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The Impact of Student Political Identity Over the Course of an Online Controversial Issue Discussion

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Abstract

As civic educators become increasingly concerned about polarized political environments, researchers have begun explore the ramifications of contentious political discourse on young people. Through a quantitative analysis of data gathered from two rural, Midwestern schools, this study provides evidence that the degree to which a student socially identifies with a political party is influential over the course of an online discussion. Strength of identification was associated with students' relative amount of knowledge for and against their position on a controversial issue and with the types of contributions students made to the online forum.

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DISCUSSIONS OF POLITICAL and social issues in the classroom often emphasize informed participation, civility, common ground, and, where possible, consensus or compromise (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Parker & Hess, 2001; Parker, 2010). In the online realm, where much of youth political participation and discussion takes place (Middaugh, Clark, & Ballard, 2017), these features are far less evident. Rather, online political discourse often takes place in either identity-reinforcing partisan silos or forums where attempts to understand competing viewpoints are few and far between (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Jacobson, Myung, & Johnson, 2016; Levendusky, 2013; Middaugh, Bowyer, & Kahne, 2017). Research is needed that examines online discussions in social studies courses in light of the partisan contentiousness of similar discussions in the real world. Using data from an online discussion exercise conducted in two rural, Midwestern schools, this study examines the influences of students' partisan political identities before, during, and after an online discussion of a controversial issue. In particular, I examine the degree to which a student's social identification with a political party influences (a) the amount of information students

have about each side of a controversial issue and (b) how students participate in the online discussion.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Social Identity Theory and Motivated Reasoning

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) emphasizes the importance of group identification in influencing individual thinking and behavior. When group membership is a salient part of an individual's self-concept, individuals seek to bolster the status of that in-group, often at the expense of out-groups. Recent research has applied the social identity theory lens to partisan contentiousness (Greene, 2004; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). Partisanship goes beyond simply voting for the group that best

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reflects one's belief on the major issues of the day. Rather, partisans often tow the party line and root for their "team," even when the party's policies may contrast with their stated beliefs (Groenendyk, 2013; Lenz, 2012). According to Iyengar et al. (2012), partisanship as a social identity explains the particular rancor that characterizes recent American electoral politics. Affective polarization (or dislike of opposing partisans) based on social identities leads Republicans and Democrats, in addition to disagreeing on matters of policy, to generally view their opponents as ill-willed or threatening (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Motivated reasoning is a collection of processes that guide individuals' thinking, much of which takes place outside of conscious awareness. As the name implies, these processes are driven by some motive, usually a belief or feeling driving individuals toward a particular conclusion. In a review of early research on biased reasoning processes, Kunda (1990) concluded that individuals without any substantial interest or knowledge about an issue can reason evenhandedly, especially if they are encouraged to be accurate in their judgments. However, if individuals are motivated by prior opinions, partisan allegiances, personal friendships, moral convictions, or other such factors, their reasoning serves more to rationally justify their existing conclusions than to evaluate alternatives. The motives that drive these biases often occur without individuals being aware of them. Lodge and Taber (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Taber & Lodge, 2016) have focused on the unconscious elements of motivated reasoning. According to their model, unconscious cues that occur early in the political thought process can direct conscious, explicit thinking in very profound ways. They argue that these subtle processes are often so powerful that explicit thoughts individuals have about politics are often rationalizations of conclusions reached through entirely automatic processing.

As most motivated reasoning research is conducted on adults, it is legitimate to ask whether or not young people have enough experience with controversial social or political issues to have developed any directional motivated bias. Although few researchers have investigated biased thinking in K–12 students, their findings support the existence of motivated reasoning in young students. Klaczynski and colleagues (Klaczynski, 1997, 2000, 2001; Klaczynski & Gordon, 1996; Klaczynski, Gordon, & Fauth, 1997; Klaczynski & Narasimham, 1998) have found that children from elementary through high school display a number of reasoning biases, many of which are driven by their prior beliefs on issues. Chief among their findings is that children, like adults, are prone to process information differently depending on how much they agree or disagree with it. In one study (Klaczynski, 2000), 139 early-mid adolescents tended to make quick, heuristic evaluations of information that agreed with their preexisting positions, while counter-attitudinal information was carefully processed and discredited with the use of higher-order scientific reasoning.

Connecting Social Identity and Motivated Reasoning

Biased reasoning is also connected to social identity. Haidt (2012) argued that humans exhibit a number of group biases in political

thinking, among them the inability to see the perspective of a political out-group. Feinberg and Willer (2015) illustrated this phenomenon in a study that asked college students to write arguments that they believed would persuade political opponents on a given issue. They found that students in their sample generally argued from their own moral frameworks, rather than adopting the frames of the people they were hoping to persuade. Further, individuals often mistrust and discount messages coming from individuals perceived as different or part of an out-group. McDonald and Ma (2016) found that such biases often appear at an early age. In their study, children watched an experimenter place a toy in one of two boxes and then a second experimenter (whose ethnicity varied with the experimental condition) told the child they could retrieve the toy from the incorrect box. Four-year-olds ($n=32$) were much more likely to believe adults who provided misinformation if they were as part of their own ethnic group.

Attempts at discussing issues across ideological boundaries often fall flat because there is not sufficient social connection to overcome the ideological differences. Individuals whose ideas are critiqued by strangers or out-group members are likely to become defensive and disregard or actively resist the critique (Esposito, Hornsey, & Spoor, 2013; Rabinovich & Morton, 2015). Being critiqued by a friend, colleague, or other in-group member, however, is a different experience. Because of the stronger social bonds present in the latter situation, the recipient of the critique is more likely to listen attentively.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to build bonds across social and political difference. Bishop (2008) and Mutz (2006) have noted that a decades-long trend of demographic sorting has impacted the political landscape of the United States. As individuals move around the country, they tend to settle in neighborhoods among people similar to themselves. Although people's housing choices are usually not political, a consequence of the sorting process has been increased political homogeneity within communities. As Mutz (2006) argued, individuals in such communities rarely have opportunities to encounter political difference. Individuals who are rarely exposed to political difference may have a difficult time imagining how reasonable people could disagree with their views. While the consistent reinforcement of a single political perspective is generally good for political involvement, it also tends to impede deliberative engagement across difference.

Media and technology also make it easier for individuals to seek reinforcement and avoid challenges to their political perspectives. Noting broad suspicion of media bias, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) found that partisans preferred news sources perceived as friendly (Fox News for Republicans, CNN and National Public Radio for Democrats) even for stories that were noncontroversial or apolitical. Further, Levendusky (2013) found that slanted media outlets tended to increase partisans' mistrust of the opposing party. Metzger, Hartsell, and Flanagin (2015) noted that preferring partisan slanted news is likely rooted in perceptions of out-party sources as less credible (as opposed to individuals wanting to avoid information that disagrees with their opinions). Recently, Kahne & Bowyer (2017) provided evidence that high school students and young adults display motivated reasoning when they interpret

political cartoons. Their study, based on a large data set of 2,101 young people aged 15 to 27, also found that media literacy instruction was able to counteract some of the tendency toward partisan motivated reasoning.

