Deliberate with the Enemy? Polarization, Social Identity, and Attitudes Toward Disagreement*

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Abstract

This paper examines how group identity salience impacts partisans’ attitudes towards political deliberation. Drawing from social identity theory, it conceptualizes partisanship as having distinct, yet interrelated social and ideological dimensions. Through both online and telephone-based survey experiments, it then examines how these two dimensions affect attitudes towards discussion that deliberative democratic theorists prioritize. Strong social attachments to one’s party consistently drive anti-deliberative attitudes toward disagreement; ideological partisan attachment, however, has an inconsistent effect. The results suggest that the rise of social identity polarization in the US public has made ideals of deliberative democracy more difficult to realize than ever.
“When citizens and accountable officials disagree, and also recognize that they are seeking deliberative agreement, they remain willing to argue with one another with the aim of achieving provisionally justifiable policies that they can recognize as such.”
— Gutmann and Thompson, Democracy and Disagreement

“There’s nothing short of Trump shooting my daughter in the street and my grandchildren — there is nothing and nobody that’s going to dissuade me from voting for Trump.”
— Lola Butler, Donald Trump supporter from Mandeville, LA (quoted from Barbaro, Martin, and Parker 2016)

During the run-up to the 2012 Presidential Election, the radio show This American Life produced an episode entitled “Red States Blue State,” where they declare that “everyone knows that politics is now so divided in our country that not only do the sides disagree on the solutions to the country’s problems, they don’t even agree on what the problems are.” In one particularly evocative scene from the show, interviewer Lisa Pollack profiles Frank Mills and Ron Sexton. The two men were close friends who repeatedly discussed political issues on the phone. This is until, as Pollack describes on-air, “Ron urged Frank to support a Republican candidate for Congress. Frank balked. Didn’t Ron know he supported Democrats?

Frank Mills: And he (Ron) said, ‘Who did you vote for for president?’ And I said, ‘I voted for Obama.’
Lisa Pollak: Apparently this had not come up before.
Frank Mills: And then he said, ‘You must be a Socialist.’
Lisa Pollak: He said this seriously or jokingly?
Frank Mills: No, seriously. ‘You must be a Socialist.’ And I said, ‘How can you make that assumption?’ He says, ‘Well, you voted for Obama. He’s a socialist, and therefore you are.’ And then I took it as if he had called me a dirty name. And we got into an argument. And then after a while, he said, ‘Well, I’m writing you off my list, Frank. Don’t ever talk to me again. You’re no longer a friend of mine,’ is how that conversation ended,” (Glass 2012).
The story of Frank and Ron may be common in America, and, for many, it may be troubling. With the rise of partisan polarization debated by academic and popular commentators alike (Abramowitz 2010; Haidt and Hetherington 2012), many point to a link between divergent political views and an incivility and breakdown of political discourse (“Civility in America 2013”). Dating back to the ancient Greeks, political theorists have extolled the virtues of deliberative democracy, predicated on the ability of the public (or at least their representatives) to see divergent perspectives as legitimate and to be open to opinion change (Rawls 2005; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Dryzek 2010). The closed-mindedness and lack of consideration evinced by Frank and Ron calls this possibility into question.

It is also perhaps puzzling, as many public opinion scholars demonstrate that, while conservatives and liberals may have increasingly sorted into their “correct” party based on ideology, the public writ large is as moderate as it has been in the past half century (Fiorina 2011). The acrimony may be real, but it may be relatively untethered to ideological or issue position conflict; in other words, it is comprised of “a nation that agrees on many things but is bitterly divided nonetheless,” (Mason 2015, 128). To help explain this puzzle, a body of recent research in political psychology (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Iyengar and Westwood 2014; Mason 2015; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015) has drawn a distinction between the ideological and social identity bases of partisanship to suggest that it is not Democrats’ and Republicans’ political views, but social identities, that are polarizing.

Drawing on the concept of “social identity” polarization, this project explores how the ideological and social identity bases of partisan attachment impact attitudes towards deliberation in the public. In particular, the focus is on the concept of reciprocity, broadly defined as open-minded, good faith consideration and reason giving towards those with whom one morally disagrees. Through both online and telephone vignette survey experiments, results show that partisanship does impact the amount of reciprocity one evinces towards disagreement. This effect is particularly pronounced for partisans who have a stronger social attachment to their party (in other words, being a Democrat or Republican is stronger part
of “who they are”). This being said, partisan social attachment does not have a substantial effect on whether one wants their representative to evince deliberative attitudes. These results point to the impact of modern partisan polarization as well as the possibility of a more deliberative democracy in the United States.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, after a discussion of deliberative democracy, reciprocity, and partisanship, the paper offers a conception of partisan identification containing both a social identity and ideological component, and it spells out a theoretical framework for how these distinct, yet interrelated components impact partisans’ attitudes towards reciprocity. From there, the survey experimental approach as well as the operationalization of key concepts is explained. Then, the experimental results are presented. Finally, the paper concludes by placing the results in the context of debates on polarization, modern politics and democratic theory.

