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Who Learns from Deliberative Minipublics? Identity-Based Differences in Knowledge Gains across Thirteen Citizens' Initiative Review Experiments

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Abstract: Voters often show low levels of accurate policy information owing to misinformation and directional motivated reasoning. Extant research shows that participants in randomly selected deliberative groups—commonly called "minipublics"—can update their beliefs and deliver reasoned policy analysis and recommendations. When distributed to a wider public, such information can bypass motivated reasoning heuristics to improve policy knowledge across the electorate. However, critics posit that these benefits may spread unevenly across demographic, political, and other social subgroups. To investigate that claim, we analyzed survey experiments conducted across 13 real-world minipublics with more than 10,000 respondents and more than 60,000 knowledge scores. Results showed that advisory minipublics boosted policy knowledge evenly across many voter groups, but gains were slightly diminished for racial/ethnic minorities and some income brackets. Further analysis indicates that these differences did not stem from variations in deliberative faith or preexisting levels of policy knowledge.

Keywords: minipublics; deliberation; democracy; race; ethnic identity; policy knowledge

Reproducibility Package: Stata replication code and data are available on the Open Science Framework (OSF), https://osf.io/rnpcq/.

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MODERN democratic societies face decision-making challenges as they debate the merits of policies addressing problems such as income inequality, climate change, and immigration (Gallup 2023). In the United States, the intensity of partisan conflict (Iyengar et al. 2019), distrust of government (Devine 2024), and cultural identity politics (Gastil et al. 2011) can thwart thoughtful public discussion and consensus building (Costa 2017; Hendriks, Ercan, and Boswell 2020; Wilkes and Wu 2018). Even seemingly non-political judgments looming on the horizon, such as weighing the risks and benefits of nanotechnology or artificial intelligence, will likely become politicized once they appear in policy agendas (Magistro et al. 2025; Redmond 2022).

One prominent mechanism underlying public misinformation and polarized debates is what scholars call directional motivated reasoning (Hahn and Harris 2014; Kraft, Lodge, and Taber 2015; Kunda 1990). Citizens select and uncritically review information congruent with their prior beliefs or group identity and avoid or critically dismiss contrary evidence. Substantial attention has been given to politically motivated reasoning (e.g., Druckman and McGrath 2019; Kahan 2013), and interest has grown in "identity politics" divisions along racial/ethnic, gender, and other lines (e.g., Boyer, Aaldering, and Lecheler 2022; Crowder-Meyer 2022). Demographic fault lines can widen issue divides between groups (Craig, Rucker, and

Richeson 2018; Dahlberg, Edmark, and Lundqvist 2012; Dinesen, Schaeffer, and Sønderskov 2020), which is why landmark legislation often requires building bridges across such chasms (Calderon, Fouka, and Tabellini 2023). More micro-analytic responses to this challenge have investigated ways to promote open-minded consideration of evidence and perspective taking (Broockman and Kalla 2016; Fishkin et al. 2021; Kozyreva et al. 2024; Myers 2022).

Such responses align with the broader body of work on deliberative democratic theory (Dryzek 2000; Landemore 2013; Neblo 2015). Democratic deliberation is the confluence of serious argumentation and mutual consideration, whereby participants weigh claims, evidence, and different value priorities to arrive at well-informed and broadly shared public judgments (Chambers 2003; Gutmann and Thompson 2004). Grounded in political theory, deliberative approaches gradually developed into empirical models for democratic reform (Fishkin 2009; Leighninger 2006; Neblo 2015; Steiner 2012), with the signature innovation being the use of randomly selected bodies—often called "advisory minipublics"—as aides in improving public judgment during elections and government policymaking (Bächtiger, Setälä, and Grönlund 2014; Escobar and Elstub 2017, 2017). However, few of these deliberative innovations have become an institutionalized part of a political system, which has made it difficult to assess their efficacy.

However, a prominent exception is the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR), which the Oregon state government established in 2009 to improve the quality of deliberation during initiative elections (Gastil and Knobloch 2020). Legislators who created the CIR had the explicit goal of countering misinformation and raising the public's policy knowledge to make it better prepared to vote on the myriad issues that appear on that state's ballots every two years. For subsequent elections, the CIR brought together a quasi-random sample of Oregon voters to deliberate for four-to-five days on ballot measures. After hearing pro, con, and neutral expert testimony and discussing issue nuances in small groups, each CIR panel drafted a one-page issue guide, which the Secretary of State placed in the *Voters' Pamphlet*.

