Partisan Polarization and Deliberative Democracy: The Role of Affect and Ideology
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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 (two) sides disagree on the solutions to the country’s problems, they don’t even agree on what the problems are.” The episode then profiles a host of average Americans who have had their families torn apart, and close friendships ruined, due to opposing, polarized politics. In one particularly evocative example from the show, interviewer Lisa Pollack profiles Frank Mills and Ron Sexton. The two men were close friends until, as Pollack describes on-air in their interview, “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 noted 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, many political theorists have extolled the virtues of “deliberative” democracy, predicted 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 type of “polarization” evinced by Frank and Ron calls this possibility into question.

Despite the connection between partisan polarization and the potential for deliberative democracy, though, few studies have explicitly connected the subfields (but see Mutz 2006). Moreover, “partisan polarization” means different things to different people (for a review, see Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006); an examination of the effects of polarization on deliberative democracy requires first a careful conceptualization of “polarization.” These are the two goals of this research project. Drawing from social identity theory research and its application in recent political psychology research (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2014; Parsons 2014), this paper will define “partisan polarization” as occurring across two related, yet independent dimensions – “ideological polarization” and “affective polarization”. While there is debate on the growth of “ideological” polarization, ANES Time Series data suggests that “affective” polarization is at its highest level in the past half century. Then, after defending the importance of three key attitudinal requirements of the public in deliberative democracy theory – “reciprocity,” “reflection,” and “efficacy” – the paper will lay out a theoretical argument explicitly connecting affective and ideological polarization to these deliberative qualities. The paper then uses 2012 ANES data to test this argument, finding mixed, modest initial results. Finally, before concluding, the paper will discuss potential future directions in empirically testing the theoretical link between affect, ideology, and deliberation.
Ideological and Affective Polarization

The notion that partisan elites have been moving apart ideologically over the past 40 years is uncontroversial; this is true for both politicians (McCarthy, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Theriault 2008) and party activists (Aldrich 2011, Ch. 6). With this observation, many scholars have argued that the public is now similarly “polarized,” harboring homogenous, distinct worldviews and issue positions (Abramowitz 2010; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). Other scholars have questioned this assertion, arguing that while the public may be better “sorted,” it is no more ideologically polarized than when The American Voter was written in 1960 (Fiorina 2011; Levendusky 2009). Along the lines of this dialogue is debate as to whether the public is polarized on economic or sociocultural issues (Frank 2004; Gelman et al. 2008) as well as whether ideological mass polarization has a geographic dimension (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003; Gelman et al. 2008; Bishop and Cushing 2008).

Many authors participating in this debate take as a starting point an “ideological” concept of polarization, where partisan affiliation is (or is not) linked to ideological and/policy preference. In a recent paper, however, 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 partisanship has become an increasingly salient “social identity” in American culture, dislike towards, and stereotyping of, partisan “out-groups” has increased in survey responses. This phenomenon is not evident for other groups; in fact, this is occurring as out-group animus has (overtly) decreased for ethnic, religious, and other traditionally-maligned groups. In a subsequent work, Iyengar and Westwood show that there are both implicit and explicit
dimensions to affective polarization. They also provide experimental evidence showing that partisan social identities can substantially effect behavior completely unrelated to politics (2014).

(Figures One and Two)

Data drawn from the ANES Cumulative Time Series File supports Iyengar et al.’s conclusion that affective polarization has been on the rise in recent years. Figures One and Two recreate analysis of one measure of “affective polarization,” partisan “feeling thermometers,” displayed in Iyengar et al.’s (2012) work. Respondents are asked to rate their feelings towards the Democratic and Republican parties on a scale from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating that the respondent feels more favorably toward the party. As one can see, for self-identified Democrats and Republicans, the distance between feeling towards in-parties and out-parties has steadily grown since 1978. Moreover, this growing distance is driven not by more positive feelings towards one’s in-party, but growing negative feelings towards one’s out-party.

(Figures Three and Four)

An increasing affective basis for partisan polarization is further demonstrated in Figures Three and Four. Here, the analysis is based on a series of open-ended questions that prompts the respondent to provide items that they like or do not like about the Democratic and Republican parties. The items provided by the respondent (up to five) are counted and reported as a single number. The “affective distance” variable is a composite of number of likes and dislikes given by the respondent for his or her in-party and out-party. It is calculated as follows:

“In-party affect” (number of in-party likes – in-party dislikes) – “Out-party affect” (out-party likes – dislikes)

1 Prior to 1978, the questions asked respondents to rate their feelings towards “Democrats” and “Republicans;” since, the focus of the question has been the “Democratic Party” and “Republican Party.” Thus, to focus on identical questions, analysis from 1978 on is displayed here.

2 Specifically, the question asks, “Is there anything in particular that you like (don’t like) about the Democratic (Republican) party?”
The “salience” variable is the total number of likes and dislikes the respondent offers for either party. It is calculated as follows:

\[ \text{# of in-party likes + in-party dislikes + out-party likes + out-party dislikes} \]

The “affective distance” variable can be viewed as a measure of the net difference in feeling towards the parties. The “salience” variable, on the other hand, measures the relevance of the party system to the respondent (or how much he or she has to say about the parties). As Figures Three and Four demonstrate, for both self-identified Democrats and Republicans, the “affective distance” between, and total salience of, the parties has increased over the past few decades, approaching levels comparable to 1950’s - an era where *The American Voter* describes partisans having deep-seated psychological attachments to their party.