Many studies in social studies education focus on student identity, though few treat political partisanship as a meaningful social identity in high school students. While social studies educators are increasingly aware of political motivated reasoning (see Clark & Avery, 2016; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017), the phenomenon's relationship to students' political identity is still largely unexplored. Such is particularly true in the context of controversial issues discussions.

Controversial Issues Discussions

Classroom discussions in social studies are an important pedagogical tool for practicing democratic skills. Parker and Hess (2001) emphasized that good discussion results in deeper understanding of both the subject at hand and the process of generating shared knowledge. Such understandings come by exposing participants' views to examination by the group. While the precise format of a given discussion may vary, the process of group consideration of varying ideas remains central. Wilen (2003) delineated several qualities of discussion that are in direct alignment with democratic values, including being able to freely express ideas, problem-solve, and disagree with prevailing opinions.

Good discussion pedagogy pays dividends in terms of student knowledge and participation. A host of research indicates that students who discuss controversial issues in their classes show more political efficacy, interest, knowledge, trust, participation (both community and electoral), perspective-taking, and tolerance (see, for example, Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Avery, Levy, & Simmons, 2013; Barr et al., 2015; Campbell, 2008; Conover & Searing, 2000; Hahn, 1998; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). Although these benefits are substantial, many of them are also related to increased partisan feeling and behavior (Hess & McAvoy, 2014). As noted before, many of these behaviors ultimately end up being related to increased partisanship when measured in adults.

Classroom climate. While pedagogy is important, the climate in which discussion takes place is equally important. Studies both within the United States and internationally conclude that open classroom climate for discussion is influential in promoting civic engagement and knowledge (Campbell, 2008; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). An open climate for discussion includes, among other criteria, student comfort, exposure to multiple perspectives, and teacher encouragement of discussion.

Group composition is important in determining the dynamics of a discussion. Diverse student groupings facilitate exposure to diverse perspectives. Goldberg's (2013) study of 64 Israeli youth engaging in small group discussions of a policy issue found that ethnically mixed groups expressed broader historical perspectives during discussion and were less-likely to rely on historical interpretations that favored their own ethnic groups than students in homogenous groups. Stoddard and Chen (2016) studied small

groups of 18-to-22-year-olds discussing a film about Guantanamo Bay. They found that ideologically diverse discussion groups generally raised more issues and had deeper discussions than homogenous groups. In general, if teachers want to expose their students to more diverse viewpoints, purposefully selected groups tend to be better than student-selected groups.

Online discussions. When young people engage in politics and political campaigns, much of that engagement happens in the digital realm. As the present study uses online discussions, it is important to understand some of the differences between politics in the online and face-to-face realms, especially among young people. A 2012 Pew Survey (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012) found that, among social media users, younger people are far more likely to use the various platforms for political engagement (such as commenting on issues, posting political links, encouraging voting, etc.).

Both online and face-to-face deliberations are valuable learning experiences and often produce high-quality student thinking (Guiller, Durnell, & Ross, 2008). There are, however, important differences between discussions that take place in the online and face-to-face worlds. Online forums rely completely on text, which may aid in student and teacher record-keeping (Wang & Woo, 2007) but also deprive students of auditory and visual cues to express themselves and understand one another (Larson, 2003). Using survey data from individuals who had participated in both formats, Wojcieszak, Baek, and Delli Carpini (2009) found that online discussions were perceived to be more diverse but also more individualistic (meaning that individuals deliberating online may learn a lot but are less focused on solving community problems). Larson (2003), in a study of 40 high school students who participated in both threaded online forums and face-to-face discussions, noted that online discussions often require more time commitment on the part of students, in addition to more reading and writing. Over the course of the online discussion, students in Larson's sample often perceived these "extra" tasks as burdensome, possibly resulting in lower-quality participation (such as shorter responses). Online discussions in classroom contexts tend to have more equal levels of participation than face-to-face discussions, which can be dominated by more talkative students (Busbin, 2013; Larson, 2003) and are perceived by participants to represent safer, more inclusive atmospheres (Clark, Bordwell, & Avery, 2015; Wang & Woo, 2007).

Mixed vs. uniform groups. As noted above, the outcomes of discussion or deliberation may be partially dependent on the participants themselves. Groups with uniform demographics or opinions may deliberate differently and have different results than those in heterogeneous groups. For example, Schkade, Sunstein, and Hastie (2007), in a study of deliberations among small groups of adult citizens in Colorado ($n = 63$), noted that uniform opinion groups have their opinions reinforced and may even become more extreme as a result of deliberation. Ethnically homogenous groups may also have their own perspectives reinforced as a result of deliberations. Goldberg (2013), when studying small group policy discussions, found that homogenous groups of Israeli students

more strongly reinforced their own identities in a deliberation than did heterogeneous groups.

The evidence is more mixed when groups are not uniform. Some researchers find mixed-opinion groups do not polarize (e.g., Martin, Hewstone, Martin, & Gardikiotis, 2008), whereas others find the opposite (e.g., Gastil, Black, & Moscovitz, 2008). The relative strength of a given political opinion during a discussion/deliberation may also matter. Noelle-Neumann (1974) argued that individuals in the minority opinion may be subject to a *spiral of silence*, wherein the unpopular opinions are not voiced for fear of social repercussions. Later studies on spiral of silence (e.g., Hayes, Matthes, & Eveland Jr., 2011) indicated that hesitancy to express opinions is also a function of individual dispositions and strength of political opinion. Despite the mixed evidence, there is a consensus that individuals are impacted by group composition, though the nature of how group factors interact with individual factors is still uncertain.

Clark and Avery (2016) called for further research examining the psychological elements of controversial issues discussion. Despite the benefits of discussions, few studies have distinguished between the desirable behaviors and processes that drive those behaviors. Research is needed to examine deeper cognitive, affective, and motivational elements of civic participation so as to better understand how they are impacted (or not) by exposure to controversial issues discussions. By examining online controversial issues discussions through the lens of social identity theory and motivated reasoning, the present study attempts to address these gaps.

Methods

The present study tracks students at two rural schools as they participate in an online discussion exercise. Using quantitative analysis, I describe the relationship between students' political identity and their behavior before, during, and after the discussion. In particular, I focus on two research questions:

- R1: To what extent is students' knowledge about a given controversial issue related to their partisan political identity? Does this relationship vary over the course of an online discussion of a controversial issue?
- R2: To what extent does student partisan political identity predict differences in behavior during an online discussion of a controversial issue?

