

# Memo: Managing Faction Without Eliminating Pluralism

**The goal is not to eliminate factions; it is to prevent any faction-especially a coordinated majority-from using its power to make participation impossible for others.**

To: Volunteer Community Moderator From: Policy Review Subject: Designing legitimate rules for faction, disagreement, and coordinated abuse

## Bottom line

Do not treat faction itself as the problem. In a large community, disagreement, competing interpretations, and organized interests are unavoidable. The moderation task is narrower and more practical: control the effects of faction when a group's passion or interest becomes hostile to other members' ability to participate or to the community's lasting interests.

This distinction supports energetic, good-faith disagreement while giving you a principled basis for intervening in pile-ons, brigading, and other coordinated behavior. It also helps answer the recurring charge of favoritism or censorship: the rule is not aimed at a faction's viewpoint or numerical strength, but at conduct that uses collective power against others' rights to participate.

## Why majority status cannot settle the question

A faction may be either a majority or a minority. The danger is not limited to a small, loud group. A numerically dominant faction can use its superior force to impose outcomes against justice or the rights of a minority. In a community, popularity therefore cannot by itself establish legitimacy. A widely shared interpretation may still produce intolerable conditions for members who disagree.

Minority factions present a different risk. They may be unable to impose their preferred outcome through ordinary decisions, yet still obstruct discussion or disturb the community through persistent coordination. The relevant distinction is between opposition that remains part of ordinary disagreement and conduct that prevents others from participating.

## What not to attempt

There are two broad ways to address faction: remove its causes or control its effects. Removing the causes would mean either destroying the liberty that permits disagreement or forcing members into the same opinions, passions, and interests. Neither is a workable moderation objective. Suppressing liberty would be worse than the conflict it seeks to eliminate, and uniformity is impracticable because people naturally differ and human judgment is fallible.

The practical conclusion is therefore direct: preserve pluralism and manage its consequences. Do not design rules around the hope that factions can be eliminated, permanently reconciled, or made politically harmless through consensus alone.

## Institutional implications for moderation

1. Define the intervention target behaviorally. A faction is relevant for moderation when it is united by a passion or interest hostile to other members' rights or to the community's enduring interests. This definition supports a neutral test: assess whether coordinated conduct threatens participation, rather than whether the group is popular, unpopular, ideologically appealing, or numerically small.
2. Build safeguards against coordination by any side. A majority faction is especially dangerous because it can retain the appearance of popular legitimacy while sacrificing minority rights. Rules should therefore apply symmetrically to dominant and marginal groups. The same conduct should not become acceptable merely because more members support it.
3. Use representation and distance to reduce direct factional capture. Representation can refine and enlarge public views by passing them through a chosen body rather than allowing an assembled crowd to decide directly. Applied to moderation, this favors decisions made through established procedures and designated reviewers rather than through the immediate pressure of a live factional surge. The point is not that reviewers are automatically unbiased; representatives can be factious, locally prejudiced, corrupt, or self-interested. The point is that a process can create room for judgment beyond the temporary force of a coordinated crowd.
4. Match decision scale to the issue. A larger sphere contains more distinct interests, making it less likely that one shared motive will dominate everyone. It also makes coordinated oppression more difficult because participants may have greater difficulty discovering their collective strength and acting in unison. This supports separating broad, durable standards from local or case-specific judgment: aggregate concerns should be handled through community-wide rules, while particular concerns can remain with appropriately situated moderators.

5. Prefer transparent safeguards to reliance on exceptional judgment. Wise moderators cannot always be expected to reconcile clashing interests, and no system should depend on unusually virtuous or perfectly informed decision-makers. Durable rules, review procedures, and stated standards are more reliable than assuming the person handling each conflict will correctly balance every competing interest.

## **Tradeoffs and cautions**

Scale is not an unlimited solution. Too much distance can weaken knowledge of local circumstances; too little can make decision-makers overly attached to local interests. Representation also creates its own risk of capture. A process can therefore fail in two opposite ways: it can be overwhelmed by immediate factional pressure, or it can become detached from the members and situations it is meant to serve.

The objective is a workable middle position: enough procedural distance to prevent a coordinated crowd from determining the result by force, but enough local knowledge to recognize the facts of the dispute. That balance should be visible in the structure of moderation rather than left to personal discretion alone.

## **Recommended policy direction**

Adopt rules and review practices around three commitments:

- Protect disagreement: differing opinions and interests are expected and should not be treated as misconduct merely because they are persistent or unpopular.
- Control factional effects: intervene when a majority or minority faction uses coordinated power in a way that threatens other members' ability to participate or disregards the community's enduring interests.
- Preserve legitimacy through structure: use clear standards, designated decision-makers, and an appropriate separation between immediate crowd pressure and final judgment.

This approach does not promise conflict-free moderation. It offers something more durable: rules that remain defensible when the faction benefiting from them changes. The community's health depends less on eliminating disagreement than on preventing any group from converting disagreement into domination.