During that same decade, other states ran similar experiments based on the Oregon model. An analysis of the aggregated survey data on these CIRs—using more than 10,000 respondents and more than 60,000 knowledge scores—found that exposure to the Citizens' Statement written by a CIR modestly raised voter knowledge across a range of issues (Gastil et al. 2023). The same study suggests that Democrats and Republicans, on average, improved their relevant policy knowledge to the same extent after reading a Citizens' Statement. If anything, the CIR is more likely to improve policy knowledge for those readers who were previously less informed or more biased (Már and Gastil 2020).

However, some scholars have speculated that the benefits of advisory minipublics may be unequally distributed across demographic groups (Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014; Sanders 1997). Indeed, research on persuasion has shown that accurate information and novel arguments can influence social groups to varying degrees. For example, Peffley and Hurwitz (2007) found that African Americans, compared to whites, were more susceptible to both racial and non-racial arguments about the death penalty. Similarly, minority status was positively associated with willingness to adopt more self-protective behavior following COVID misinformation corrections

(Zhao et al., 2023). However, other empirical results are more mixed and suggest the importance of context. For example, persuasive effects can vary depending on whether the source and receiver share a common identity, with mismatches attenuating attitude change (Mcgarty et al. 1994). In contrast, a more recent study found little evidence supporting the demographic match hypothesis (Broockman et al. 2024), with other studies suggesting that certain groups are more persuasive than others, regardless of the audience makeup (Lees, Todd, and Barranti 2023).

Because minipublics are randomly selected, we might expect that the information they provide does not offer identity cues and, instead, broadly represents diverse perspectives (Paulis et al. 2024). In theory, their recommendations ought to reflect the informed position of a cross-section of the public (MacKenzie and Warren 2012). Nonetheless, bias might creep into such minipublic statements, which are commonly written by stratified samples that reflect the same demographic disparities as the wider population (Leydet 2019; Steel et al. 2020). That said, evidence exists of strong persuasive influence by minorities within minipublics, resulting in their voices being represented well in final policy statements (Gastil and Wilkerson 2013; Kim, Fishkin, and Luskin 2018). Thus, we might expect that minipublic statements exert similar effects across demographic groups because of their representativeness, if they are perceived as such (c.f. Germann 2025; Pow, Dijk, and Marien 2020). On the other hand, it is possible that the types of issues minipublics are asked to consider are imbued with racial connotations. Furthermore, minipublics provide relatively detailed information and arguments, which might equally spark an accuracy motivation and effortful thinking among different social groups (Rathje et al. 2023; Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson 2010).

Extant research on source effects and persuasion also suggests significant moderation across source credibility and prior attitudes (Crano and Prislin 2006; Ismagilova et al. 2020). Few studies have explored demographic variation of minipublic trust, but those that have suggest small differences across demographic groups (Gastil et al. 2023; Paulis et al. 2024). If such differences exist, we would expect smaller knowledge gains among groups with lower trust. For prior policy knowledge, the direction of the effect is less clear. Már and Gastil (2020) found that those with less accurate policy knowledge improved more after reading a minipublic statement. Nevertheless, some demographic groups might be less motivated to learn about policy issues, which might explain a lower prior policy knowledge and smaller effect of persuasion. Relatedly, those with less education might have less capacity to understand and evaluate the information provided by the minipublic. Following extant research, we predict that those with less accurate factual beliefs will improve more from reading a CIR Citizens' Statement, but those who have less trust in minipublics will be less likely to be persuaded.

To test whether an advisory minipublic's information benefits are distributed unevenly across different voter subgroups, we reanalyzed previously reported, publicly accessible data on the CIR by pooling 13 independent survey experiments from real-world elections. We tested whether exposure to a minipublic statement had different effects on social groups compared to a control group. Following longstanding concerns about deliberation's benefits for traditionally underrepresented or marginalized groups that have grounds for distrusting institutions (Lafont

2020; Young 2002), we hypothesize that the CIR may yield more modest policy knowledge gains among women, younger voters, and those who self-identify as a non-white ethnicity. We also tested whether the CIR had a reduced impact on voters with less formal education and those who express less interest in politics (Eliasoph 1998). To the extent that these hypotheses were supported, we then tested whether underlying explanations include skepticism about the value of deliberation or preexisting policy knowledge on the specific ballot issue in question.

Theory and Hypotheses

In many cases, deliberative democratic reforms have worked as intended. Remarkable policy-making successes have occurred in special circumstances (e.g., Farrell and Suiter 2019; Fishkin 2018), and minipublics typically have strong positive effects on the civic attitudes of their participants (e.g., Boulianne 2019; Fishkin et al. 2021). Nevertheless, deliberative theory has yet to devise a sustainable model for transforming a public's decision-making capacity and attitudes on a mass scale.