Setting and Participants

The population of interest for this study is high school seniors (17-to-18-year-olds). Research suggests that the development of political and partisan identity usually begins during the teenage years (Converse, 1969; Jennings & Markus, 1984). High school seniors are more likely to have developed partisan identities than younger high school students.

Relying on a professional network of educators for recommendations, I selected two schools where the teachers typically use discussions of controversial issues. Due to the focus of this study, the relative amount of political diversity found in a given school was the primary consideration in selecting school sites. Two

schools, both located in rural communities, agreed to participate. At Loomis High School, I observed two sections of a course called Democratic Citizenship, an elective course focused on the major issues of citizenship and governance in the United States. At Nichols High School, three sections of an AP government course participated in the study.

Loomis High School is located in community of roughly 5,000 residents about an hour's drive from a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. The school has approximately 850 students, 47 of which participated. Nichols High School is located in a county seat of approximately 24,000 people. The student body numbers about 1,400 and consists of 65% White, 22% Hispanic, 8% Black, 6% Asian. Seventy-nine students at Nichols participated in the study. As table 1 illustrates, the two sites provided the desired diversity of political identification among students, though there are low levels of ethnic/racial diversity. The limitations of the sample will be discussed further below.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics (n = 126)

School	
Loomis	47
Nichols	79
Gender	
Male	51
Female	75
Race/Ethnicity	
White	108
Hispanic	6
Asian/Pacific Islander	1
Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic	3
Did Not Disclose	8
Political Identification	
Republican	40
Democrat	48
Independent	19
Other/Did Not Disclose	19

Data Sources

As part of an assignment in their classes, students researched a controversial political issue and participated in an online discussion in small groups. In addition to that assignment, all students completed three questionnaires (Q1 prior to deliberation, Q2 after deliberation, and Q3 two weeks later; see the appendix). Using the questionnaires and discussion transcripts, I assessed the impacts of partisanship on students in social studies classrooms.

Prediscussion. I worked with the teachers at each school to choose a topic that was both prominent in the 2016 election and aligned to the course content ("stop and frisk" policies at Loomis

and raising taxes at Nichols). Students were given class time to conduct research. Prior to their deliberations, students took Q1, providing baseline measures of focal variables, controls, and background information on the students (demographics, previous experiences in social studies classes, etc.). Based on their responses to political opinion questions, I assigned them to small discussion groups of three or four students using stratified random sampling. Some students were placed in mixed-partisanship groups, while others were placed in uniform partisan identity groups (all Republicans, all Democrats, or all Independents). Each participating school conducted separate deliberations and students were assigned to groups within their own school, though not necessarily within their own class period.

During discussion. Over the course of one week, students participated in an asynchronous online discussion using a threaded forum. Online forums were chosen for this study because they offer similar quality to face-to-face discussions (Guiller, Durndell, & Ross, 2008), provide safer environments for participation and opinion expression (Busbin, 2013; Clark, Bordwell, & Avery, 2015; Ho & McLeod, 2008), and represent a relatively understudied aspect of student discussions. Students were asked to consider and respond to the following propositions:

Loomis: “Stop and frisk” should be adopted nationwide as a means of reducing crime.

Nichols: Taxes should be raised to more evenly distribute income and better fund government programs.

Students were instructed to post, at minimum, one post on the main thread and one reply to another student’s post. Beyond that, they were given no other specific requirements about the posts. These minimal constraints were intended to better approximate online discussion environments students are likely to encounter outside of school, though, as will be discussed below, these conditions may have also shaped student participation in the forum.

Postdiscussion and follow-up. Following the discussion, students took Q2, measuring their ability to recall arguments for and against their position. Q2 also contained questions asking students to comment on their discussion group and the online discussion process. Two weeks after their discussion, students’ ability to recall arguments for each side of the controversial issue was measured a final time (Q3).

Questionnaires

In addition to the information described above, Q1–Q3 recorded student responses to a number of scales and variables that will be included in the quantitative analyses.

Predictor variable: Partisan social identity. Students received a list of questions asking how strongly they identify with their party of choice (Republican, Democrat, or Independent). These seven questions, taken from Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015), provide an indication of how strongly a student’s partisan identity influences their self-concept. While studies of political identity typically rely on self-location on a seven-point strongly conservative–strongly liberal scale, such scales do not

necessarily capture the degree to which such identifications are part of the respondent’s self-concept. As the present study is grounded in social identity theory and assumes that social identification with a particular political group (in this case, a political party) impacts student behavior, the partisan social identity scale represents a better conceptual fit for this analysis than a simple party self-identification. Students responded to seven questions (see appendix), creating a score from 7 to 37 ($\alpha = .90$), where lower values represent weaker identification and higher values represent stronger identification.

The partisan social identity strength scale also has the advantage of sidestepping variance in young people’s issue opinions. Individual’s issue positions do not always neatly align with their partisan or ideological identification (see Abramowitz, 2010). Such is especially true for younger individuals, whose political identities may still be developing. For example, using data from a study of youth in 14 European countries, Pollock, Brock, and Ellison (2015) found that young people’s views often defy simple categorization on a liberal/conservative spectrum. Further, as noted in the literature review, social identification with a political party is more likely to dictate behavior toward out-party members than issue positions (Iyengar et al., 2012).

Control variables. The following variables were measured in the questionnaires and serve as controls in the models. Because of the small sample size, it is necessary to drop controls that do not substantially improve model fit so as to preserve degrees of freedom and as much statistical power as possible. As such, not all of the controls discussed below will appear in each model. The items for all the control measures can be found in the appendix.

Both outcomes measured in this study could be impacted by the amount of disagreement present in the discussions. For example, if everybody in a group agrees on a given position, it would be reasonable to expect less problem talk in that group. Perceived disagreement (Wojcieszak, 2011) was measured by a single question asking students to mark (in 10% time increments) how often they found themselves disagreeing with their group.

An index measuring exposure to good social studies pedagogy was adapted from a survey conducted by the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge (2013). It consists of six questions ($\alpha = .74$) that ask about students’ prior educational experiences with discussion pedagogy, service projects, or other forms of quality civic learning. As higher amounts of quality civic education experiences are related to desirable civic behaviors, such as increased participation and informed voting (Kahne, Crow, & Lee, 2013; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014), it is important to control for students’ prior educational experiences when examining their discussion behaviors. Also, the relationship between quality civic education pedagogies and the development of partisanship is largely unexplored. Prior civic experiences may prove influential in the strength of partisan belief and/or polarization.

