

Be Reasonable. See It My Way!

Identifying Psychological Biases that Prevent Efficient Agreements

Exercise Overview

The overall goal of this exercise is to help participants identify common psychological biases that may prevent them from reaching efficient negotiation agreements, particularly in situations rife with ideological conflict. In this exercise, participants will gain valuable interpersonal skills, including the ability to perspective-take during conversation, recognize and neutralize their own psychological biases, and listen actively to their conversation partners. These skills are critical to negotiation success and often overlooked by both trainers and practitioners because they are difficult to articulate and demonstrate.

At a high level, this will be accomplished by asking participants to imagine discussing a current policy issue with an ideological opponent, then actually engaging in such a discussion, and then reflecting back on that experience. Most participants will find that their actual experience during the conversation is more positive than their expectations in important ways. The debrief will then focus on understanding the relevant biases that lead individuals to maintain incorrect assumptions/predictions about holders of opposing views.

This exercise will be most effective in a later part of a negotiation course when participants have grasped some of the key “mechanics” of both distributive and integrative bargaining and are ready to grapple with challenges arising from conflict and emotions. In the legislative context, it is most useful for groups that are highly partisan and where bipartisan collaboration is essential to success. Rather than asking participants to take on a fictional role, this exercise will require that they engage with a current policy issue and their own, authentic views with regard to that issue. To that end, instructors will have to carefully consider which issues are most appropriate at any given training session and assure the participants that their views will remain private and confidential.

TIME TO TEACH EXERCISE: 90 – 120 minutes total (10 to take pre-survey, 20 - 40 for discussion, 10 to complete post-discussion survey, 45-60 to debrief).

This teaching plan was written by Julia Minson, Assistant Professor of Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (HKS) as part of the Harvard Kennedy School's "Teaching Legislative Negotiation Project." These materials were developed with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. HKS simulations are developed solely as the basis for class discussion; they are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

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Exercise Outline

The exercise consists of three major parts:

Part 1: During the first part of the exercise, participants will be asked to think about entering a discussion with an ideological opponent on a mutually important policy topic. They will then answer a series of questions about their expectations with regard to this situation. These questions fall into several categories designed to illustrate the biases that prevent effective communication in ideological conflict.

The first set of questions addresses expectations regarding agreement by asking participants about their own views versus their opponent's views on a variety of social and policy issues. Partisans tend to exaggerate the extent to which they disagree with their opponents, and view those opponents as more extreme and more homogeneous in their views than turns out to be the case.

The second set of questions will address the characteristics of the opponent:

- Is this person intelligent?
- Moral?
- Objective?

Extensive research has demonstrated that individuals believe their own views to be reasonable, and grounded in admirable motives, whereas they believe that those who disagree with them to be biased in their judgment and motivated by self-interest or desire to harm. Participants who are envisioning that they are discussing an issue with an ideological opponent are likely to make similarly negative inferences about the opponent's traits and motives.

The third set of questions will address the emotions that participants expect to experience during the discussion. Typically, people expect to experience more negative emotions than turns out to be the case. This in turn, leads them to avoid interacting with people they disagree with or exposing themselves to alternate views.

In total, administering this preparation questionnaire should take about 10 minutes.

Part 2: The second major part of the exercise will involve actually pairing participants who hold opposing policy views to engage in a structured discussion. For this exercise to be effective, it is important that participants are paired with people that they actually disagree with. This can be done in one of several ways, depending on available information and class size. In the simplest scenario, participants can be simply paired with members of the opposing political party, or conflict group. Alternatively, participants can be paired based on their views on specific policy issues provided at the beginning of the exercise. The advantage of pairing on party, or group membership, is that pairs can be assigned in advance, which is useful in large groups. However, pairing on specific issues allows assignment of pairs in the moment, and is likely to result in better matches with regard to the issues. The policy issues pairing would work well for smaller classes (20 participants or less), and/or uncertain

attendance. In general, deciding on the best pairing system should be done after talking with someone who knows the context and beliefs of the participants to get their information on which issues provoke the greatest level of disagreement in the group.

The discussion should last at least 20 minutes in order to allow both participants equal time to both explain their views and listen. The key to success in this exercise is a structure that requires timed rounds of speaking and listening for each party. For example, each pair might flip a coin for who has to speak versus listen first. Then for a set amount of time, one person (the listener) is tasked with trying to understand the other person's perspective on a particular issue on which they disagree. This can involve simply sitting quietly and letting the other person speak, asking specific questions to reach better clarity, or even bringing up specific relevant facts in order to understand how the other side interprets them. After time elapses, the roles switch and the previous listener becomes the speaker. The discussion is complete after each partner has had the chance to speak and listen.

Part 3: During the third part of the exercise discussion partners will return to their individual seats and answer the questions from Part 1 with regard to their partner and the discussion they just had. The goal is to provide them with a vivid comparison of the beliefs they held about their counterpart prior to the discussion, versus with the benefit of experience. Typically, participants post- discussion rate their discussion partners as more intelligent, ethical, and reasonable than anticipated; they are usually surprised that their views are not as far apart as they expected; and they will typically report experiencing fewer negative and more positive emotions than they forecasted.