1 Deliberative Democracy

In the 21st century, democracy is generally seen as a good thing. However, like other valence terms such as “freedom” or “justice,” democracy is a universal good with many and at times conflicting interpretations. Many of those that study democracy primarily focus on the electoral connection (Schumpeter 2003; Mayhew 1974 [2004]), or the quality of representation from those elected (Pitkin 1967). Still others focus on the protection of minority rights (Mill 1859 [1978]), the importance of group competition (Dahl 1956), or the role of social justice in democracy (Rawls 1971 [1999]). Increasingly, however, democratic theory has taken a “deliberative turn” (Dryzek 2010, 3), placing public discourse and decision making processes at the forefront of political thought, empirical political inquiry, and real-world institutional development. Deliberative democratic theorists assert that the quality of political communication that connects citizens both with each other and the ruling class matters. Dryzek lays out a succinct definition of the core elements of deliberative democracy:
“A system can be said to possess deliberative capacity to the degree it has structures to accommodate deliberation that is authentic, inclusive, and consequential. To be authentic, deliberation ought to be able to induce reflection upon preferences in noncoercive fashion... and involve communicating in terms that those who do not share one’s point of view can find meaningful and accept... To be inclusive, deliberation requires the opportunity and ability of all affected actors (or their representatives) to participate. To be consequential, deliberation must somehow make a difference when it comes to determining or influencing collective outcomes,” (2010, 10).

Thus, at its core, deliberative democracy is about reason giving (Thompson 2008); decisions are not made by fiat, but with collective, interactive discussion, and with justification towards those disagree. Normative theorists vary in their requirements for the quality of reasons given, the role (if any) of power or bargaining, the proper site for this discussion, as well as the place for consensus as a discursive goal (Bachtiger et al. 2010). In a seminal work, though, Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argue that a key to ideal deliberation is a norm of *reciprocity*. While this basic moral concept broadly means that “we should return good for good, in proportion to what we receive.” (Becker 1986, 4), Gutmann and Thompson apply it to the realm of democratic politics by stating that “when citizens deliberate, they seek out agreement on substantive moral principles that can be justified on the basis of mutually acceptable reasons,” (1996, 55). Recognizing the collective nature of democratic decision making, political reasoning is given in terms that those that disagree could, at least in theory, accept. Consensus is sought, but in recognizing the reality of moral disagreement (particularly in contemporary American politics – see Jacoby 2014), reciprocity only requires the honest effort to forge moral agreement, and mutual respect for competing legitimate viewpoints when consensus fails. While the term is Gutmann and Thompson’s, the concept is well developed in deliberative theory, with roots in Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality (1983).
Often, scholarship on deliberation focuses on discursive norms for elite politics. A reason for that is, for deliberative democracy to matter, it cannot be just idle talk; deliberative norms have to be consequential in government decision making. Many empirical studies on deliberation, thus, either examine decision making practices of legislative bodies (Bachtiger et al. 2007) or specific empowered public bodies such as juries (Sunstein 2002) or advisory boards (Warren and Gastil 2015). This being said, most theorists argue that, in an ideal democracy, deliberative norms are imbued through the whole citizenry. Citizens should participate vibrant, inclusive “public space, ideally hosting free-ranging and wide ranging communication,” which plays a consequential role in influencing policymaking (Dryzeck 2010, 11). In addition, normative calls for reciprocity have a place in guiding public, not just elite, rhetoric. This is because, for one, the public and the political elite inhabit the same social and cultural context, and widespread open-mindedness or intransigence in public political culture can impact future elites’ attitudes towards dialogue and decision making. The rhetorical cue elites can take from the public is further enhanced by the formal dependence of elites on the public’s support via the electoral connection (Mayhew 1974 [2004]) as well as the demonstrated responsiveness of elites to public opinion (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). If representatives engage in “pork barrel” spending or adopt certain policy positions to demonstrate responsiveness to their constituents (Mayhew 1974 [2004]), it is reasonable to suspect they may adopt their constituents’ preferred rhetorical style or attitude toward ideological difference, as well.

Further, despite presumptions to the contrary, the public does engage in political discussion more than commonly presumed (Cook, Delli Carpini, and Jacobs 2007). If deliberative discussion norms can lead, as theorists posit, to better informed, higher quality opinions and decisions for elite policymakers, they can certainly do so for the majority of the public that engages in political talk as well. Often, public opinion literature is cynical about citizens’ ability to engage in this process (Converse 1964; Achen and Bartels 2016). However, social psychological research on persuasion (Lerner and Tetlock 1999; Petty, Haugtvedt, and
Smith 1995; Broockman and Kalla 2016) shows that, given the right conditions, citizens can overcome even strong prejudices and follow what Habermas calls the “unforced force of the better argument” (1993, 163). Finally, as a critical ideal, a deliberative democracy that takes both the word “deliberative” and the word “democracy” seriously requires widespread, and reciprocal, public political participation. While there is a clear tension between fostering both public participation and ideal standards of deliberation (Mutz 2006), it is up to deliberative theorists and empirical researchers to explore how institutional reform and changing cultural context can help move us closer to this ideal.