The CIR stands as an exceptional case because of its establishment in law, its repeated use over several years, and its built-in transmission belt from small-group deliberation to the full electorate. Although critics such as Lafont (2020) worry about giving policy authority or influence to minipublics (Curato et al. 2021), the CIR infuses participatory democracy with policy knowledge, rather than taking any measure of authority out of the electorate's hands. Various theorists have recognized this as a potentially effective way to embed deliberation in existing political systems (Curato and Böker 2016; Cutler et al. 2008; Geisler 2022, 20; Setälä et al. 2020; Stojanović and Geisler 2019). As noted earlier, research to date on the Oregon CIR and similar designs in the United States and Ireland show its ability to boost an electorate's policy knowledge (Gastil et al. 2023; Suiter et al. 2020).

Differences in Knowledge Gains

Critics of deliberation might acknowledge such gains while questioning the equity of their distribution. This "difference critique" is a longstanding objection to deliberative democracy theory and practice, and it posits that existing inequalities make inclusive and egalitarian deliberation impossible (Levinson 2003; Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Oliphant 2014; Sanders 1997). Worse still, by granting legitimacy to a process biased in favor of advantaged groups, deliberation threatens to worsen conditions for the underrepresented (Young 2001, 2002). As Lupia and Norton (2017) argue, "Deliberation is another way of allocating power. It privileges some interests at the expense of others. It is not generally neutral with respect to who wins and who loses." Applying this theoretical critique to recent democratic innovations, practitioners often overlook inequalities in the design and execution of ostensibly deliberative processes, sometimes in ways that disadvantaged groups come to recognize as illegitimate (Lee 2014).

Our first set of predictions follows this logic to expect historically disenfranchised groups as less likely to change their policy beliefs after exposure to information from the CIR's Citizens' Statement. In an adaptation of one well-established

model of public opinion, each of these groups may prove less willing to accept and retain the information provided by a CIR, in effect filtering out such messages owing to a perception that it comes from an unreliable source (Druckman and McGrath 2019; Zaller 1992; but see Már and Gastil 2021). Given the demographic data available from prior CIR surveys, this can be tested in four ways—for women, ethnic minorities, voters from lower-income households, and younger voters. Each of these groups has a longstanding history of political marginalization (Ericson 2011; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), so each may prove less receptive to the voting guide provided through a conventional deliberative forum such as the CIR.

Formal education constitutes a second dimension along which a CIR might yield varied results. Those with lower educational attainment might feel more discounted by conventional public forums. Members of this group may come to see themselves as outsiders whose voices get ignored and who feel less civic duty to vote or otherwise engage in political life (Hansen and Tyner 2021). This parallels the observation that support for authoritarianism often comes from less educated publics (Lipset 1959), a finding made more salient in the recent reemergence of right-wing populism in the United States (Feldman 2021). Thus, in the context of the CIR, we predict that those with lower levels of formal education will prove less receptive to its Citizens' Statement. Finally, the CIR may hold less influence over those who openly express a lack of interest in politics and public affairs (Dionne 1991; Eliasoph 1998). Deliberation practitioners have long acknowledged the challenge of drawing politically disengaged individuals into public forums, which is one reason many such processes use cash incentives for recruitment (Crosby and Nethercutt 2005; Curato et al. 2021; Fishkin 2018). This works well enough when such inducements are possible, but the voters in a jurisdiction featuring a CIR have no such monetary motivation. Likewise, in the context of a survey experiment testing the CIR's impact, a modest incentive to take the survey itself has no bearing on whether one takes the time to read the text on a page or on a screen before answering the subsequent knowledge questions about the policy at hand. In other words, with no countervailing incentive, those already disinclined to participate should likewise prove less likely to read, process, and gain knowledge from the content of a CIR Citizens' Statement.

Underlying Mechanisms

One of the potential explanations for the preceding hypotheses concerns trust in deliberation itself. A process such as the CIR cannot function as a "trusted information proxy" (Warren and Gastil 2015) for busy voters if they do not trust its premise. The CIR's credibility stands on its claim that an inclusive, fair-minded, and rigorous process of issue analysis can result in insights that would benefit any prospective voter (Gastil and Knobloch 2020). Nonetheless, there is considerable evidence of skepticism about such processes, ranging from recent attempts to "decolonize" deliberative theory (e.g., Banerjee 2022) to wide variations in the public's expressed trust in deliberation (Már and Gastil 2021; Medvic 2019; Scherer et al. 2015) or in the CIR process itself (Gastil et al. 2016). Put simply, only those willing to place credence in the CIR itself could be expected to gain insight from

reading its Citizens' Statement. A recent review of CIR surveys showed that, indeed, "the CIR's impact was partly a matter of trusting in the citizen deliberation on which it relies" (Gastil et al. 2023). Here, we test whether this relationship can account for any or all the differences in CIR impact we find across the demographic groups.