**Social Identity and Self-Categorization Theory**

The study of “affective” partisan polarization, may be relatively novel, but it ties into a cannon of research that suggests partisanship is a long-term, psychological attachment (A. 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 we can make meaningful “minimal groups” out of even the most insignificant and arbitrary of circumstances (Brewer 1979; Tajfel et al. 1971). Socially-constructed group identification is a necessary part of human experience, as “an undifferentiated social environment makes very little sense and provides no guidelines for action.” (Tajfel et al. 1971, 153). Experimental research has also shown that subjects focus on the *relative* difference in resource between one’s “in-group” and “out-group,” even when alternatives that are to the *absolute* advantage of all are present (see Brown 1999 for a review).

“Minimal” groups, however, are not very relevant in real-world settings. Humans inhabit a dense, overlapping network of group categories (and potential group categories); a central
insight from self-categorization theory (SCT), given this fact, is that only certain group
categorizations will be salient at certain times. In defining SCT (which builds directly from SIT,
and is often used interchangeably), Turner emphasizes that humans do not identify a “personal”
self that is independent of group relations; instead, one’s self-concept is defined by an
interrelated “continuum” of personal and group self-categorizations (1987, 43-4). One’s group
categorization, as opposed to a personal categorization, becomes a salient self-categorization
when the group category is easily accessible in one’s mind, and environmental stimuli fit well
with the categorization (Ch. 6). How much the group category is valued or prioritized by the
individual, as well as the perceived differences between the in-group and out-group, also help
explain salience of group categories (Yzerbyt and Demoulin 2010, 1029). With their “salient”
groups, though, individuals develop a host of stereotypes and prejudices, including engaging in
“self-stereotyping” by changing attitudes and behavior, exaggerating in-group similarity and out-
group difference, and favoring the in-group while denigrating the out-group (Allport 1958;
Branscombe and Wann 1994; Branscombe et al. 2002).

Iyengar et al. provide valuable insight into the psychological nature of partisan
polarization via SIT; it would be wrong, however, to suggest that “ideological” polarization is
completely irrelevant or unrelated to this affective identity formation process. If affect is all that
matters, it would be difficult to explain how individuals are increasingly “sorting” into the
“correct” party ideologically (Levendusky 2009). It would also be difficult to explain how the
public is increasingly knowledgeable about partisan differences in policy, and can place
Democrats to the “left” of Republicans on a variety of issues (Hetherington 2001; Layman,
Carsey, and Horowitz 2006).
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 (2013; see also Kunda 1990). This pressure is evinced from studies demonstrating that citizens will change their views on specific policies solely based on their partisan attachment (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Carsey and Layman 2006). It is also suggested from SIT research that shows individuals engage in “self-stereotyping” activities concerning salient in-group norms (Branscombe et al. 2002; Mason 2014). However, this phenomenon is not universal, as the need for consistency between affect and “cognitive” ideology varies across personalities, across time, and across culture (Nisbett et al. 2001; Kitayama et al. 2004; Cacioppo and Petty 1982).

A Schematic for Partisan Polarization

In short, with regards to partisan polarization, it is important to look at affect and ideology, not one or the other. Figure Five presents a proposed schematic for individual-level partisan polarization, which consists of two dimensions of one’s “distance” from his or her out-party. On the x-axis is “ideological” polarization, or how far one’s policy views are from the median individual in his or her out-party. The right side of the axis represents one who is ideologically distinct from his or her out-party, the left side represents one who is ideologically similar. On the y-axis is “affective” polarization, or the level of negative out-group affect one registers for his or her out-party. The top of the line represents a strong negative affect, and the bottom of the line represents little negative affect.

(Figure Five here)

One can expect different patterns of attitude and behavior in each of the four quadrants. Quadrant I would consist of the partisan described in The American Voter, for whom party is
primarily or solely an affective “group” or “team” attachment. Quadrant II is a fully “polarized” voter, portrayed by Abramowitz (2010) and Bafumi and Shapiro (2009), where ideological and affective distance from the out-party are high. Quadrant III, according to the critique from Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2011), is where most citizens in the United States lie – moderate, disinterested, and without negative affect for “the other team.” Quadrant IV represents perhaps Madison’s vision for democratic citizenship; a citizenry that harbors distinct viewpoints, but is able to “dispassionately” engage in public debate (Wood 1988).

**Deliberative Attitudes in the Public**

While much of the empirical work on partisan polarization hinges on the descriptive question of whether, how, and where the public is “polarizing,” the debate on the consequences of polarization receive less empirical attention. Some suggest that partisan polarization is resulting in a more “engaged” public (Abramowitz 2010), one that is able to send a clearer signal to political elites (Hetherington 2001; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009). Other scholars, however, point to host of seemingly vitriolic and (at the very least) nonproductive utterances in recent political discourse (anything from Rep. Joe Wilson’s “You Lie,” to comparisons of George W. Bush to Hitler, to insinuations that Barack Obama is a Muslim/terrorist/socialist/Kenyan/etc.) and wonder if partisan polarization seriously harms the public’s capacity to productively discuss and decide on issues. Partisan polarization thus may “poison the well,” hindering the potential for deliberative democracy in the United States. To wit, the paper now turns to a discussion of deliberative democratic theory and the potential effect affective polarization has on “deliberative” attitudes.

