring.[8]

Communication and Democratic Decision-Making

Implicit in this discussion about information and democratic judgment is the role that communication plays in reducing complexity and improving decision quality. Views on the value of reasoning are rooted in theoretical debates between those who favor deep deliberation as a true, authentic democratic practice for decision-making, and those who advocate for the use of satisficing shortcuts, which have been treated by their opponents as suspect at best and deeply manipulative and democratically inauthentic at worst.

For too long, contests over these ideas were incorrectly characterized as a "Walter Lippmann-John Dewey" debate, in which Walter Lippmann was portrayed "as an anti-democratic elitist.[9]" Michael Schudson rehabilitated Lippmann, illustrating that Lippmann did not believe voters were incompetent—rather, he rejected the view that democracy requires "omnicompetence" of citizens (Schudson, 2008, p. 1033). Moreover, Schudson took to task claims that Lippmann was taking "the public out of politics and the politics out of public life (Carey, 1995, p. 390)," noting Lippmann's recognition that in a representative democracy, elections connect the public and politicians. In short, Schudson argued that Lippmann's central concern was to find a way that citizens, who inevitably relied upon shortcuts to navigate the world, could still act within a complex democracy.

Even Jürgen Habermas, who is recognized for the argument that strong deliberation is characteristic of the early-modern public sphere, acknowledged that subsequent developments in the late 19th and early 20th century undermined the ideal form of democratic deliberation. In *The Theory of Communicative Action,* Volume 2*: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, he argues that heuristics are necessary to reduce complexity and are essential to democratic decision-making. Heuristic and deliberative judgment may not be so fundamentally at odds as some have suggested.[10]

Our argument builds on this insight. While we bracket the larger claim that public deliberation is a necessary condition for understanding, we examine the socio-political conditions of everyday life, the "lifeworld" in which citizens come to political questions shaped by prior experience *and* association with like others. We show that, in practice, these conversations are

based on cultural worldviews that, we believe (although do not definitively show here) are acquired through socialization and reinforced through homophilous social networks. We demonstrate that these bases of political conversation, when mobilized under conditions of homophily, may tend toward a breakdown of communication across groups with different political views. We stress that this describes not only a process of division and use of heuristics, but also a *breakdown* in the use of heuristics as a communicative relief mechanism. Under these conditions, heuristics cannot relieve or bridge the process of everyday understanding without discourse; rather they tend to reinforce prior divisions, turning groups inward.

However, there may be circumstances in which neither heuristic nor deliberative judgment might be expected. In particular, when people in high-information, contentious environments must make political decisions about whether to engage and participate and about whom to support, they are constrained by these hostile contexts, perhaps independent of their cognitive processing style. Our approach is different from investigations that test whether individuals pay attention to particular cues and whether those cues lead to decisions that maximize their interests. In particular, we suggest that the environment in high-information, contentious political contests is such that people make choices not in response to cues, nor in response to high-minded deliberation, but in response to what "people like me" are supposed to do and think.

> . . . heuristics cannot relieve or bridge the process of everyday understanding without discourse;

Accordingly, we argue–building upon Habermas, Schudson, and Lippmann—that the complexity of contemporary society demands that a theory of democracy take a more complete account of heuristic–and other–judgments by the public. Heuristics are both inevitable and necessary–the debate over whether they should be used misframes the central issue, which should instead consider what forms of decision-making are most likely to operate in different kinds of communication environments. As such, we seek to examine how people make decisions in *contentious political climates*, which are characterized by high-information volume in media and conversation, relatively strong partisan commitment on the part of a large part of the public, and an affective divide between the opposing camps.

Our contribution moves beyond political communication's valorizing of fully-informed, deliberative decision making, low-information individual rationality through heuristics, and macro rationality through the "miracle of aggregation" to take account of the possibility that increasingly,

and perhaps especially in contentious environments, political communication offers neither reasoned arguments nor cues, but rather solidarity signals that are relevant to people's *cultural worldviews*[11]. In high-information, contentious environments, heuristics cannot be as valuable or harmful as they are in low information conditions since many people's minds are already made up and their policy choices are already cocooned in a comfortable cognitive network of associations, resentments and identities that have been honed over time through social and communicative processes.

This is not to say that communication does not matter. After all, political elites carefully craft messages to tap into the cultural worldviews of supporters and potential supporters to help them at the ballot box. Indeed, elites ought to be more likely to tap reflexive and habitual patterns of behavior that exist in communication between politicians (and activists) and the public as well as between individuals and others in their community. In highly contentious environments, people are likely to process information with their guards up–taking in information that produces more polarization than deliberation and encourages less low-information heuristic processing because the information environment is saturated with media coverage, political advertisements, and interpersonal communication networks flooding the marketplace of ideas.