The open classroom scale (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001) captures the degree to which students feel comfortable expressing their opinions in the classroom. Students respond to six statements about their classroom on a 1–5 Likert scale (e.g., *Teachers encourage students to make up their own minds.*). Open classroom

climate ($\alpha = .83$) has been frequently used in international civics assessments (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010) and has been shown to be associated with student willingness to participate in discussions as well as student achievement in civics.

A school democratic climate measure was used to indicate the degree to which students feel their voice is heard in the school at large. It consists of four questions ($\alpha = .73$) measuring whether students feel that they can influence decisions at their school, whether students are free to disagree with teachers, and whether they are part of a caring community.

Perceived political polarization measures the degree to which students perceive divisions between the two major political parties. Students responded to three questions ($\alpha = .78$) about their perceptions of partisan differences in ideology and how they think the parties feel about one another (e.g., *Do you feel that Republicans and Democrats trust each other?*). The public often perceives more ideological polarization among politicians than there actually is (Levendusky & Malhotra, 2015), though little research has addressed whether these misperceptions exist among high school students. Controlling for perceived polarization reduces the chance that changes in student knowledge polarization following deliberation will be attributable to students' perceptions of politics outside of the deliberation. Items for these questions were developed for a 2016 election panel study conducted by the University of Minnesota Center for the Study of Political Psychology.

Political efficacy reflects individuals' sense of whether their participation matters and whether they are able to have an impact on the world around them (e.g., *People like me don't have any say about what the government does.*). Variations of this scale are used in both political science and civic education research. In the questionnaires used for this study, items were drawn from the 2016 Minnesota Center for the Study of Political Psychology election study. These items have also appeared in studies of political efficacy by Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991) and Levy (2011), students respond to eight statements using a seven-point (strongly agree–strongly disagree scale) Likert scale. Higher scores are typically associated with higher levels of voting and political engagement. It is common to divide political efficacy into internal efficacy ($\alpha = .88$) and external efficacy ($\alpha = .76$) to assess the degree to which students feel they comprehend politics and are able to influence political events, respectively.

Student civic knowledge was measured using five questions modeled after work by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996). The five questions cover basic civic and political knowledge (e.g., *Which political party is more conservative at the national level? What size majority in both houses of Congress is needed to override a presidential veto?*) and are drawn from Delli Carpini and Keeter's work. Political and civic knowledge questions are often averaged into a scale (e.g., Capella, Price, & Nir, 2002) to represent participants' general level of political understanding ($\alpha = .82$).

Students will be asked to identify their gender (male, female, other), race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (using the IEA study proxy of number of books in the home; see Schulz et al., 2010). There may be important differences in political behavior at a young age among demographic groups. For example, Hooghe and

Stolle (2004) identified differences in intended political expression among boys and girls, with boys being more likely to anticipate joining a political party and support more radical forms of political action. In order to see if the impact of other predictor variables is different across demographic groups, interaction terms were tested in the models as necessary.

Data Analysis

Data from the Q1–Q3 and the coded discussion posts were used to model student knowledge of the controversial issues (R_1) and behavior during the discussion (R_2). To assess R_1 , exploring student knowledge of both sides of the controversial issues, a measure called argument repertoire was used. Argument repertoire (Capella, Prince, & Nir, 2002) captures both student issue opinion and their ability to present arguments both for and against their position. The measure asks students to state their position and up to six reasons that support that position. They were then asked to state up to six reasons a person who disagreed with their position would give. The positions were read and repetitions or restatements of the same position were not counted. The number of arguments against their position was subtracted from the number of arguments for their position to create the argument repertoire score. The measure serves as an assessment of student learning throughout the course of the deliberation process. In addition, comparing the number of reasons a student gives for and against their position measures the degree to which they engaged in biased assimilation of information (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979). A multivariate regression model is used to predict changes in argument repertoire over the course of the study as a function of student political identities.

Coding Discussion Posts

Student posts in the online deliberation forum were archived and coded using a scheme adapted from Stromer-Galley (2007). The rationale for choosing this scheme is that it allows for assessing deliberation through both the group and individual lenses. Coding took place in two stages. Stage one coded each contribution from the speaker (in the case of the present research, a post or reply to the deliberative forum) in terms of four categories: problem talk, meta-talk, process comments, and social talk. *Problem talk* reflects students' consideration of the topic and can be subdivided into questions, opinions, agreements, disagreements, and factual statements. *Meta-talk* refers to attempts to summarize or characterize the content of the deliberation and includes statements of consensus ("It seems we all agree that . . ."), conflict ("We still can't agree on . . ."), and clarification. *Process comments* express participants' thoughts on either the online environment or the deliberative process in general. Such comments could praise or criticize the activity or raise technical issues with forum. Lastly, *social talk* consists of greetings, goodbyes, apologies, praise, and other similar talk designed to build community among the discussants.

In stage two of the coding, each instance of the four main categories was broken down into specific types of contributions. In this study, problem talk was by far the most common type of talk and

the only one with enough specific contributions to allow for statistical analysis. The specific types of problem talk contributions coded were opinions, factual statements, argumentation, agreements/disagreements, and questions. Opinions included any statements where a student expressed a position on the subject of the discussion. All statements that referenced specific statistics or information from sources provided by the teacher or found during student research¹ were coded as factual statements. The factual statement category excluded student summaries of arguments made by sources. Argumentation included all statements that were used to further a position but were not specifically connected to a fact (such as hypothetical examples or unsupported statements not classifiable as opinions). Agreements or disagreements were coded when students directly stated their position on a statement made by another discussion participant. All inquiries directed to the group or individual participants (excepting ones that were clearly rhetorical) were coded as questions. For example, a hypothetical student problem talk statement could read: "I disagree with Dan. Previous minimum wage hikes haven't resulted in huge reductions in the number of jobs." This statement, though two sentences, would be coded as a single thought in Stromer-Galley's (2007) scheme because the two sentences are directed to a previous point made by Dan. As the statement discusses the issue (income inequality), it would be coded in stage one as problem talk. During stage two, it would be further divided into a disagreement and an argument, as it does not provide a factual support for the claim. Table 2 provides examples of problem talk statements coded from the two discussions.

Table 2
Examples of Problem Talk Statements Coded Using Stromer-Galley's Coding Scheme

Statement	Coding
"I completely agree with you. Only people who have something they're hiding would be offended about the searching."	Problem Talk: Agreement; Argumentation
"Another study wrote that of the people who were stopped, 90% of them were Black or Latino. And of that 90%, 88% had done nothing wrong."	Problem Talk: Factual statement
"... Your GPA is in the top third... of all GPAs. Now imagine if you were required to forfeit a portion of the GPA you have earned so that it could be given to a student on the bottom end of the spectrum. Would you be pleased to use this adjusted GPA for college applications and scholarships?"	Problem Talk: Argumentation
"I believe that taxes should be raised to benefit citizens and the community. Although I think that the raise in taxes should be targeted more toward the wealthier people."	Problem Talk: Opinion

Following coding, statements of each type were tallied both at the individual and group levels. For the individual level, there is a

¹ As my major concern during coding was that students were presenting the information as factual support of an argument, I did not independently verify all statistics or factual references made by students.

tally of specific types of comments as well as a tally of each broader category (problem talk, meta-talk, etc.) for each participant.

