

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in Experimental Political Science

edited by  
James N. Druckman  
*Northwestern University*

## EXAMINING MOTIVATIONS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIMENTS

Elizabeth C. Connors  
*University of South Carolina*

Matthew T. Pietryka  
*Florida State University*

John Barry Ryan  
*Stony Brook University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-11428-8 — Examining Motivations in Social Discussion Experiments  
Elizabeth C. Connors, Matthew T. Pietryka, John Barry Ryan  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009114288](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009114288)  
DOI: 10.1017/9781009110327  
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First published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-009-11428-8 Paperback  
ISSN 2633-3368 (online)  
ISSN 2633-335X (print)

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## Examining Motivations in Interpersonal Communication Experiments

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DOI: 10.1017/9781009110327  
First published online: September 2022

Elizabeth C. Connors  
*University of South Carolina*

Matthew T. Pietryka  
*Florida State University*

John Barry Ryan  
*Stony Brook University*

**Author for correspondence:** Elizabeth C. Connors,  
ecconnors@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Does interpersonal political communication improve the quality of individual decision-making? While deliberative theorists offer reasons for hope, experimental researchers have demonstrated that biased messages can travel via interpersonal social networks. We argue that the value of interpersonal political communication depends on the motivations of the people involved, which can be shifted by different contexts. Using small-group experiments that randomly assign participants' motivations to seek or share information with others as well as their motivations for evaluating the information they receive, we demonstrate the importance of accounting for motivations in communication. We find that when individuals with more extreme preferences are motivated to acquire and share information, collective civic capacity is diminished. But if we can stimulate the exchange of information among individuals with stronger prosocial motivations, such communication can enhance collective civic capacity. We also provide advice for other researchers about conducting similar group-based experiments to study political communication.

**Keywords:** interpersonal communication, group experiments, motivations

**JEL classifications:** A12, B34, C56, D78, E90

The appendix for this Element can be found online at:  
<https://cambridge.org/examining-motivations-appendix>

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ISBNs: 9781009114288 (PB), 9781009110327 (OC)  
ISSNs: 2633-3368 (online), 2633-335X (print)

## Contents

|   |  |    |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Introduction                               | 1  |
| 2 | Our Experimental Framework                 | 6  |
| 3 | Motivating Information Seeking and Sharing | 18 |
| 4 | Motivating Prosociality                    | 37 |
| 5 | Advice on Experimental Design              | 56 |
|   | References                                 | 70 |