

Partisanship in a Social Setting

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No factor appears more powerful in explaining how individuals evaluate political information and form political preferences than partisanship. Yet, virtually all work on the effects of partisanship on preference formation neglects the crucial role of social settings. In this study, I examine how social settings can fundamentally change the influence of partisanship on preferences. I demonstrate that, in fact, social settings exert an independent influence over preference formation—one that is even larger than the influence of partisan ambivalence. The central implication of these findings is that, going forward, we cannot fully explore how citizens apply their partisanship in evaluating political information without also accounting for the social settings in which individuals find themselves.

The past half century of research has provided critical insights into the degree to which partisan identification acts as a “perceptual screen” (Campbell et al. 1960, 133) that dramatically shapes individuals’ evaluations of even seemingly objective political information (e.g., Bartels 2002; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012; Redlawsk 2002; Taber and Lodge 2006). The tendency to unduly reward one’s own party and unfairly dismiss the opponent appears to be even more powerful among those who hold the strongest partisan attachments (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012).

Yet, virtually all research on partisanship has neglected a component we know to be crucial to preference formation: social settings (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Druckman and Nelson 2003; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004; Mutz 2006; Sinclair 2012). The influence of social surroundings (e.g., family) is acknowledged as an important role in the development of partisan affiliations (e.g., Jennings et al. 2009), but the manner in which individuals apply their partisanship to form preferences is measured in isolated settings without the company of others. In this study, I incorporate actual social interaction into the process by which partisan identification shapes opinion formation. I show that one’s social setting—whether composed of ideologically like-minded partisans or a heterogeneous group of

partisans—fundamentally affects how individuals apply their partisan identification in evaluating information. My results suggest that studying political attitudes without accounting for social setting neglects a key component of preference formation.¹

I begin by discussing the attitudinal consequences of partisan ambivalence before theorizing how social settings may exert an equally, if not more, important influence over attitudes. I then describe an experimental design in which I manipulate both partisan ambivalence and the ideological composition of social settings. Perhaps the most overwhelming result I present in this study is that social settings exert a powerful influence over preference formation, even among the most univalent partisans.

Attitudinal Consequences of Partisanship

Partisanship—an individual’s adherence to a particular political party or platform—tends to be highly stable over one’s lifetime (Campbell et al. 1960) and remains “a powerful and pervasive influence on perceptions of political events” (Bartels 2002, 120). Indeed, partisanship influences such outcomes as individuals’ issue preferences

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The author is grateful to Jamie Druckman for his helpful advice. Thank you to Miles Hewstone, Yanna Krupnikov, Matt Levendusky, and Yotam Shmargad for insightful comments. This study benefited immensely from constructive feedback voiced at the 6th Annual NYU-CESS Experimental Conference; thank you to Elizabeth Suhay for excellent suggestions. The author is very grateful to the editor and anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and thorough critiques. Replication files for this study are available at the AJPS Dataverse Archive (<http://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/ajps>).

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American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 00, No. 0, xxxx 2014, Pp. 1–18

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DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12087

(Jacoby 1988), vote choices (Bartels 2002), evaluations of the economy (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008), perceived competence of political parties (Gerber and Huber 2010) and the blame attributed to them (Tilley and Hobolt 2011), and even assessments as seemingly objective as the color of a candidate's skin (Caruso, Mead, and Balcetis 2009).

The absence or presence of partisan cues tends to determine the degree to which individuals engage in accuracy-driven or directional motivated reasoning. In their absence, individuals make use of cognitive strategies to most effectively uncover accurate information (known as a systematic or data-driven position; see Rahn 2004, 477; Kunda 1990). When partisan cues *are* available, on the other hand, they can influence opinion formation by triggering partisans to actively cohere new information with their preexisting preferences (Peterson et al. 2013).² As a result, Democrats are likely to view the economy favorably under a Democratic administration, even if they would be dissatisfied under the same conditions were the Republicans in power, and vice versa (e.g., Bartels 2002; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012).

The attitudinal consequences of partisan-motivated reasoning could fill many books, but for the sake of brevity, they can be summarized into three primary outcomes. First, partisan-motivated reasoning leads partisans to support the option endorsed by their preferred party, regardless of how ideologically compatible that option may actually be (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). Second, partisans perceive their own party's solutions to be highly effective, dismissing the opponent's ideas as ineffective (Gerber and Huber 2010; Redlawsk 2002, 2004). Finally, partisans are less likely to seek out incongruent information that contradicts their priors (Redlawsk 2002).

²It is important to be sure that rational perceptual differences are not mistaken for biases, or perhaps to be cognizant that *bias* is not itself indicative of a negative personality-type. When a partisan prefers a partisan candidate's policy choices due to a common preference for a certain policy, this is not due to bias in a negative sense but rather to like-minded thinking (Gerber and Green 1999). But when a partisan prefers a partisan candidate's decisions – no matter how inconsistent they may be with the party's values – one cannot deny the presence of biased reasoning. In this case, “the appropriate conclusion to draw . . . is not that perceptual biases do not exist but that perceptual biases may be sometimes rational” (Bartels 2002, 126). The intent of this work is not to disentangle Bayesian updating from partisan motivated reasoning, but rather to illustrate that the partisan-driven process of preference formation depends on the social setting in which an individual finds his or herself.

Preference Formation in Nonsocial Settings

The Effect of Partisan Univalence on Motivated Reasoning

While partisan-motivated reasoning can powerfully shape evaluations, bounds exist (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2000). One particularly important moderator of motivated reasoning is that citizens are much less likely to employ a partisan perceptual screen when they hold both positive and negative evaluations of their preferred party, referred to as partisan ambivalence (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). As Lavine et al. suggest, ambivalence signals a need for greater attention and deliberation, and it leads to judgments less colored by the “partisan perceptual screen.” Thus, univalent partisans are expected to engage in partisan-motivated reasoning to a greater extent than are ambivalent partisans. This leads to my first hypothesis.

H1: Overall, univalent (i.e., less ambivalent) partisans express a stronger preference for attitudinally congruent information (i.e., their own party's policy) than do ambivalent partisans.

Preference Formation in Social Settings

Ambivalence, however, is not the only—and perhaps not even the key—moderator. While scholars have investigated the role of factors such as motivation and partisan conflict (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Kunda 1990), one critical moderator is ignored: the social settings in which political information is often exchanged (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987; Mutz 2006; Sinclair 2012). An essential question is how these social interactions impact partisan-motivated reasoning.

As Sinclair argues (2012), individuals are “social citizens” embedded in networks of interaction. Some tend to be homogeneous (e.g., voluntary associations; Mutz 2006; Popierlarz and McPherson 1995), whereas others are more commonly diverse (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004; Sinclair 2012), particularly as they become larger in size (Price, Cappella, and Nir 2002, 98; also see Granovetter 1973). Social groups often do not form based on partisan compatibility (Sinclair 2012), but rather on a host of other social and demographic factors; yet regardless of the source of the relationships, politics invariably arises in conversation (Sinclair 2012; Walsh 2004). While

social settings have received attention when it comes to their ideological compositions (e.g., Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004; Mutz 2002), no empirical work directly explores how social settings influence an individual's evaluations of political information. I next turn to my hypotheses for how social settings—both ideologically homogeneous and heterogeneous—influence this process.

The Effect of Homogeneous Groups on Motivated Reasoning

Empirical work suggests that homogeneity within groups has a reaffirming effect on group members' attitudes. Druckman and Nelson (2003) invite participants to interact in a social setting wherein all group members are provided with the same issue frame. The authors find that certainty in the common frame is reinforced and affirmed as a result of the homogeneous setting (also see Druckman 2004). This supports observational work on social context, which similarly demonstrates that discussions without dissent affirm common arguments, as homogeneous discussants encourage one another's mutual viewpoints as like-minded discussants become increasingly convinced by their agreed-upon preference (Isenberg 1986, 1141; Mendelberg 2002, 159; Mutz 2002).