The exercise debrief will consist of a discussion of the biases that play out in negotiations, based on the data from the class as well as prior research. Participants can be invited to reflect on their own conversations, what they found surprising, and how this experience is likely to alter their approach to future interactions with ideological opponents.

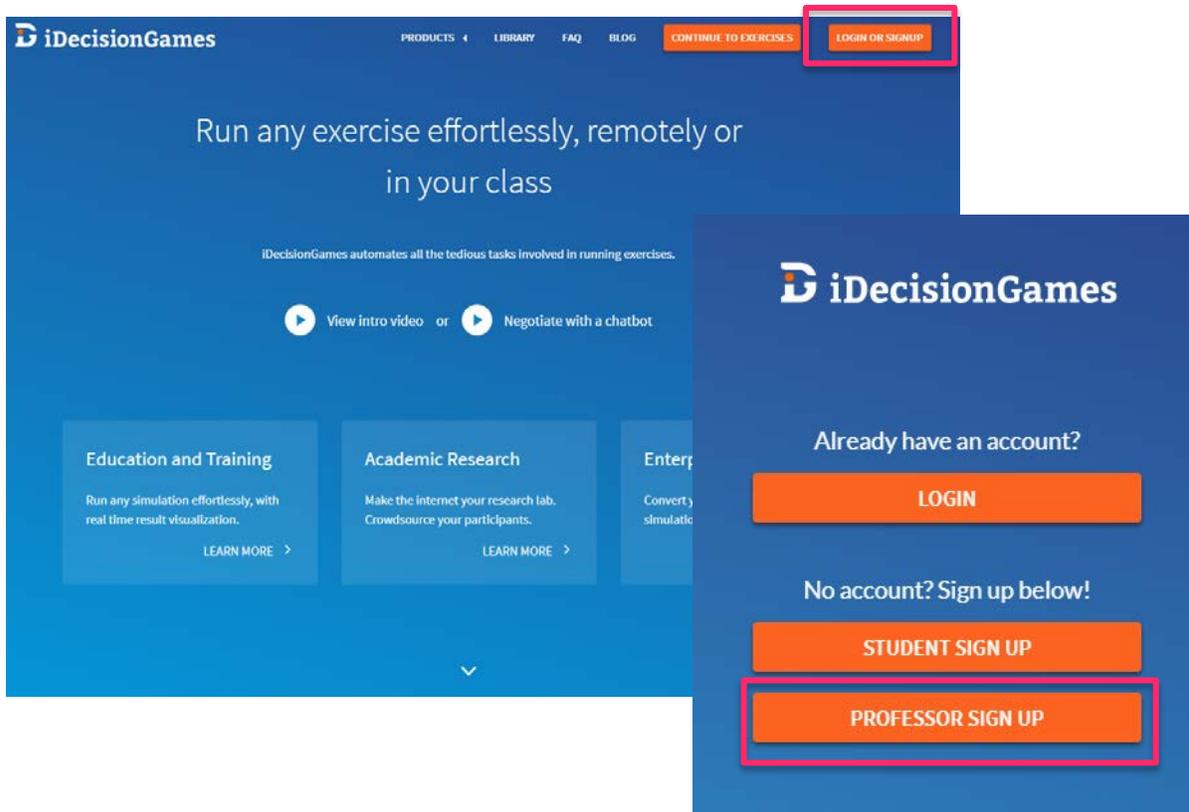
Before Class: Exercise Preparation

Below are the preparation steps that need to be undertaken prior to running the exercise.

1. Logging into iDecision Games

This exercise has been implemented online using the iDecision Games platform (“iDG”). This platform enables instructors to run the exercise from anywhere in the world, as long as they and the participants have a device with internet access. The platform also produces graphs of the participants’ survey responses in real time, so there is no need for manual processing of the exercise results. Throughout exercise preparation and implementation, online support is available by emailing: support@idecisiongames.com.

To begin, an instructor must first have a “Professor” account on idecisiongames.com. This is done simply by going to this website: <https://idecisiongames.com/promo-signup>, and following the steps to create an account. Alternatively, you can email support@idecisiongames.com to help you setup an account.



2. Selecting the Exercise

Once the account is created, the instructor can find this particular exercise by searching for the exercise title in the iDG library. There are two versions of this exercise to choose from:

1. Be Reasonable, See It My Way! (Ideology-Based): This version of the exercise will pair participants based on their political ideology (i.e., Liberals will be paired with Conservatives).

2. Be Reasonable, See It My Way! (Policy-Based): This version of the exercise will pair participants based on their views on several hot button policy issues (i.e., those who agree with a certain issue statement will be paired with those who disagree). This version might work best when teaching a group wherein a majority of participants share the same political ideology.