The coded discussion behaviors were analyzed to examine R2. While there are four main types of behavior in Stromer-Galley's (2007) coding scheme, the problem talk category dominated the discussions for this particular assignment. The other main discussion categories had too few cases for statistical analysis. Thus, the present analysis focuses on the problem talk category and its sub-behaviors. The relationship between student political identity and discussion behaviors is modeled with multivariate regression.

Statistical Considerations

Having two separate schools poses a problem of statistical independence for the analyses. Despite similarities between the two schools, students in each school are nevertheless exposed to different teachers and school policies. Were the sample larger with more schools, a hierarchical linear model could be used to control for variance between school sites. A conservative approach would be to analyze each school site separately, though that would substantially reduce the sample size in each analysis and, consequently, the statistical power. Given that the sample size is limited as is, this is not an appealing option. As a middle ground, I added school site as an interaction term with certain variables (open classroom climate, for example) to ensure that the differences in school environment are incorporated into each analysis. In all the models below, these interactions were non-significant and were dropped from the model for parsimony and to preserve degrees of freedom.

Results

Research Question 1

R1 inquired about the extent to which students learn opposing perspectives and arguments from the discussion. If partisan students are more prone to motivated reasoning and biased information seeking, they should, in general, recall more reasons from their own side of the argument and less from the other. The key measure in this research question is argument repertoire (Capella, Price, & Nir, 2002), or the difference between arguments a student produced for his or her own side of the discussion and ones generated for the opposing side. Argument repertoire score was tallied by subtracting the number of opposing arguments listed from the number of supporting arguments. Positive scores indicate a balance of information in favor of students' original opinion.

Prediscussion differences in argument repertoire. Both t-tests and regression models were used to analyze differences between partisans and non-partisans in terms of argument repertoire. Results of the t-tests indicate that there were no significant differences in argument repertoire score in the sample between partisans and nonpartisans during the prediscussion survey. Regression models controlling for demographics and prior social studies experiences also showed no significant relationships between partisanship or partisan social identity and starting argument repertoire score. As noted, interactions between

classroom site and open classroom climate, school democratic climate, and social studies pedagogy were added to control for possible violations of the independence of observations assumption, though models including these terms failed to predict differences in argument repertoire scores.

Change in argument repertoire following discussion.

Regression was used to model the change in argument repertoire from the pre- to postdiscussion questionnaire. Key predictor variables were partisan social identity, group condition (uniform or mixed), and the amount of problem talk at both the group and individual level. Controls were added for demographics, school experiences, civic knowledge, and political efficacy. To improve model fit, several nonsignificant predictors were dropped. Interactions between partisan social identity and group conditions were tested, though they did not substantially improve the model. Table 3 displays the results of the analysis.

Table 3
Regression Predicting Change in Argument Repertoire Scores from Q1 to Q2

	β	SE
Partisan Social Identity	0.09*	0.04
Group Condition—Mixed	0.56	0.37
Level of Disagreement	-0.15*	0.07
Group Problem Talk	-0.05*	0.02
Social Studies Pedagogy	-0.10*	0.05
Open Classroom Climate	0.09	0.05
School Dem. Climate	0.09	0.06
Civic Knowledge	0.18	0.12
Political Efficacy—Int.	-0.04	0.04
Political Efficacy—Ext.	0.02	0.06
Constant	-0.82	1.28
Adjusted R ²	.13*	

Note. * $p < .05$

The results of the regression analysis provide support for a relationship between partisan social identity and biased assimilation of information favorable to students' preexisting opinions. Partisan social identity strength is related to a significant increase in the students' argument repertoire score ($\beta = .09, p < .05$), indicating that the balance of arguments from the pre- to postdiscussion questionnaires shifted in favor of students' existing opinion. Although group condition was not a significant predictor of change in argument repertoire score, the reported amount of disagreement between a student and their group predicts a decline in argument repertoire scores ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$). Additionally, the total amount of problem talk in each group was inversely related to argument repertoire scores ($\beta = -.05, p < .05$). In this sample, strength of partisan social identity was related to students learning more about their own side of an issue, while disagreement and the

amount of problem talk in the group were related to learning more about the opposite side of the issue.

Argument repertoire at the end of the study. Following the same procedure as before, I used regression models to predict changes in argument repertoire from the postdiscussion to the follow-up questionnaire two weeks later. Table 4 displays the final model. In contrast to the model represented in table 3, this model shows a significant interaction between partisan social identity and group condition ($\beta = .15, p < .05$). This interaction indicates that the impact of partisan social identity on change in argument repertoire in the weeks following the discussion is different depending on whether the student was in a uniform or mixed group. In mixed groups, there is a positive relationship between partisan social identity and change in argument repertoire at the end of the study. In uniform groups, the relationship is inverted, with high-partisan-identity students showing a reduction in their argument repertoire scores. Figure 1 illustrates this interaction. Thus, mixed groups showed evidence of a relationship between partisan social identity strength and reasoning and increased argument repertoire scores though these results were not replicated in uniform groups.

Table 4
Regression Predicting Change in Argument Repertoire Scores from Q2 to Q3

	β	SE
Partisan Social Identity	-0.13**	0.04
Group Condition—Mixed	-2.29*	0.95
Level of Disagreement	0.08	0.05
Social Studies Pedagogy	0.05	0.04
Open Classroom Climate	-0.06	0.04
Political Efficacy—Ext.	-0.04	0.04
White	-1.05*	0.52
SES	0.30	0.19
Partisan Soc. ID: Mixed	0.15*	0.06
Constant	2.59*	1.17
Adjusted R ²	.17**	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Research Question 2

R2 asks about the relationship between student political identity and their behaviors during an online discussion. Recall that students were divided into groups of three or four, depending on class size and number of students who reported having a partisan identity. Each group's discussion was broken down into statements and each statement was coded using the scheme established by Stromer-Galley (2007) described above. Tables 5 and 6 provide summaries of the classification and sub-classification of the statements, respectively.