This can be explained by two potential mechanisms: First, affirming beliefs commonly held by group members reinforce the common identity of the group (e.g., Nicholson 2012). In a political context, a second mechanism of ingroup affirmation may be that a common partisanship serves as a heuristic, which in turn encourages respondents to actively defend preexisting partisan beliefs (Peterson et al. 2013; Rahn 2004). For these reasons, I expect that partisans interacting in like-minded groups subsequently engage in directional (partisan-) motivated reasoning. They become more likely to prefer their own party's policy and rate the opponent's policy as more ineffective as a result of the like-minded social setting.

H2a: Respondents in homogeneous groups (i.e., groups that include only fellow partisans) engage in more partisan-motivated reasoning and prefer policy solutions that more closely represent their own party's policy, as compared with those in nonsocial settings.

H2b: Respondents in homogeneous groups (i.e., groups that include only fellow partisans) perceive their own party's policy to be more effective, and the opposing party's policy to be less effective, as compared with those in nonsocial settings.

In sum, I expect that homogeneous settings will polarize opinion, regardless of partisan ambivalence.

The Effect of Heterogeneous Groups on Motivated Reasoning

In diverse social settings, on the other hand, individuals respond quite differently. Observational data suggest that diverse discussion networks provoke more even-handed and considered electoral choices (Nir 2005). Cross-pressures from within one's network cause attitudes to become more ambivalent (Mutz 2002), which in turn weakens the group cues that guide decision making (Druckman and Nir 2008). Druckman (2004) finds that heterogeneous groups effectively introduce new perspectives and, with Druckman and Nelson 2003, finds that these groups minimize the influence of preexisting issue frames over respondents' evaluations of issues. I thus expect that heterogeneous discussion groups have a powerful influence over prior beliefs. Respondents who discuss political issues in heterogeneous settings engage in *less* partisan-motivated reasoning than do those in nonsocial settings. As a result, respondents in heterogeneous settings become less defensive of their own party's policy and less critical of the opponent.

H3a: Respondents in heterogeneous groups (i.e., groups that include opposition partisans) engage in less partisan-motivated reasoning and are more favorable toward the opposing party's policies, as compared with those in nonsocial settings.

H3b: Respondents in heterogeneous groups (i.e., groups that include opposition partisans) perceive their own party's policy to be less effective and the opposing party's to be more effective, as compared with those in nonsocial settings.

In sum, I expect that heterogeneous settings will lead to more bipartisan evaluations and preferences, regardless of partisan ambivalence.

The Influence of Social Settings on Ambivalent and Univalent Partisans

Hypothesis 1 states that univalent partisans engage in more partisan-motivated reasoning, but it does not take social setting into account (as is common in existing work). Hypotheses 2 and 3 introduce the element of social setting to the study of motivated reasoning, but they do so without distinguishing between univalent and ambivalent partisans. It is therefore worth pursuing one final

test: whether the effects of social setting are evident even when accounting for partisan ambivalence.

With an observational data set, Sinclair (2012) controls for factors that influence an individual's choice of social network and, in so doing, demonstrates that the network itself has a powerful influence on the individual's vote choice. Sinclair makes the case that political preferences among individuals in a common social setting become more compatible as a result of social interactions, and—importantly—that common preferences do not form the basis of the network a priori. Sinclair cannot, however, determine whether it remains influential even for univalent partisans. Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague (2004) hint that it may be so, arguing that even “strong partisans are not immune to the political messages that are filtered through networks of political communication” (63). An advantage of my experimental design is that I manipulate both social setting *and* partisan ambivalence. I am able to examine whether the polarizing effects of homogeneous social settings are evident even among ambivalent partisans, and whether the tempering effects of diverse groups are evident even among univalent partisans. Given observational findings in previous work, I expect that social settings will influence political preferences for both univalent and ambivalent partisans. That is, even ambivalent partisans should be susceptible to the polarizing influence of homogeneous social settings, and even univalent partisans should be susceptible to the opposite influence of heterogeneous networks.

Downstream Effects

Downstream effects are residual effects of experimental treatments that may influence respondents' subsequent behaviors or attitudes (Green and Gerber 2002). A known consequence of univalent partisanship is an avoidance of opposing information (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). Partisans prefer to acquire information about candidates they already support (Redlawsk 2002), whereas partisan ambivalence leads to more open-minded evaluation of ideologically incongruent information (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). I experimentally manipulate partisan ambivalence and expect those treated with partisan univalence to subsequently avoid incongruent information sources, as opposed to those treated with ambivalence (Hypothesis 1). Partisans in like-minded social settings express a greater preference for ideologically congruent sources, as compared to those in nonsocial settings (Hypothesis 2), and those in heterogeneous settings prefer more diverse information sources (Hypothesis 3). I expect to find this influence of social setting for both univalent and ambivalent partisans.

Experimental Design

Sample

To test these hypotheses, I required (a) a sample population of partisans and (b) policy issues for the partisans to discuss in social settings. For participants, I turned to the undergraduate population at a large midwestern university during October 2011 and February 2012.³ Three hundred seventy-nine students participated in the study in return for academic credit. In line with previous experimental work on partisan behavior (e.g., Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Levendusky 2010), I excluded the 35 respondents who identified as pure Independents (also see Bullock 2011), and I grouped leaning Independents with their preferred party. Leaners behave like partisans when it comes to opinions and vote choice (Lascher and Korey 2011; Magleby, Nelson, and Westlye 2011), justifying this typical approach (which is the norm in studies of partisan elite influence). This left 344 research subjects who identified as a Democrat, as a Republican, or as a leaning Independent. Among them, an overwhelming proportion identified as Democrats (79%) as opposed to Republicans (21%). Homogeneous and nonsocial settings were thus composed of all Democrats, whereas heterogeneous groups were composed of both Democrats and Republicans. The analyses of all groups in this study therefore focus exclusively on responses among Democratic respondents. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other partisan groups, and I discuss the implications of this limitation in this article. The student population has variance on the characteristics of study and thus provides a suitable sample for this study (see Druckman and Kam 2011). Students' partisan attachments are, however, not as crystallized as an adult population, and we may therefore see more movement among their preferences than we would among an adult sample. Given this possibility, these results may indicate an upper bound of the effects one would find in a nonstudent sample.

I now turn to a detailed description of the study, which involves two policy issues that respondents were asked to evaluate. I begin by describing these issues, followed by my experimental manipulations. I then outline the experimental conditions and, finally, the dependent variables that were used to operationalize the results of this study.

³This experiment was administered twice: once during October 2011 and then once again during February 2012. The two studies used separate samples and produced identical results. I thus combine them in the presentation of these data.

Policy Issues

Participants evaluated two prominent public policies: energy policy and health care policy. By using two issues, I was able to test my hypotheses across two different subject matters, increasing robustness. I intentionally selected high-profile issues with which most Americans are familiar, including undergraduate political science students. A content analysis of the top five newspaper publications in the United States during the year leading up to this experiment revealed 1,707 articles that include both the terms “energy policy” and “gas prices,” and over 3,000 articles that include both the terms “health care policy” and “health insurance.” This is significantly more coverage than for other issues; articles mentioning “immigration policy” numbered only 401, and articles mentioning “education policy” numbered only 298. Using highly salient issues tempers sample bias based on the all-student population, since attitudes about salient issues are more difficult to manipulate.