Dryzeck insists that “since the deliberative turn taken by democratic theory around 1990, deliberative democracy has gone from strength to strength,” (Dryzek 2010, 3) and has become a
central focus of political theory (Rawls 2005; Gutmann and Thompson 1996), empirical social science (Barabas 2004; Mutz 2006), and “real-world” political reform (Gastil and Levine 2005). While some deliberative theorists focus on institutions of political communication and decision making (such as Fishkin’s “deliberative forums” or Bessette’s examination of deliberation in Congress), the heart of deliberative democracy focuses on communicative process, not on specific institutions (Fishkin 1995; Bessette 1994). Dryzek lays out a complete, 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).

The deliberative view of democracy offers a sharp contrast to the view of democracy merely as elites’ “competitive struggle for the people’s vote,” (Schumpeter 1942 [2003], 9). To be sure, there is some debate as to the exact role of citizens, vis-à-vis representatives or jurists, in an ideal democracy. Rawls, for example, confines the discursive requirements of his deliberative “public reason” framework to judges, executives, and legislators only (2005, 444-5). Dryzek, however, argues for a larger role for the public – a vibrant “public space, ideally hosting free-ranging and wide ranging communication,” which plays a consequential role in influencing the “empowered space” of policymaking (2010, 11). Both these theorists, though, view an ideal of
political decision making as a “bottom-up” process, “inclusive” of the actual (for Dryzek) or represented (for Rawls) citizenry, and proceeding through “authentic” deliberation amongst the public. Early deliberative theorists maintained stringent standards of communicative rationality for this process, which placed a primacy on logical reasoning, complete sincerity, lack of coercion, and a focus on what Habermas calls “the unforced force of the better argument,” (quoted in Bachtiger et al. 2010, 16). However, many theorists have since highlighted the significant real-world obstacles and limitations to this ideal situation for public political debate. As such, later deliberative theories opens the door for emotion, bargaining, storytelling – in general, more flexible forms of communication – that do less to preclude authentic, inclusive, and consequential claims from the public (Bachtiger et al. 2010; Young 2000; Warren and Mansbridge 2013).

Efforts at inclusion notwithstanding, critics are correct in inserting that deliberative democracy does require much more of the public than a “minimalist” (Schumpeter 1942 [2003]), or what Young calls an “aggregate” (2000), democratic ideal. To use Dryzek’s term, it requires, in part³, that the public to engage in “authentic” discourse, which hinges on three key characteristics: reciprocity, reflection, and efficacy.

Reciprocity

Dryzek contends that successful deliberation hinges on reciprocity, or “communicating in terms that those who do not share one’s point of view can find meaningful and accept,” (10). Thompson, sees this “reason-giving requirement” as the core of deliberative theory (2008, 498);

³ This is not meant to be a “complete” conception of the role, and duty, of the public in deliberative democracy. For example, both Young (2000) and Gutmann and Thompson (1996) insist on “accountability” for what is said in the public sphere. Other contend equality and non-domination to be vital. Moreover, a level of political trust, in both opposing parties and the governmental system as a whole, is implied for “reciprocal” and “reflective” discourse. Thompson also correctly notes that a diversity of opinion in the public must exist for deliberation to have any meaning (2008). Diversity in deliberative network is the focus of Mutz (2006) as well as Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague (2004).
he expounds with Gutmann in arguing that “when citizens or their representatives disagree
morally, they should continue to reason together to reach mutually acceptable decisions,” (2003,
18). Rawls likewise defends the value of a political discourse focused on reciprocity, or what he
calls “public reason;” in this vision, “citizens will of course consider differ as to which
conceptions of political justice they think the most reasonable, but they will agree that all are
reasonable, even if barely so,” (2005, 446).

It may be easy to view this goal of “reciprocity” as a utopian drive for “consensus”
between all citizens. And, indeed, some have suggested, both in deliberative theory (Cohen
1989) and in empirical tests (Barabas 2004), that consensus is the end goal of deliberation. This
view of deliberative democracy may make it an easy target for critics; one can note the long
history of partisan disagreement in the United States (Gerring 1998), or the preponderance of
empirical research that suggests people dismiss or ignore, rather than engage with, conflictual
information (Lodge and Taber 2013; Jackman and Sniderman 2006; Druckman, Fein, and Leeper
2012; Mutz 2008), and contend that reciprocal ‘consensus’ is a utopian ideal. One could also
argue that there are dangerous “coercive” implications in positing the goal of consensus. Fish,
for example, argues that Gutmann and Thompson need to change their theory from “mutual
respect” to one of “mutual self-congratulation” for espousing and dictating (in Fish’s view) the
“correct” liberal values for others to hold (1999). And, to be sure, a primacy on consensus may
be disquieting for social justice advocates or others fighting oppression (from forces that are not
affording “mutual respect” themselves).