Cultural Worldviews and Group Differences

Although we come from diverse perspectives as a set of authors, our interest in this question is empirically and normatively intertwined, focused around our shared concerns about the functioning of democracy, the quality of representation, and the connection between communication and political decision-making. While we might expect democratically deliberative ideals to flourish in high-information environments, even contentious ones, we argue that these are precisely the contexts in which deliberation is not likely to flourish and heuristics are not likely to be helpful. To account for how contentious, high-information environments result in short-circuited decision-making, we advance the concept of *cultural worldviews*[12] to complement cognitive heuristics as triggers for decision simplification. We follow Stephen Vaisey and Omar Lizardo's definition of cultural worldviews, presented in research examining social network formation, as "broad orientations toward moral evaluation" that are "*implicit* schemes of perception" (pgs. 1695–96; 1701).

We choose to move beyond the notion of heuristics because they are generally defined as *cognitive shortcuts*. Though, it is important to recall Balkin's assertion that, "cultural heuristics. . . are partly constitutive of individuals, to say that people are situated in culture is also to say that cultural tools are situated in them." These cultural tools (a) simplify decision-making in noisy and combative contexts, (b) allow citizens to retreat from deliberative opportunities, (c) reduce the value of the high information environments, and (d) permit decisions to be guided by core cultural identities. Said another way, cultural worldviews help individuals, through the lens of their cultural and social position, to "tame the information tide," fostering motivated reasoning, and reducing cognitive dissonance[13]. For this reason, cultural worldviews are strategically deployed by political elites, hoping to tap into fundamental differences between how individuals see the world and to turn those differences into support at the ballot box[14].

Further, we also posit that the use of cultural worldviews is asymmetrical at the individual level—this asymmetry raises important questions about democracy in a society in which a variety of worldviews have different weights for various individuals and publics. Moreover, while some heuristics are powerful enough to be used by a wide range of individuals making democratic decisions in low-information environments, we make the argument that conservatives in the United States are more likely than liberals to use cultural worldviews reflecting candidate traits indicative of deep, value-laden preferences arising from individuals' cultural positions, an asymmetry that we contend has real consequences for political decision-making.

Cultural Worldviews, Ideology, Interests and Values

To understand how cultural worldviews operate in high information, contentious environments—and, indeed, to begin to assess whether there are democratically valuable heuristics—it is of central importance to wrestle with the question of what forms of democracy are possible in a complex society. We argue that to answer this question, one must first grapple with how ideology, interests, and values relate to one another within a set of institutional structures. Of particular importance is the role of symbolic values. Traditionally, albeit with some exceptions, political science research has underestimated the role of symbolic values[15] and core values[16]. Much of what political scientists have written about democracy has focused on

expressed preferences and whether those preferences are reflected in the behavior of political elites[17].

Recently, Christopher Ellis and James Stimson[18] have demonstrated that American ideology—and much of political news coverage—is symbolically conservative but operationally liberal. That is, the public tends to favor conservative symbols and be more likely to self-identify as conservative while also favoring specific policies that are more liberal in nature such as increased government spending on social programs. As such, the framing of politics around certain potent political symbols and values advantages conservatives[19]. What is missing in these leading perspectives is a recognition that measures of ideology are underspecified by largely ignoring how ideology, values, and interests mutually shape each other, providing some structure within otherwise inconsistent preferences.

Indeed, the entire debate about citizen competence and the role of heuristics in promoting or damaging democracy ignores a crucial element of politics: citizens' mental frameworks encompass heuristics, ideology and values to be sure, but they also encompass cultural worldviews. Moreover, one way in which these factors come together in a contentious political environment is in the way that they are framed to the public by elites, in media coverage, and carried forward through interpersonal conversations between citizens. Value framing is a potent example of how heuristics, ideologies, and values intersect to simplify decision-making[20]. Such framing can trigger the activation of values or other principled priorities, indicating how the construction of messages can encourage the application of certain shortcuts.[21] In an electoral environment, then, individuals can use symbolically-oriented value frames to decide which candidate is most closely connected to their deeply-held core values. This process may be more likely in this era of "candidate-centered elections."[22]

> Regardless of the normative claims of deliberative theorists . . . we argure that a realistic conception of democracy . . . must take into account the limited investment and interest in politics of average citizens.