Both issues also provide conservative tests of my hypotheses due to the fact that they are highly polarizing. Whereas less heated debates (e.g., regarding obscure local issues or fictitious issues generated for the experiment) might allow for more malleable shifts in opinion, these are issues about which partisans often have strong opinions. The Pew Research Center (2011) found that 83% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning Independents supported alternative fuels as an energy policy solution. Conversely, favorability among Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents was only 53% during the same period.⁴

Experimental Manipulations

This study incorporates two unique experimental treatments. First, I employ actual social interaction in the experimental design. Whereas scholars often rely on self-reports of social network composition (e.g., Huckfeldt et al. 2004; Mutz 2002) or manipulate the degree to which respondents *anticipate* interaction but never actually engage in it (Groenendyk 2012; Tetlock and Kim 1987; Tetlock 1983), this design involves interaction in randomly assigned groups. Second, I experimentally manipulate

partisan ambivalence by inducing either ambivalent or univalent evaluations of the respondent’s preferred party. I am thus able to identify a causal relationship between social setting and partisan-motivated reasoning. I now turn to each experimental treatment.

Social Setting Treatment. One month before attending the study, respondents first completed a brief anonymous survey in which they provided their demographic traits, including their partisanship. Based on this self-report, I randomly assigned respondents to one of three social setting conditions—a homogeneous group of eight Democrats, a heterogeneous group of four Democrats and four Republicans—or a nonsocial setting in which group members do not interact with one another. The respondents were called to the study center four weeks later. They arrived one group at a time, without knowing the ideological composition of their group or even knowing that they would interact with the group at all. No cues regarding the group composition of the groups were provided. Group members were also almost entirely unfamiliar with one another, as measured with a survey question posed at the end of the study. Fifty-four percent of respondents reported that they did not know any members of their group; 33% had “seen some group members before but did not know them personally”; and the remainder (13%) reported to know just one of the seven other members in their group.

Partisan Ambivalence Treatment. Upon arriving in the survey center, group members each chose an individual computer terminal where they privately completed an anonymous survey. The first question of the survey primed either univalent partisan affect (for those assigned to a univalent partisan condition) or ambivalent partisan affect (for those assigned to an ambivalent partisan condition). Modeled on the priming technique used by Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012), the univalent prime asks respondents to write why they prefer their own political party and why they dislike the opposing party. The ambivalent prime asks respondents to write only why they are dissatisfied with their own party (see Section 1 of the supporting information for full text). Immediately after the prime, the survey asked respondents to rank the importance of their party identification on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 (from *extremely unimportant* to *extremely important*). Indeed, those assigned to the univalent party prime ranked their party identification as significantly more important (4.84) than did those assigned to the ambivalent party prime (4.52; statistically different at $p = .06$). Just as Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012) find, this movement of approximately 5% along the

⁴Pew data: <http://www.people-press.org/2011/11/10/partisan-divide-over-alternative-energy-widens/?src=prc-headline>. Polls demonstrate similar partisan differences regarding health care. Between October of 2011 and February of 2012 (when this study took place), favorability for President Obama’s Healthcare Affordability Act ranged from 62% to 66%. Among Republicans, during this same period, favorability of the Act ranged from 11% to 16%. Data: www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/health-tracking-poll-interactive.cfm.

7-point scale demonstrates that the priming technique has a statistically significant directional influence on party attachment.⁵

Study Procedure

After completing the ambivalence prime, respondents—still at individual computer terminals—read about energy policy (specifically, how to decrease the price of gas and become more energy independent). Information regarding both the Democrats' and Republicans' policies on these issues was provided to all respondents, and the information was identical across all conditions (see Section 2 of the supporting information for full text.) After individually reading about the issue, respondents in homogeneous or heterogeneous groups gathered with their fellow group members. The group was told that the study administrator was seeking feedback on the language used in the survey and wanted to know if both policies were explained persuasively. Each group member then had the opportunity to state which party's policy sounded more persuasive (participants were allowed to refrain from commenting if they so desired). The group was then given approximately five minutes to discuss the issue together. Group members were not explicitly told of each other's partisan identities, but were only given as much information about the other members' political perspectives as they chose to reveal.

After the discussion, members returned to the computers, which were visually shielded from one another with opaque glass barricades for privacy. At the computers, each group member completed the duration of the survey, which asked for his or her preferred policy and the effectiveness of each party's policy. Group members were then asked for the level of ideological diversity they would prefer in a group were they to discuss this issue again.

Respondents assigned to nonsocial conditions endured the same procedure with one important exception—they did not engage in any social interaction. As in previous work (e.g., Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012; Lodge and Taber 2000; Taber and Lodge 2006), respondents read about the issues alone and then completed the survey in isolation.

After completing the energy policy survey, respondents then read about one more issue: health care (specifically, how to lower costs and widen coverage; see Section 2 of the supporting information for full text). Once again, homogeneous and heterogeneous groups

gathered to discuss this issue (nonsocial group conditions did not).⁶ Following the discussion, respondents completed the duration of the survey privately, which included questions about health policy preference and the perceived effectiveness of each policy, as well as the respondent's preferred discussion group composition for the future.

Conditions

Respondents were thus treated to either a univalent or an ambivalent partisanship prime, and to one of three group conditions: homogeneous, heterogeneous, or no group. This provides a six-condition experimental design that allows me to distinguish the influence of the two social settings across both ambivalent and univalent partisans.

Table 1 displays the experimental grid and highlights the comparison groups for Hypothesis 1 (univalent partisans versus ambivalent partisans). Participants in Conditions 1, 2, and 3 received the univalent partisanship prime. Participants in Conditions 4, 5, and 6 received an ambivalent partisanship prime. Hypothesis 1 expects that respondents across univalent partisanship conditions express more partisan-motivated reasoning than those in ambivalent partisanship conditions. The outcome is operationalized by measuring (a) policy preference and (b) perceived effectiveness of each party's policy.

Table 2 illustrates this same experimental design, but it highlights the groups I compare to test Hypotheses 2 and 3: respondents in nonsocial, homogeneous, and heterogeneous groups. Participants in Conditions 1 and 4 read about policy issues in isolation and then reported their preferences in an anonymous survey. Participants in Conditions 2 and 5 read about policy issues in isolation and then discussed the issues in an ideologically homogeneous group before reporting their preferences in an anonymous survey. Participants in Conditions 3 and 6 read about policy issues in isolation and then discussed the issues in an ideologically heterogeneous group before reporting their preferences in an anonymous survey. Hypotheses 2a and 2b expect that respondents in homogeneous groups (Conditions 2 and 5) engage in more partisan-motivated reasoning, as compared to respondents in nonsocial settings (Conditions 1 and 4). Hypotheses 3a and 3b expect that respondents in heterogeneous groups (Conditions 3 and 6) engage in less partisan-motivated reasoning, as opposed to those in nonsocial settings.

⁵Due to the directional predictions of the hypotheses, all significance tests are one-tailed (Blalock 1979, 163). This is consistent with previous work on directional shifts in preference formation (for e.g. Druckman and Nelson 2003, footnote 16).

⁶The order of the issues – energy policy and then health care – remained consistent for all treatment groups. If distinct orders affect opinions differently, the result would not be comparable within conditions (e.g. Levendusky 2010; Druckman et al. 2013; Klar Forthcoming).