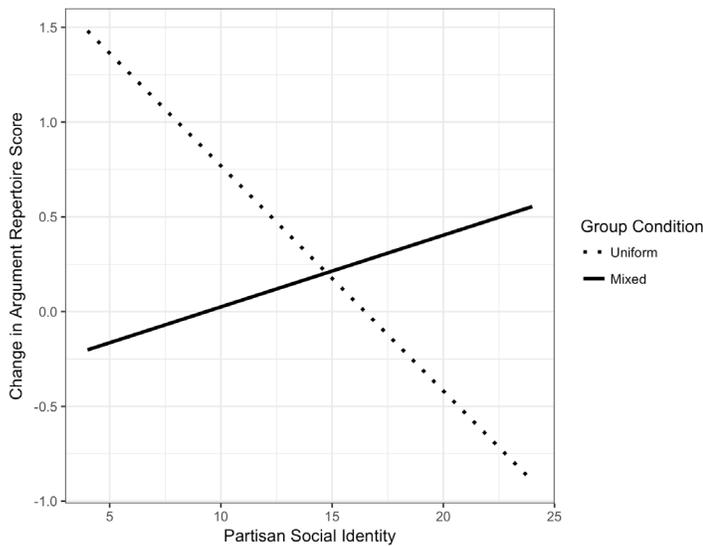


Figure 1. Relationship between partisan social identity and change in argument repertoire scores across group conditions.

Table 5

Tally of Discussion Behavior Categories

Problem Talk	Meta-Talk	Process Talk	Social Talk
740	2	4	39

Table 6

Tally of Discussion Behavior Sub-Types

Problem Talk	
Opinions	348
Argumentation	337
Facts	81
Agreements/Disagreements	116
Questions	33
Meta-Talk	
Summary	2
Process Talk	
Mistaken Post	1
Technical Issue	2
Discussion procedure	1
Social Talk	
Praise	24
Gratitude	6
Reminder	1
Empathy/Encouragement	3
Greetings	3
Apology	3

Note. As a single discussion behavior can contain multiple sub-behaviors, the totals from this table do not necessarily match those in table 5.

While there were not enough meta-talk, process talk, or social talk behaviors to conduct statistical analyses, I was able to analyze the impacts of student partisanship on the frequency of problem talk, both in the aggregate and for each statement sub-type. Among the various types of problem talk (table 6), opinions and argumentation were the most common. Interestingly, students justified their positions more with argumentation than with factual support. While such arguments are not necessarily invalid, they are often considered lower-quality contributions to discussions and deliberations (see, for example, Friess & Eilders, 2015).

Multivariate regression models were used to predict the number of problem talk behaviors based on the strength of student partisan identity. Controls were added to each model for demographics, group condition, political efficacy, perceived polarization, civic knowledge, high-quality social studies pedagogy exposure, and perception of open classroom climate. To better account for differences between groups, the total number of problem talk behaviors in each group was added to the model as a control variable.

The results of the analyses (see table 7) indicate that partisan identity strength is related to certain student behaviors during the online discussion. Partisan identity strength was positively associated with the total number of problem talk statements ($\beta = .12, p < .05$), as well as the amount of argumentation ($\beta = .11, p < .001$) and questions ($\beta = .03, p < .05$) contained in the process talk statements. Partisan social identity was not significantly related to expressing opinions, using supporting facts, or expressing agreement/disagreement in this sample. In short, those with strong partisan social identities tended to contribute more to the discussion, provide more unsupported arguments, and ask more questions than their peers.

Results Summary

The results for R1 provide evidence that students exhibit motivated reasoning toward their favored party. Students with stronger partisan social identities saw larger increases in argument repertoire than other students, suggesting that these identities are shaping learning during the discussion. Partisanship also seemed to play a role in students' ability to recall arguments for both sides of the issue two weeks after the discussion, though there is evidence that group context may moderate that relationship.

Investigation of R2 provides evidence that partisanship influenced student behavior during the discussion, with strong partisans participating more but also relying more on lower-quality, unsupported arguments. The implications of these findings are discussed below.

Discussion

Partisan Social Identity and Argument Repertoire

While partisan social identity did not predict differences in starting argument repertoire scores, it was predictive of changes in argument repertoire scores over the course of the study. Following the discussion, higher-partisan social identity scores were related to increases in argument repertoire scores. Two weeks after the

Table 7**Regressions Predicting Problem Talk Behaviors During Student Online Discussions**

	Problem Talk Total	Opinions	Argument	Factual Support	Agree/ Disagree	Questions
	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)	β (SE)
Partisan Social ID	0.12 (.05) [*]	0.00 (.03)	0.11 (.03) ^{***}	0.00 (.02)	0.02 (.02)	0.03 (.01) [*]
Mixed Group	-0.70 (.49)	-0.19 (.24)	-0.55 (.30)	-0.27 (.21)	0.00 (.15)	-0.14 (.11)
Group Behavior Total	0.28 (.03) ^{***}	0.31 (.03) ^{***}	0.32 (.03) ^{***}	0.31 (.04) ^{***}	0.29 (.05) ^{***}	0.23 (.04) ^{***}
Perceived Polarization	-0.21 (.11)	-0.02 (.06)	-0.08 (.06)	-0.08 (.05)	-0.07 (.03)	-0.02 (.03)
Civic Knowledge	0.26 (.16)	0.18 (.08) [*]	-0.01 (.09)	0.13 (.07) [*]	0.01 (.05)	0.01 (.04)
SS Pedagogy	-0.10 (.07)	-0.08 (.03) [*]	-0.04 (.04)	0.00 (.03)	-0.01 (.02)	0.00 (.02)
O.C. Climate	0.14 (.06)	0.07 (.03) [*]	0.05 (.04)	0.05 (.03)	-0.01 (.02)	0.01 (.01)
Female	1.19 (.51) [*]	0.77 (.26) ^{**}	0.47 (.30)	-0.11 (.21)	0.34 (.16) [*]	0.11 (.14)
Constant	-2.01 (1.77)	-0.59 (0.91)	-1.59 (1.04)	-0.74 (.72)	0.18 (.56)	-0.49 (.39)
Adj. R ²	.52 ^{***}	.55 ^{***}	.57 ^{***}	.37 ^{***}	.28 ^{***}	.24 ^{***}

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

discussion, students who had discussed in mixed-opinion groups showed a positive relationship between partisan identity strength and argument repertoire. The opposite relationship was observed in students who discussed in uniform groups.

The stronger a student's partisan social identity, the more their argument repertoire tended to increase immediately following the discussion. The finding that partisan social identity strength serves to increase argument repertoire is consistent with other work on partisan identity and learning (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2013). Students are likely evaluating arguments in light of their agreement with their preexisting beliefs and ignoring or seeking to dismiss disagreeing point (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979).