2 Deliberation and Partisanship

Many commentators have argued for the ideal of reciprocity in public discussion, positing benefits that include a greater normative and empirical legitimacy, a more informed citizenry, better and more consistent attitude formation, higher tolerance for diverse viewpoints, greater engagement and social capital building, and higher quality, more consensual decisions (see Mendelberg 2002, 153-4). Many commentators, in turn, have lamented the loss of reciprocal political discourse, and these benefits that accrue, given the rise of partisan polarization in the 21st century. A good example of this consternation comes from Jon Stewart; concluding his 2010 “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear,” he encapsulates this (media-perpetuated, he argues) concern by asking, in the age of polarization:

“Why would we work together? Why would you reach across the aisle to a pumpkin assed forehead eyeball monster? If the picture of us were true, of course, our inability to solve problems would actually be quite sane and reasonable. Why would you work with Marxists actively subverting our Constitution or racists and homophobes who see no one’s humanity but their own?” (quoted in Examiner.com 2010).
Despite the normative popular concern, the academy has not fully explored connection between partisan polarization and ideals of deliberative democracy. For example, political scientists have paid increasing attention to partisan polarization; scholars, however, tend to study polarization as an ideological construct, examining whether Democrats and Republicans are increasingly comprising ideologically homogenous, ideologically distinct camps. Debate still rages as to whether the public is ideologically polarized (Abramowitz 2010) or simply better “sorted” and as moderate as ever (Fiorina 2011; Hill and Tausanovitch 2015). This line of inquiry provides vital, yet incomplete, insight into the impact of 21st century partisanship on the quality of American democracy. This literature is primarily motivated by a normative concern over the quality of representation in America, and the electoral connection between representatives and the represented. Given the clear ideological rift between parties in government (McCarthy, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006), if the public is not similarly split ideologically (as Fiorina 2009 argues), there is a clear breakdown in this machinery. If, on the other hand, the public is ideologically polarized (as Abramowitz 2010 argues, the electoral connection is then healthy. While this line of inquiry is important and not misplaced, concerns voiced by deliberative theorists as well as popular commentators like Stewart – of incivility, aggression, legislative gridlock, and a lack of “reciprocity” in elite and lay political discussion – do not factor in with a sole focus on the electoral connection.

If polarization studies often miss the concerns of deliberative theorists, empirical work in deliberative democracy (Fishkin 1995; Barabas 2004; Mansbridge 1980) often glosses over the potential impact of partisanship on deliberation that our founders worried about. Most of this literature takes deliberation as an independent variable, assessing its effects on dependent variables such as trust, tolerance, consensus, etc. They also operationalize deliberation holistically, arguing that the package of conditions theorists prioritize (reciprocity, reason-giving, non-domination, accurate information, etc.) create the effects they study. While this holistic approach has value, it is at best incomplete. For one, it suffers from issues of endogeneity. Is the open-mindedness, opinion change, greater understanding, etc., created
by the deliberative process, or is it driven by the type of people that choose to participate in the extensive research process? There are also issues of identification; in other words, what specifically produces the salutary benefits that studies of deliberation find? Is it the access to accurate, expert information? The encouragement of open-mindedness? Social contact with persons of a different opinion? By setting up a holistic deliberative process and not subjecting each of these components of the process to scrutiny, Mutz is correct that deliberation becomes a “moving target,” which “insulate(s) the theory from falsification” (Mutz 2008).

Thus, studying the specific components of deliberation in isolation, with an eye towards internal validity, is a necessary addition (but not replacement) to the extant holistic research that case based and forum based studies provide. Indeed, her work (2006) as well as other work (eg. Jackman and Sniderman 2006; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002) takes such an approach, using survey experiments and other experimental techniques to examine isolated characteristics of deliberation such as interpersonal network diversity or exposure to counterargument. However, like the more holistic research, this experimental work, with few exceptions, takes characteristics of the deliberative setting as independent variables, examining if they produce the salutary effects theorists contend they do. Less research from this subfield takes the deliberative setting as the dependent variable, exploring its preconditions. This is unfortunate, as Thompson argues that “the aspect of deliberation about which empirical inquiry has potentially the most to say is the set of conditions that are necessary for, or at least contributory toward, good deliberation,” (2008, 509). He posits that more research into the cultural and institutional preconditions that lead to higher-quality deliberation can help to explain the mixed results empirical inquiry into deliberation often finds. To wit, despite the extended popular and academic debate over the rise of partisan polarization, little work has examined the role of parties in fostering or inhibiting deliberation. However, recent work examining partisan social identity can provide a useful tool with which this project can do just that.
3 The Dual Bases of Partisan Identity

While other scholars work with an ideological concept of polarization, in a recent paper, Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) argue that negative affect towards an “out-group” party, not ideological difference, is the most important dimension of partisan polarization. They draw on social identity theory (SIT) to explain how, as elite polarization and the modern media environment have made partisanship an increasingly salient social identity in American culture, dislike towards, and stereotyping of, out-partisans has increased in survey responses; this phenomenon is not evident for other groups. They also show that ideology is only, at best, a very weak predictor of “affective” partisan polarization, which suggest that the salience of the partisan social grouping is primary, and it is not caused by a prior ideological or issue-based difference.

The study of “affective” or “social” partisan polarization, may be relatively novel, but it ties into a canon of research that suggests partisanship is a long-term, psychological attachment (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). It also resonates with psychological research on attitude formation and group identification. Social identity theory has long posited that group affiliations (such as attachment to one’s party) play a key role in an individual’s identity development, and even the most arbitrary or “minimal” group affiliations can drive attitude formation and behavior (Tajfel et al. 1971; Turner 1987). Much depends on context; group categorizations become salient to an individual depending on their cognitive accessibility, their perceived value to the individual, and relevant environmental stimuli (Yzerbyt and Demoulin 2010, 1029; Turner 1987, Ch. 6). With salient group identifications, though, individuals develop a host of attitudes and behaviors, including:

- Engaging in self-stereotyping by adopting in-group attitudes and behavioral norms (Terry and Hogg 1996; Suhay 2015)

- Exaggerating in-group similarity and out-group difference (Brown 2000; Ellemers,
Spears, and Doosje 1997)

- Favoring the in-group and prejudice towards the out-group (Brewer 1999; Brown et al. 2001)

- Positive ingroup emotions (such as pride) (Suhay 2015), and negative outgroup emotions (such as anger) (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000).