TABLE 1 Conditions and Expectations, Hypothesis 1

	No Group	Homogeneous Group	Heterogeneous Group
Univalent Partisan	Condition 1 (N=43)	Condition 2 (N=63)	Condition 3 (N=31)
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> H1: Univalent partisans (regardless of social setting) engage in more partisan motivated reasoning than do ambivalent partisans. </div>		
Ambivalent Partisan	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> H2: Ambivalent partisans (regardless of social setting) engage in less partisan-motivated reasoning than do univalent partisans. </div>		
	Condition 4 (N=48)	Condition 5 (N=62)	Condition 6 (N=30)

TABLE 2 Conditions and Expectations, Hypotheses 2 and 3

	No Group	Homogeneous Group	Heterogeneous Group
Univalent Partisan	Condition 1 (N=43)	Condition 2 (N=63)	Condition 3 (N=31)
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Partisans without groups engage in: H2: Less PMR than those in homogeneous groups. H3: More PMR than those in heterogeneous groups. </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Partisans in homogeneous groups engage in: H2: More PMR than those without groups. </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Partisans in heterogeneous groups engage in: H3: Less PMR than those without groups. </div>
Ambivalent Partisan	Condition 4 (N=48)	Condition 5 (N=62)	Condition 6 (N=30)

Note: PMR represents partisan-motivated reasoning.

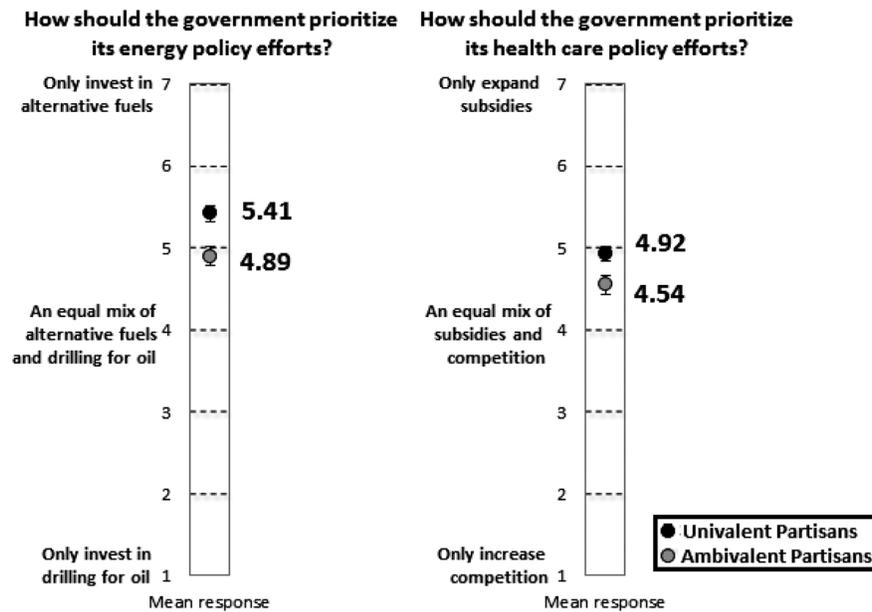
I am furthermore able to test whether this effect of social setting is evident among both ambivalent and univalent partisans. If homogeneous social settings increase motivated reasoning even among ambivalent partisans, we should find this outcome by examining Conditions 5 and 6. Similarly, comparing Conditions 2 and 3 will reveal whether heterogeneous social settings induce more accuracy-driven reasoning even among univalent partisans.⁷

⁷I do not examine whether there is an interaction between social setting and partisan ambivalence; that is, whether the influence of social setting depends on level of partisan ambivalence.

Measurement of Effects

For both issues, I used three dependent variables to measure partisan-motivated reasoning. First, respondents selected their preferred policy choice on a 7-point scale, where each side of the scale represents a strong preference for one party's policy and the midpoint represents an equal preference for both. Second, respondents rated the effectiveness of each party's policy on a 7-point scale ranging from *extremely ineffective* to *extremely effective*. Third, respondents selected their ideal discussion group according to ideological composition on a 7-point scale ranging from *completely diverse* to *completely homogeneous*.

FIGURE 1 Policy Support: Univalent and Ambivalent Partisans



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

All dependent variables are listed in Section 3 of the supporting information.

Analyses and Results

Respondents first read about, discussed, and responded to questions regarding energy policy and then repeated this procedure for health care policy. Given the nearly identical results across both issues, I present results for both issues together. I begin with policy preferences and perceived policy effectiveness, and then turn to downstream effects.

Hypothesis 1: Univalent versus Ambivalent Partisans

Hypothesis 1 states that, regardless of social settings, we should see greater partisan-motivated reasoning among univalent partisans. Recall that all of the respondents I analyze identify with the Democratic Party, and thus, in every case, the Republican Party is the opponent. I first expect that univalent partisans express a stronger preference for attitudinally congruent information (i.e., Democratic Party policy).

Figure 1 displays univalent and ambivalent partisans' preferences for energy policy on the left side and their preferences for health care policy on the right side. The black dot indicates univalent partisans' preferences, and

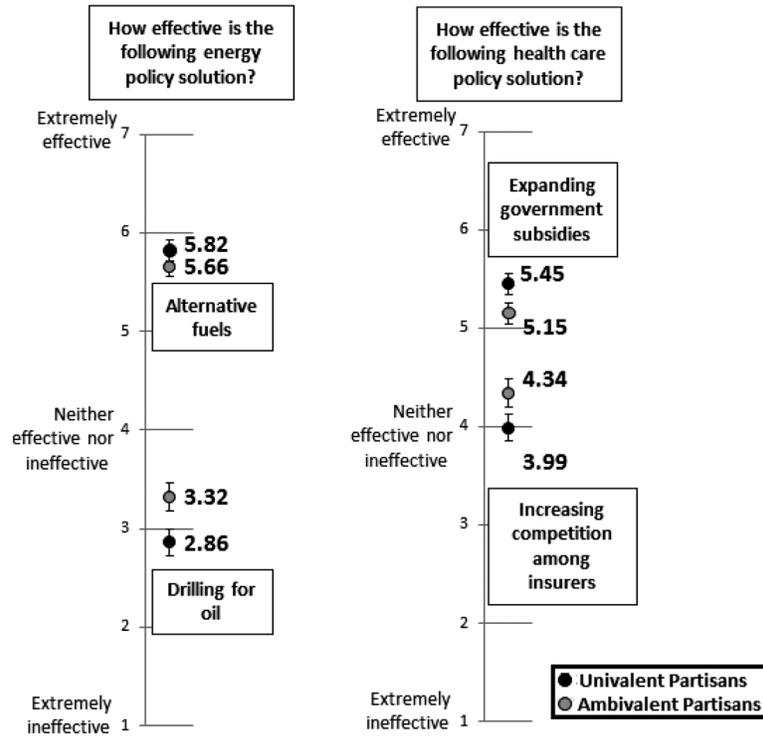
the gray dot indicates ambivalent partisans' preferences. Surrounding each dot are two vertical lines indicating the 95% confidence interval. Along the y-axis, the response scale ranges from the Republican policy at the lowest point (*Only invest in drilling for oil* as the energy policy solution and *Only increase competition* for health care) and the Democratic policy at the highest point (*Only invest in alternative fuels* and *Only expand subsidies*). The midpoint on the scale represents equally prioritizing both parties' policies.

On the left side of Figure 1, univalent partisans are significantly ($p < .01$) more favorable toward investing in alternative fuels (5.41) as opposed to drilling for oil, as compared to ambivalent partisans (4.89). On the right side, we see that univalent partisans report a 4.92 on the 7-point scale, which is a significantly ($p < .01$) greater preference for their own party's policy than ambivalent partisans (4.54).

Hypothesis 1 expects that univalent partisans perceive the Democratic Party's policy to be more effective, and the Republican Party's policy to be less effective, than ambivalent partisans.