This conception recognizes that democracy is complex. Regardless of the normative claims of strong deliberative theorists, we argue that a sociologically realistic conception of democracy—even a strong version—must take into account the limited investment and interest in politics of average citizens. To meet Lippmann's goals for republican democracy, heuristics are needed to help citizens make important choices. Again, heuristics can help citizens

determine whose interests and values most align with their own and when citizens might want to penalize politicians for lying or poor performance.

Heuristics can serve as simple information shortcuts that can be used in low information environments when voting, whereas in high information environments cultural worldviews can trigger deeper values and symbolically-oriented, but very real, cultural identities such as "rural consciousness" that can trump interests that scholars tend to look for with respect to economic inequality.[23] Robert Dahl[24] famously argued in *A Preface to Democratic Theory* that democracy would not last very long if there was not broad agreement on a general set of values within a population. It is, at minimum, reasonable to ask whether there is agreement on a broadly shared set of democratic and cultural values, those elements characterized by Robert Bellah as the "civil religion."[25] It is possible that while core democratic values may still be widely shared, the contemporary communication ecology, the cultural worldviews made salient by elite behavior, media and conversation, and the resulting manifestations of those values may be reaching a point of incompatibility.

Citizen Use of Heuristics and the Media System

How does mass mediated communication shape democratic decision-making under conditions in which heuristic reasoning predominates? Amber Boydstun's[26] hybrid approach combines two prominent models of news coverage: the patrol model, which posits that news organizations and their reporters regularly walk their metaphorical beats to relay threats to their audience, and the alarm model, in which a more efficient media sounds alarms on the rare occasions an issue is important enough to orient citizens' attention away from the important matters in their own lives and toward responding to the alarm.[27] Rather than prescriptive models of how the media *should* operate, the alarm/patrol hybrid model describes how the news agenda *does* operate. The alarm/patrol hybrid model suggests a means for understanding the media's agenda.

The model advances four broad possibilities. First, coverage could come exclusively in alarm mode with a short burst of coverage followed by little else. Second, the media might engage solely in patrol mode providing regular, reliable and durable attention to an event or issue. Third, neither mode might be operational, thus producing little to no coverage on an event/issue. Finally, coverage might develop with an alarm, followed by extensive

patrolling or extensive patrolling punctuated by occasion alarms, creating a "sustained media explosion" (Boydstun, 2013, p. 64).

Boydstun takes us closer to a model of how the media operates to *signal* the need for attention and likely builds that attention. But our research attempts to move beyond the heuristic model of signaling interest to ask: How do values and ideology underpin and shape reasoning when information is abundant and heuristics are less useful? Recalling Dahl's assertion above, it is fair to say that in the U.S. today there is no longer a broad underlying value consensus shared by individuals on both sides of the aisle. Core values, and indeed, moral foundations, compete. At minimum, we can speak of predominantly liberal and conservative value orientations that at best offer competing interpretations of the underlying traditions Bellah[28] described. As analyzed in a comprehensive Pew Research Center Survey (2014), there are not only multiple sets of conservative orientations (libertarian and evangelical) but, increasingly, each articulates underlying values that appear to be absolute, making public compromise systematically more difficult. We need to distinguish between these value orientations, despite the mutually-conditioning exchanges between them. While they are correlated in a variety of ways, we have to understand their analytical separation to understand how individuals make decisions in democratic politics.

Briefly then, there are interests, ideologies, and basic values. Heuristic cues can trigger all three levels simultaneously–although almost certainly not equally or in the same way and, as we have noted, in low-information environments. Because American public opinion can be broadly understood as operationally liberal but symbolically conservative, we posit that in high information environments–where shortcuts are not needed–cultural worldviews operate asymmetrically across these complexes for different groups. Indeed, Democratic presidents have been shown to be more likely to frame issues in terms of their societal consequences while Republican presidents are more likely to frame issues in terms of moral absolutes.[29] This rhetorical strategy, grounded in moral outrage, "provides an electoral advantage by inspiring greater political engagement and valorizing candidates in the eyes of voters" (p. 388).[30] Moral appeals from this perspective are often framed in terms of the values of justice and equality, but it is assumed that reasonable people will see their interests and these values as linked, and so simply "stating the case" is sufficient to appeal simultaneously to the interests and deeper values of a majority of the population.[31]

To grasp the other side of the equation, it is important to recognize that conservatives are concerned with different fundamental moral foundations

than are liberals and these concerns are asymmetric.[32] In particular, when making political decisions, conservatives are concerned with the moral foundations of care/harm and fairness (like liberals) *and* with authority, sanctity/purity, and loyalty (unlike liberals). Thus, these differences give opportunities for conservative elites to use a wider variety of symbolic appeals to tap into the wellsprings of conservatives' deeply-held values. Thus, there is a fundamental asymmetry between the way the two parties mobilize their votes, not just at the levels of interests and ideology, but in the way the interest/ideology/value complex is framed and mobilized.[33] We recognize that this claim builds on a body of work concerning values[34] and political heuristics[35] that we cannot fully explore in this brief article.