The screenshot shows the iDG Exercises interface. On the left is a navigation menu with 'Library' highlighted. The main area shows a search for 'Be Reasonable, See it my way!' with 2/641 exercises found. Two results are displayed:

DISPLAY NAME	STATUS	EXERCISE	CLASS	STUDENTS	ONLINE	SCHEDULED
You can now publish your exercises with us! PUBLISH YOUR EXERCISE NOW						
Be Reasonable, See it my way!						
EXERCISE SOURCES						
2 / 641 exercises						
Results for "Be Reasonable, See it my way!"						
<input type="checkbox"/> Open Source						
<input type="checkbox"/> Author - Direct						
Partner libraries						
<input type="checkbox"/> Harvard PON						
<input type="checkbox"/> NTR						
<input type="checkbox"/> HBSP						
<input type="checkbox"/> DRRC Kellogg						
+ Show all 18 partner libraries						
Be Reasonable, See it my way!(Policy Bas...			NEGOTIATION, AGENTS, BASED ON REAL WORLD CASES, DE...			
By Julia Misson						
This exercise is designed to help participants identify the psychological biases that may prevent them from reaching efficient negotiation agreements, particularly in situations rife with ideological conflict. This exercise captures results in three specific areas: Level of Agreement with Partner, Personal Emotions, and Perceptions ...						
Used: 8 times Last used: Never						
54 - HKS						
CREATE EXERCISE						
Be Reasonable, See it my way!(Ideology B...			NEGOTIATION, AGENTS, TRUST & ETHICS, BASED ON REAL ...			
By Julia Misson						
This exercise is designed to help participants identify the psychological biases that may prevent them from reaching efficient negotiation agreements, particularly in situations rife with ideological conflict. This exercise captures results in three specific areas: Level of Agreement with Partner, Personal Emotions, and Perceptions ...						
Used: 1 time Last used: Never						
54 - HKS						
CREATE EXERCISE						

Once you locate the exercise you would like to run, click on “Create exercise.”

Once the exercise has been created, you will see it listed in the exercises available under your account. Click on the name of the exercise and you will be redirected to the professor’s dashboard.

Exercises

Showing: All my classes

Select classes

DISPLAY NAME	STATUS	EXERCISE	CLASS	STUDENTS	ONLINE	SCHEDULED
Be Reasonable, See it my way!	Unpublished	Be Reasonable, See it my way!	Set class	0/0	0	"12:55pm" on 10/2/2018

3. Preparing the Exercise

i. Exercise Statements:

Policy-Based Exercise:

If you are running the policy-based version of this exercise, participants must first report their agreement or disagreement on several issue statements. Participant responses to these statements will subsequently be used to pair them with a disagreeing other. Although the baseline version of the exercise provides a list of several policy issues that can be used for this purpose, instructors have the option to modify these statements to fit their pedagogical objectives.

The baseline version of the exercise includes several statements that are currently controversial in US politics. However, with time, other topics will take center stage and other groups in conflict will have different concerns. Thus, instructors and facilitators should feel free to modify the statements below or generate new ones based on current events. To make changes to the issue statements please contact support@idecisiongames.com with your desired edits. [As noted earlier, often it is helpful to talk with someone who knows the context and beliefs of the participants to get their intelligence in advance on which issues would work best.]

Issue statements included in the baseline version of the Policy-Based Exercise:

- The United States should make it a lot more difficult for illegal immigrants to enter and stay in the country.
- The US government should closely track sales and ownership of firearms and ammunition by US civilians.
- If a woman wishes to terminate a pregnancy she should first be required to undergo a fetal ultrasound in order to make a fully informed decision.
- The death penalty should be abolished in all US States.
- Medical marijuana should be legalized at the federal level.

Ideology-Based Exercise:

If you are running the ideology-based version of the exercise, participants will first report their political ideology. Then, participant responses will be used to pair them with a discussion partner from the opposing political party.

In this version of the exercise, the instructor will be in charge of assigning a topic for discussion. The instructor can assign each pair a specific policy issue to discuss (for example, a recent legislative topic, or an issue of broad social concern). Alternatively, the instructor can leave the choice of specific topic to each pair by instructing participants to ask each other about something they have always struggled to understand about the other side. An ideal topic is one that the majority of the participants will have strong opinions about, and one that will be associated with disagreement between the relevant groups.

The topic of discussion can be projected as part of the slide presentation in class.

ii. Generating Exercise Link

In order to get an anonymous link to share with participants, click on 'Edit Exercise' on the professor's dashboard. Then click 'Advanced settings' and ensure the setting 'Allow anonymous users' is selected. Copy the link provided to share with participants. Opening the link in a private browsing window will allow participants to join the exercise from any internet-enabled device, while maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of their survey responses.

The screenshot displays the 'Exercise settings' interface. On the left sidebar, the 'EDIT EXERCISE' button is highlighted. The main content area shows the 'Advanced settings' tab selected. Key settings include: 'Exercise status' set to 'unpublished', 'Assign roles automatically' unchecked, 'AutoSkip stages page' checked, 'Reveal student data to non host profs' unchecked, and 'Allow anonymous users' checked. A 'Link to share' field contains the URL <https://iddecisiongames.com/v3/negotiation/e1cd3aff-fe27-4bd0-b0cf-239cf264295>, with a 'copy' button highlighted below it. The 'Default welcome message for anonymous users' field contains the text 'You are about to join the exercise'.

