

The Dynamics of Social Identity: Evidence from Deliberating Groups

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The last three decades have seen increased affective polarization in the American public, as social identification with a political party leads Americans to hate and fear members of the other party. Yet, over the same period, the public-deliberation movement reports remarkable success in bringing together politically diverse groups of people for substantively rich and mutually respectful discussions of political issues. I argue that deliberative minipublics succeed in an era of heightened partisanship because the deliberative process creates a new object for social identification, the deliberating group itself. Identification with the deliberating group reduces the salience of other social identities, especially partisan social identity, and encourages behaviors consistent with the new identity, such as listening respectfully and compromising. While the process of public deliberation is in many ways extraordinary, these results suggest that scholars should pay more attention to how the effect of social identities on politics is fluid and context dependent as well as how the content of these identities is constructed and reconstructed by political processes.

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A growing literature shows affective polarization has reached dangerous levels in the American public. Opposing partisans are disliked, discriminated against, and even viewed as dangerous (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012), Finkel et al. 2020. Political scientists have come to view this increased affective polarization through the lens of social identity theory (Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2018), the psychological theory that humans derive much of their self-concept, self-worth, and views of other members of society through identification with social groups (Hogg, Abrams, & Brewer, 2017; Tajfel, 1974). Yet, despite this new focus on social identity, political scientists have paid remarkably little attention to the way that social identities are constructed, instead focusing on long-standing social identities, often tied to ascriptive characteristics such as race or gender (Huddy, 2001). I suggest that this focus obscures how identity construction is a dynamic and on-going process, a process that can bring new identities to the fore and make even powerful and long-standing social identities fade into the background. Attention to the dynamic character of social identities' content and political effects would help us better understand the wave of partisan animosity that has engulfed liberal democracies and, perhaps, find ways to defuse this conflict.

I demonstrate these dynamics by exploring the role of social identity in a Citizens' Jury, one kind of deliberative minipublic advanced by the public-deliberation movement as a way to renew engagement with the political process (Crosby & Nethercut, 2005). The public-deliberation

movement presents a curious puzzle for social-identity explanations of affective polarization. Over the past 30 years, a variety of deliberative experiments have gathered diverse groups of lay citizens to talk about complicated public-policy issues (Gronlund, Bachtiger, & Setala, 2015). These “mini-publics” place considerable demands on deliberators: Participants are expected to spend hours or days learning about often obscure policy issues, discussing these with others who hold very different political views, and coming to agreement on a final decision or recommendation.¹ Surprisingly, in a period of accelerated affective polarization, these minipublics have been remarkably successful at encouraging sophisticated, respectful discussion among deliberators, producing recommendations that provide useful inputs into broader policy processes, and even being enjoyable for deliberators (Myers & Mendelberg, 2013).

This article suggests that deliberative minipublics succeed because they create a new social identification, with the deliberating group itself. As deliberators talk and work toward a common goal, they come to perceive the collection of deliberators as having “entitativity,” that is, as being a coherent social group (Lickel et al., 2000). This group is defined by a unique set of prototypical traits: listening respectfully, demonstrating open-mindedness, and compromising to accomplish the group’s task, all traits that are very different from those of a prototypical partisan. Deliberators come to self-categorize as members of this group and through the process of self-stereotyping to adopt these traits and perform these behaviors. Further, this new identification reduces the salience of other social identities, such as partisan identification, that might complicate deliberation. Thus, social identification can account for much of the ability of minipublics to facilitate conversation in a polarized public.

In this article, I describe these processes, drawing on nonparticipant observation and interviews with participants in three minipublics about climate-change adaptation. Climate change is a highly polarized issue in the United States, one where social identification plays a large role in structuring attitudes (Bolsen & Druckman, 2018; Kahan, 2012). As Kahan (2012) argues, opinions about climate change serve primarily “to signify the kind of person one is” (p. 255). Thus, climate change presents a hard case for this argument. Nevertheless, I show that participants in the minipublics came to identify with the deliberating group and that this identification helped overcome the barriers that partisan political identity might otherwise create.

These observations have important implications for how we think about the partisan divides that increasingly dominate US politics. The process described here shows that politically relevant social identities are not static things. First, even in environments where we would expect partisan identity to be highly salient, such as discussions of climate change, alternative identities can be created that reduce the importance of partisanship. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the political impact of a social identity depends on the content of that identity; for example, an identity that defines compromise as a positive behavior will have a very different political impact than an identity that defines compromise as a negative behavior. This content—the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes toward others that define what it means to be a member of the group—is itself constructed through a social process. Finally, viewing deliberative minipublics as a process of identity construction has important—and not uniformly positive—implications for how we view these institutions.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory holds that individuals naturally identify with groups (Tajfel, 1974) and that these identities meet a variety of psychological needs (Brewer, 1991, Greenaway, Cruwys, Haslam, & Jetten, 2016). Groups are defined in the minds of individuals in terms of prototypes: a set of attributes, beliefs, and behaviors that define the ideal group member (Hogg et al., 2017; Turner, 1987).

¹Procedures vary across types of minipublics; in particular, not all minipublics produce collective recommendations (e.g., Fishkin, 2009). I discuss the implications of these procedural differences in the conclusion.

While any individual will identify with multiple groups, self-categorization theory holds that the identity or identities that affect belief or behavior at any moment are determined by contextual and motivational factors. Individuals who self-categorize as members of the group will see themselves in terms of the group's prototype, a process known as self-stereotyping (Hogg and Turner, 1987). Espousing prototypical beliefs or enacting prototypical behaviors can confer status within the group (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006). Conversely, prototype-incompatible behaviors threaten both the individual's status in the group and their own self-concept. Thus, once an individual self-categorizes as a member of a group, this self-categorization motivates the individual to perform, publicly if possible, the group prototype.