While Iyengar et al. (2012), as well as subsequent studies similarly leveraging social identity theory (Iyengar and Westwood 2014; Huddy, Mason, and AaroE 2015; Mason 2015), are right to highlight the social and affective dimensions of mass partisan polarization, it would be wrong to suggest that ideology is irrelevant. If affect is all that matters, it would be difficult to explain how individuals are increasingly sorting into the “correct” party ideologically (Levendusky 2009). Lodge and Taber, moreover, argue that humans are “motivated reasoners,” facing implicit pressure to bring their ideological worldview in line with their affective feelings of partisan support (Lodge and Taber 2013; see also Kunda 1990). In short, with regards to partisanship and polarization, it is important to look at social identity and ideology, not one or the other.

4 Theoretical Outline

Drawing on social identity theory and the distinction between the social and ideological bases of partisan attachment, this project seeks to explore how partisan polarization impacts the potential for a more deliberative democracy. The general expectation is that, for both Democrats and Republicans, partisan social identity produces a diminished capacity for cross-party deliberation. Much previous research has primarily focused on negative outparty attitudes produced by partisan social identity salience (e.g. Iyengar et al. 2012). However, for those with stronger social identity attachments to their party (heretofore “Social Partisans,” as opposed to “Non-Social Partisans”), I expect both less reciprocal attitudes towards
their outparty and greater reciprocal attitudes towards their inparty. This connects to the insight from SIT that, for salient group identities, one finds out-group bias and anger, in-group homophily and activism, and exaggeration of differences across groups. It also connects to recent research on partisan psychology that suggests that, far from open-mindedness, one’s partisanship conditions the quality and hue of information that he or she receives from their environment (Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Ramsay et al. 2010), as well as how that information is processed and interpreted (Gaines et al. 2007; Lodge and Taber 2013). The project here extends the theoretical purview of SIT and partisan psychology research by positing a negative connection to deliberative democratic ideals.

H1: “Social Partisans” will hold less reciprocal attitudes towards their outparty as well as more reciprocal attitudes towards their inparty than “Non-Social” Partisans.

I expect separate effects for both the social identity and ideological dimensions of one’s partisan identification. Given the strong role that party stereotyping and party-based affect plays in political cognition (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Achen and Bartels 2016), I expect partisan social identity salience to have the strongest effect on reciprocity. However, since self-stereotyping is also an indicator of social identity salience (Mackie 1986; Mason 2015), I expect one’s ”ideological partisanship” (as an indicator of adopting prototypical in-group norms) to have a secondary effect on reciprocal attitudes. Thus, for more conservative Republicans and more liberal Democrats, I expect to see less reciprocal attitudes towards their outparty and more reciprocal attitudes towards their inparty.

H2: All else equal, both more conservative Republicans and more liberal Democrats will hold less reciprocal attitudes towards their outparty and more reciprocal attitudes towards their inparty.
5 Data, Method, and Descriptive Statistics

This project assesses the impact of the ideological and social identity components of partisanship on deliberation through a set of two survey experiments. First, an online survey of 1,619 respondents was conducted during the summer of 2015. Respondents for this survey (hereafter referred to as the “Online Survey”) were recruited through Amazon’s mTurk human intelligence task service. Each recruited respondent was paid $0.90 to complete the survey. This study focuses on the impact of treatment on the 973 respondents identifying with the Democratic or Republican Party based on the traditional, ANES party identification scale. After a series of preliminary questions assessing the extent and dimensions of respondents’ partisan attachment\(^1\), the treatment consists of vignette questions. The first two vignettes ask the respondent about a political issue (one vignette concerning immigration, and one concerning civil liberties), and then introduce a counterargument to the respondent’s position. This approach draws from Jackman and Sniderman (2006); the key manipulation, though, is that the counterargument will be attributed to either a Democrat, a Republican, or a person without a party identifier (the respondent is assigned through simple random assignment to one of these three groups). Respondents will then be asked a series of questions about the argument; I expect that partisans will be more likely to respond with an attitude of reciprocity to an in-party counterargument, and less likely to respond with reciprocity to an out-party counterargument. The final vignette question gauges the respondents’ support for candidates that exhibit deliberative behaviors. It is a two-by-two vignette (vignettes assigned through simple random assignment), presenting a scenario which manipulates whether an in-party candidate (either a Democratic or Republican) is working with both parties to pass legislation, or worked in opposition to the other party to pass legislation. I expect partisans to be less likely to support in-party candidates

\(^1\) This measurement of partisanship was conducted before the experimental questions to avoid having respondent covariates influenced by treatment (see Gerber and Green 2012, 96-7). The downside of this ordering is potentially a weaker treatment effect, as these questions introduce the concept of partisanship before partisanship is primed by treatment.
that work across the aisle, and more likely to support candidates that work in opposition to
the opposing party.

As there is strong debate as to whether mTurk experiments are externally valid
(Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Krupnikov and Levine 2014), a second survey experiment
replicated key results from this study with a representative sample of the South Carolina
population in the spring of 2016. Conducted by the Institute for Public Service and Policy
Research at the University of South Carolina, a sample of 800 residents were interviewed via
landline and cell phone sampling frames, with a response rate of 13%. Again, the focus of
this survey (hereafter referred to as the “Telephone Survey”) is the 515 of these residents
identifying with one of the two major parties based on the traditional ANES scale. After
a series of initial questions on respondents’ partisan attachment, this survey replicated the
“civil liberties” issue vignette questions as well as “candidate support” vignette question
from the online survey (described above). Scripts for all vignette treatments, as well as
rational for developing the counterarguments, can be found in the Appendix, and full text
from both survey instruments can be found at ryanstrickler.weebly.com.