In Class: Running the Exercise

1. Joining the Exercise

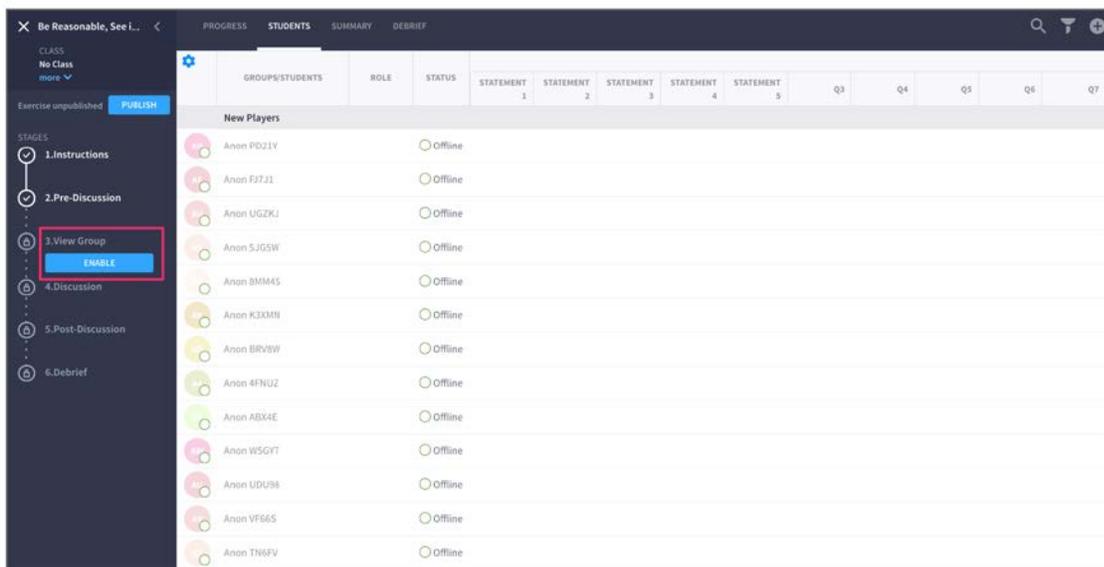
To get started with this exercise, share the anonymous link (generated during the step above) with participants. This can be done via email, by displaying it as part of a slide presentation, or by posting it on a message board or chat.

iDecisionGames performs best using the Chrome browser. To open the exercise, participants should launch Chrome, go to the “File” menu and open a new “Incognito Window.” They can then paste or type the URL into the address bar.

As participants click on the link to join the exercise, their automatically generated anonymized IDs (e.g., Anon234FJU) will appear in the professor’s dashboard page. The anonymous IDs ensure that participants’ responses to controversial policy topics remain private.

The left part of the exercise window contains a list of the exercise stages through which the participants will progress. In order to ensure that participants do each stage of the exercise at roughly the same pace, the instructor must click the “ENABLE” button at various phases once the participants are ready to proceed.

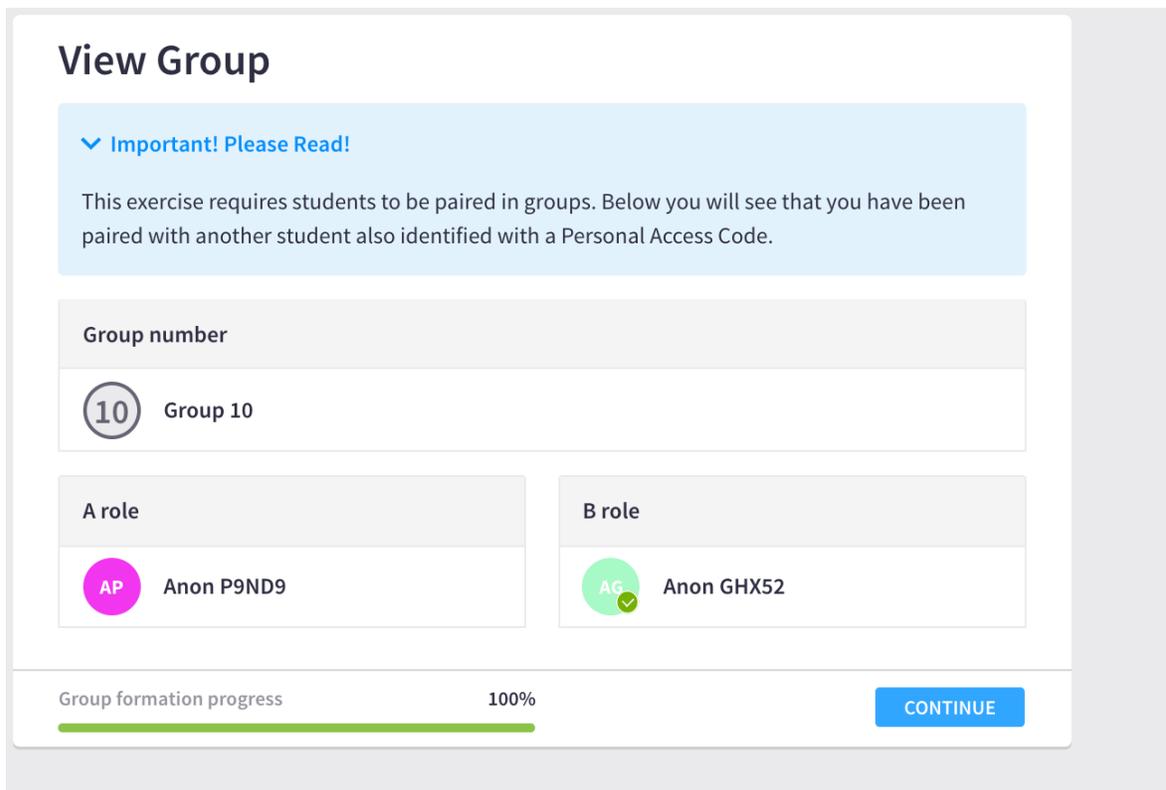
After joining the exercise, participants will be able to answer the pre-discussion survey. When all participants have completed the survey, the instructor can click the blue “ENABLE” button on the left-hand side to begin the ‘View Group’ stage. Once the instructor enables this stage, participants will be able to see their automatically generated anonymous ID (e.g., Anon234FJU) along with the anonymous ID of their assigned discussion partner (e.g., Anon0834SFE).