Contentious Politics in Wisconsin: A Brief Sketch of Cultural Worldviews in Action

To provide an initial test of our perspective, we analyze public opinion data collected during the time surrounding the recall election of Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin. Shortly after Walker, a Republican, took office in 2011, he proposed the highly controversial Wisconsin Budget Repair Bill, known as Act 10. Act 10 dealt a crippling blow to collective bargaining rights for organized labor and made major changes to state retirement policy, health insurance, and sick leave for public employees.

The legislative process was incredibly contentious. Thousands of citizens engaged in a sustained protest inside and around the state capitol at the same time that Democratic legislators fled to Illinois to stall the bill's consideration by denying the Republican majority a quorum. In short, Wisconsin became a flashpoint for contentious politics. In the end, Act 10 passed both houses of the Wisconsin legislature and was signed into law by a triumphant Walker. Governor Walker became a hero to Tea Party supporters and Republican Party activists more generally, but had little support among Democrats.

Shortly thereafter, activists who opposed Act 10 collected over 900,000 signatures petitioning for a recall, far exceeding the number required to force an election. After a Democratic primary to determine the challenger, Tom Barrett, who had lost the governor's race to Walker in 2010, faced him once more. Non-partisan groups tracking campaign spending by candidates, parties, and outside groups estimated that over $80 million was spent on behalf of the two candidates in the recall, more than doubling

the roughly $37.4 million spent on the first Walker-Barrett content, with a sizable majority of this additional spending behind Walker. He once again won the contest, actually increasing his margin of victory over Barrett compared to 2010.[36]

How did voters decide whether to support Walker or to recall him? Recent research suggests the contentious politics of the recall did not lead to the development of reasoned opinion based on democratic deliberative practices. Rather, it suggests that polarized divides were exacerbated, especially with respect to deliberative acts such as talking with family, friends, and co-workers and persuasive acts such as an individual trying to encourage another to vote for the individual's preferred candidate.

Chris Wells et al. show that as the recall election drew closer, people were more likely to report that they had literally stopped talking to someone they knew because of that person's views on the recall.[37] When communication did occur—whether family and friends or co-workers, Itay Gabay et al. showed that the communication predicted the expression of more polarized attitudes as compared to those who did not talk about the recall with others.[38] What is more, and reminiscent of Morris Fiorina's argument about the "dark side of civic engagement" in polarized societies, Leticia Bode et al. showed that those with the most polarized attitudes and those who expend effort trying to persuade others to their own view are the most likely to participate.[39]

> In other words, in high information, contentious political environments, political talk gets more closed off as Election Day draws near, . . .

In other words, in high information, contentious political environments, political talk gets more closed off as Election Day draws near, while those who do the most talking: (a) develop more extreme attitudes and (b) engage in political talk to try and win converts to their side. This does not represent the democratic ideal; rather it suggests that conversation itself has heuristic, rather than (or at least in addition to) deliberative value.

If we are right that cultural worldviews do operate in high information environments, how do individuals across different ideological and value orientations use them when making political judgments? Using public opinion data from the Marquette University Law School Poll[40] that measured Wisconsinites' voting intention and trait evaluations of candidates, and a host of demographic information, we provide initial evidence regarding the asymmetric use of cultural worldviews in democratic decision-making.

This evidence suggests that within this context, the climate of communication triggered evaluations that advantaged the conservative candidate, standing Governor Scott Walker, by valorizing him in the eyes of voters and strengthening certain trait evaluations.[41]

With respect to traditional examinations of heuristics, the 400lb. gorilla in American politics is partisan identification. In low information contests, partisanship is a statistical and substantively meaningful predictor of vote choice. In the high information environment of the Wisconsin recall it was nearly definitive: 90 percent of Republican identifiers reported a desire to vote for Scott Walker in the recall election as compared to 89% of Democrats who claimed they were for Tom Barrett.[42] While self-reported ideology[43] and party identification are not perfectly correlated (r=.54, p<.01), 85 percent of strong conservatives favored Governor Walker and 94 percent of strong liberals favored Mayor Barrett. Partisan Independents were nearly evenly split. Party identification negatively correlated with a vote for Walker among liberals at -.40 while it positively correlated with a Walker vote among conservatives at .66.