Beyond looking writ large at how partisans respond to variations in party frames and
vignettes, I am interested in the conditional average treatment effect (CATE) for different
partisan subgroups, based on measures of partisan social identity salience and ideology.
It is important to note that they will not be used as covariates in analysis, but simply
to facilitate subgroup comparison by dividing respondents into groups based on medians
for these measures. For ideology, the Online Survey gives the respondent 11 declarative
statements concerning an array of policy issues, allowing for a five-point response ranging
from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” Following a technique employed by Carsey
and Layman (2002) as well as Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012), the 11 policy items were then
used to create ideology scores for each respondent using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).
Respondents with negative scores are thus more liberal than the average “true independent,”
and respondents with positive scores are more conservative.
Partisan Social Identity (PSI) is operationalized differently by the two survey instruments; in the Online Survey, partisans’ PSI score is calculated based on the following three statements, where the respondent is asked for their extent of agreement on a five-point scale:

- When I talk about Democrats (Republicans), I usually say “we” rather than “they”
- When someone criticizes Democrats (Republicans), it feels like a personal insult
- I don’t have much in common with most Democrats (Republicans)

For the Telephone Survey, a different set of questions as follows, based on the work of Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015) was used to create PSI scores:

- How important is being a Democrat (Republican) to you?
- How well does the term Democrat (Republican) describe you?
- When talking about Democrats (Republicans), how often do you use “we” instead of “they”?
- To what extent do you think of yourself as being a Democrat (Republican)?

By using different sets of questions, the Online and Telephone Surveys together can demonstrate construct validity for partisan social identity and its impact on deliberative attitudes. At the same time, as both surveys also have the same traditional ANES partisanship scale, results from the Online Survey using this measure can still be completely replicated with the Telephone Survey. More information on the processes used to create PSI and ideology scores can be found in the Online Appendix.

Both the PSI and ideological partisanship measures will be used to divide partisan respondents into subgroups. As the Telephone Survey does not contain a measure of ideological partisanship, respondents are simply divided as “Social” and “Non-Social” partisans by the median score, with the former having higher PSI scores. Table One indicates what proportion of respondents fall into each of four subgroups in the Online Survey. As one can
see, partisans are allayed across the range of social and ideological attachment. Given the prevalence of partisan ideological sorting (Levendusky 2009), one may have expected fewer “Social Partisan, Low Ideology” and “Non-social Partisan, High Ideology” respondents. This may, though, highlight the line of research suggesting that, even for partisans, the public does not have ideologically consistent or polarized attitudes (Converse 1964; Fiorina 2011).

[Table 1 about here.]

The two surveys samples, in some ways, contain similar sets respondents; both the Online and Telephone Survey have samples that are whiter and more educated than the nation as a whole. However, the samples have stark differences in partisanship. Mirroring past research on mTurk survey respondents (Krupnikov and Levine 2014), Online Survey respondents are more liberal and prefer the Democratic Party more than the country’s population writ large. The Telephone Survey sample, reflecting the state of South Carolina as a whole, skews Republican. Individually, the proportion of partisans in each survey may raise concerns of external validity. Together, though, a consistent effect across both sets of surveys would attest to the robustness of the results across parties. Further descriptive information is in the Online Appendix.

The Online Survey also contains questions on emotions towards the Democratic and Republican parties. As Figure One demonstrates, partisans scoring above the median on the social identity measure have uniformly stronger emotional reactions to the two parties. Social Partisans, as opposed to Non-Social Partisans, are much more likely to report feeling pride and hope towards their in-party “most of the time” or “always.” There are also more likely to feel anger and fear towards their outparty “most of the time” or “always.” This difference is consistent with intergroup emotion theory (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000; Suhay 2015), which suggests that salient social identities produce positive emotions towards one in-group and negative emotions towards one out-group. It also serves as a robustness check for the

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2This difference is consistent for both Democratic and Republican respondents.
PSI measure used in this project, confirming that it in fact taps into respondents’ social identity salience.

[Figure 1 about here.]

6 Experimental Results

Table Two shows the vignettes in the Online Survey produce a significant effect on respondents’ attitudes toward deliberation. Respondents are consistently more likely find arguments from inparty interlocutors “very reasonable” and worth considering “a good deal,” and they are also more likely to find arguments from outparty interlocutors “not at all” reasonable or worth considering. This effect holds for both immigration and civil liberties issues. Differences in responses to all questions are significant at $p < 0.1$, based on a non-parametric test of independence; statistical significance, though, is stronger for the set of civil liberties questions. That being said, there are still substantial swings in responses to the immigration questions based on the treatment groups. For example, respondents are nearly 50% more likely to state that an immigration counterargument is “not worth considering” if the argument comes from an outparty, rather than an inparty, interlocutor. Treatment effects are also consistent for both Democratic and Republicans, and they only strengthens when one includes partisan “leaners” (self-identified independents who state they are closer to one party than another) as well as identified partisans. For these supplementary analyses, see Online Appendix.

[Table 2 about here.]