2. Pairing Participants for Discussion Exercise

Pairing Participants in the Ideology-Based Exercise: In this version of the exercise, participants will be paired with discussion partners based on the political ideology they report in the pre-discussion survey. When the instructor enables the “View Group” phase of the exercise, participants will see the anonymous ID of the person they have been paired with (e.g., Anon0834SFE). Participants should record their partner’s ID, and then get up from their seats to find their partner.

Pairing Participants in the Policy-Based Exercise: In this version of the exercise, participants will answer a series of questions about the positions they hold on specific policy issues during the pre-discussion survey. The iDG “Smart Pair” system will then assign each participant to a disagreeing counterpart based on their responses. Participants will first see the issue statement that they have been assigned to discuss with their partner. Then, when the instructor enables the “View Group” phase of the exercise, participants will see the anonymous ID of the person they have been paired with (e.g., Anon0834SFE). Participants should record their issue statement and their partner’s ID, and then get up from their seats to find their partner. The instructor can accelerate this process by having both members of Group 1 raise hands so they can recognize each other, then have Group 2 do the same, etc.



The screenshot displays the 'View Group' interface. At the top, there is a blue banner with a downward arrow and the text 'Important! Please Read!'. Below this, a light blue box contains the text: 'This exercise requires students to be paired in groups. Below you will see that you have been paired with another student also identified with a Personal Access Code.' The main content area is divided into several sections: 'Group number' showing '10' in a circle next to 'Group 10'; 'A role' showing 'AP' in a pink circle next to 'Anon P9ND9'; and 'B role' showing 'AG' in a green circle with a checkmark next to 'Anon GHX52'. At the bottom, a green progress bar indicates 'Group formation progress' at '100%', and a blue 'CONTINUE' button is visible on the right.

3. Discussion

Once participants have found their discussion partners, each pair should find a spot in the classroom or outside to have a discussion about the assigned topic.

In the ideology-based version of the exercise, the instructor can assign the pairs a specific policy issue to discuss (for example, recent legislation, or an issue of broad social concern). Alternatively, the instructor can leave the choice of specific topic to each pair by instructing participants to ask each other about something they have always struggled to understand about the other side. The topic of discussion can be projected as part of the slide presentation.

In the policy-based version of the exercise, iDG will assign each pair of participants a discussion topic on which they and their partner maximally disagree. This topic will be displayed to participants on the page right before they see the ID of their partner.

The discussion should last at least 20 minutes in order to allow both participants equal time to explain their views and listen. The key to success in this exercise is a structure that requires timed rounds of speaking and listening for each party. The iDG platform assigns participants to Role A and Role B. Role A speaks first. For a set amount of time, one person (Role B) is tasked with trying to understand the Role A perspective on a particular issue on which they disagree. This can involve simply sitting quietly and letting the other person speak, asking clarifying questions, or even bringing up specific relevant facts in order to understand how the other side interprets them. After time elapses, the roles switch and Role B becomes the speaker and Role A listens.

Depending on the time available, each round of discussion can last between 10 and 15 minutes, and there can be 1 to 3 speaking rounds per participant. The discussion is complete after each partner has had an equal amount of time to speak and listen.

4. Post-Discussion Survey

After participants have discussed their views with their partner, they will return to their computers and complete the final stage of this exercise. The final “Post-Discussion” stage must again be enabled by the instructor to make sure all participants proceed roughly at the same time. During the post-discussion survey participants will answer the same set of questions as earlier, but now keeping in mind the discussion they just had, rather than imagining a hypothetical one.

Be Reasonable, See It My Way Teaching Plan

CLASS: No Class

Exercise unpublished **PUBLISH**

STAGES:

- 1. Instructions
- 2. Pre-Discussion
- 3. View Group
- 4. Discussion
- 5. Post-Discussion** (ENABLE)
- 6. Debrief