A second potential mechanism underlying varied CIR impact concerns a voter's preexisting policy knowledge on the corresponding ballot issue. Deliberative theorists have long celebrated education's virtues for knowledge and judgment (e.g., Barber 1994), but some have recognized a paradox about deliberative participants' unequal knowledge and skill levels going into a discussion (Gastil and Dillard 1999; McMillan and Harriger 2002; Ralston 2010). On the one hand, those with a greater capacity for learning and heightened confidence in their abilities might not only thrive in a deliberative forum but also readily absorb insights from a voting aid like that produced by the CIR. On the other hand, those who have less initial knowledge might stand to gain more from vicariously deliberating (Goodin 2003) by rapidly picking up new skills and knowledge, owing to their initial deficits (Gastil 2000).

Experimental evidence supports the idea that a simple prompt can trigger an "accuracy motivation" (Druckman 2012; Rathje et al. 2023), and voters often express a desire for more balanced, relevant, and accessible information, which is what the CIR Citizens' Statement can provide relative to more opaque official issue statements (Gastil, Richards, and Knobloch 2014). Surveys and usability tests on the CIR suggest that voters readily recognize its purpose—aiming to provide accurate information and balanced insights on complex issues (Gastil et al. 2016). If this motivates voters to hold more accurate beliefs about the issue on their ballot, then once again, those with the greatest initial knowledge deficit stand to gain the most either through correcting mistaken beliefs or instilling an accurate one where voters would have previously pleaded ignorance. In the context of the demographic variables discussed earlier, this could prove an underlying explanation for varied effects to the extent that marginalized or disenfranchised groups hold lower reservoirs of policy knowledge (Carpini and Keeter 1996), partly owing to prior political disengagement (Dalton 2017; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Data and Methods

Sample and Procedure

This study merges survey data from experiments conducted from 2010 to 2018 on 13 CIRs held in Oregon, Arizona, California, Colorado, and Massachusetts. (For details, see Section SI1 in the online supplement information [SI] accompanying this article.) Each survey was conducted in the final month before the election using only registered adult voters who had not yet voted (but intended to do so), excluding any who had already seen the official voter guide and/or CIR Citizens' Statement. Participants were recruited through a Qualtrics online panel, except for a 2014 mail survey and a 2012 online survey that used a publicly available list of registered voters.[1]

Pooling all the usable survey data together resulted in a data set with 10,872 respondents, from which we extracted 67,120 factual accuracy scores, as detailed in

the following section. (Descriptive statistics appear in SI2 in the online supplement.) Omitting respondents with missing values on the dependent or independent variable yielded between 25,000 and 55,000 factual accuracy scores for most analyses. This provided enough statistical power to detect even small effect sizes for most of the subgroups we examined (Cohen 1988). Because most respondents came from Oregon, the sample skewed white and older. For less obvious reasons, the final sample also had significantly more women than men.

Procedure and Measures

We randomly assigned respondents to an information exposure condition in advance of an election, then measured their policy knowledge on a series of pertinent true/false questions. Respondents in the control group either saw nothing or the official voter guide, whereas those in the treatment group were exposed to the CIR statement. Each statement included one or more factual claims about the policy on the ballot that we asked respondents to assess as either true or false, then state their degree of confidence in their answer. To see whether the CIR statement improved the accuracy of voters' policy beliefs, we arrayed these responses on the following five-point scale: confident in an incorrect answer (-2), unsure of an incorrect answer (-1), don't know (0), unsure of a correct answer ($+1$), and confident in a correct answer ($+2$).

In addition to our demographic moderators (race/ethnicity, gender, income, age, and education), we tested whether significant effect heterogeneity was due to greater faith in deliberation, baseline knowledge, or interest in politics. To measure the first of these, three survey items from Brinker, Gastil, and Richards (2015) were combined into a scale measuring respondents' faith in the deliberative process ($\alpha = 0.66$). These items measure respondents' belief in whether, for example, "people from different parties" could have "civil discussions" and whether people can "solve common problems" by discussing them together. Prior knowledge was measured using as a baseline the factual accuracy scores for respondents who were not exposed to any issue information. Finally, political interest was measured using a single standard item from the American National Election Study: "Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. How often would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?" Response options ranged from "Hardly at all" (1) to "Most of the time" (4).

Testing for Effect Heterogeneity

In our main analysis of effect heterogeneity, we used ordered logistic regressions with an interaction term between exposure to treatment and each moderator—ethnicity/race, gender, age, income, and education. (Reference categories are described in the findings section for each analysis.) We used robust standard errors (i.e., the "robust" option in Stata) and clustered them by the 82 factual claims in the data set. Despite having directional hypotheses, the theory and prior evidence were relatively weak, so we employed two-sided statistical tests (see Cohen 1988) with a conventional significance threshold of 0.05.