Increases in argument repertoire related to partisan social identity were counteracted in the model by the levels of disagreement reported by students and group levels of problem talk. Thus, students who had richer discussions with higher levels of disagreement tended to show reduced argument repertoire scores immediately following the discussion. These findings are consistent with research on classroom discussions that finds high-quality discussion can increase perspective-taking (Avery, Levy, & Simmons, 2014) and lead to students valuing alternative opinions (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Although it would be intuitive to think that students experienced more of both of these elements in mixed groups, students in mixed groups did not show any significant decrease in argument repertoire scores compared to their peers in uniform groups (although this may be partially explained by

mixed groups reporting higher disagreement than uniform groups).

Taken together, these findings emphasize the need for teachers to consider the tendencies of partisans when designing discussion experiences. Given that higher levels of disagreement were predictive of decreased argument repertoire, it may be wise to place partisans in mixed-opinion groups where they are likely to encounter disagreement. The exposure to alternative perspectives and increased levels of problem talk can work against the partisan tendency to seek only identity-reinforcing opinions.

The explanatory picture for argument repertoire change at the end of the study is more complex than that immediately following the discussion. Like changes from the pre- to post-questionnaires, it seems that the level of group problem talk was again influential in reducing argument repertoire scores. However, the effect for level of disagreement did not explain as much variance in this model as did an interaction term between partisan social identity and group condition. This interaction effect produces a surprising result for uniform groups, even while the mixed group results are expected. In the mixed group, increased partisan social identity predicts increased argument repertoire. The uniform group, however, shows the opposite effect; students with higher partisan social identities show reductions in argument repertoire while those with lower social identities showed a marked increase.

At first look, the moderating effect for group condition seems counterintuitive, as it goes against research that predicts

like-minded groups will polarize their opinions (see Schkade, Sunstein, & Hastie, 2007). It is possible that these results may be artifacts of the sample or measurement (highly partisan individuals having nowhere to go but down on the argument repertoire score, for example). It is also important, however, to consider the possibility that some part of the discussion process is responsible for these unexpected results. Students scoring high in partisan social identity in a uniform partisan group may not have had anything to learn from their co-partisan peers in terms of arguments, whereas low-partisan social identity students may learn a lot from those with stronger identities. This would cause high levels of change in low social identity partisans and little or no change in high social identity partisans, creating the negative association seen in the model.

Students in the mixed group exhibit a positive relationship between partisan social identity and change in argument repertoire. Students with high-partisan social identity scores tended to increase their argument repertoire scores while students with lower partisan social identity scores tend to show a decrease in the score. Students with lower partisan social identities may be more open to difference when placed in mixed groups and would therefore show a more even balance of information at the end of the discussion exercise. High-partisan social identity scores, in contrast, may indicate that the individual is threatened by other perspectives, and may seek to reinforce their identities by either learning new arguments in support of their position or, more likely, ignoring arguments against their position. Such a “doubling down” would be consistent with research on motivated responses to argumentation (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2013).

These results suggest a number of questions for research and practice. A primary area of concern is whether students are recalling alternative perspectives they learned during the discussion. If students are not retaining information that is in opposition to their positions, then it is questionable whether the discussion is fulfilling its democratic purpose. Given the wide array of content teachers are pressured to cover, it is impractical to spend entire semesters on a single topic to ensure better recall. Another difficulty may be the inauthenticity of a school discussion. Since the students are participating as part of their course, they are having a conversation that they might not have had otherwise. In such a situation, even the most open-minded student may find it difficult to retain information that does not fit neatly into their schemas. Researchers should examine the circumstances under which students show long-term retention of identity-inconsistent information. Practitioners should seek to promote climates that encourage as much engagement with differences as possible in the classroom and continually reinforce the value of understanding multiple perspectives on each issue. Building such habits can reduce the tendency toward motivated dismissals of disagreeable information (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017).

Student Behavior During the Online Discussions

Overall, there is evidence that partisanship impacts the behavior of students during a discussion, though that impact seems to be confined to their tendency to use argumentation (as opposed to

factual support) during a discussion. Further, there is no evidence in this sample to support the notion that group condition moderated discussion behavior.

Problem talk vs. other contributions. Of the four main types of behavior coded during the online discussion, students in the sample engaged in far more problem talk, or discussion of the specific discussion prompt, than any other type of talk. Such a finding is not necessarily negative and may be in line with many teachers’ goals for online discussion; productive discussions should focus on addressing the problem at hand. The imbalance of problem talk subtypes, however, may be problematic. Students in the discussion were far more likely to state their opinions or offer generalized arguments than they were to support either with specific factual information. During the online discussion, the ratios of opinion to fact and argumentation to fact were both approximately three to one. Such types of participation are of lower quality than many teachers would like to see in discussions, both online and face-to-face.

It is possible that the design of the online forum may have served to encourage certain types of contributions over others. For example, students in this exercise were not explicitly instructed to explore many possible solutions or attempt to reach a consensus. Both of these changes might have encouraged students to engage more in meta-talk, as it would likely require more summarizing and highlighting of disagreement to keep track of progress toward consensus. While the instructions required students to create at least one original post and respond to at least one of their classmates’ posts, there were no word limits or requirements for using factual information. Without explicit requirements, students may have defaulted to sharing their opinions and use of argumentation, both of which are less cognitively demanding than providing specific factual support. Future studies should employ a variety of forum instructions to explore the impact of different requirements in the discussion environment. While relatively loose forum instructions may make the discussion similar to forums for online political conversation students will encounter outside of school, it is likely that more specific instructions are needed to make the discussion a better learning experience.

Partisan social identity and discussion contributions. In this sample, partisan social identity was positively related to the number of problem talk statements produced. In other words, the more students identified with their chosen political party, the more problem talk statements they tended to produce. In particular, partisans seemed to favor argumentation (such as hypothetical examples or statements phrased as facts but not backed up with any citation). Given that partisans tend to have higher civic knowledge (see, for example, Hess & McAvoy, 2014), one might expect that partisans would be able to provide more, albeit skewed, factual statements in their posts. Such was not the case in this sample. Considering the discussions as a whole were low on factual information it may be that the students in general were unmotivated or unable to provide specific factual support for their arguments. Partisans may have simply had the advantage of having more arguments at their disposal, which they then used in place of facts. These results would be consistent with Mutz’s (2006) finding

that individuals infrequently exposed to disagreement find it difficult to imagine how others could disagree with their points. Partisan students likely come from partisan households, meaning there may be a lack of exposure to disagreeing points of view. Further, there are certainly many models of political discussion in the media that are mere exchanges of talking points. It is also possible that partisan students do not make a distinction between providing factual support and arguing through talking points (see also Haidt, 2012). There may also be an unwillingness to call out other students on unsupported statements, inapt metaphors, or other such contributions, especially if the forum instructions do not explicitly encourage students to do so. A norm of politeness may permeate the discussion, allowing argumentation to dominate the discussion even when participants notice that such statements are unsupported.