PROGRESS STUDENTS SUMMARY DEBRIEF

GROUPS/STUDENTS	ROLE	STATUS	STATEMENT 1	STATEMENT 2	STATEMENT 3	STATEMENT 4	STATEMENT 5	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
1 Group 1											
Anon PD21Y	A	Offline	Moderatel...	Strongly ...	Slightly A...	Moderatel...	Strongly ...	23	26	48	97
Anon FJ7J1	B	Offline	Slightly A...	Slightly Di...	Moderatel...	No Opinion	No Opinion	84	74	67	64
2 Group 2											
Anon UGZKJ	A	Offline	No Opinion	Strongly ...	Moderatel...	Slightly Di...	Slightly Di...	84	69	40	48
Anon 5JGSW	B	Offline	No Opinion	No Opinion	Slightly A...	Strongly ...	Moderatel...	55	69	55	5
3 Group 3											
Anon 8MM45	A	Offline	Strongly ...	Strongly ...	Slightly Di...	Slightly A...	Moderatel...	36	6	92	69
Anon K3XMN	B	Offline	Moderatel...	Moderatel...	No Opinion	Slightly A...	Moderatel...	69	59	70	40
4 Group 4											
Anon BRV8W	A	Offline	Strongly ...	Strongly ...	Strongly ...	Moderatel...	Strongly ...	0	0	7	60
Anon 4FNUZ	B	Offline	Slightly A...	Strongly ...	No Opinion	Moderatel...	Moderatel...	73	80	75	2
5 Group 5											
Anon ABX4E	A	Offline	Strongly ...	Slightly Di...	Moderatel...	Slightly Di...	Slightly A...	34	72	80	20
Anon WSGYT	B	Offline	Strongly ...	Strongly ...	Moderatel...	No Opinion	Slightly Di...	19	100	91	8
6 Group 6											
Edit (locked)											

Groups Total: 10 Empty: 0 Players Total: 20 Without Gr...

In Class: Debriefing Participants

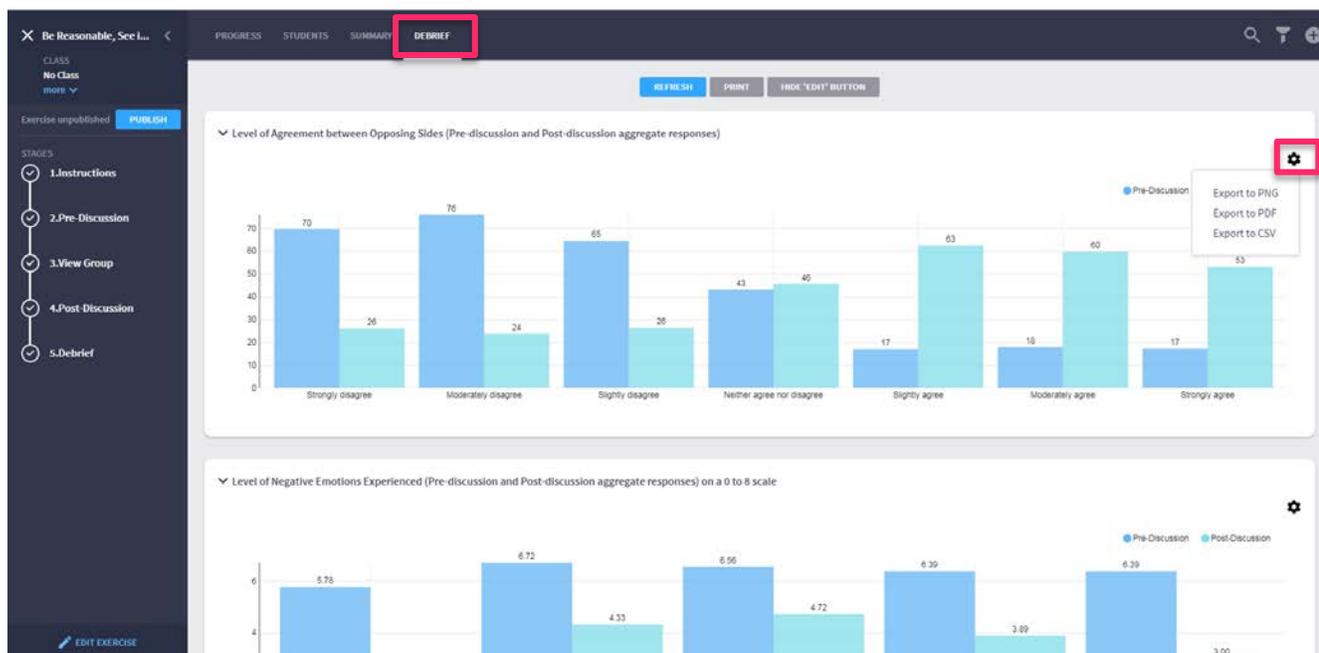
The goal of the surveys and the resulting charts is to present participants, in real time, with their expectations regarding those holding opposing views, and contrast their expectations with their assessments after the interaction/discussion.

1. Displaying Participant Responses

During the debrief, present the results of the survey to the class on your slides. You can show the results from your iDG dashboard, or use the slides provided that contain the live HTML embed codes which will update automatically as participants respond. These slides can be created for you prior to your class by the iDG support team.

All results for both the pre- and post-surveys will be displayed on your dashboard in real time. Each of these graphs will be live, clickable, and the information contained within is fully exportable.