Political science often treats social identities as fixed or at least very slow to change, as shown in the field's description of partisanship as the "unmoved mover" of political attitudes. Yet, research in the social-identity tradition emphasizes how social identification is fundamentally dynamic. First, the set of groups with which an individual might identify is not fixed. Not every collection of individuals is perceived as a group, and those that are vary in their "entitativity," or their "groupness" (Campbell, 1958, Lickel et al., 2000). Entitativity is a precursor to individuals self-categorizing as members of that group—the group must be perceived as a group in order for an individual to identify with it. Groups vary in the degree to which they are perceived as entities, and an individual's perception of a group's entitativity can vary depending on motivation and context (Piliatoha & Brewer, 2006), as well as interaction among members, shared goals or outcomes, the importance of the group to its members, and similarity among members (Lickel et al., 2000).

Even given an individuals' set of social identities, the effect of these identities on beliefs and behaviors will change over time. Self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987) holds individuals will only self-categorize, or see themselves in terms of, one or a few of their many social identities at any point in time. This self-categorization is determined by contextual and motivational factors, which make some identities more salient than others. Finally, individuals' perceptions of the content of these identities, the group prototype, is itself dynamic, with different aspects of a group identity becoming more or less salient depending on contextual factors such as the presence of salient outgroups (Brewer, 1993).

Several studies demonstrate these dynamics by showing how relatively brief participation in intensive collective activities such as protest (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996) or religious observance (Khan et al., 2016) can strengthen existing identities or grant entitativity to groups that would not have previously been seen as groups with which one could identify. These studies suggest two characteristics that make collective action more likely to produce social identification. First, collective action that is goal oriented is more likely to produce or change group identification, as orientation toward a group-level goal allows individuals to "*enact* their group identity and thereby concretely affirm and strengthen it" (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2010, p. 1055). Second, the presence of an outgroup makes identity formation easier; it allows new groups to define what they *are* by drawing a contrast with what they *are not* (Drury & Reicher, 2000).

Studies of public deliberation have largely ignored social identity, instead focusing on deliberation as a process of becoming informed (e.g., Fishkin, 2009) or of individual transformation (e.g., Gastil et al., 2010). An important exception is Batalha, Niemeyer, Dryzek, and Gastil (2019), whose study of the Australian Citizens' Parliament show that predeliberation identification with the deliberating group, and postdeliberation identification with a relevant subgroup, the deliberator's electoral district, are both correlated with postdeliberation world views. They argue that this shows that identification with the deliberating group serves as a second identity, as described in dual-identity theory, but not as a superordinate identity, which might subsume and thus eliminate the effect of subgroup identities. The measurements available to Batalha et al. (2019) limit their ability to evaluate the development of identification with the minipublic over time or the change in the role of subgroup identity; in particular, they only measure identification with the minipublic at the beginning of the

deliberative process and identification with the subgroup at the end of the minipublic. We pick up where this work leaves off, showing how identification with the deliberating group develops over the course of the minipublic and how it comes to affect the role of relevant subgroup identities on beliefs and behaviors.

Other studies attend to deliberation's influence on existing, long-standing identities. Hartz-Karp, Anderson, Gasti, and Felicetti (2010) and Knobloch and Gastil (2015) argue that participating in a minipublic increased identification with larger political units (e.g., identification as an Australian). In contrast to these studies' argument that deliberation strengthens existing identification with large political units, I detail the process by which deliberation creates a *new* social identity with the deliberating group itself. This means a new group prototype whose content may differ in important ways from existing identities; for example, a prototypical American might stand firm on deeply held beliefs, while a prototypical deliberator would seek compromise or accommodation.

Method

This article draws on qualitative data collected from the Rural Climate Dialogue program, a series of three deliberative events held in rural Minnesota communities and modeled on the Citizens' Jury process. Each Rural Climate Dialogue (RCD) occurred in a rural county in Minnesota and included 15–18 participants recruited to match the demographic and political make-up of the county. Responses to preevent surveys show that this was largely successful; importantly, the level of affective polarization in these juries is similar to the level of affective polarization in the country as a whole (Appendix S2 in the online supporting information). Each event took three days. The first morning comprised introductions and an ice-breaking “practice deliberation.” During the rest of the first day and entirety of the second, jurors heard expert testimony and then discussed this testimony in small groups. On the third day, the group wrote a final report on the challenges and opportunities that the community faced as a result of climate change and actions that could be taken in response. Four experienced facilitators facilitated discussion. To ensure the event attracted a wide variety of community members rather than only activists, deliberators were paid a stipend between \$300 and \$400. Postdeliberation surveys showed that deliberators had generally positive views of the quality of deliberation (Appendix S3). More details on the RCD process can be found in Myers, Ritter and Rockaway (2017).

This article draws primarily on semistructured interviews with 24 deliberators from the three dialogues (see Appendix S1). I refer to the dialogues by letter and refer to participants by their dialog letter and a number (e.g., “A2”). I interviewed three participants in Dialogue A, nine from Dialogue B, and 12 from Dialogue C, between two weeks and six months after their respective dialogues. I supplemented interview data with nonparticipant observation of the final day of Dialogue B and the entirety of Dialogue C. I did not record the dialogues but took extensive field notes during and after each. Appendix S1 in the online supporting information describes the interview methodology in more detail.

Formation of Group Identity

I describe the process of identity creation in four steps. First, jurors find themselves in an unfamiliar social setting surrounded by strangers, creating a sense of social dislocation. Second, just as jurors find themselves unmoored from familiar social groupings, deliberative facilitators begin the construction of a new group prototype by offering a new set of normative behaviors which can be a source of status among these strangers. Third, the jurors work together in group tasks aimed at a collective goal, allowing them to practice and perform the new norms. Finally, jurors identify two different kinds of outgroups, political partisans and group members who did not adopt the behavioral norms, allowing

them to clarify the new identity by contrasting who “we” are with who “we” are not. These four processes—social dislocation, construction of a new group prototype, working toward a shared goal, and identifying outgroups—combined to give the collection of jurors entitativity in individual jurors’ minds. The same processes motivated jurors to identify with this new group, providing them with a sense of self-concept and self-worth, along with norms to guide behavior in this unfamiliar situation.