However, many deliberative theorists today accept, even embrace, disagreement in
political discussion and decision making. Young, for example, insists on a democracy that
recognizes difference and tolerance in identity, mode of discussion, and political opinion; she
argues that “a discussion is liable to break down if participants with deep conflicts of interest and value pretend they have common interests, because they are unable to air their differences,” (Young 2000, 44). Dryzek, moreover, insists that agreement on values and policy is likely unrealistic and, if nothing else, “a soft target for pluralist critics,” (85). He instead insists that deliberative democracy should seek “meta-consensus,” or an agreement that the values and policies others espouse are legitimate, credible, and in an appropriate discursive framework (2010, Ch. 5). A key for Dryzek is not “over-specifying” the terms of meta-consensus, else deliberative democracy does run the risk of creeping towards a mandate for consensus on values and policies (2010, 114-5).

In addition, the frameworks offered by Rawls as well as Gutmann and Thompson fully acknowledge that agreement may well be impossible; more important are the reasons offered, the motivations behind them, and the processes by which an ultimate decision is made. To wit, Rawls criterion of “public reason” merely asserts that one act in good faith, from the basis of what he calls a “civic friendship” (2005, 447). He later contends that “when hotly disputed questions, such as that of abortion, arise which may lead to a stand-off between different political conceptions, citizens must vote on the question according to their complete ordering of political values. Indeed, this is a normal case: unanimity of views is not to be expected,” (479, emphasis added). The process of decision making, though (if conducted in accordance with “public reason”), can be considered legitimate. In sum, many deliberative theorists do not insist on the goal of consensus, and no deliberative theorist mandates the outcome of consensus.
Reflection

The corollary to reciprocity is “reflection,” or an openness to receive, listen to, and perhaps be swayed by countervailing reasons. In arguing for freedom of “thought and discussion,” John Stuart Mill saw the value of being able to honestly reflect on diverse viewpoints:

“But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation – those who dissent from the opinion still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great of a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth produced by its collision with error,” (Mill 1859 [1978], 16)

In likewise championing reflection, Young sets a standard of “reasonableness:” “Reasonable people often have crazy ideas; what makes them reasonable is their willingness to listen to others who want to explain to them why their ideas are incorrect or inappropriate,” (2000, 24). Citizens in the “public sphere” cannot participate solely by “defending to the death” fixed, immutable beliefs (Young 2000, 24-5; Cohen 1989, 22-3). Instead, citizens must participate in deliberation with the ideal of “social argument” in mind, approaching the discussion with the potentiality of “losing” one’s case if it is not the best group or community decision (Klumpp 2006).

Again, a key point is that Young and others insist that reflection is an orientation one adopts when one enters a deliberative situation; it does not necessitate consensus as an endgame.

Young also rightly makes a point that there is a danger of reflecting on only specific types of communication, particularly “articulate,” “logical,” and/or “dispassionate” argument. This can “privilege the modes of expression more typical of highly educated people” (2000, 38; see also Bachtiger et al. 2010)); she instead calls for alternate forms of reciprocal and reflective
expression, such as “greeting,” “rhetorical,” and “narrative,” to be fully welcomed in the “public sphere,” (2000, Ch. 2).

Efficacy

Finally, deliberative democracy necessitates that “reciprocal” and “reflexive” discourse must amount to more than idle or entertaining banter. Public spheres of deliberation, such as associations, public hearing and protests, must influence the “empowered spheres” of policymaking. Deliberation from the public, in other words, must be “consequential” (Dryzek 2000). Gutmann and Thompson likewise argue that democratic legitimacy necessitates input and justification from “middle America,” claiming that “the moral authority of collective judgments about policy depends in part on the process by which citizens collectively reach those judgments,” (2003, 19). While this aspect, like the rest of deliberative democratic theory, may be relatively new, the notion of meaningful citizen input is as old as democracy (from the Ancient Greek for “rule of the people”) itself. Even the Schumpeterian, “minimalist” conception of democracy necessitates consequential feedback from the public writ large (although feedback much less often, and on a much broader level, than with a deliberative democracy).

A prerequisite for consequential deliberation from the public is a perceived sense of efficacy, or the belief that one’s participation in discussion will have an authentic impact on politics and policy. This perception may or may not be accurate, but without it there is not even the possibility of consequential citizen participation in politics. Likewise, a sense of efficacy may or may not coincide with actual engagement in the political process. While engagement and efficacy are closely related, a belief in one’s ability to influence policy does not require that one will actually try to do so. Efficacy is moreover related to, but distinct, from the concept of
political interest. One could, for example, believe in his or her power to impact the political system but simply be disinterested.

**Theoretical Connection to Polarization**

There is a great deal of research to suggest that partisan polarization leads to a loss of the capacity for reciprocity and reflection among the populace. This is the worry James Madison famously voices in *Federalist #10*, where he warns of the “mischiefs of faction” creating “instability, injustice, and confusion” in popular government (2003 [1787]). Recent social science also suggests that, far from open-minded reflection, one’s partisanship conditions the quality and hue of information that he or she receives from the 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). Many scholars suggest that partisan attachment is established at a young age and often immutable afterwards (A. Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Even expert information can be ignored if it contradicts the dictates of partisan thought leaders (Darmofal 2005), and strong partisans are more certain than others of their views, even when they are factually incorrect (Kuklinski et al. 2000).