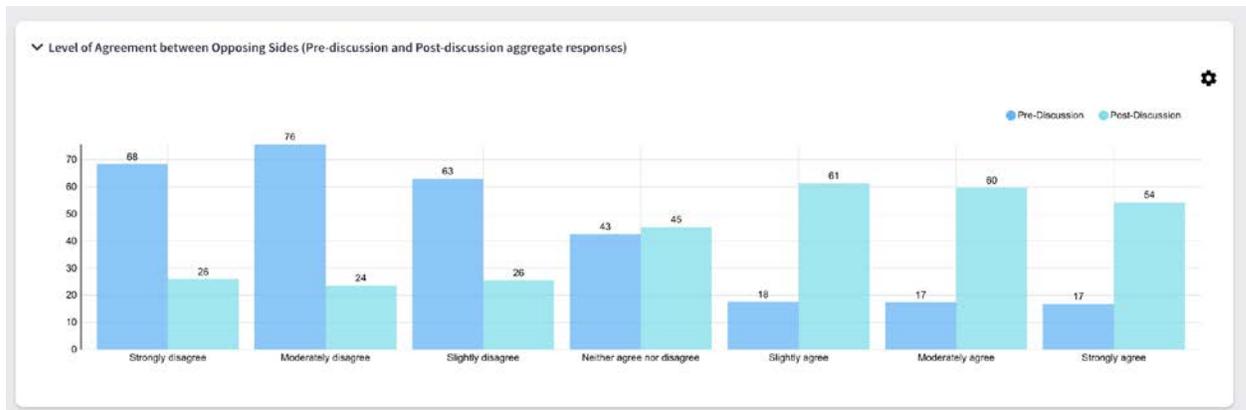
To access these graphs, click on the 'Debrief' tab at the top of the exercise window. These graphs can be individually exported in various formats by simply clicking the gear icon next to each graph.



Level of Agreement between Opposing Sides:

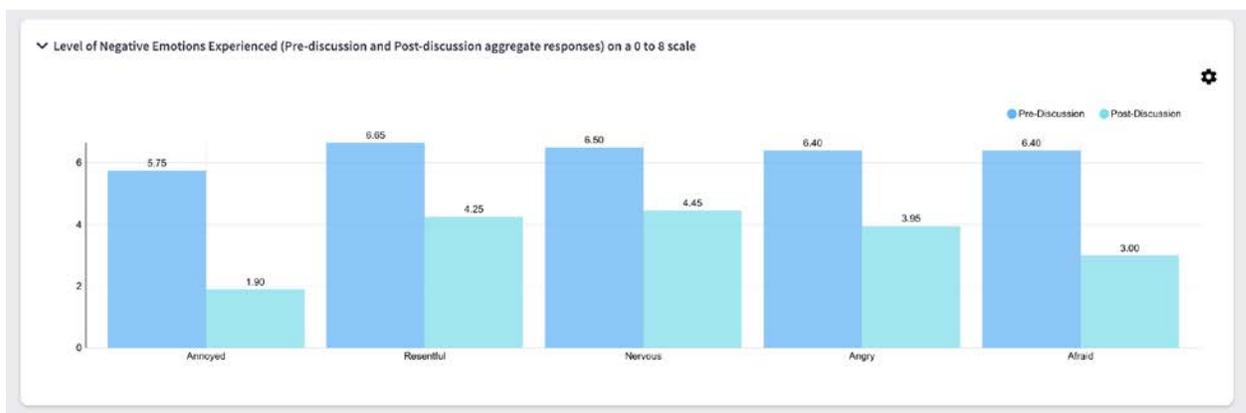
This graph directly compares participants' estimates of the amount of agreement and disagreement they would experience with their partner during the discussion, with their actual experiences as

reported after the discussion. In this example, participants actually experienced lower levels of disagreement and higher levels of agreement with their partner than they thought they would.



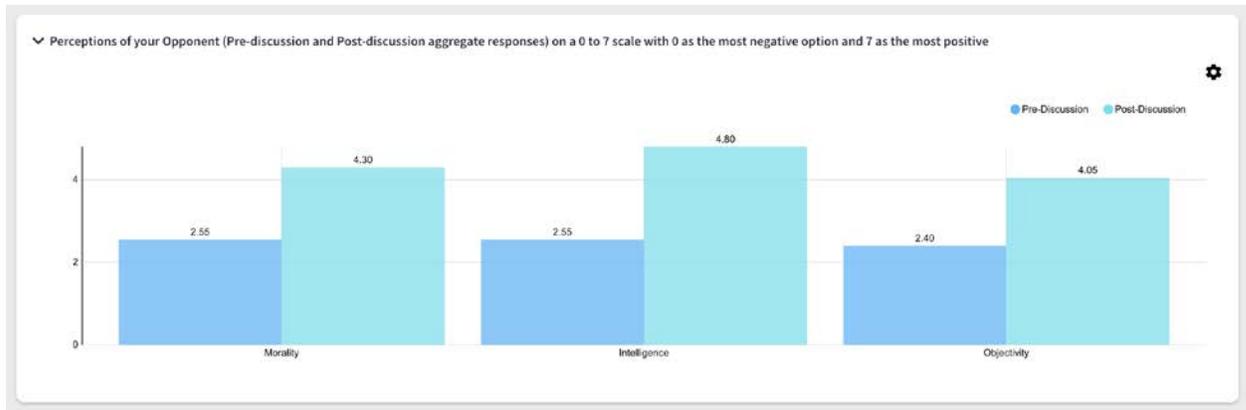
Level of Negative Emotions Experienced:

This graph shows the differences between participants' forecasts of their negative emotional experience during the discussion with their actual emotional experiences. In this example, participants predicted they would experience higher levels of negative emotion than they actually experienced during the discussion.