Testing for Underlying Causes

We then determined whether any significant effect heterogeneity was due to variation in respondents' faith in deliberation or prior policy knowledge levels. We first determined whether there were significant differences in each factor among respondents who were not exposed to treatment or an active control (i.e., they only answered the survey questions) across the different levels of each moderator. Then, we use two-tailed statistical tests with a 0.05 threshold. To measure faith in deliberation, we used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression because it is a continuous scale, with the presumption being that a group with less deliberative faith would show a lower knowledge gain from reading a CIR statement. If we found statistically significant differences of faith in deliberation in the baseline sample, we could then re-run the main analysis but include deliberative faith as a control.

For prior knowledge, we used ordered logistic regression to test whether subgroups with the smallest average gains in factual accuracy also had either (1) lower levels of knowledge in the baseline group (potentially reflecting a lack of interest or capacity to learn) or (2) higher levels of knowledge in the baseline group (potentially creating a ceiling effect on CIR statement effects). If we found significant baseline differences across subgroups, we could re-run the analysis for respondents with high versus low factual knowledge.

Findings

Recall that our main hypothesis was that politically marginalized or disadvantaged groups improve their factual accuracy less compared to the majority or more powerful group after reading the CIR statement. Figure 1 shows the comparative effect of treatment (difference in means) across ethnicity, biological sex, income, education, age, and political interest. We found relatively small differences in effect size across all the subgroups but statistically significant effect heterogeneity for ethnicity and income. (For details, see SI3−SI8 in the online supplement).

White respondents [$bStdXY^2 = 0.15$; $p < 0.001$] improved their factual accuracy more compared to Asians [$bStdXY = -0.014$; $p = 0.032$], blacks [$bStdXY = -0.014$; $p = 0.034$], and Hispanics [$bStdXY = -0.025$; $p = 0.025$] (see SI1 in the online supplement). We also found that indigenous populations (Native American, Alaska Native, Pacific Islanders, and/or Hawaiian Natives) benefitted on average more than other minorities (see SI3 in the online supplement), though the difference was not statistically significant.[3] These differences are relatively small, as shown in Figure 2. For example, there were about 10 percentage points more confidently accurate white respondents among the CIR readers (versus non-readers), compared to seven percentage points more for Hispanic readers (versus non-readers). To be clear, each of these self-identified minority ethnic groups did improve their average factual accuracy scores after exposure to a CIR statement, just to varying degrees (see Figure 1 and SI9 in the online supplement).

We also found that median ($40,000 to $60,000) and mean ($60,000 to $80,000) income groups in the United States improved their factual accuracy significantly

