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Is Less More? - The Role of Linguistic Complexity in Polarized Moral Deliberation

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Abstract

The increasing polarization of political discourse has sparked growing interest across cognitive science and the social sciences. While ideological divides are often attributed to structural factors such as media echo chambers or algorithmic biases, recent research suggests that more subtle communicative mechanisms may also play an important role. In particular, the linguistic form of arguments –beyond their content– may affect how people evaluate them, how open they are to persuasion, and whether group discussions lead to consensus or entrenchment. This work shows that greater discursive complexity negatively influences both individual appraisal and collective deliberation on highly polarizing topics (e.g., whether freedom of speech should be limited). Using word length and number of words as proxies for linguistic complexity, three experiments (N=11,916) provide convergent evidence suggesting that writing with fewer and shorter words increases communication efficiency, facilitating consensus and reducing polarization on controversial moral issues.