However, there is also evidence to suggest that, even for strong partisans, closed-mindedness or a lack of reciprocity is not automatic. Contextual factors, such as the salience of partisan cues or level of sophistication, matter in whether partisanship is primarily relied on in decision making (Rahn 1993; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). “Ambivalent” citizens are not blinded by partisanship, and can developed nuanced, informed opinions and voting decisions (Basinger and Lavine 2005). Many scholars have also pushed back against the thesis of *The American Voter*, arguing that partisan attachments are at times amenable to reflective change (Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983). Moreover, while Darmofal (2005) shows that partisans do
not rely on “experts” in the media, Huckfeldt shows that citizens do rely on perceived experts in their own social network, even if they disagree (2001). In short, partisanship has a heterogeneous effect on the capacity for reciprocity, reflection, and perceived efficacy in political matters.

In the context of party polarization, also, it is reasonable to suggest that ideological and affective polarization having unique, independent effects on an individuals’ capacity for deliberation. While affect has a primary role in the political attitude formation process (Abelson et al. 1982; Lodge and Taber 2013), social identity theory suggests that the perceived difference of beliefs and opinions between in-groups and out-groups increases the salience of the grouping to one’s social identity. Moreover, as social identities become salient, SIT predicts that individuals will adopt in-group norms and beliefs, to the point of even “self-stereotyping.” Thus, ideological beliefs and issue opinion norms do not drive, but can build off of one’s “affective” partisan attachment, reinforcing the salience of partisanship as a social identity. This can occur through both ideological “sorting” and “polarization.” Ideological sorting, in and of itself, is an indication that an individual is conforming to in-party norms, leading to bias, anger, and activism against one’s out-party (Mason 2014). In addition, beyond simply ‘sorting,’ ideological extremity or polarization is directly related to one’s level of interest in politics (Zaller 1992), and it is a further indication of social identity salience.

In sum, social identity theory and research on political attitude formation suggest the following hypotheses:

\[ H1a - \text{At the individual level, “affective” polarization will be negative related to attitudes of reciprocity and reflection} \]
**H1b - Ideological sorting and ideological polarization will have distinct, negative relationships to attitudes of reciprocity and reflection. These relationships will be weaker than that of “affective” polarization**

In contrast to the negative relationship to reciprocity and reflection, there is a litany of social and political psychology research that suggests affective polarization is *positively* related to the perception of efficacy. Social identity theory, for example, posits that individuals will take action to support their salient partisan groups. Applying this idea to politics, Mason shows that those with strong partisan social identities are more likely to try to influence others to vote, donate money, or take other action on behalf of their party (2014). If the salience of partisan social identities drives activism, it makes sense that this identity would drive the *perception* of political efficaciousness. In addition, we should see a positive relationship between perceptions of efficacy and ideological sorting/ideological polarization. This is in line with the extant literature on ideological polarization, which shows that activists, or those most engaged in politics, are the most ideologically polarized (Fiorina 2011; Abramowitz 2010). Thus, the following hypothesis:

**H2a - The presence of affective polarization will be more strongly, and positively, related to the perception of political efficacy than ideological polarization**

**H2b – Ideological sorting and polarization will have separate, positive relationships to attitudes of efficacy. These relationships will be weaker than that of “affective” polarization**

**An Initial Empirical Test**

Empirical research on deliberative democracy has largely proceeded along two separate paths. One is by constructing “deliberative forums,” or specifically constructed groups and
siutations aimed at achieving reciprocal decision making (Fishkin 1995; List et al. 2012; Barabas 2004). Other studies take a more “real world” approach, either utilizing observational or experimental survey data (Jackman and Sniderman 2006; Mutz 2006), or examining group deliberation “in the field” (Mendelberg and Oleske 2000). While these studies necessarily examine only specific aspects or variables associated with the theory, they can show the conditions in which citizens are more likely or less likely to participate in deliberation. They also have the value of more external validity than deliberative polls. As such, an initial “real world” test of the connection between polarization and deliberation will be offered here.

Data and Variables

The dataset used here is the 2012 ANES Times Series File. For this year, the National Election Study combined multiple modes of data collection; for 2,054 respondents, pre and post-election interviewed was conducted face-to-face. In addition, a representative sample of 3,860 respondents was drawn from the GfK Knowledge Networks panel, for pre and post-election interviewing over the internet. The analysis here uses the “full” sample including both modes, for a total of 5,914 cases. Survey weights and design effects are incorporated in all analyses.

Providing a complete operationalization of rich, complex constructs such as reciprocity, reflection, and efficacy will require multiple, finely-tuned survey items. For an initial look, though, the dependent variables for this analysis draw on three ANES survey items that are related to the deliberative attitudes developed in this paper. Social trust asks the respondent how often “people can be trusted.” This is coded as a binary variable, with “1” being “all” or “most” of the time. Tolerance asks the respondents whether he or she agrees that we should be tolerant of others with different moral standards. This is also coded as a binary variable, with “1” equating to “agree” or “strongly agreeing” with this statement. While these variables do not
perfectly or completely capture “reciprocity” or “reflection,” they provide an initial, crude look at attitudes at least related to these constructs.