On the left side of Figure 2, we see how univalent and ambivalent partisans rate the effectiveness of each party's policies regarding energy. Univalent partisans rate alternative fuels as more effective (5.82) than do ambivalent partisans (5.66). This difference is directionally in line with Hypothesis 1, although it does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($p = .17$).

FIGURE 2 Perceived Policy Effectiveness: Univalent and Ambivalent Partisans



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

This may be due to the widespread popularity of this particular policy among both univalent and ambivalent partisans. When it comes to drilling for oil, univalent partisans rate this Republican policy at a low 2.86, which is significantly ($p < .01$) less effective than the perceived effectiveness of this Republican policy among ambivalent partisans, who rate it at 3.32.

On the right side of Figure 2, we see this same pattern when it comes to health care. Univalent partisans rate the Democratic policy of expanding government subsidies at 5.45, which is significantly ($p < .05$) more effective than the ambivalent partisans' rating of 5.15. Univalent partisans perceive the Republicans' policy as significantly ($p < .05$) less effective (3.99) as compared to ambivalent partisans (4.34). I thus find support for Hypothesis 1: partisan univalence increases partisan-motivated reasoning.

Hypotheses 2 and 3: Homogeneous, Nonsocial, and Heterogeneous Settings

I now turn to Hypotheses 2 and 3, which focus on the influence of social setting in determining partisan-motivated reasoning. Hypothesis 2 predicts that respon-

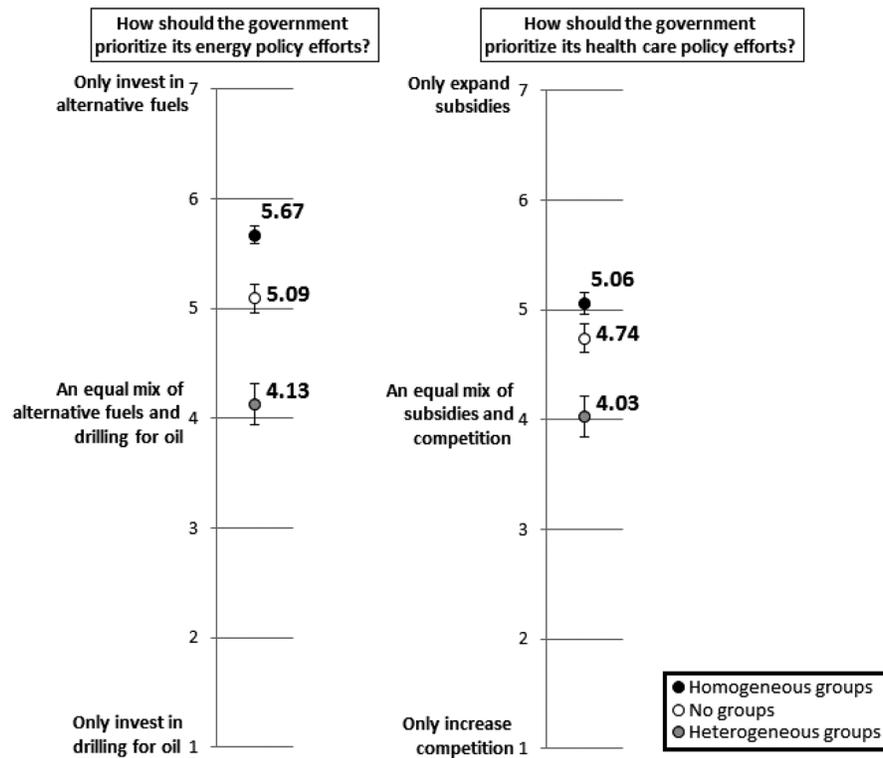
dents in homogeneous groups engage in more partisan-motivated reasoning than do those in nonsocial settings. This results in more extreme preferences for Democratic policies (Hypothesis 2a) and a perception that Democratic policies are more effective and Republican policies are less effective (Hypothesis 2b).

Hypothesis 3 expects respondents in heterogeneous groups to engage in less partisan-motivated reasoning than do those in nonsocial settings, leading to weaker preferences for Democratic policies (Hypothesis 3a), an increase in the perceived effectiveness of Republican policies, and a decrease in the perceived effectiveness of Democratic policies (Hypothesis 3b).

Figure 3 displays responses for the energy policy options on the left side and the health care policy options on the right side. The black dot indicates respondents in homogeneous (all-Democrat) groups. The white dot indicates respondents without groups (nonsocial settings). The gray dot indicates respondents in heterogeneous groups (i.e., four Democrats and four Republicans). Vertical bars around the dots indicate the 95% confidence interval.

On the left side of the figure, homogeneous groups are most biased in favor of the Democratic policy

FIGURE 3 Policy Support: Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Social Settings



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

(5.67). Those in nonsocial settings are significantly ($p < .01$) lower on the 7-point scale (5.09). Respondents in heterogeneous groups are even closer to the midpoint of the scale. Compared to those in nonsocial settings, respondents in heterogeneous groups are significantly ($p < .01$) lower on the scale (4.13).

Regarding health care, we see this same strong pattern. Those in homogeneous groups are closest to the Democratic policy (5.06)—significantly ($p < .01$) more than those without groups (4.74). A significant ($p < .01$) difference exists between those without groups and those in heterogeneous groups; the latter rate their preferred policy at 4.03. Across both issues, Hypotheses 2a and 3a are strongly supported. Partisan-motivated reasoning is contingent upon social setting. In the company of heterogeneous others, motivated reasoning is drastically tempered, and when respondents are among like-minded copartisans, partisan-motivated reasoning is considerably enhanced.

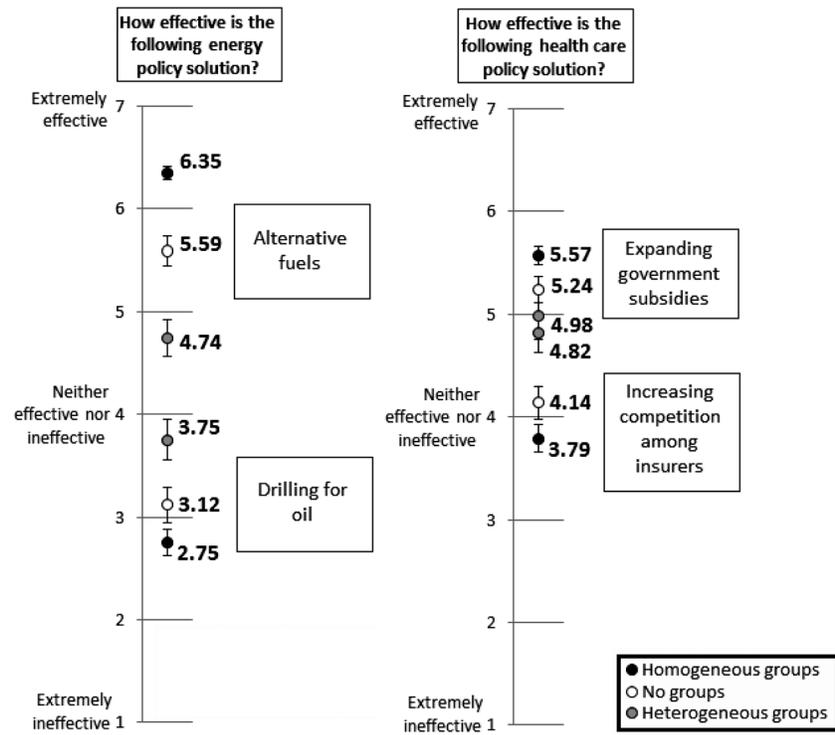
Turning to Hypotheses 2b and 3b, Figure 4 displays perceived effectiveness of the Democratic policy and the Republican policy among those in homogeneous groups (the black dot), nonsocial groups (the white dot), and heterogeneous groups (the gray dot). On the left, we see

the perceived effectiveness of the Democratic solution to energy policy (alternative fuels) at the top and the Republican solution to energy policy (drilling for oil) at the bottom. Respondents in homogeneous groups perceive alternative fuels to be significantly ($p < .01$) more effective (6.35) than do those in nonsocial groups (5.59). They perceive drilling for oil to be significantly ($p < .05$) less effective (2.75) than do those in nonsocial groups (3.12). Hypothesis 2b is thus supported.