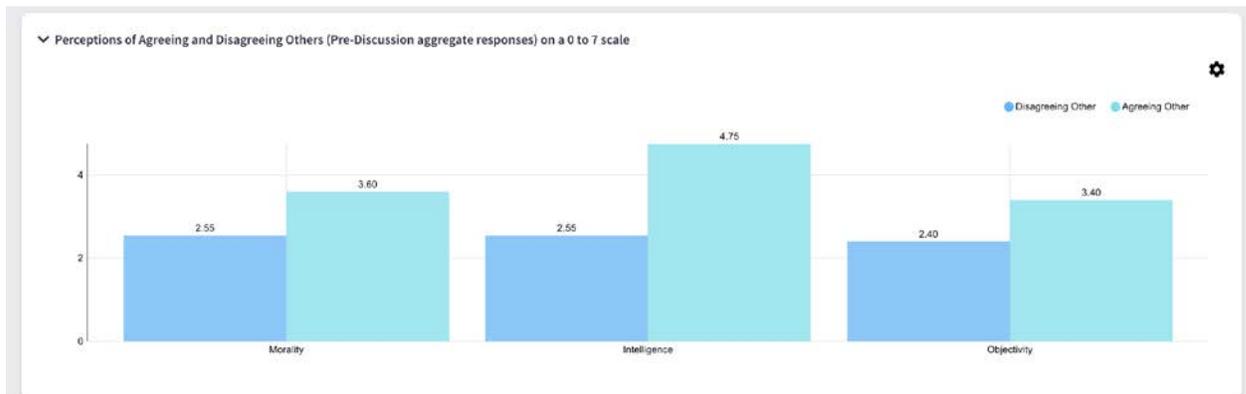
Perceptions of Your Opponent:

This graph contrasts participants' predictions of how moral, intelligent, and objective their discussion partner would be with their actual perceptions of their partner as rated after the discussion. In this example, participants reported that their partner was more moral, more intelligent, and more objective than they expected.



Perceptions of Agreeing and Disagreeing Others:

This graph compares participants' beliefs about how moral, intelligent, and objective a person who holds a view opposite to their own would be in comparison to a person who holds the same view as them. In this example, participants predict that those who hold opposing views are less moral, less intelligent, and less objective than agreeing others.



2. Discussion of Results

This exercise is likely to generate a lively discussion among participants about what they have just learned from each other and by observing their own behavior. The instructor can begin the discussion by simply asking participants about ***whether they learned anything new from/about their counterpart. Did they find any aspect of the interaction surprising?***

Participants are likely to first offer fairly polite and innocuous comments about specific pieces of information that came to light during the discussion. They might point out things that they had

previously wondered about that became clearer, or comment on the fact that the interaction overall was easier or more pleasant than they anticipated.

This is a good time to **display the graphs from the pre-discussion survey and highlight the fact that in anticipation most participants expected a negative experience**. This can be done by displaying the charts summarizing the emotions that participants expected to feel during the discussion, which should be predominantly negative. Examining the charts can lead to an interesting conversation about why people expect to have negative emotions when engaged in discussions with others with whom they disagree.

The instructor can at this point **bring up prior research findings documenting the fact that we expect people who disagree with us to be quite extreme and homogenous in their views** (i.e., the phenomenon of **“false polarization”** (Keltner & Robinson, 1993; Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995; Sherman, Nelson, & Ross, 2003).

This discussion can further transition into one about the explanations or “attributions” that people generally make for the disagreeing views of others. For example, the instructor might ask the class to **reflect on why they believe that others hold views different than their own**. Participants are likely to offer a range of theories including that other people have different backgrounds and have consequently come to develop different views; that others with whom they disagree are less well informed or unable to accurately assess relevant information; or that they are biased by their ideology/constituents/self-interest, etc.

The instructor can then confirm that the individual comments are in line with the overall expectations of the class by **displaying the chart from the pre-discussion survey where participants rated the morality, intelligence, and objectivity of the people** on the other side and introduce the idea of **“naïve realism”** (Ross & Ward, 1995, 1996; Ross, Lepper, & Ward, 2010). The instructor can share the “naïve realism” research demonstrating that most partisans in conflict consider that they are viewing the world objectively and thus view their own side to be intelligent, rational and moral since they are viewing the world as it is. Because of this, they see the other side as less intelligent, rational and moral than they are; the instructor can also note the logical conundrum that both parties in conflict can’t both be more intelligent, rational and moral than the other side.

The debrief can then progress to the post discussion phase of the exercise, with the instructor displaying the charts from the post-discussion survey. Prior research (Dorison, Minson & Rogers, 2019) has demonstrated that individuals misjudge the aversiveness of partisan discussion. Thus, the one-on-one conversations should be rated more positively than what participants anticipated. This should lead to a conversation about what aspects of the experience were surprising and what general lessons the participants can import into future practice. For example, it might be useful to highlight to the class that engaging in policy discussion is surprisingly interesting, productive, etc.

Take Away Impacts from Exercise:

- Be aware of your own biases and how they may limit your ability to process new information.
- Be aware of potential biases exhibited by your counterpart and how those views may affect your interaction.
- Reframe your initial emotional perceptions towards your opponent as research demonstrates that your initial impression is often misguided.
- If possible, structure your discussion so as to grant clear time for each argument to be heard and discussed.

References

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