_Efficacy_ asks the respondent whether he or she agrees that “people like me don't have any say about what the government does.” Again, this is coded as a binary variable, with “1” equating to “disagreeing” or “strongly disagreeing” with this statement (in other words, the more “deliberative” attitude). And, again, this single question does not completely equate to “efficacy” as developed by deliberative theorists, but it hopes to suffice as an initial examination.

The covariates used in this test seek to capture affective polarization, ideological polarization, and ideological sorting. Following Iyengar et al. (2012) use of “feeling thermometers,” _affect_ here is the absolute value of the respondent’s net difference in feeling thermometer scores towards the Democratic/Republican party. This value ranges from 0 to 100.

The “ideological” variables are constructed through the use of four issue opinion questions, dealing with government spending, the Affordable Care Act, abortion, and gay marriage. All of these ordinal items are scaled from 0 to 1, with 1 being the “most liberal” response. _Sorted Democrat_ is a binary variable, where the respondent is coded as “1” if he or she has a score above 0.5 on all four variables (or, in other words, is “liberal” on all four issues). _Sorted Republican_ is coded the same way, this time if the respondent has a score below 0.5 on all four issues (or is consistently “conservative”). _Ideological polarization_ is a folded measure of the average extremity with which the respondent holds his or her opinions. For example, if a respondent holds all of his or her opinions at one end of the ordinal scales or another (regardless of ideological direction), he or she would have a score of “1.” If he or she in the middle of the scales, or “hasn’t thought about it,” for all the measures, he or she would have a score of “0”.
Democrat and Republican dummy variables were also created based on whether the respondent self-identified with one of the parties. In addition, demographic covariates include:

- age, which is simply the respondents’ age
- white, a dummy variable that measures if the respondent is non-hispanic caucasion
- education, a dummy variable for respondents that have at least a bachelor’s degree
- male, a dummy variable for male respondents
- South, a dummy variable for respondents that live in one of the 11 “Deep South” states

Full question wording and more detail for each item can be found in the Appendix.

Results

For each of the dependent variables, a survey-weighted logistic regression model was estimated including all of the covariates outlined above. The full results can be found in the Appendix, and a summary of the significant results, as compared to theoretical predictions, can be found in Figure Six. These results suggest mixed, at best, support for the theoretical connection between polarization and deliberation outlined in this paper. Affective polarization does have a negative relationship to social trust and a positive relationship to feelings of efficacy (as hypothesized), but the relationship is only marginally significant at p<0.1. Ideological sorting (as operationalized in this analysis) does not appear to be related to deliberation as predicted by theory. In fact, in the tolerance model, liberal sorting is positively related to greater tolerance for opposing moral views, while conservative sorting is negatively related to these views. This indicates that the moral tolerance question used for this analysis is not perceived by respondents as openness to dissent or opposing value claims (which an attitude of “reflection”
demands), but as a question more narrowly tapping views on “culture war” issues (where there is a clear Democrat/Republican, liberal/conservative split).

(Figure Six here)

One of the more interesting results to come out of this analysis is the relationship between ideological polarization and deliberative attitudes. Once affect, opinion sorting, and control variables are taken into account, this folded measure of extremity on issue positions is positively (and strongly) related to social trust, moral tolerance, and perceptions of efficacy. This result implies that ideological extremism, in and of itself, is not the driver of the bias and incivility seen in contemporary political discourse today (a result Iyengar et al. (2012) also find). It also suggests that concerns for a “disappearing center” (Abramowitz 2010) are perhaps misplaced, as an ideological “polarized” public can potentially deliberate in a good faith, engaging manner. However, further test would be needed to see if these initial results hold up under greater scrutiny.

(Figures seven and eight)

An example of the substantive significance of the results can be seen with Figures Seven and Eight. Drawing from the “Clarify” approach (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000), these figures show expected values and 95% confidence intervals for covariate values of interest, created through 1,000 simulations. Figure Seven displays the expected probabilities of agreeing that “people can be trusted” given certain covariate values, and Figure Eight displays the expected probabilities of disagreeing that “people like me don’t have a say in what government does” given certain covariate values. All simulated expected values set Democrat equal to one. The “baseline” bar gives the expected value for Democrats that are not “sorted” (Sorted Democrat and Sorted Republican are equal to zero), with all other variables held at their mean.
The “affect” bar uses the same values as the “baseline” bar, with the only change being that the affect variable is increased by one standard deviation. The “affect and sorted” bar is different from the “affect” bar only in that the Sorted Democrat variable is set at one, not zero. Finally, the “affect and polarized” simulation differs from the “affect and sorted” simulation only in the fact that the ideological polarization variable is increased to one standard deviation above the mean. Thus, viewing the simulated expected values from left to right gives a sense of the impact of each subsequent change in values.

As demonstrated in the figures, increasing affect by one standard deviation only has a modest effect on the expected probabilities; the expected probability of agreeing that “people can be trusted” goes down only slightly, and the expected probability of disagreeing that “people like me don’t have any say about what the government does” goes up only slightly. The biggest effect on the expected probabilities in both models, though, comes from increasing the level of ideological polarization by one standard deviation. When this is done in the simulations, the expected probability for social trust and efficacy increase by a significant amount. A similar pattern (marginal effects for raising the affect variable, and stronger effects for raising the ideological polarization variable) is found with simulations where Republican is equal to one.