Hypothesis 3b expects that respondents in heterogeneous groups will engage in less partisan-motivated reasoning and therefore perceive their own party's policy to be less effective and the opponent's to be more effective, as opposed to those in nonsocial settings. With respect to energy policy, the left side of Figure 4 displays that this is indeed the case. Respondents in heterogeneous groups rate alternative fuels to be significantly ($p < .01$) less effective (4.74) than do those in nonsocial settings, and they rate drilling for oil to be significantly ($p < .01$) more effective (3.75).

Hypotheses 2b and 3b are also strongly supported when it comes to health care policy. On the right side of Figure 4, we see that respondents in homogeneous groups rate the Democratic policy to be significantly ($p < .01$)

FIGURE 4 Perceived Policy Effectiveness: Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Social Settings



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

more effective (5.57) than do those in nonsocial groups (5.24). Respondents in heterogeneous groups rate the Democratic policy to be significantly ($p < .05$) less effective (4.82) than do those in nonsocial settings. Regarding the Republican policy of competition, respondents in homogeneous groups perceive it as significantly ($p < .10$) less effective (3.79) than do those in nonsocial settings (4.14), and those in heterogeneous settings rate it as significantly ($p < .01$) more effective (4.98).

The Influence of Social Settings on Both Ambivalent and Univalent Partisans

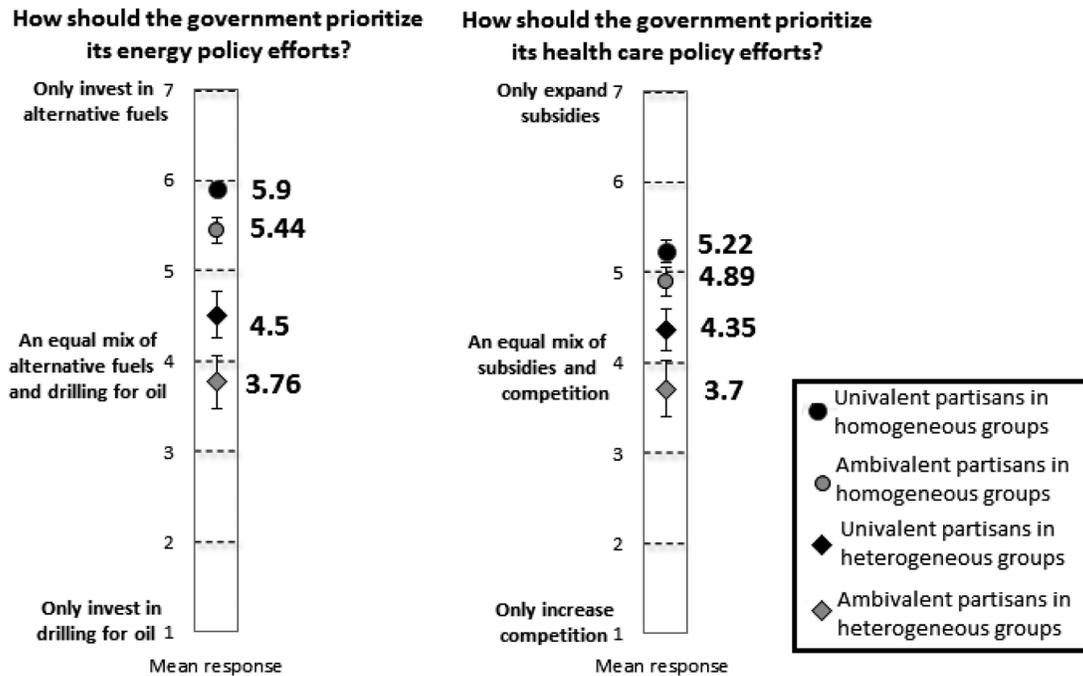
While social settings appear to exert a powerful influence over partisan-motivated reasoning, I take one additional step to examine whether these differences hold for both univalent and ambivalent partisans. I expect that homogeneous settings polarize opinion among ambivalent partisans (who would otherwise engage in more accuracy-driven evaluations), and that heterogeneous settings minimize partisan-motivated reasoning even among univalent partisans (who would otherwise polarize toward partisan extremes).

In Figure 5, energy policy preferences are on the left side and univalent partisans are depicted in black. The black dot represents univalent partisans in homogeneous settings (5.9), and the black diamond represents univalent partisans in heterogeneous settings (4.5). Note that, even among univalent partisans, there is a significant ($p < .01$) decline in partisan-motivated reasoning in diverse as opposed to homogeneous settings.

Also on the left side of Figure 5, ambivalent partisans are depicted in gray: the gray dot represents ambivalent partisans in homogeneous groups (5.44), whereas the gray diamond represents partisans in heterogeneous groups (3.76). Again, note that, among ambivalent partisans, social settings play a significant ($p < .01$) role in determining preference formation: homogeneous groups encourage partisan-driven reasoning, whereas heterogeneous groups have the opposite effect.

On the right side of Figure 5, we see similar results for health care policy. Among univalent partisans (in black), homogeneous groups lead to a strong preference for one's own party (5.22), whereas heterogeneous groups lead to more bipartisan preferences (4.35). The same finding holds for ambivalent partisans (in gray): those in homogeneous groups report a stronger finding in favor of the

FIGURE 5 Policy Support: Univalent and Ambivalent Partisans in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Social Settings



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

Democratic policy (4.89) than do those in heterogeneous groups (3.70).

Finally, perceived effectiveness is also strongly influenced by social setting—even when looking within univalent partisans or within ambivalent partisans. Figure 6 depicts the perceived effectiveness of the Republican policy solutions to energy policy (on the right) and health care policy (on the left). Responses for univalent partisans in homogeneous groups (black dot) and heterogeneous groups (black diamond), as well as for ambivalent partisans in homogeneous groups (gray dot) and heterogeneous groups (gray diamond), are shown.

Starting on the left, homogeneous groups lead to perception of extreme ineffectiveness for the Republican energy solution among both univalent (2.56) and ambivalent (2.95) partisans. Heterogeneous groups in both cases lead to more positive assessments of the Republican policy, both for univalent (3.42) and ambivalent (4.1) partisans. On the right side, we see the same pattern: homogeneous social settings lead to more negative evaluations among univalent (3.63) and ambivalent (3.95) partisans, whereas heterogeneous settings improve these evaluations for both groups (4.84 among univalent partisans, 5.13 among ambivalent partisans). I similarly examined the effect of social setting on the perceived effectiveness of the Democratic policy, and, again, I find that

social setting has a powerful effect within both groups.⁸ This suggests that the importance of social setting is often underestimated—and, in fact, appears to be greater than the effect of partisan univalence/ambivalence.