The results of this study provide evidence of partisanship's impact in the high school classroom. Partisans in this sample tended to make more, though not necessarily better-informed, statements. While teachers should encourage students to substantiate their statements in a discussion forum, it may be wise to pay particular attention to partisan students. It is likely that better factual support can be encouraged through the use of stricter discussion forum instructions and rubrics to evaluate students' use of supporting information. Such measures can help guide students toward informed participation, rather than regurgitating talking points.

Summary Discussion

The above results indicate that partisanship influences learning and behavior in an online discussion. Teachers should consider how the partisan/nonpartisan elements of a students' political identity may influence learning and participation in the discussion and frame students' preparation, participation guidelines, and follow-up conversations in such a way as to provide a more balanced learning experience. While most teachers lack detailed knowledge of student partisan social identities, even vague perceptions of student political leanings can be used as the basis for choices that expose students to more diverse political perspectives.

Limitations and Further Research

There are several factors that limit the generalizability of the findings in this study. As noted above, the research context has the advantage of political diversity but lacks ethnic or socioeconomic diversity. Thus, in the present context, I am unable to analyze whether any impacts of political identity vary across different racial/ethnic or socioeconomic groups. In addition, while there are sufficient cases for statistical analysis, broader generalizations are not possible based on a sample of two schools.

It should also be noted that political discussions and opinion formation are very complex processes. Thus, while the effects and models reported for R1 are significant, they still explain only a relatively small amount of the variance in argument repertoire. It is possible that variables not measured in this study could explain more of the variance and provide more complete or alternative explanatory pictures. Although the effects are larger in the models

assessing R2, there is also the possibility of missing variables being able to substantially improve the models.

While the results of the study indicate that partisan identity impacted the online discussions in the two classrooms studied, further research is needed to replicate these results in other classrooms and in a variety of online discussion contexts. Particularly, studies with a larger number and variety of classroom contexts are necessary both to eliminate concerns over whether the effects observed are artifacts of context and to allow for more sophisticated analytical models that correct for violations of independence of assumptions. While the corrections employed in this paper (interacting classroom site with potentially context dependent variables) attempt to reduce this concern, replications with larger statistical power are still necessary. Further, as different forum requirements may substantially alter the types of contributions students make to the online discussion, replication of the study with varying rules and instructions is needed.

Social studies research should incorporate more research directly observing and measuring student mental processes. Research like Kahne and Bowyer's (2017) study of young people's political biases in responding to political cartoons can help identify methods that better prepare students to operate as citizens in a contentious political climate. Future studies should also recognize that partisanship is an impactful part of many students' identity. Politics is increasingly present in the classroom, whether teachers like it or not (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; McAvoy & Hess, 2013). As such, it is incumbent on researchers to research the impacts of student political identity on their behavior and learning in the classroom.

Conclusion

Although the sample for this study is small, it provides a view into students' partisan feelings, or lack thereof, and the potential impacts they can have on the classroom during a discussion exercise. Partisan identities, though often ignored by social studies research, are related to changes in these students' recollection of arguments over the course of an online discussion as well as their behavior in the discussion itself. While limited in scope, this study provides evidence that partisanship impacts student behavior and learning in an online discussion. In addition, this study incorporates methods and measures that bridge the gaps between social studies education research and political science and psychology that can be replicated in future studies. Social studies educators are tasked with developing the civic capabilities of all students. Recognizing the effects of partisanship on student learning and behavior is an important first step in developing methods and tools for social education in divided political contexts.

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Appendix—Questionnaire Items

Partisan Social Identity

$\alpha = .89$ for Democrats, $\alpha = .91$ for Republicans, $\alpha = .90$ for Independents

- To what extent do you feel certain about your [party name] political outlook? 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A great deal)

2. To what extent is your [party name] political outlook a reflection of your core moral beliefs or ideas? 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A great deal)
3. To what extent is your [party name] political outlook connected to your beliefs about fundamental questions of right and wrong? 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A great deal)
4. How important is being [party name] to you? 1 (Not at all important) to 4 (Extremely important)
5. How important is the term [party name] to you? 1 (Not at all important) to 4 (Extremely important)
6. When you talk about [party name], how often do you say “we” instead of “they?” 1 (Never) to 4 (All the time)
7. To what extent do you think of yourself as a/an [party name]? 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A great deal)

Perceived Disagreement

During your discussion, how often did you find yourself disagreeing with your group?

1 (0–10%) to 10 (91–100%)

Social Studies/Civic Educational Experiences

Based on your school experience up to this point, how often do you . . . ($\alpha = .74$)

1 (Never) to 5 (Once a week or more)

1. Spend class time discussing current events?
2. Have teachers encourage you to discuss political and social issues about which people have different opinions?
3. Do research on social, political, or community issues for your class?
4. Do community projects for your classes?
5. Have teachers require you to keep up with politics or government by reading the newspaper, watching TV, or using the Internet?
6. Feel that the knowledge you get from your civics/ government/social studies class is useful in your current, everyday life?

Open Classroom Climate Scale

1 (Never) to 5 (Always), $\alpha = .83$

When you discuss social and political issues during regular lessons, how often do the following things happen?

1. Teachers encourage students to make up their own minds.
2. Teachers encourage students to express their opinions.
3. Students bring up current political events for discussion in class.
4. Students express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students.
5. Teachers encourage students to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions.
6. Teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining it in class.

School Democratic Climate

When you think about your school as a whole, how much do you agree/disagree with the following?

1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), $\alpha = .73$

1. Students have a say in how the school is run.
2. In general, students can disagree with teachers, if they are respectful.
3. In general, students are encouraged to express opinions.
4. Students feel like they are part of a community where people care about each other.

Perceived Polarization

In general, do you feel that Republicans and Democrats . . . ($\alpha = .78$)

1 (Not at all) to 5 (A great deal)

1. Respect each other?
2. Trust each other?
3. Like each other?

Internal Political Efficacy

1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), $\alpha = .88$ at Q3

1. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. (reverse coded)
2. I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.
3. I think I am better informed about politics than most people my age.
4. I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.
5. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.

External Political Efficacy

1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), $\alpha = .76$ at Q3

1. People like me don't have any say about what the government does. (reverse coded)
2. So many people vote in national elections that it doesn't matter much whether I vote or not. (reverse coded)
3. Public officials don't care much about what people like me think. (reverse coded)

Political/Civic Knowledge

Students typed their responses in a text box underneath each question.

1. Which political party currently has the most members in the United States House of Representatives?
2. Who is currently the Vice President of the United States?
3. Who is currently the governor of [state where research took place]?
4. How long is the term of a United States Senator?
5. How much of a majority in both houses of Congress is needed to override a presidential veto?