Discussion and Future Directions

The initial test provided here only gives mixed and modest support for the theoretical connection between affective polarization and deliberative attitudes. For partisans, one’s distance in affective feeling between the two parties is negatively related to attitudes of social trust and moral tolerance, and it is positively related to attitudes of political efficacy. However, these relationships are statistically and substantively modest. With regards to ideological sorting and polarization, the results did not match up to theoretical predictions. The most surprising
result, though, was that one’s level of ideological extremity (without regard to its direction, whether it is ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’) is positively related to attitudes social trust, moral tolerance, and political efficacy. While confirmatory testing would be needed for these results, they further show that the polarization of “affect, not ideology,” drives the incivility exhibited in American political discourse today (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). It also suggests the possibility that engaged and respectful deliberation can occur even between a public with polarized worldviews or issue opinions.

The overall weak results presented here, though, are likely due to imperfect operationalization and testing strategies. While this is only designed to be a crude, initial test, it is true that the social trust, moral tolerance, and efficacy survey items only marginally (at best) tap into the rich, complex concepts of reciprocity, reflection, and efficacy as developed by deliberative theorists. In addition, feeling thermometers only represent a limited, explicit operationalization of partisan affect, and the “sorting” and “polarization” indices are created using only a small set of survey items. Thus, as this project progresses, there will be a focus on better operationalization of the dependent and independent variables. To create greater construct validity for the deliberative attitudes of reciprocity, reflection, and efficacy, multiple survey items will be examined and indexed. As done with other recent studies examining affective polarization (Mason 2014; Parsons 2014), additional items will also be used to measure partisan affect, such as “like” scores and questions on emotional reactions to party and party leaders. Ideological polarization and sorting, moreover, can be measured through indices created from many more than four survey items.

Furthermore, other data sets beyond the ANES will be examined, and other statistical models will be employed. For example, time series models can allow this project to move
beyond testing a single year, measuring the change in affective polarization and its impact over time. Ultimately, though, the goal of this research project will be to move beyond extant data sets and engage in original survey research. As “reciprocity” means something more than a single question on “tolerance” or “consensus” can capture, and “efficacy” means something more than single question on political “interest” or “engagement,” the best way to measure the deliberative constructs discussed in this paper will be to employ multiple survey measures specifically designed for this purpose. Also, in addition to standard survey questions, this research project will develop experimental survey items, which can help determine the causal effect of “affective” and “ideological” partisan polarization on deliberation in the public (Morgan and Winship 2007). Questionnaire development, experimental design, and securing funding for original survey research is thus the next step in this project.

In addition to developing a stronger research design, next steps will include exploring the contexts in which affective and/or ideological polarization has an effect on deliberative attitudes. One potential avenue of many in this regard would be to examine differing effects of specific emotional markers on deliberation. While affective responses to stimuli occur prior to (and condition) cognition and emotional appraisal (Zajonc 1980; Lodge and Taber 2013), different emotion markers can still predict different political attitudes and behaviors (Westen 2007). Anxiety, for example, has been found to stimulate attention and learning, while enthusiasm stimulates political interest and involvement (Marcus and MacKuen 1993; Brader 2005). Research from Tausch and colleagues, moreover, finds a distinction between anger and contempt. While anger can engender good faith engagement with opponents and “normative” political participation (such as voting or peaceful protest), contempt promotes “nonnormative” political behavior (violence, terrorism, etc) (Tausch et al. 2011). If affect is a primary appraisal, and
cognition is a more complex secondary appraisal (Ellsworth and Scherer 2003), more can be done to incorporate the “secondary” appraisal process into a description of affective polarization.

Finally, future work on this project hopes to explore the normative implications of the empirical connection between polarization and deliberation. A significant caveat to the project discussed here is that it, as of yet, does not make a normative argument with regards to either partisan polarization or deliberative democratic ideals. While deliberative democracy has its advocates, many scholars are very critical, seeing it as tool for controlling debate and marginalizing legitimate voices (Herbst 2013; Fish 1999). Certainly, advocates for social justice may be skeptical of a suggestion to funnel their claims for basic rights into “reciprocal” language. Others see it as an impossible ideal, or see competition and engagement as more vital to democracy than deliberation. As such, for now the project is treating the question of polarization and deliberation as a purely empirical question. In the future, the goal is to develop and defend a normative position on partisan polarization and its consequences; while polarization touches on deep questions with regard to normative democratic theory, empirical scholars often only gloss over them. These questions, however, will only be tackled once all the evidence is in.

**Conclusion**

The role of parties in American democracy, and whether they perform a salutary or corrosive function, has long been a subject of debate in classic and modern political thought. The research project laid out here hopes to connect this debate to recent research on partisan identification and social psychology, examining whether “affective” and “ideological” polarization conditions how citizens discuss political issues. The initial results presented here are merely a first step; through an original survey and survey experiment, this project hopes to make a statement as to how polarization affects the capacity for a deliberative democracy.
Works Cited


Strickler 30


Figure One – Feeling Thermometers towards Parties, Self-Identified Democrats, 1978 - 2012

[Graph showing feeling thermometer data for Democrats from 1978 to 2012.]