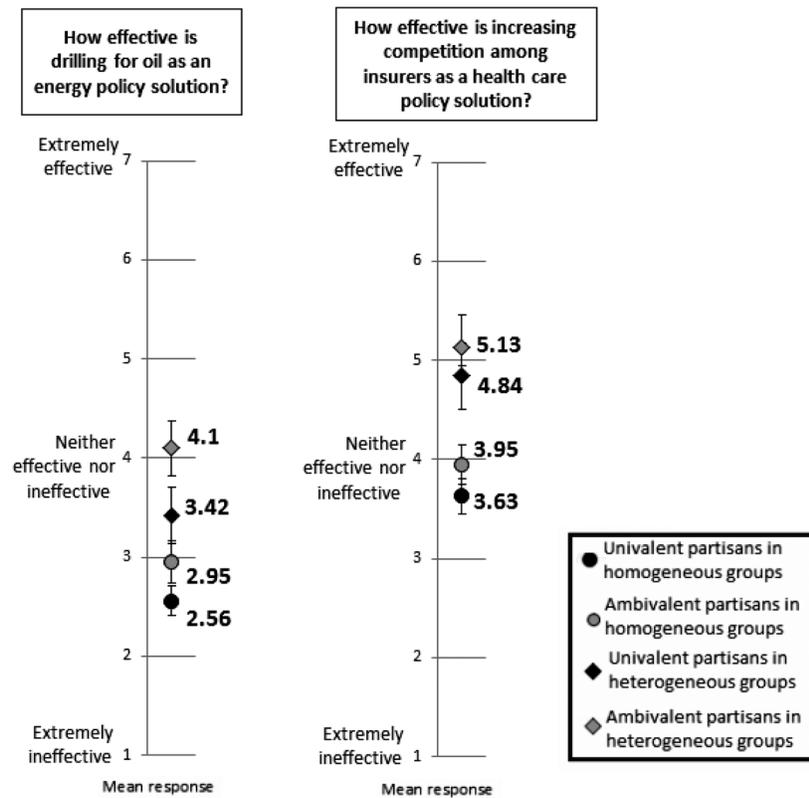
Downstream Effects

My final dependent variable measures the potential downstream effects of the treatments. Hypothesis 1 expects that univalent partisans are more likely to prefer a group with like-minded respondents (Democrats). Figure 7 displays the results, which indicate that, indeed, univalent partisans prefer a group with significantly ($p < .01$) more like-minded respondents (i.e., fellow Democrats) to discuss energy policy (left side of figure) and that univalent partisans also prefer a group with significantly ($p < .01$) more like-minded respondents to discuss health care policy (right side of figure).

Hypothesis 2 expects that those in homogeneous groups prefer a more like-minded discussion group in the future, as compared to those in nonsocial settings. Hypothesis 3 states that respondents in heterogeneous groups prefer a more diverse discussion group. The left

⁸These results are available in Section 4 of the Supporting Information.

FIGURE 6 Perceived Policy Effectiveness: Univalent and Ambivalent Partisans in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Social Settings



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

side of Figure 8 illustrates that, regarding energy policy discussions, respondents in homogeneous groups prefer a significantly ($p < .01$) more like-minded group (4.57) than do those in nonsocial settings (4.23). Respondents in heterogeneous groups prefer a significantly ($p < .01$) more diverse group (3.63).

These findings hold when it comes to health care (right side of Figure 8). Again, those in homogeneous groups prefer the most Democratic group in the future (4.34; $p < .01$) and those in heterogeneous groups prefer a more diverse discussion group (3.72; $p < .01$).

Finally, I can check whether these results hold when we look within ambivalent and univalent partisan groups. On the left side of Figure 9, univalent partisans in heterogeneous groups (black diamond: 3.74) prefer a significantly ($p < .01$) more diverse group to discuss energy policy than do univalent partisans in homogeneous groups (black dot: 4.79). Ambivalent partisans in homogeneous groups (gray dot: 4.34) prefer a significantly ($p < .01$) less diverse group than do ambivalent partisans in heterogeneous groups (gray diamond: 3.52). This is also true

when it comes to health care discussion groups (shown on the right side of Figure 9).

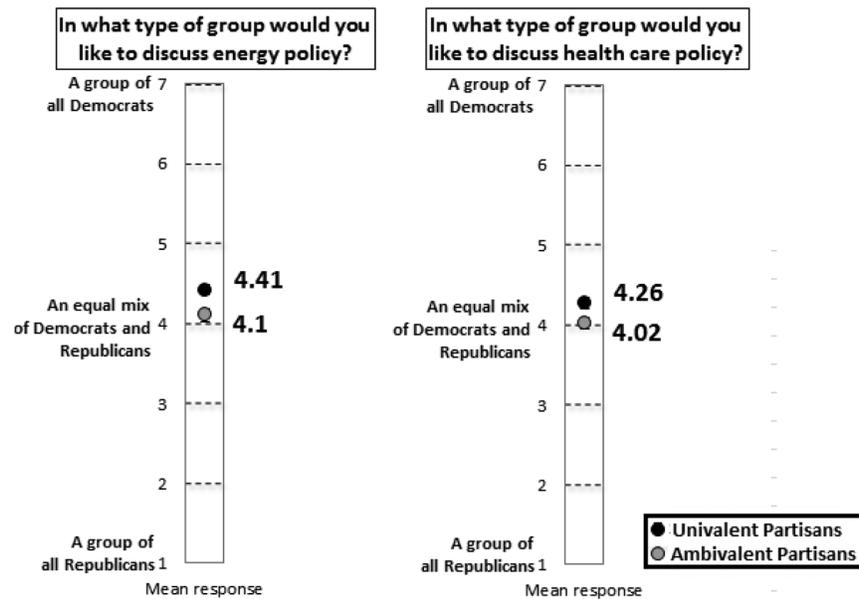
Summary of Results

To be sure, partisan ambivalence exerts an important influence on the degree to which individuals engage in partisan-motivated reasoning (Hypothesis 1). The composition of a social setting, however, plays a distinct and important role in this same process (Hypotheses 2 and 3). I furthermore examine the role of social setting among ambivalent and univalent partisans separately, and I find that social setting plays a powerful role in both cases.⁹

The three hypotheses were subject to three distinct tests: (a) preferences regarding energy policy, (b) preferences regarding health care policy, and (3) preferences for

⁹As a further test of robustness, I performed all tests on participants for whom the partisan ambivalence treatment was most effective, as measured by their partisan identity importance rating. The results, which strongly parallel those presented in this paper, are available in Section 5 of the Supporting Information.

FIGURE 7 Downstream Effects: Univalent and Ambivalent Partisans



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

the ideological composition of discussion groups. These were measured with eight separate dependent variables (listed in Section 6 of the supporting information). Hypothesis 1 was supported in all eight cases except one, where it was nearly significant. Hypotheses 2 and 3 were strongly supported by all eight dependent variables. In addition, an examination of whether these effects are evident among both univalent and ambivalent partisans succeeded for all eight dependent variables.

