

The Moderation Mistake: Trying to Eliminate Factions

You cannot preserve pluralism by eliminating faction; you preserve it by controlling faction's effects.

The moderation mistake is trying to eliminate factions.

In a very large community, disagreement is not a temporary bug waiting to be fixed. People differ in opinions, passions, interests, attachments, and ideas about what the community is for. Those differences naturally form groups.

The useful question is not: *How do we make everyone agree?*

It is: How do we prevent any faction-majority or minority-from making participation intolerable for everyone else?

A faction is not simply "people I disagree with." It is a group united by an interest or passion that becomes hostile to other participants' rights or to the community's broader interests. That distinction matters. Energetic disagreement can remain legitimate. The danger begins when a group uses superior numbers, relentless coordination, or concentrated pressure to override others' ability to participate.

A practical framework follows from that distinction:

1. Do not confuse disagreement with harm.

Trying to remove every cause of conflict would require either destroying liberty or forcing people into identical opinions, passions, and interests. Neither is a workable moderation goal. A healthy community must leave room for disagreement, including disagreement about its purpose.

2. Watch majority power, not only minority disruption.

A small faction can obstruct discussion or disturb the community. But a majority faction presents a different risk: it can preserve the appearance of popular legitimacy while using its numbers to sacrifice minority participation and the broader good.

"Most members agree" is therefore not, by itself, a complete justification for an intervention.

3. Control effects rather than trying to cure causes.

The durable remedy is not to eliminate factions. It is to limit what factional power can do. In practice, that means rules and decisions should focus on conduct that blocks others from participating-not on which interpretation, identity, or viewpoint is currently popular.

4. Build distance between passion and final decisions.

Directly assembled majorities can communicate and coordinate quickly against weaker parties. Large communities need some institutional distance: transparent standards, consistent procedures, and decision paths that do not simply mirror the loudest coordinated reaction.

This is where representation becomes useful. A chosen body can, at its best, refine and enlarge the community's view rather than reproducing the most immediate passion. But representation is not automatically virtuous; representatives can be factional, locally prejudiced, corrupt, or self-interested. Safeguards still matter.

5. Use scale and diversity as protection, not as an excuse for neglect.

A larger community contains more distinct interests. That can make it harder for one oppressive motive to become universal and harder for everyone sharing it to discover their strength and act in unison. But scale also creates a tradeoff: too much distance can weaken local knowledge, while too little makes decision-makers overly attached to local interests.

The goal is not uniformity. It is a structure in which rival groups can disagree without any one of them being able to convert numerical strength or coordination into durable domination.

The strongest moderation standard is therefore simple and demanding:

Protect the conditions of participation, not one faction's preferred outcome.

That principle will still be called favoritism or censorship by someone. A transparent rule, applied consistently, cannot guarantee universal approval. It can, however, make the community's decisions more legitimate across rival groups.