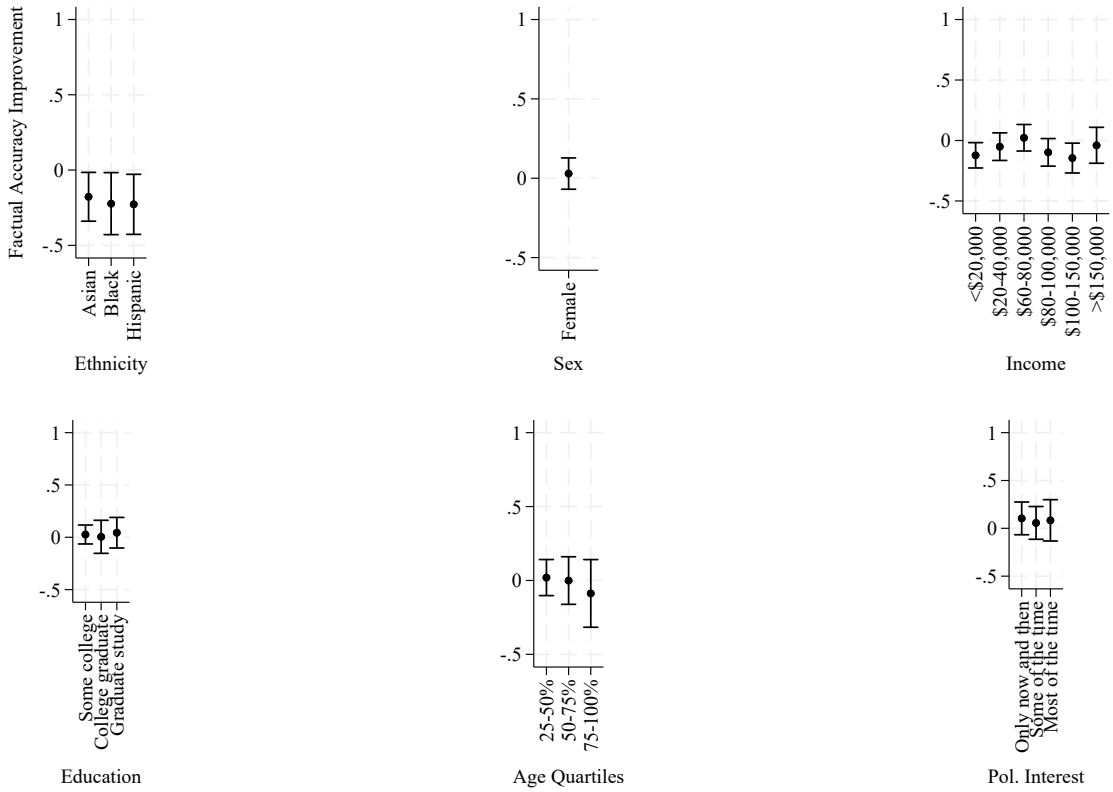

Figure 1: Comparative gains in factual accuracy scores after reading CIR statements across respondent subgroups. *Note:* Mean (circle) and 95 percent confidence intervals (bars) of improvement in factual accuracy (range −2 to 2) compared to a reference category across subgroups. Reference categories are "white," "Male," "$40−60,000," "No college," "0 − 25 percent," and "Hardly at all." Estimates are from ordered logit regressions (see SI3−SI8 in the online supplement), with an interaction term between subgroup and exposure to treatment (shown or not shown CIR statement). Robust standard errors are clustered by factual claims.

more than the lowest income group (less than $20,000) and also more than the two income categories above them ($60,000 to $150,000). Again, these differences were small, between 0.014 and 0.022 of a fully standardized coefficient (see SI6 in the online supplement).

As for the potential mechanisms underlying these subgroup differences, we found no strong evidence for the two that we could test. Despite Asian, black, and Hispanic respondents expressing less faith in deliberation compared to white respondents (from 0.015 to 0.042 standard deviations; see SI10 in the online supplement), those differences did not explain the CIR's heterogeneous effects on factual accuracy. If anything, the difference between treatment effects across these groups is slightly *larger* when controlling for faith in deliberation (see SI11 in the online supplement). In addition, we found no evidence that prior factual accuracy differs across ethnicity and race (see SI12 in the online supplement), which eliminated this factor as a potential explanation for effect heterogeneity.

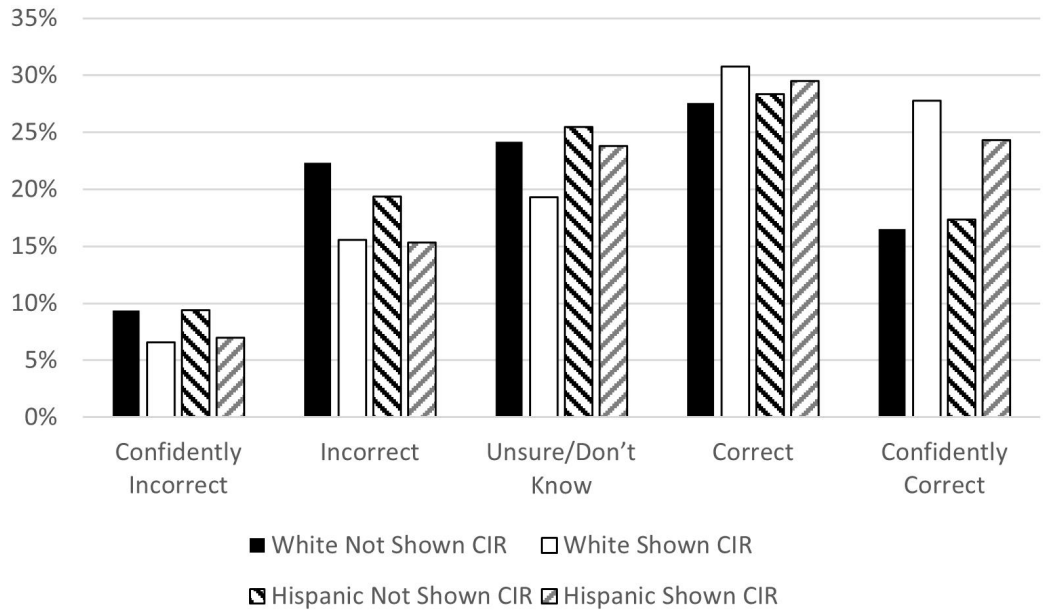

Figure 2: Factual accuracy score distributions across experimental conditions for white and Hispanic respondents. *Note:* Results show pooled tabulations.