Social Dislocation: Cutting Ties With Existing Identities

Even in the small, relatively homogeneous rural communities that hosted these juries, participants arrived on the first day with many different social identities. Several—partisan identity, age or gender-based identities, identification as a person who lives in town versus a rural area—had the potential to complicate deliberative conversation if made salient. Several design decisions reduced the possibility that deliberators would see themselves in terms of these identities, primarily by disconnecting deliberators from others who might relate to them in terms of these identities. Intentionally or unintentionally, these structural elements made it unlikely that competing identities would become salient and divide the deliberators.

The process of social dislocation began as soon as jurors walked in the door. The juries were held in conference rooms at local colleges or hotels. Upon arrival, jurors were handed a folder containing the jury’s agenda and asked to sit around a U-shaped table with name placards in front of them. This setting was alien to most participants. One juror in dialogue B recalled their arrival:

INTERVIEWER: *You show up at [location] ... What were you expecting?[...]*

JUROR B1: *[...] So when I showed up the first day, I thought it doesn’t look real comfortable. Everybody was kind of on edge and kind of looking around like, “What’s going on here?” Maybe it was more formal than I thought it would have been. [...] Just the environment ... the way we were seated, the proper napkins, all that stuff.*

Several jurors analogized the setting to a “class” or “school,” an environment most had been out of for years or decades:

JUROR B2: *I think we all were a little uneasy about being thrown into the group activities right away but that’s human nature, being out of school for years and being thrown back into school right away. (LAUGHTER)*

This unfamiliarity gave them few clues about which of their existing social identities might help make sense of the setting.

Turning to each other for cues about relevant social identities was unlikely to be helpful because of the way that jurors were recruited. Each group’s 18 participants were selected from a larger pool of several hundred applicants to take part in the forum, most recruited through a mass mailing to county residents. These 18 were selected to match their community’s political and demographic diversity, with two effects. First, participants lacked existing social ties to each other. While attendees at a more traditional public forum might arrive with friends or family members, only one of the 24 interviewees reported recognizing another person when they arrived at their dialogue. Second, the small number of participants and the fact that organizers attempted to match the community’s political and demographic composition meant that jurors had few overlapping identities. Selecting 18 participants to represent the diversity in even a small rural county meant that there would be only a few participants of any age group, education level, or partisanship. Further, those who shared one social identity likely differed on others. If two of the younger participants started talking, they were likely to discover that one was a farmer and the other worked in town; two stay-at-home mothers might find

they had different partisan affiliations. The recruitment process made it unlikely that coherent social groupings would form around clusters of existing identities.

Other design decisions contributed to social dislocation. Notably, when the entire jury was seated together, participants were assigned seats in alternating male-female order, with seating otherwise randomized. Organizers assigned participants new seats each day. This was discussed explicitly as a way to ensure that participants heard a variety of views; however, at the end of day 1 in Dialogue C, the organizers decided to seat two participants who appeared to know each other from before the forum at opposite sides of the table. Organizers changed the composition of small discussion groups at the start of each day, and sometimes more frequently. Participants were forced, by design, to interact with all other participants, yet rarely had repeated small-group interaction with any one participant. Like the recruitment process, this reduced the chance that participants would cluster along the lines of existing identities.

This lack of clustering was perhaps most evident during the 10-minute breaks between activities. Unstructured time presented a chance for jurors to congregate along lines of preexisting identities, thus raising the salience of those identities. Most participants did form small conversational clusters during breaks, but in the juries I observed, these clusters did not break down on any demographic or political lines recognizable to me. Further, I observed these clusters changing frequently between breaks such that it was rare for participants to talk to the same person or group of people from break to break. Participation in conversations during breaks seemed to have more to do with the participants' degree of extroversion than any social identity. For example, Dialogue C included two retired men who were rural landowners. One largely stayed to himself during breaks, particularly toward the beginning of the Dialogue, while the other engaged in affable small talk with a variety of other group members. The two rarely ended up speaking with each other.

I observed a few exceptions to this general pattern. In Dialogue B, I noted a divide between the smokers and nonsmokers, while in Dialogue C, a group of young mothers started sitting together for lunch. Notably, neither group was based on identities particularly implicated by the discussion of climate change, though the smoker/nonsmoker divide coincided to some degree with visible indicators of social class. Nor were these groupings exclusive; when not smoking, smokers talked to nonsmokers, and the mothers ate lunch together but conversed with nonmothers during other breaks. Thus, the limited sorting on preexisting identity appeared unlikely to create clear identity-based direction for engaging with the forum's topic.

Forming the Group Prototype

Social dislocation left jurors without a clear social identity that could provide guidance about which beliefs and behavior would be socially rewarded in this setting. This void was quickly filled by an alternative source of guidance: The rules for behavior provided by discussion facilitators and the way that facilitators performed these behaviors. Since all jurors were aware of these rules (and aware that others were aware of these rules), they had a shared guide to how to demonstrate their membership in the new group. The rules created the basis for the group prototype, the "fuzzy set of attributes that capture those perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that define the group and differentiate it from relevant other groups" (Hogg et al., 2017, p. 572). In short, they told jurors what made someone a "good deliberator."