As shown with the Telephone Survey results in Table Three, one sees that treatment effects are still evident when one moves to a different sample and to a telephone, as opposed to an online, survey mode. However, the effect is more mixed. There is a clear difference in partisans’ response to the civil liberties counterargument based on who it came from; in fact,
partisans are over 50% more likely to state that the argument is “not at all reasonable” if it comes from an outparty, as opposed to an inparty, interlocutor. As supplemental analysis in the Online Appendix shows, this effect is evident across both Democrats and Republicans, when one incorporates “leaners” into the analysis, and when survey weights are applied. The treatment response to whether the counterargument is “worth considering,” however, is more muted. While there is some movement away from considering the argument when one goes from the inparty to the outparty group, it does not come close to statistical significance. One possible reason for this weakened response is that this question comes after the question on whether the argument is reasonable. As such, perhaps treatment effects were weakened by being first asked to consider the reasonableness of the argument. More testing would need to be done to explain these heterogeneous responses.

[Table 3 about here.]

Crucially for this project, a subgroup analysis shows that the results in Tables Two and Three are driven primarily by partisans scoring above the median on partisan social identity indicators (Social Partisans). To improve the efficiency of the analysis (see Green and Aronow 2011), multinomial logistic regression models, which included dummy variables for two of the three treatment groups as well as a handful of demographic variables, were run on the “civil liberties” set of questions in the Online Survey. While all regression results are in the Online Appendix, Figures Two and Three present predictive margins from these models. As one can see, Social Partisans are significantly less likely to view an inparty argument, as opposed to an outparty argument, concerning civil liberties as “not at all” reasonable or worth considering. In contrast, there is no significant sign of a treatment effect for “Non-Social Partisans”. This suggests that simply being partisan is not enough to deter

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3 Survey weights are not used in this analysis because, while weighted responses are very close to non-weighted responses, incorporating weights reduces the effective size of the sample and thus statistical power. Analysis incorporating weights can be found in the online appendix.

4 While the three category response set of these questions can be construed as ordinal, a Brant test (1990) showed they many models failed the parallel regression assumption. Thus, an ordered regression model is not used.
one from adopting a reciprocal attitude. Social identity salience, or the extent to which being a Democrat or Republican is part of “who one is,” plays a key role in partisans’ willingness to deliberate across cross-party disagreement.

Similar models were run for partisans in the Telephone Survey, and predictive margins for these models are displayed in Figure Four. Although the results a bit more mixed, there are again real differences between Social and Non-Social Partisan respondents. As discussed earlier, there was no treatment effect for the partisan sample as whole with regard to the “consider” question; Figure Four, however, shows how this null result masks clear differences in response between partisan subgroups. Those for which partisanship is more salient to their social identity are substantially more likely to state that an outparty, as opposed to an inparty or neutral, civil liberties argument is “not at all” worth considering. For partisans with lower PSI scores, however, the effect is muted and does not approach statistical significance. Social Partisans in the Telephone Survey similarly are much more likely to view the outparty argument as “not at all” reasonable; for this question, though, the treatment effect is also found with Non-Social Partisans. Overall, Figures Two through Four suggest a link between social identity and deliberation. For partisan respondents, as one’s party becomes a more important part of their social identity, one is less likely to approach cross-party political disagreement in the “good faith,” reciprocal way that Gutmann and Thompson (1996) extol.

While missing responses are a negligible issue for the Online Survey regression analysis (as less than 2% of respondents were listwise deleted due to missingness), for the Telephone Survey models, it is more of an issue, as up to 9.5% of respondents were listwise deleted due to having at least one missing item. As such, alternate models were run with data created through multiple imputation (available in the Online Appendix). The results with the imputed data are nearly identical.
What about the ideological dimension of partisanship? While it was hypothesized that greater ideological adherence to one’s party would have a similar, yet secondary, negative effect on open-mindedness towards disagreement, the results presented in Table Four provide a more nuanced picture. These figures give predictive probabilities that respondents will state an issue counterargument is “not worth considering,” focusing only on respondents scoring above the median on the PSI indicator. They compare high and low scoring subgroups of respondents based on ideology; “High Ideology” Democratic respondents are coded as such if they are more liberal than the median Democrat, and Republican respondents are coded as “High Ideology” if they are more conservative than the median Republican. Full model results are in the Online Appendix.

For the immigration question, High Ideology respondents are significantly more likely to see an inparty argument as worth considering, and less likely to see an outparty argument as worth considering. This effect does not hold up for Low Ideology respondents. This accords with the theory outlined earlier that ideological partisanship is an indicator of social identity salience and as such helps to drive an unwillingness to deliberate with the outparty. However, the effects of the vignettes across these subgroups are mitigated when looking at the question on civil liberties. Here, the Low Ideology subgroup is responding to treatment, and there are no substantial effects looking at the High Ideology subgroup. One possible explanation for this is that the question concerning civil liberties (focusing on NSA data collection) could be less familiar to respondents scoring lower on the ideological partisanship score. There is a well established relationship between political knowledge and ideological consistency (Zaller 1992), and if it is true that less ideological partisans are not familiar with the issue, they may be looking to the party of the interlocutor as a cue for their disposition to the argument. This would be consistent with a long line of research on partisan heuristics used by low-knowledge citizens (Lupia 1994; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Darmofal 2005). For the immigration question, though, it may be that the partisan positions on this issue are
clearer to respondents regardless of their ideology or attention to politics. If that is the case, cueing effects would be limited, and the social identity effects of in-group norm adoption would predominate. This all being said, as there are not questions of political knowledge on this survey, all one can say for now is that the effect of ideological partisanship on attitudes of reciprocity varies by issue context.