Source: ANES Time Series Cumulative File. All data weighted.

Figure Two – Feeling Thermometer toward Parties, Self-Identified Republicans, 1978 - 2012

[Graph showing feeling thermometer data for Republicans from 1978 to 2012.]

Source: ANES Time Series Cumulative File. All data weighted.
Figure Three – Affective Distance between, and Salience of, Parties for Self-Identified Democrats, 1952 - 2004

Source: ANES Time Series Cumulative File. All data weighted.

Figure Four - Affective Distance between, and Salience of, Parties for Self-Identified Republicans, 1952 - 2004

Source: ANES Time Series Cumulative File. All data weighted.
Figure Five: Dimensions of Partisan Polarization

Affective Polarization

High

I

II

Ideological Polarization

Low

Low

High

III

IV

Figure Six – Summary of Significant Empirical Results

<table>
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<td>Ideo. Polarization</td>
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<td>-</td>
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Covariate          | Social Trust | Actual          | Moral Tolerance | Actual  | Efficacy | Actual |
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Figure Seven - Expected Probability of Agreeing that “People Can Be Trusted”

Figure Eight - Expected Probability of Disagreeing that “People like me don't have any say about what the government does”

Expected values for covariates of interest simulated 1,000 times with Zelig (King et al. 2000)
Appendix A – Question Wording and Information for Selected Survey Items

Data comes from the 2012 ANES Time Series Study. The survey consists of 5,914 respondents – 2,054 face-to-face respondents, and 3,860 online respondents. Additional information on these and other survey items used (feeling thermometers, control variables, etc) can be found at www.electionstudies.org.

**Dependent Variables**

**tolerance** – respondents are asked if they agree or disagree with the following statement – “We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are very different from our own.” Responses are along a five-point ordinal scale, ranging from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” Question is asked in the ANES post-election follow-up survey, with 404 (6.8%) of respondents excluded due to no or only partial post-election interviewing. Once these respondents are excluded, an additional 15 respondents (0.2%) give “don’t know” or “refused” responses.

**trust** - respondents are asked, “Generally speaking, how often can you trust other people?” Responses are along a five-point ordinal scale, with “always,” “most of the time,” “about half of the time,” “some of the time,” and “never” as options. Question is asked in the ANES pre-election survey, with 19 respondents (0.3%) giving “don’t know” or “refused” as responses.

**efficacy** - respondents are asked if they agree or disagree with the following statement – “People like me don't have any say about what the government does” Responses are along a five-point ordinal scale, ranging from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” This question is only asked in the “standard” version of the pre-election survey; an alternate formulation is asked in the “revised” version. Thus, 2,891 (48.9%) randomly selected respondents received the “revised” version and are excluded from analysis here. Of the remaining respondents, 14 (0.4%) give “don’t know” or “refused” responses.

**Survey Items Used in sorted Democrat, sorted Republican, and ideological polarization variables** (see “Data” section for description on how these variables are coded)

**abortion** – respondents for this question are asked to choose between the following four options:
- “By law, abortion should never be permitted”
- “The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger”
- “The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman”
- “By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice”

59 of the respondents (1.0%) volunteered a different options or gave “don’t know” or “refused” responses.

**spend** – respondents are given a horizontal (left to right) scale labeled 1 through 7, with “government should provide many fewer services: reduce spending a lot” at the left (1) end, and
“government should provide many more services: increase spending a lot” at the right end. Respondents are then asked “Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?” The 655 (11.1%) of respondents who responded with “Haven’t though much about this” were placed at the middle of the scale (the “4” position) for this analysis. This is justified given the fact that ideological moderation and disinterest in politics have been well established to go together (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992; Fiorina 2011). In addition, coding these respondents in this way, while ensuring that these respondents will not be coded as “sorted,” allows to keep them in the analysis. In addition, 18 respondents (0.3%) gave “don’t know” or “refused” as a response.

**marriage** - respondents for this question are asked to choose between the following three options:
- “Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry”
- “Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions but not legally marry”
- “There should be no legal recognition of a gay or lesbian couple's relationship”
Eighty (1.4%) of respondents gave “don’t know” or “refused” as a response

**aca** – This is a summary variable based on the following root question: “Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the health care reform law passed in 2010? This law requires all Americans to buy health insurance and requires health insurance companies to accept everyone.” Responses range along a seven-point ordinal scale, from “favor a great deal” to “oppose a great deal.” Seventy-three respondents (1.2%) gave “don’t know” or “refused” as a response.
Appendix B – Logistic Regressions, Full Results
Respondents with “don’t know,” “refused,” or otherwise NA responses for questions were deleted listwise. The final sample size, as well as the percent of responses excluded, are indicated below.

### Dependent Variable – Trust

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**Controls**

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n = 5560, percent excluded = 6.0%

### Dependent Variable – Tolerance

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**Controls**

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n = 5188, percent excluded = 5.8%

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4 This figure excludes the respondents that did not complete a full post-election interview
Dependent Variable – Efficacy

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n = 2838, percent excluded = 6.1%

5 This figure excluded the respondents taking the “revised” form of the survey and did not receive this question on political efficacy