Immediately after facilitators opened the jury with a welcome and brief explanation of the jury's change, they presented jurors with a set of eight "Guidelines for Productive Conversation." These behaviors differed from those commonly associated with political debate or casual political conversation. Three of the eight guidelines, "Listen Carefully," "Stay in Learning Mode," and "Share the 'Air-Time,'" emphasized aspects of listening. Two others ("Maintain a Positive Attitude" and "Disagree Positively") focused on productive ways to express disagreement; in contrast to everyday

political conversation, group harmony in the RCD would not be protected by suppressing disagreement, but by expressing disagreement in a positive way. Other guidelines encouraged jurors to actively engage (“Participate Fully”) and stressed the importance of working diligently and efficiently at the group task (“Keep Focused on the Issue” and “Speak Clearly and Concisely”). These guidelines were accompanied by suggestions for concrete actions that jurors could perform (e.g., “Bracket your opinion(s) briefly in order to be ready to listen”) and sometimes even a script to follow (e.g., “‘I see that differently’ or ‘I have a different conclusion,’ rather than ‘you are wrong’ or ‘I have a problem with that.’”). The guidelines were presented to the whole group and placed on each small-group discussion table in vertical stands (Figure 1), providing a physical reminder (literally in jurors’ faces) of normative behavior.

In interviews, jurors frequently attributed the fact that deliberators listened and generally acted in a “respectful” manner to the tangible presence of these discussion rules and organizers’ explicit focus on these behaviors as group values:

GUIDELINES FOR PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION

STAY IN LEARNING MODE



Be open to new ideas and information, seeking to hear and understand a wide range of perspectives. Avoid “campaigning” for a specific position.

Tips/Examples

- » Notice your beginning stance on an issue.
- » Notice how your understanding changes as new information becomes available.

SPEAK CLEARLY & CONCISELY



SHARE THE “AIR-TIME”

Speak clearly and concisely. Time is precious, so limit discussion on an issue to as short a statement as possible. After you have had an opportunity to speak, wait for others to speak before contributing again.

Tips/Examples

- » Jotting down what you want to say can help you be clear and concise.
- » Check with and make room for people who may not have spoken as often as you.

MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE



Assume good intent. If the intent of another party is not clear, ask questions and seek to clarify their meaning.

Tips/Examples

- » “When you spoke, I interpreted what you said as _____. Is that what you intended to communicate.”
- » “I’m curious why that’s important to you.”
- » Smiling works!

PARTICIPATE FULLY



Participate and contribute to the discussion, but don’t dominate it by interrupting others or being long-winded. Don’t stay silent when your views differ from the current discussion—your perspective will enrich the conversation!

Tips/Examples

- » Don’t dismiss your thoughts as unimportant if they differ from what others are saying.
- » Let the group know if there is something that prevents you from participating fully (ex. you can’t see or hear, you’re missing a handout, etc.)

LISTEN WITH CARE



Make a genuine effort to understand the perspectives of others, especially before trying to get them to understand your perspective. Limit interruptions.

Tips/Examples

- » Bracket your own opinion(s) briefly in order to be ready to listen to others.
- » Ask a question before responding, i.e. “what leads you to that conclusion?”
- » Check for understanding, i.e. “I think I heard you say _____. Is that accurate?”

DISAGREE POSITIVELY



Express your views when you disagree, but do so in a positive way. Direct your energy toward the issues, not people. Be a problem-solver by suggesting alternative approaches or solutions.

Tips/Examples

- » “I see that differently” or “I have a different conclusion,” rather than “you are wrong” or “I have a problem with that.”
- » Inquire of others—“What leads you to this conclusion?”
- » Be clear that you are speaking your position—“I understand it this way” rather than “this is the way it is.”

KEEP FOCUSED ON THE ISSUE



Pay attention to and focus on the most significant issues. Limit digressions and minimize stories unless they are pertinent to the issues being discussed. Focus on the issues, not on other people.

Tips/Examples

- » Jot down points you want to make that are not related to the current discussion for later reference.
- » Help each other, i.e. “Can you help me understand how this is related to the issue we’re discussing right now?”

Figure 1. Pictures used to present discussion rules.

INTERVIEWER: *What specifically about the way that the people or the way things were organized or whatever do you think allowed that to happen?*

JUROR C1: *I think that it made a difference that we started out talking a little bit about successful communication and what it means to actually listen and, you know ... I am of the opinion that society in general has a really tough time with communication. [...] So I think that just kind of going over those guidelines first and then, you know ... I think ... I don't know. I noticed too that on each table they had the page for us. I only looked at it once or twice, but maybe it was good to have a reminder there.*

When necessary, facilitators and deliberators used these guidelines to police “good” and “bad” behavior. One facilitator recounted, in response to a question about more vocal group members, “Sometimes you have to use... ‘Oh, remember XYZ—Share the airtime,’ or ‘remember...’. That doesn’t happen very often, but still there’s this check.”

But, jurors also self-policed:

INTERVIEWER: *Would you put yourself in the camp who was kind of restraining yourself, or do you put yourself in the camp that was kind of being encouraged to talk?*

JUROR C2: *I restrained myself because I'm very opinionated. (LAUGHTER) [...] Well, you know, I always will have an opinion on stuff, but I ... It was important to look at other people, too. I wanted to be respectful and not sound like I was ... I only cared about what I was thinking, you know.*

This self-policing was motivated both internally, wanting to be respectful, and externally, wanting to avoid public behavior that “sounded” different from the good deliberator prototype.

The guidelines’ power was increased by the social dislocation. One facilitator compared facilitating Citizens’ Juries to facilitating discussions in which participants had preexisting ties:

FACILITATOR: *I think that [...] when you pull these people together into a room who don't know one another [...] they may feel a little insecure, whatever ... And you give them those guidelines that we do, I have never been in a context outside of these kind of gigs where the people take those guidelines so seriously. [...]*

INTERVIEWER: *That's not something that happens if you go in with the same guidelines say into a workplace where people are still in that workplace and they know the other people in the room and ...*

FACILITATOR: *I mean it's ... You know, my guess is that it has something to do with an existing past history that can't ... that needs to be overcome or that enters in and that this new group, you know, is being formed, and your task is to do these guidelines, and that's the only thing they have to hang onto.*

Disconnected from other sources of social value, the guidelines were a “thing to hang onto” that provided a way to demonstrate group membership.