For difference across income levels, we found that respondents with $40,000 to $60,000 had *less* faith in deliberation compared to the lowest income category and those with $100,000 to $150,000, despite gaining somewhat more factual accuracy from reading the minipublic statement (see SI13 in the online supplement). Controlling for deliberative faith reveals results similar to the main analysis, but these are not robust because respondents in the $40,000 to $60,000 bracket no longer had a significantly larger knowledge gain from reading the CIR statement (two-sided $p = 0.085$; see S14 in the online supplement). Finally, we found no statistically significant differences between the factual accuracy scores of income groups in the baseline group (see SI15 in the online supplement).

Discussion

Overall, most subgroups of voters in this multi-state sample improved their issue-specific policy knowledge at a similar rate after reading a CIR statement, and we found no evidence to suggest differences in the CIR's effect across self-reported biological sex or age quartiles. Nevertheless, the data showed that ethnic minorities benefit slightly less from reading the CIR statement, along with mixed evidence regarding different household income groups. Asian, black, and Hispanic respondents improved their factual accuracy scores significantly less than did white respondents. In addition, the two middle groups ($40-80,000) had greater knowledge gains than income groups below and above them. However, neither of the hypothesized mechanisms, explained these differences, as heterogeneous

CIR impacts were driven neither by differences in deliberative faith nor prior issue knowledge.

We also tested whether respondents with lower levels of formal education benefitted less from reading the CIR's issue summaries. We found no evidence that those with more education improved their factual accuracy to a greater extent than those with less education. Within the control group, respondents with more formal education had greater policy knowledge than their peers, but even that difference was miniscule (SD < 0.05; see SI16 in the online supplement). Regardless, the CIR Citizens' Statement neither narrowed nor widened the policy knowledge gap between different educational groups.

Previous research has often shown that the more politically interested or sophisticated are more attentive to novel and relevant political information (e.g., Carpini and Keeter 1996). Indeed, we found that in the control group, those who follow politics more frequently had higher factual accuracy scores than their counterparts (see SI17 in the online supplement). Once again, the difference was quite small—roughly 0.05 standard deviations of difference between those who follow politics "most of the time" versus those who "never" do so. In any case, one's interest in politics had no bearing on the CIR's impact (see SI13 in the online supplement).

Returning to our main finding, persistent worries about deliberation's intersection with social inequality (Lafont 2020; Sanders 1997; Young 2002) appear warranted, at least to some extent. The difference in knowledge gains relative to white respondents was modest, but it was striking to see such a consistent effect across three distinct categories of self-reported ethnicity. Post-hoc analyses of prior policy knowledge and faith in deliberation could not explain the varying effects across ethnic groups. In previous analyses of part or all of these surveys, these variables were found to boost the knowledge gains resulting from reading the CIR (Gastil et al. 2023; Már and Gastil 2020), so they had seemed likely candidates for moderation.

Theoretically, the demographic representativeness of a small deliberative body could explain why minorities benefit less from reading a minipublic statement. Due to potentially minimal representation in the panel, members of minority ethnic groups may doubt that their concerns and experiences would find voice in the CIR. After all, the most common site for CIRs is the state of Oregon (or a county or metropolitan area therein). With the U.S. Census reporting that 74 percent of Oregon's population identifies as white, non-Hispanic,[4] no minority group could expect to have more than one or two representatives in a stratified random sample of just 20-24 residents. Readers of the CIR statement do not see the ethnic makeup of its participants, but perhaps the CIR panelists' language choices (Gastil, Knobloch, and Richards 2015) convey a cultural difference that may have diminished deliberation's impact for some readers (Min 2014). This could lead to the perception that diverse voices do not have significant impact in the process.

Relatedly, methodological limitations might explain why, for race, knowledge gains are not moderated by faith in deliberation. First, the modest reliability of our measure ($\alpha = 0.66$) and our scale's loose handling of the trust concept itself (Warren 2018). A more subtle explanation concerns *what* we attempted to measure. These surveys operationalized faith as an abstract notion of deliberation—the imagined

capacity of fellow citizens to produce reasoned and reflective insights through a process of careful discussion. The particular discussions used in the CIR, however, concern *specific* groups of voters, a majority of whom self-reported their ethnicity as white, particularly in Oregon (Gastil and Knobloch 2020). Indeed, Asian and black respondents had significantly less faith on our abstract deliberative measure, which might indicate that a more fine-tuned assessment of the actual CIR's representativeness would have yielded even larger differences. Those minority group members who had less confidence in the CIR's inclusion of their perspectives, therefore, might have been less willing to alter their factual beliefs to align with its findings. This account would fit within a broader pattern, wherein prior personal or social group experience of discrimination shapes people's social trust and confidence in public institutions (see Evangelist 2022; Simpson, McGrimmon, and Irwin 2007).