The final experimental manipulation is a 2x2 vignette analyzing the impact of partisanship impact on respondents’ willingness to support efforts towards consensus by elected representatives. Figure Five displays the percentage of partisan respondents from the Online Survey stating that they would be “more likely to support” a Congressperson, broken out by treatment group. The graph on the left contains results for Social Partisan respondents, and the graph on the rights contains results for Non-Social Partisan respondents. Here, there are clear indications of partisan bias, but not partisan social identity, at work; given the same information, partisan respondents in both Social and Non-Social subgroups are more willing to support legislative efforts if they come from an inparty rather than an outparty representative. They are also more likely to support these efforts if the representative “worked with both parties to increase domestic energy production, as opposed to simply “worked to increase domestic energy production.” Although this difference is smaller than the difference across parties, it is evident regardless of whether one looks at inparty or outparty treatment groups.

Looking at the replication results from the Telephone Survey in Figure Six, though, this apparent willingness to support consensus-building across parties may be driven more by Democratic Party norms than a general desire to see more deliberation. The figure breaks down results of the experimental vignette by Democratic and Republican respondents. Partisan identity still clearly matters most, as both sets of partisan respondents are less likely to support a Congressperson’s policy efforts if she is from the outparty as opposed to the inparty. This result, again, is consistent across parties and for both Social and Non-Social
partisans (see Online Appendix). Democrats, moreover, are also more likely to support a Congressperson, regardless of party, if she “worked across the aisle.” Republicans do not respond to treatment in a similar way, however. For them, we find similar percentages of support comparing a Congressperson who “worked across the aisle” to a Congressperson who simply “worked” to pass legislation. The difference in response helps in part to explain the pattern we see with the Online Survey results (as the sample is skewed Democratic). This difference in partisan response could be fueled by Democratic norms supporting compromise and consensus, less prevalent with the Republican Party. This explanation is in line with social identity theory’s prediction that group salience drives in-group norm adoption. It could also be fueled by the current political context; Republicans may well be the ones seeking legislative consensus if Democrats gain control of Congress. More research needs to be done to explain this differential response to treatment across parties. However, the impact of partisan identity on representative support, as evidenced by higher levels of inparty support, is consistent across parties and across surveys.

[Figure 6 about here.]

7 Discussion and Conclusion

Does partisanship, and in particular partisan social identity salience, impact the possibility of a more deliberative democracy? The survey experiments discussed here suggest that it does; when faced with an argument running counter to their opinion, partisans take into account whether the argument comes from an inparty or outparty member. They are significantly less like to evince deliberative or “reciprocal” attitudes when faced with an outparty argument and significantly more likely to evince reciprocal attitudes towards an inparty argument. The effects on reciprocity are particularly pronounced for the subset of partisans for whom party is an important part of their social identity (in other words, being a Democrat or Republican is an important part of “who they are”). Partisan ideological attachment does
have a secondary effect on reciprocal attitudes, but it is nuanced and hinges on the specific issue being considered. Partisan social identity, however, has little impact on one’s view of representative deliberation; instead, the extent to which partisans want to see reciprocity evinced by their member of Congress hinges on specific party norms. While both Democrats and Republicans condition support for policymaking activity based on whether that activity come from an inparty or outparty representative, Democrats also reward representatives from either party that “work across the aisle” to change policy.

While the experimental approach used maximizes the internal validity of the findings, a lack of external validity is a potential limitation to this study. For one, while results are replicated across different samples and survey modes, neither the Online nor Telephone Surveys are completely demographically representative of the U.S. population as a whole. Another concern with external validity is with the use of a survey approach more broadly. For example, it can be questioned as to whether receiving a counterargument statement through a computer screen or telephone interviewer adequate simulates encountering “real world” political argument. Also, it can be questioned whether a small set of survey questions can adequate tap into nuanced, multifaceted concepts such as reciprocity, ideological partisanship, and/or partisan social identity. This latter limitation is fundamental to the survey experimental approach. Future research could thus continue this exploration of the relationship between partisanship and deliberation through, for example, embedding an experimental design in deliberative forum (see Barabas 2004 or Mendelberg and Karpowitz 2007 for examples), or analyzing deliberation in field settings (see Bryan 2004 or Mansbridge 1980 for examples).

Limitations aside, the results nonetheless help us to understand the impact of partisan polarization in the 21st century. Recall from Figure One that partisans with higher social identity salience are more likely to express positive emotion towards their inparty as well as negative emotion towards their outparty; Figures Seven and Eight show that this affective response that characterizes “Social Partisans” has only amplified in the past two decades.
This ANES data are from questions that probe partisans' emotions towards Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. It is an imperfect substitute for emotion towards the parties, and electoral and candidate context adds considerable variability to this measure. However, since 1996, there is a clear secular trend; a majority of partisans now feel anger and fear “most of the time” to their outparty candidate, as well as hope and pride “most of the time” to their inparty candidate. These graphs support the notion that the public is indeed splitting along partisan lines, but it is a social and affective, not ideological, split. The experimental results in this study, in turn, illustrate how this social polarization is impacting political discourse. While it seems to have muted impact on the desire to hold representatives accountable to standards of reciprocity, in everyday interpersonal talk, it makes good faith discussion and efforts at forging consensus across party lines more difficult. To the extent that the ideal of deliberative democracy demands a deliberative public, not just deliberative elites (Dryzek 2010), the results show that our current era of polarization makes this ideal more difficult to obtain.