Setting the Group to Work

A range of existing research emphasizes how perceptions of entativity can be created through collective, goal-directed participation (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Lickel et al., 2000).² In deliberative

²Cf. intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954).

minipublics like the RCDs, deliberators do not just come together to form their own individual opinions but also to produce recommendations (in this case, how their communities should adapt in the face of climate change). Having a task helped orient participants toward the deliberating group and gave them an opportunity to perform the behaviors prescribed by the group prototype, reinforcing these as examples of “good” behavior both to themselves and to the group. This allowed the group to meet the psychological needs commonly met by other social identities.

In these juries, the experience of working together as a group started even before climate change was discussed. The groups’ first activity was a “practice” deliberation scenario: Jurors were placed into small groups and assigned to decide whether a town should renovate or tear down an aging but historic courthouse. A facilitator led each small group through a specific procedure: drawing out important bits of information from the vignette, discussing the implications of this information for key group values, and finally producing a decision supported by a list of reasons. By giving jurors the chance to practice the nascent deliberative prototype while discussing a non-climate change issue, the practice task allowed this prototype to develop without reference to political identities that might be implicated by this issue.

The remainder of day 1 and all of day 2 ostensibly centered on a series of half-hour expert presentations on topics like local trends in temperature and rainfall or the effects of climate change on agriculture. However, the real work of the jury was done in small-group discussions following each presentation, which followed a familiar pattern: distilling information from the presentation into a set of key facts, categorized as “challenges” and “opportunities” for their communities, discussing the facts’ implications, and presenting these to the full jury. Producing these lists provided a clear focus for small-group work; facilitators would refer to the lists to bring discussions back on track and, after a few rounds, jurors started to do this on their own. Moreover, listing challenges and opportunities, rather than rendering a decision, limiting the trade-offs that had to be made at this point, and reducing the chance that conflict over scarce resources could raise the salience of political identities.

The final day of each jury was devoted to distilling these lists into a final set of recommendations for regarding how their county should adapt to climate change. This shift, from processing information to issuing recommendations, placed stress on the jury. Their decision-making now involved real trade-offs. Jurors might disagree about what to recommend or how to prioritize different recommendations, yet the report would be presented as a group product to the rest of their community. Rather than heightening disagreements, this stress was experienced as bonding the group more closely. One participant recalled:

JUROR C1: *I’ll tell you what. We like buzzed through ... It was great. [...] There was a lot more cooperation that day about trying to pick, you know, which point is more important or less important and which ... which people and evidence really fit with that point or fit with this point? That day probably required more cooperation than either of the previous days [...]*

INTERVIEWER: *Okay. So sort of the fact that you had to make a decision here made cooperation all the more important?*

JUROR C1: *Yes. More challenging because we couldn’t include everything. We had to, you know, pick and choose what was ... What seems most important to one person or what seems most important to another person ... We had to find a way to work both of those things together.*

After two days of working together, this intense, goal-directed work was experienced as a group effort to produce a group product, rather than individual efforts to meet personal goals. This included making concessions on points relevant to other social identities:

INTERVIEWER: *So the third day, right, you go from this sort of process of generation to this process of actually figuring out what's going to go in this document [...] Can you walk me through that process and how that process was different from the first two days, or just how it went?*

JUROR B2: *Well, that's where you had to start giving up ... truly start giving up your opinion, I mean honestly. [...] [laughs] That's where you didn't necessarily win out. I mean, that's the majority ... You know, up until then, you maybe half-heartedly listened, or there was still enough options where, you know, you could ... You still fell in the majority or whatever, but at that point you truly had to objectively consider everybody's reasoning and open-mindedly get down to two and from that angle, you know, everybody probably did do a better job in a group as the time went on because we were able to do that by Day 3.*

INTERVIEWER: *Uh huh. So it was a lot harder. What you were being asked to do was harder?*

JUROR B2: *Yeah, but we were able to do it, and if you would have had to do it on Day 1, it probably never would have happened*

INTERVIEWER: *Uh huh. Uh huh. So, I mean, was there an increase in kind of tension on the third day because it got difficult?*

JUROR B2: *No, there wasn't. [...] I had no problem, I mean, objectively looking at it and conceding and, you know, I mean I could understand why other issues were more important when you actually looked at it from other points of view and stuff.*

INTERVIEWER: *Uh huh. And so what specifically did you concede on?*

JUROR B2: *Oh, there was just ... I'm an outdoorsman. You know, it was just some of those things. I mean I could have dug my heels in the sand and fought more for water and woods issues or whatever and stuff, but it's all inter-related actually [...] If one wins out, they all should win out when it's all said and done.*

This juror conceded on an issue connected to one of his central social identities, motivated by adherence to the deliberative prototype: listening carefully and considering the issue from other points of view.

Jurors responses to finishing group work underscored how such work solidified the new identity. In both juries I observed, small-group work sessions often ended with cheers or shouts of “go team!” or “good work!” In Jury B, the first draft report's reading was met with spontaneous applause. This palpable pride shows how the recommendations' production provided the kind of goal-directed group activity that can help create a new group identity.

Identifying the Outgroup

A salient outgroup is a valuable tool for defining who “we” are as a group. Group prototypes are constructed to minimize within-group differences and maximize differences between the group and salient outgroups (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1998). Drawing such contrasts helps group members meet the need for distinctiveness from others, while also meeting the need for inclusion by clarifying ingroup attributes (Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010). Given the contrast the public-deliberation movement often draws between itself and “normal” political processes, one obvious potential outgroup is partisans, politicians, and media figures involved in normal political debate.³ Indeed, some deliberators drew this contrast.

³See, for example, Johnson, Morrell, and Black (2019)'s report of participants in a Citizen's Initiative Review panel expressing frustration with the broader political process (pp. 2183–2184).