Conclusion and Discussion

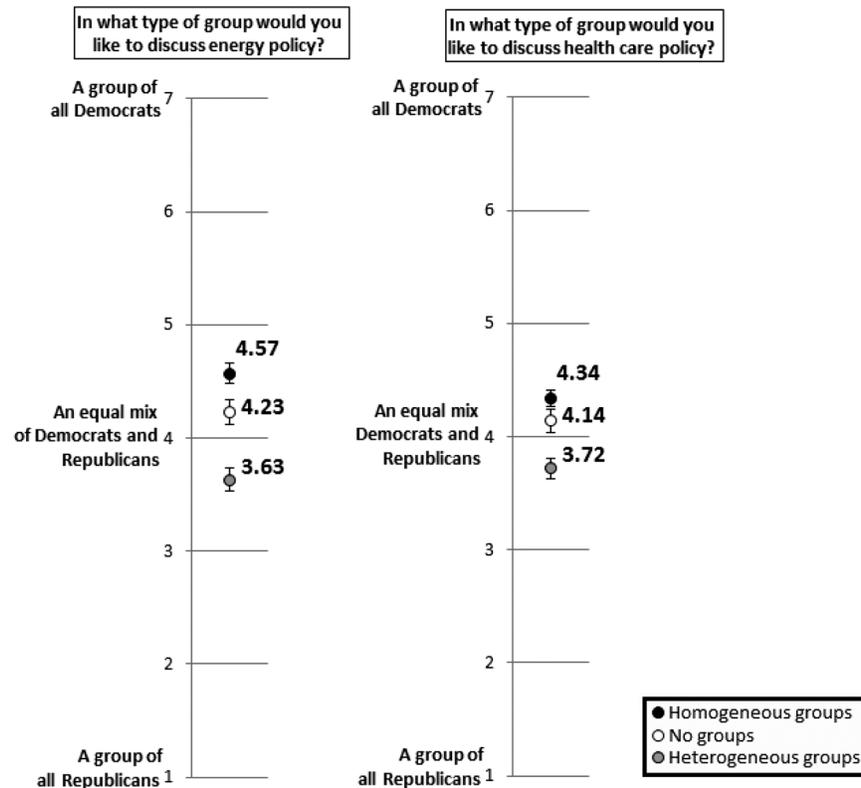
Partisanship—arguably the most consequential determinant of our political preference and behavior—is frequently studied in both observational and experimental settings as though it operates distinctly from the social environment within which an individual finds himself or herself. In reality, many of our social settings form for nonpolitical reasons (Sinclair 2012) and lead to political discussion nonetheless (Walsh 2004). I demonstrate that these social settings play an important role in the formation of political preferences. While ambivalent or univalent partisanship is, on its own, a reliable predictor of partisan-motivated reasoning, all partisans engage in more partisan-motivated reasoning when their social settings are ideologically homogeneous, and they pursue more accuracy-based evaluations when these settings are

diverse. Motivated reasoning is therefore dependent on at least one additional factor that scholars have acknowledged in theory but neglected in practice for over half a century.

Generalizing to Other Settings

As with experimental work of this nature, there are limitations. The results of this study speak specifically to political behavior among college Democrats. If college-aged individuals are particularly open to social influence, then these findings may represent an upper bound. Replication with different samples will expose the degree to which this applies in different cases. In addition, we cannot draw direct conclusions regarding the behavior of other partisan groups (i.e., Republicans), and this is an important area for researchers to pursue in future research. There exist no studies that experimentally demonstrate differences between Republican and Democratic responses to social settings, but some work hints at possible variations. Partisan cues may not have equal influence for members of different parties (e.g., Bullock 2011; in a non-American context, see Slothuus and de Vreese 2010). Tetlock et al. (2007) argue that individuals who identify as conservatives hold harsher and less nuanced judgments than do liberals, and Shook and Fazio (2009) and Jost (2006) find conservatives to be less open to exploring new ideas. These studies do not incorporate social interaction to test their

FIGURE 8 Downstream Effects: Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Social Settings



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

hypotheses, and thus any differences in Republicans' reactions to social interaction would require experimental designs similar to what I present in this article.

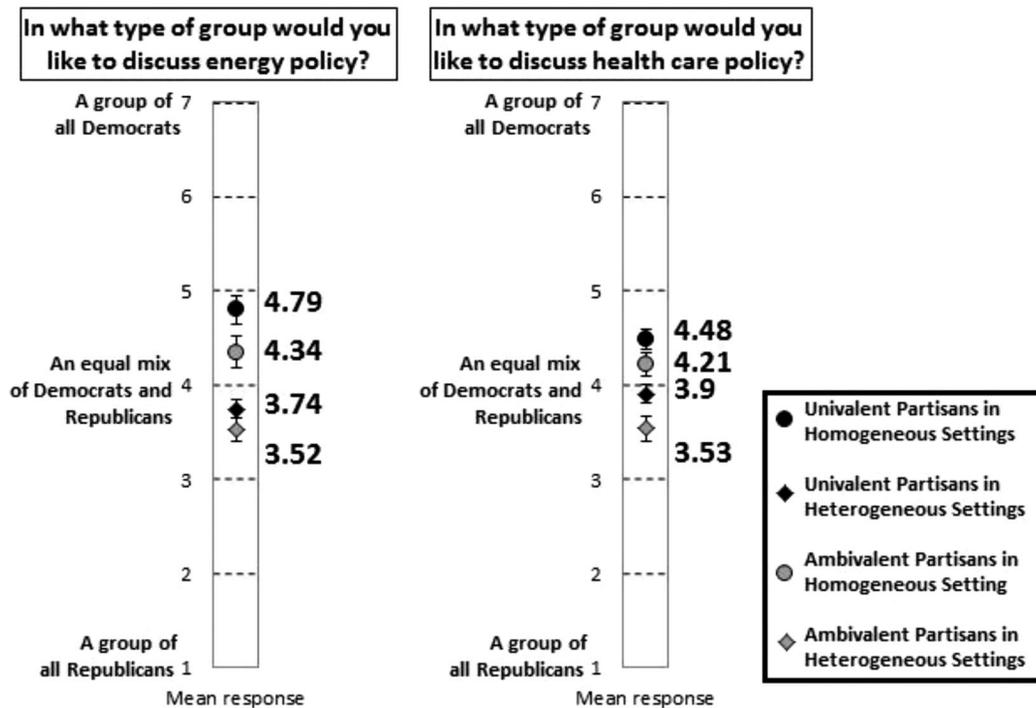
In measuring participants' preferences for future discussion groups, I attempt to provide some evidence that heterogeneous social settings are not as unharmonious as previously thought (Mutz 2002), and, in fact, partisans who engage in diverse discussions may seek them again in the future. However, a limitation lies in the possibility that participants succumb to demand effects, overstating their satisfaction with the controlled setting to which they were assigned. The relationship among group participants should also be considered in future work. In this setting, group members were strangers who nearly all reported that they had never met before—but they were also members of the same university community. If participants anticipated future interactions with one another, there may have been an additional motivation to approach interactions with openness. The settings we encounter in “real life” vary in the degree to which this is the case, and scholars will be well served to study how these factors interact with social setting to influence motivated reasoning.

Additional Considerations

Although responses were collected in isolation and with an assurance of anonymity, it is indeed still possible that the mechanism at play involves social pressure, a force that has been shown, for example, to boost turnout among voters (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008). Another possibility is that social setting enhances partisan ambivalence or univalence by introducing new considerations. The precise mechanism at work is surely a question that deserves further scholarly attention. Finally, I manipulate partisan ambivalence so as to apply a controlled experimental approach to my research. Future research might attempt to uncover the extent to which social settings determine opinion among univalent and ambivalent partisans outside of an experimental setting.

As modern communication technologies and geographic mobility draws people into larger and increasingly diverse networks (González and Brown 2006), Americans are more likely to find themselves in diverse social and political groups. Indeed, more Americans than ever identify as multiracial, multiethnic (Pew Research Center 2008, 2010), and multilingual (U.S. Department of

FIGURE 9 Downstream Effects: Univalent and Ambivalent Partisans in Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Social Settings



Note: Brackets surrounding each dot indicate 95% confidence interval.

Education 2011). For these reasons, the study of preference formation is stifled as long as it is conducted in isolated settings. The experimental study I present in this article is a pioneering attempt to uncover the consequences of social settings—both homogeneous and heterogeneous in nature—on our political attitudes. These outcomes cannot be effectively understood so long as we only conduct our studies in contexts of isolation, for the political world takes place in the company of others.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Section 1: Text of Primes.

Section 2: Text of Policy Information.

Section 3: Question Wording.

Section 4: Additional Dependent Variables.

Section 5: Robustness Checks.

Section 6: Summary of Results Across Full Set of Dependent Variables.