The goal of this study is empirical – to examine how partisanship impacts the attainment of ideals of deliberative democracy, not to examine those ideals as such. Nonetheless, this study can contribute to the normative assessment of modern democracy in the United States. This assessment hinges on the yardstick one is using. If one hews to a procedural or minimal view of democracy, the results here are not problematic; partisan social polarization does not impact the likelihood of one supporting a representative’s efforts in bipartisan legislating. If, however, one takes the deliberative ideals of Dryzeck, Gutmann and Thompson, and others seriously, the results here are more troubling. If the ideal of deliberative democracy requires an engaged public adhering to norms of reciprocity—participating in political talk with an open mind, offering arguments that all could see as legitimate, and working towards a final consensus—mass social polarization is driving us away from this ideal.

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6The graphs begins at 1996 as this is the first year the ANES asks how often respondents feel these emotions. Response wording changed in 2012. For 2012, graphs reflect percentage of partisans feeling emotion “most of the time” or “always;” prior data reflects percentage of partisans feeling emotions “fairly” or “very often.”
Perhaps, as critics suggest, deliberative democracy is unrealistic, exclusionary, or irreconcilable with ideals of participatory democracy. Rebuffing critics and defending deliberation is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a cursory look at the 2016 Presidential race suggests that we should at least consider what our standards of political discourse should be, and when those standards are transgressed. It is an election season marked by misogyny, calls for outgroup exclusion/vilification, misinformation and ad hominem as a rhetorical norm, violence, and little in the way of substantive debate. These are not characteristics of a healthy democracy; to move in a more productive direction, it may be worth it to consider the ideals laid out by deliberative theory, as well as how factors such as partisanship impact the likelihood of adopting these ideals.
References


Table 1: Distribution of Respondents among Partisan Subgroups, Online Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social Partisans</th>
<th>Non-Social Partisans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Ideology</td>
<td>28.47%</td>
<td>21.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Ideology</td>
<td>21.58%</td>
<td>28.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 973

Table 2: Vignette Treatment Effect for All Partisans, Online Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inparty</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Outparty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is Immigration Argument Reasonable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette</td>
<td>A Good Deal</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inparty</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>59.76%</td>
<td>29.13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7.49%</td>
<td>56.59%</td>
<td>35.93%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outparty</td>
<td>8.55%</td>
<td>56.33%</td>
<td>39.14%</td>
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n = 971; p = 0.06

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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is Immigration Argument Worth Considering?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette</td>
<td>A Good Deal</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inparty</td>
<td>16.52%</td>
<td>61.56%</td>
<td>21.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>12.57%</td>
<td>61.08%</td>
<td>26.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outparty</td>
<td>11.84%</td>
<td>55.68%</td>
<td>30.92%</td>
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n = 971; p = 0.08

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Neutral</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is Civil Liberties Argument Reasonable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette</td>
<td>A Good Deal</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inparty</td>
<td>13.53%</td>
<td>58.53%</td>
<td>27.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>57.47%</td>
<td>28.90%</td>
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<td>7.12%</td>
<td>58.08%</td>
<td>34.67%</td>
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n = 971; p = 0.03

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<td>Is Civil Liberties Argument Worth Considering?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette</td>
<td>A Good Deal</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inparty</td>
<td>19.41%</td>
<td>57.06%</td>
<td>23.53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>20.41%</td>
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<td>26.95%</td>
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<td>Outparty</td>
<td>12.65%</td>
<td>57.72%</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
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n = 972; p = 0.05

Significance from $\chi^2$ test for independence,
Table 3: Vignette Treatment Effect for All Partisans, Telephone Survey

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<th>Vignette</th>
<th>A Good Deal</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inparty</td>
<td>17.81%</td>
<td>54.79%</td>
<td>27.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>15.17%</td>
<td>58.43%</td>
<td>26.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outparty</td>
<td>13.46%</td>
<td>44.87%</td>
<td>41.67%</td>
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\[ n = 480; p = 0.02 \]

Is Civil Liberties Argument Reasonable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>A Good Deal</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inparty</td>
<td>16.11%</td>
<td>60.40%</td>
<td>23.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>16.48%</td>
<td>63.19%</td>
<td>20.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outparty</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>55.77%</td>
<td>28.85%</td>
</tr>
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\[ n = 487; p = 0.49 \]

Significance from $\chi^2$ test for independence,

Table 4: Argument Vignette Effects for "Social Partisans," by Ideological Partisanship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>High Ideology</th>
<th>Low Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inparty</td>
<td>0.255 [0.044]</td>
<td>0.259 [0.052]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0.319 [0.049]</td>
<td>0.188 [0.045]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outparty</td>
<td>0.462 [0.053]</td>
<td>0.297 [0.054]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 274 \]

Proportion "Not At All" Considering, Immigration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>High Ideology</th>
<th>Low Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inparty</td>
<td>0.261 [0.044]</td>
<td>0.116 [0.037]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0.256 [0.044]</td>
<td>0.246 [0.057]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outparty</td>
<td>0.322 [0.049]</td>
<td>0.287 [0.051]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 274 \]

Predicted probabilities from multinomial logistic regression, robust standard errors displayed
Figure 7

Emotion Toward Presidential Candidates, Democrats

Source: ANES

Figure 8

Emotion Toward Presidential Candidates, Republicans

Source: ANES