INTERVIEWER: *How did those [small group] discussions go? How did people work together?*

JUROR C3: *Very well. Very, very well. I was ... I was thinking about this later, and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice if our governments and everything else could sit down and negotiate like that, and get these ideas and then' ... There wasn't any ... There was no arguing.*

Later in the interview, the same juror made the point more explicitly:

JUROR C3: *I told people about [the jury process], and I said, 'I wish governments could sit down and not be screaming and hollering at each other,'*

Yet, this outgroup, those who engaged in “politics as usual,” had little presence in the jury room, meaning that they could only serve as an outgroup to politically engaged jurors for whom examples of “politics as usual” were chronically salient.

In two of the three dialogues, A and B, a second outgroup emerged from within the jury.⁴ This “internal outgroup” took the form of a juror who challenged the legitimacy of the deliberative process and refused to abide by deliberative norms. While still formally a member of the jury, his behavior allowed other jurors to see him as an “other” and define themselves against him.

In both cases, this role was adopted by an older male juror. One of the facilitators in Jury B described this juror's behavior:

INTERVIEWER: *And can you talk a little more specifically about what the interpersonal challenge was?*

FACILITATOR: *Oh, someone had a very strong ... One person in the small group had a very, very strong opinion not ... not able to listen to others [...] He had one message that he was very ... felt strongly about and kept on hammering that message home rather than having the conversation that was on the table.*

A participant in Jury B used similar terms to describe the same juror:

JUROR B3: *He was very opinionated. Things needed to be done HIS way. [...] He would take over and finally you would just say, 'You know, we're not talking about your [PARTICULAR ISSUE].'*

In Jury A, the juror displayed a similar fixation on a single issue:

JUROR A1: *There was a juror who ... How do I phrase this? On the record, I think this juror's opinions were colored by some less than reliable sources [...] [the juror] was trying to make everything about [PARTICULAR ISSUE].*

This behavior violated the norms of the deliberator identity in several ways. The violator failed to listen and, rather than participating in dialogue, simply repeated his own message. He was “opinionated” and showed an unwillingness to reconsider his opinion. His singular focus on “his” issue distracted the group from its assigned task, interfering with its ability to reach its goal.

⁴Two jurors discussed expert presenters in a way that suggested that they served as a sort of outgroup. In both cases, the juror perceived that the presenter was trying to lead jurors to a predetermined outcome, a violation of the “good deliberator” prototype. The fact that individual presenters were present for only a brief period may have made it difficult for them to serve as an outgroup.

The continuous presence of this norm violator helped the group clarify its identity. Indeed, managing the norm violator became a new, important task for the deliberating group to perform. The facilitator interviewed above explained:

FACILITATOR: *This happens not infrequently. Some people figured out a way to work with this guy. They used humor. [...] So they built kind of a little bit of a container that would hold [the norm violator], which is really a pretty good thing. [...] From the group dynamics perspective, the group assembled collectively to manage the energy.*

Talking about the same norm violator, the juror in dialogue B recalled:

INTERVIEWER: *And how did the group as a whole deal with that [...]?*

JUROR B3: *Well, we all just chuckled about it because he was [...] 'If you're gonna keep telling me to shut up, I'm not gonna talk.'* (LAUGHTER)

INTERVIEWER: (LAUGHTER)

JUROR B3: *Awww, yeah. It was ... It was good times*

Policing proper behavior bonded the group, which collectively “chuckled” at the norm violator and helped delineate clear boundaries between the ingroup (chuckling together) and the outgroup member (chuckled at). This interaction also clarified the ingroup prototype as the opposite of the norm violator’s behavior: staying on task, *not* insisting on having things done in a particular way, and listening. At the same time, the “chuckling” at the norm violator shows that this new identity is not anodyne and can, like most social identities, produce outgroup derogation and ostracism.

The Effects of Group Identity

The processes described above show how the group gained entitativity and deliberators developed an identification with the deliberating group. While this identification had a variety of effects, I focus on the way that motivation to perform the “good deliberator” prototype suppressed partisan disagreement, an essential step to deliberation on contentious issues like climate change.

Some jurors entered the dialogue expecting a partisan fight. One highly educated liberal male recalled entering the dialogue “loaded for bear.” This juror described his normal political behavior in terms of social-media interactions:

JUROR A1: *And I do, and I will freely admit that I am [...] the Internet asshole*

INTERVIEWER: (LAUGHTER)

JUROR A1: *I freely admit to being that sometimes on Facebook discussions. Now I will never go to someone's page and say, “You're full of it.” But if someone brings that stuff onto my feed, then “Katy, bar the door.” And it's cost me several friends over the years [...] I'm mostly okay with that.*

Yet, later this same juror recalled behaving very differently in the jury:

INTERVIEWER: *What did the discussion itself look like?*

JUROR A1: *Very civil. There's that word again. Oh, occasionally lively back and forth, but we made a conscious effort and, guided by the folks at The Jefferson Center, of course, to not interrupt ... to give fair hearings to everyone, to be thoughtful in both senses of the word, and I think that's what allowed us to get a sense of the overall context. I think that overall the best thing*

about this is that it created a space where we didn't feel like the quickest, wittiest response was the best. In an age of Facebook discussions, you know, how quickly can you get in the zinger? And I'm horrifically guilty of that.

INTERVIEWER: (LAUGHTER)

JUROR A1: *And there were a few times I was still in that mode, and I would have to really bite down on my tongue, because I had some good lines in reserve. I was ready, man, but creating a space where we had an expanse of time to give issues due diligence [...]*

INTERVIEWER: What made you bite your tongue?