Of course, we have asserted that culturally symbolic judgments about candidate traits can also shape preferences. Our preliminary evidence is consistent with these expectations but also suggests that certain traits related to broader cultural worldviews may be more important for conservatives than liberals, at least in contentious political environments.

Respondents rated both Scott Walker and Tom Barrett on a variety of symbolic traits, asking how fair, caring, decisive and inspiring each candidate was. *In each case*, the correlation coefficient between a respondent saying she or he would vote for Walker and each trait assessment about Walker or Barrett was higher for conservatives than for liberals. For liberals, the only two of twelve trait variables that correlated above -.6 (greater disagreement that Walker possessed a trait negatively correlated with a vote for Walker) were whether Walker was honest and caring. Notably, these traits are the most closely connected to Jonathan Haidt's claims that liberals have foundational commitments to care over harm and fairness over dishonesty. For conservatives, beliefs about both Barrett and Walker's fairness correlated with an intention to vote for Walker, negatively and positively, respectively, with a correlation coefficient above .6, as did feelings about Walker's honesty and caring. Recall that conservatives also are deeply concerned with the care/harm and fairness foundations—as reflected in the correlations we report—but that they also are driven by concerns with other moral foundations. While not perfect reflections of the moral

foundation of authority (the only other one we can measure with our data), the fact that the correlations between conservatives' vote for Walker and their assessments of Walker's decisiveness and inspirational qualities and was high while correlations between liberals' willingness to vote for Barrett and their assessments of Barrett's authority-figure qualities was low is further evidence of our argument.

In addition to the asymmetry between liberals and conservatives regarding the role of candidate trait assessment and vote choice, other research suggests that these appeals tapped a deeper resentment, termed *rural consciousness* (Walsh, 2012) against liberal "elites," as well as those who were educated, those who had steady jobs, and those guaranteed pensions. These resentments need to be understood in the context of constantly eroding life-opportunities for rural and blue-collar Wisconsin residents, the movement of high-paying manufacturing jobs to Southern states or out of the country, the difficulty of sustaining small family farms with children leaving the small towns or even the state in search of opportunity in larger urban areas. Coupled with middle-and upper-middle class voters in exurban counties, this rural consciousness was sufficient to build a state-wide coalition in a way that suggests these kinds of social fractures extend beyond place.

Indeed, we hypothesize that this was a symbolically driven reaction to the policy process itself. Resentment of teachers and Madison "elites" (the symbolic center of government, the state's liberal establishment, and university educators) also became resentment against the political process. The life-chances of rural families arguably depend on the educational opportunities for their children provided by public schools and the state university system, the economic engine provided by the UW-Madison with its strong record of agricultural innovations, and subsidized by state and federal aid to farmers. But this argument was never made in public. The symbolic force of resentment overrode policy arguments. The GOP succeeded as Democrats failed as they used a very effective form of symbolic politics.

The Democratic and liberal forces also mobilized symbolic appeals for solidarity, but this was largely internal to mobilization. There is a living cultural tradition of Wisconsin progressivism, and this was the primary symbolic force that liberals could draw from. But this was not truly sufficient to counter the symbolic mobilization from the opposition. Democratic appeals to traditional labor solidarity and centrist Democratic values in the recall did not, we believe, move beyond the very large group of Wisconsinites already opposed to Governor Walker and Republicans. Here we would note

that, ironically, Democratic solidarity was more about internal bonding among those groups against Walker. "Solidarity Forever" was sung by tens of thousands, who believed that it was impossible that the rest of the state, a majority, did not support them. However, in fact, this represented a particular kind of liberal political delusion: based on what is rational, how could "anyone" possibly disagree with us? It also speaks to the psychological heuristic of false consensus, believing others share one's beliefs and options.[44] The very scheduling of the recall election in June 2012, rather than waiting for the November general election which may have created up to a 5% swing in the electorate suggested a kind of moral arrogance among liberals: that is, it is impossible for us to lose because we are right. The election proved otherwise.