One finding consistent with this view concerns gender. Women make up roughly half of each CIR, which provides an equitable level of "descriptive representation" (Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Goedert 2014). The even balance of male and female participants in the CIR corresponds with our finding equivalent knowledge gains for men and women. This parallels a similar finding regarding the experience and civic impact of jury service for women, again borne out with a very large sample of actual jurors (Hickerson and Gastil 2008). Although this descriptive representation explanation holds promise, it requires more direct testing, not least of all because of voters' limited knowledge of the details of the CIR process (Gastil et al. 2016), likely including the demographic makeup of its participants.

The lack of a prior-knowledge effect was due to there not being statistically significant differences in prior knowledge across ethnic identification. However, the data studied here lacked pre- and post-exposure policy knowledge measures. Instead, the moderation test relied on an indirect measure of prior knowledge by reference to observed variance across baseline subgroups (see earlier discussion in Data and Methods). This approximation might come with considerable measurement error. Future studies could use pre−post designs to directly explore the moderation of prior knowledge.

The strength of this study was the consistent application of a survey experimental design across multiple CIR processes with varied issues and political contexts. Even so, the aggregated data set was insufficiently large to compare all potential subgroups (e.g., Native American and Pacific Islander respondents). Due to small subgroup samples in individual CIR samples, we also were unable to explore variation across context (e.g., CIR location or policy topic). Future research investigating the effect heterogeneity of minipublics such as the CIR should collect larger subgroup samples to determine whether the findings reported here are robust across different municipalities, states, and nations, each of which may have a distinct demographic makeup. Likewise, the range of issues covered by the CIR had its own limitations, with the issues typically addressing more technical questions than morally contentious ones.

As for the central dependent variable concerning the factual accuracy of policy beliefs, this concept was measured based on a limited number of informational items that appeared in the CIR statements. A more intensive battery of questions might yield more complex patterns of knowledge gains. Future research should

look more closely at the items to see if the CIR's impact varied by, for example, their location in the CIR statement or the kind of claim they made.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study's overall findings show that small-scale deliberative interventions can lead to widespread knowledge gains, even if they produce some variance in their impact across different subgroups of citizens. These results broadly support deliberative, epistemic, and participatory theories of democracy that stress the importance of an informed public (Carpini and Keeter 1996; Dewey 1927; Estlund and Landemore 2018; Fishkin 1991; Landemore 2013; Schwartzberg 2015; Yankelovich 1991). At least in political circumstances comparable to those encountered in the present study, advisory minipublics such as the CIR provide more evidence that the gravitational pull of motivated reasoning has its limits (c.f. Bolsen, Druckman, and Cook 2014; Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson 2010).

Although all the subgroups we examined showed knowledge gains from reading the CIR's issue statements, the variation in those effects stands as the main takeaway from our analysis of survey experiments run across 13 different iterations of this process. Minipublic messaging might cut through political biases, but the CIR's signal appeared to weaken for ethnic minorities and for some income groups. Whatever its virtues, an uneven distribution of deliberation's benefits risks undermining the democratic purposes of such engagements. Given the power of identity in contemporary politics (Boyer, Aaldering, and Lecheler 2022; Crowder-Meyer 2022), this problem warrants careful attention lest it damage deliberation's reputation among groups already disinclined to trust public institutions (e.g., Muradova and Suiter 2022).

We hope that these results inspire future systematic, aggregated analyses of other deliberative bodies, such as larger Citizens' Assemblies, Deliberative Polls, Citizens' Juries, and other minipublics that harness the power of small deliberative bodies for larger public purposes (Curato et al. 2021; Fishkin 2018; Grönlund, Bächtiger, and Setälä 2014; Nabatchi et al. 2012; OECD 2020). The movement toward more consistent evaluation of such processes points in the right direction (OECD 2022), and we hope that our study becomes one of many effective efforts to advance the science of deliberation. Comparison of effect heterogeneity across varying sources of information would also help deepen our understanding of how to reduce directional motivated reasoning and inaccurate policy beliefs. In a world beset by misinformation and misperception (Kavanagh and Rich 2018; Rauch 2021; Redmond 2022), such a body of knowledge could not be more timely.

Notes

1 The contact lists used in this research were held by either Qualtrics or the initial investigators and destroyed after data collection. Researchers received exemption determinations that permitted using implied consent for mail, phone, and Internet surveys from the University of Washington Human Subjects Division and the Pennsylvania State University Office for Research Protections.

2 We present fully standardized (X and Y) coefficients.

3 The relatively small number of respondents in this category suggests caution when interpreting results for this subgroup.

4 Data obtained via https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/OR.

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