JUROR A1: *It didn't feel right. It didn't feel right. It didn't feel in the spirit of the event*

INTERVIEWER: Okay

JUROR A1: *And I didn't want to be the guy who turned this thing upside down*

This shows several aspects of the group prototype in action. The juror recalls restraining his normal patterns of behavior—"biting his tongue"—in response to the "spirit of the event." His motivation was external as well as internal; after realizing that behaviors that are normally socially rewarded, such as quickly getting in a "zinger" in a Facebook discussion, would not be met with approval in this group, he "didn't want to be the guy who turned this thing upside down." In place of this behavior, deliberative behaviors were valued, and a "we" was created that "made a conscious effort" to perform such behaviors, assisted by the deliberative facilitators.

A bit later, Juror A1 continued:

JUROR A1: *I thought, 'You know what? This is not the place. This is not the place. There is something real happening here. I'm not going to get a bunch of clicks on "like" for saying something flippant. I think it's important to really be thoughtful about this. It's okay to be humorous. It's okay to drop a bomb into the conversation, but let's think more Benjamin Franklin and less Bill Maher.' Franklin had a great way of speaking that even when he was being humorous, it made a point. I thought this ... 'Maybe this is the operative model here. Let's sit back. Let's listen.' It was great because the ideas felt like they had breathing room [...] a feeling that if you put something into this environment, it can grow.*

The opportunity to create something as a group, the sense that "[t]here is something real happening here," meant that his normal patterns of highly partisan behavior would not be rewarded, but that other, more thoughtful behavior would be valued. The juror characterizes this shift in terms of exemplars of competing prototypes: Franklin and Maher.

The intensity of this juror's transformation was not typical, but the direction of the change and description of the group's norms were echoed by other participants. Often, this was expressed in terms of relief that anticipated partisan conflict did not emerge. One juror who described his general political views as "constitutional conservative" recounted anticipating a hostile environment when he first arrived at the jury:

JUROR C6: *I had some preconceived notions [...] [County Name] Climate Dialogue. "Alright, we're all going to get into this room, and we're all going to figure out how to change the temperature of the planet." You've got to be kidding me?*

INTERVIEWER: Uh huh. Uh huh

JUROR C6: *So in my mind, I was like, "Okay, they're going to try to tell us we can't do this, we can't do that, we can't do this, we can't do that." So I was all on the ... There was a lot of negatives coming up, a lot of regulations and a lot of money.*

But as the event went on:

JUROR C6: *As we broke into small groups, what I found was it was amazing how much common ground we discussed, very specific topics. You may not agree with everybody, but everybody got their voice, and the group could come to a consensus, a small group like that. [...] I was very surprised to have common ground with people I never would have guessed and disagreements with somebody you thought you would agree with.*

The goal-directed work disconfirmed the juror's expectations of agreement and disagreement along the lines of politically tinged identity markers. This juror, in particular, had expected to agree with other jurors with a technical background and disagree with a juror whose occupation suggested liberal political views. The disconfirmations reduced the usefulness of his existing political identity in understanding how to relate to others in the jury.

While partisan identity was suppressed during the deliberation, for most deliberators this did not appear to have a long-term effect on their partisan alignment or views of the other side. Affective polarization, as measured by partisan feeling thermometers in the pre- and postsurveys of Dialogues B and C, was essentially unchanged, with a gap of 36.6 points before deliberation and 40.1 points after deliberation ($p = .24$ paired two-sided t -test, $d = .14$). At the end of most (17 of 22) interviews, I asked jurors about their general views about politics. Despite coming at the end of a lengthy interview about the jury, only two jurors linked their political views to this experience, one largely to reaffirm his existing views. The one exception connected his experience in the forum to believing that “[t]he climate thing is for real” and to a more general disenchantment with the Republican Party.⁵

Conclusion

The success of the public-deliberation movement is puzzling amid the well-documented rise in affective polarization. If Americans “behave more like a pair of warring tribes than like the people of a single nation” (Mason, 2018, p. 141), how have organizers of minipublics succeeded in bringing together politically diverse groups of people for productive, respectful conversation about contentious political issues? This article argues that, just as social identity theory can help explain the rise in affective polarization, it can explain how deliberative minipublics overcome this polarization.

Deliberative minipublics are, perhaps inadvertently, extremely well-designed to foster the development of a new social identity characterized by open-mindedness, mutual respect, and tolerance for disagreement. Uncertain of which, if any, of their existing identities are relevant in an unfamiliar environment, jurors find a new source of social worth by performing the behaviors and holding the beliefs of a “good deliberator.” This identification is strengthened by the experience of working with others in a goal-oriented fashion and, at times, by differentiating themselves from an outgroup, whether it is those outside the minipublic who engage in “normal politics” or those within the minipublic who reject the new norms and impede group progress. The salience of this new identity reduces the chance that deliberators will self-categorize in terms of the political identities that might be made salient by the forum's topic.

Several features of the RCDs contributed to the formation of this social identity, including a demographically representative recruitment process, rules and norms introduced by the event organizers, and the goal-oriented tasks of the deliberating group. The generalizability of the processes of identity formation described here may depend on the degree to which other minipublics include these features. For example, self-selected participation would make it more likely that deliberators will arrive with others who share existing social identities; minipublics that do not ask deliberators to produce a collective report (e.g., Fishkin, 2009) or that focus on interaction between deliberators

⁵This interview was conducted in March 2016, as Donald Trump consolidated his lead in the Republican primary.

and experts or political elites (Neblo et al. 2018) would create fewer opportunities to work towards a common goal. Minipublic organizers also have little control over the emergence of an “internal outgroup,” though they can build group cohesion by playing up the contrast between the minipublic and normal, partisan politics. Generalizability may also depend on conditions specific to the RCDs’ political context, such as the salience of the issue, the particular structure of political identity in the United States, or the nature of the communities in which these juries took place. Finally, the generalizability of these processes to deliberating bodies, such as criminal juries (Gastil et al. 2010), is unclear, but worth exploring in future research.