One implication of our work is that despite the importance of base-mobilization, deeper symbolic currents operate in the framing of politics. Further, liberals and Democrats will have a continuing structural disadvantage if individual assessments of candidate traits become more symbolically and ideologically connected to individual decision-making. Alternatively, liberal groups will have to rediscover how to mobilize in ways that appeal to deeper common value currents—the values of equality, justice, and solidarity that Bellah has so eloquently argued continue to lie at the base of American civil society and civil religion.[45] Moreover, they will have to do so while appealing to citizens with fundamentally different moral foundations than their opponents.[46]

> . . . despite the importance of base-mobilization, deeper symbolic currents operate in the framing of politics.

Work for the Future

While heuristics will continue to play a central role in explanations of democratic decision-making and political mobilization in complex democratic societies, we have built upon the extant work about the Wisconsin recall to show that cultural worldviews play important roles in political decision-making in high information, contentious environments. We are also positing that these cultural worldviews themselves are tri-fold, appealing to interests, ideology, and values. Further, we are suggesting a basic asymmetry in how the two basic blocks of American politics mobilize using these complexes. Liberal and Democratic appeals continue to rest on the appeal to

those policies and programs that will provide the greatest good to the greatest number, resting on principles/core values of equality and fairness. We suggest that these are internally effective in base mobilization, but that they presume an economically interest-oriented public will form in a way that may not exist to build sufficiently broad coalitions, particularly in non-presidential election years. This is an important caveat, since an apparent Democratic trend in national elections suggests that this solidarity *does* have majority appeal, when turnout is higher (or at least triggers corresponding heuristic decision-making among those who turn out for general elections but stay home for midterm contests). Yet this approach lacks motivational appeal when turnout is lower, complicating dynamics during lower turnout elections.[47]

Symbolically tapping into emotional complexes like resentment, on the other hand, are highly mobilizing to the base of the conservative/Republican block, including in states that are relatively equally divided politically, like Wisconsin. This kind of emotional response grows from a set of value orientations and symbolic beliefs, triggered by certain processes and is likely to continue to give the GOP an outsized advantage in the state level politics that, despite the ongoing focus of the media and much of political science on the national level, persists in controlling not only much policy but also the drawing of districts that gives structural advantages to those who control state legislatures.

We are not arguing that moderation is an ultimate value in political discourse. We recognize that under certain conditions contentious politics may be justified and even necessary. For example, where systematic injustice is combined with a blockage of civic communication, i.e. there is no means either formal or informal to communicate with other actors in civil society about fundamental claims about justice or equity, protest which often leads to social division may be necessary. However, we also believe that this is rarely so dichotomous in democratic societies. Even under the extreme conditions of racial injustice leading up to the civil rights movement, in which violence was a fact of everyday life for African-Americans in the South, the movement involved *both* contentious protest against racial injustice and lack of political equality and an appeal to the broader processes of communication in civil society[48]. In democratic societies, civil repair often involves both contentious politics and cross-cutting dialogue and problem solving. Indeed, this is precisely what makes them democratic. The moment of protest, the ability to withdraw from dialogue, to "say no" as Habermas notes, is fundamental to democracy and civil rights.

But the necessity of, eventually, persuading others, of changing both law and social understanding, is equally fundamental.

Decades of research examining how well democracy works have bounced back-and-forth between micro and macro levels, examining communication, elections, and representation. By focusing on political elites' widespread use of cultural worldviews and their asymmetric adoption at the individual level when it comes to political decision-making, we are taking an initial step in blending micro and macro perspectives to cast a revealing light on how Americans make political decisions in contentious environments. Our initial sketch is focused at the state level, but given the increasing polarization at both the elite and public levels in national politics, a comprehensive understanding of how cultural worldviews operate is increasingly important.[49]

This is why we believe this problem transcends state politics. If so, then asymmetric cultural worldviews may hold one key to unlocking larger problems, not least, the continuing growth of inequality that negatively affects the life chances of a large majority of Americans, coupled with the failure, so far, of a politics that can motivate action on the part of those left behind by these policies.

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40. The authors are grateful to Professor Charles Franklin for sharing this data.

41. The ongoing Marquette University Law School Poll was conducted over the time period encompassing the recall election via seven waves of cross-sectional data collection from January of 2012 to June of 2012. Each of the waves we analyzed asked whether the respondent planned to vote for Walker or Barrett (coded as Walker=1, Barrett=0).

42. This was true regardless of whether using a three-point or five-point scale to measure partisan identification.

43. Ideology was measured on five-point scale ranging from 1=strong liberal to 5=strong conservative.

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