The positives of the identity-creation process described here are obvious, particularly to those who have seen issues like climate change become partisan battlefields. Yet, the normative implications of this article’s argument are not clear. Deliberation’s normative value depends on communication processes being noncoercive (Habermas, 1975). Indeed, the procedures described, particularly the rules laid out for speech during the minipublic, are intended to limit coercion by restraining more powerful groups from dominating discussion. Yet, as Mansbridge (1990) notes, “the transformation of ‘I’ into ‘we’ brought about through deliberation can easily mask subtle forms of social control” (p. 143). In the process described here, these subtle forms of social control might include the social dislocation caused by the structure of the jury, the introduction and definition of a new identity at the point of maximal confusion, and the policing of that identity by facilitators and by the group itself. By encouraging jurors to self-categorize in terms of this new identity, these forces may make it less likely that they will self-categorize in terms of other social identities.

Does a process that reduces the salience of other, preexisting social identities represent a different, but still worrying, form of coercion? In a highly polarized county, we may applaud Republicans and Democrats self-categorizing as deliberators rather than partisans in order to have a productive conversation about climate change. We may be less sanguine about a process that reduces the salience of racial identity before deliberation about policing or gender and religious identities before deliberation about abortion. To the extent that good deliberation involves people finding agreement across lines of difference rather than erasing that difference (Young, 2000), the process described here should give us pause. Encouraging deliberators to self-categorize as deliberators rather than members of other groups is also problematic for the view of individual deliberators as representatives of or “trusted informational proxies” for the broader public (Warren & Gastil, 2015). To the extent that social identities are important to those a deliberator represents, reducing the salience of these identities makes for poorer representation.

Fully exploring this question is beyond the scope of this article, but we suggest a few points that might guide future research and practice. First, adopting the “good deliberator” identity is encouraged, but the examples of the “internal outgroup” members show that some successfully resist this encouragement. Second, the processes that suppress partisan identity might work very differently with identities that are harder to conceal, such as race or gender, or whose prototypes do not conflict as much with the “good deliberator” prototype. Finally, self-categorizing as a deliberator may not preclude simultaneously self-categorizing as a member of another group. Batalha et al. (2019) invoke dual-identity theory to suggest that individuals might self-categorize in terms of both simultaneously.⁶

⁶Our interviews suggest mixed evidence for this. On the one hand, the new identity clearly suppressed self-categorization in partisan terms. On the other hand, some deliberators cited other identities that shaped their thinking during the minipublic. For example, one juror had doubts about the process that were rooted in his professional identity as an engineer:

***Juror B4:** I started having my doubts about, ‘Oh, this group doesn’t understand the scientific process, the engineering process, or how you get from facts to... The different steps we’re supposed to take to go where we’re supposed to go.’ ... that set the whole day off to kind of a free-for-all.*

These doubts led him to complain about the structure of the deliberation to the facilitators, who, in turn, clarified some of the procedures in a way that reduced his sense that the deliberation was a “free-for-all.”

They note that work on intergroup contact finds that “attempts to ameliorate intergroup conflict are better served by promoting a dual identity (e.g., woman and scientist) rather than a single higher-order identity shared across conflictual groups” (p. 4). If deliberators can be both good deliberators and good members of other relevant groups these concerns are diminished.

This final point suggests that deliberative facilitators think consciously about how their procedures shape deliberators’ identities and how they might ensure that relevant identities are not suppressed. For example, having established a new, shared identity as deliberators, minipublic organizers might consider explicitly raising the importance of other identities in order to encourage such dual identification. The organizers of the RCDs could have included expert testimony on partisan divisions in public opinion about climate change; this might have encouraged deliberators to draw on their partisan identities to discuss why such divisions exist and how common ground could be found across them, while relying on their shared identity as deliberators to limit hostility created by these identities. Consider, as well, the interracial dialogue groups described by Cramer (2007), in which racial difference was explicitly and repeatedly invoked but accompanied by a shared commitment to discussing such difference respectfully.⁷

Beyond deliberative minipublics, these findings suggest new directions for the broader turn toward placing group identification at the center of political behavior research (Achen & Bartels, 2016; Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2018). Political scientists have generally defined social identity in terms of long-standing group attachments treated as chronically salient, such as identification with racial, gender, and partisan groups. The irrelevance of such long-standing identities to the deliberations studied here suggests that political scientists should pay more attention to the fluidity of identity and the degree to which contextual factors can make even long-standing identities less salient, at least temporarily (e.g., Levendusky, 2018). Moreover, the potential for the formation of new social identities suggests a source of dynamism in political systems.

Further, this work suggests a greater attention to the *content* of social identities. An identity’s prototype—the normative beliefs, behaviors, and actions that make up a social identity—matters for how that social identity affects politics. In the case studied here, identification with the deliberating group facilitated good deliberation not merely because this identity temporarily replaced partisan identity but because the content of the “good deliberator” prototype encouraged jurors to act in a respectful, open-minded way. Additionally, the content of a social identity can evolve as the group locates itself in a changing social space. Consider how chuckling at a fellow juror, behavior that would have violated group norms early in the jury process, became normative once the group began to define itself against the opinioned juror who formed the “internal outgroup.” Viewing social identities as fluid things may help us understand the rise of affective polarization; it may also help us devise ways to counter such trends.

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⁷Notably, individuals self-selected into participating in the dialogues described by Cramer; no attempt was made to recruit a representative cross-section of the community or to encourage participation by those uninterested in the topic through financial incentives, and these groups were not tasked with making any concrete policy decisions. These factors likely made it easier for deliberators to work together despite this salience of racial identities.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher’s web site:

Appendix S1. Methodological Appendix

Appendix S2. Juror Demographics and Pre-Existing Affective Polarization

Table S2 .1. Jury Demographics

Appendix S3. Juror Evaluations of Deliberative Quality

Table S3 .1. Deliberator’s Evaluation of Deliberative Quality