IDENTITY-MOTIVATED ELABORATION:

THE ROLE OF PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND ELABORATION IN POLITICAL PERSUASION AND LEARNING

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The undersigned, appointed by the Associate Vice Chancellor of the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, have examined the dissertation entitled

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THE ROLE OF PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND ELABORATION IN POLITICAL PERSUASION AND LEARNING

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a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

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DEDICATION

This achievement stands as a testimony to family, friends, and faith. My parents have always been there for me and have taught me countless life lessons. Mom, you are the most compassionate and loving person that I know-you give so much of yourself to help other people. Dad, you are hard-working and kind-you inspire me to be a better man. Your love for me was never as apparent as when you traveled across the world to China in order to care for me following my accident. This grand act of love, however, was not an anomaly, it is representative of the love I receive from you every single day.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure Page

Table

IDENTITY-MOTIVATED ELABORATION:
THE ROLE OF PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND ELABORATION IN POLITICAL PERSUASION AND LEARNING

Fred J. Jennings

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ABSTRACT

Persuasive political messages play a central role in the attitude formation process. The unification of the social identity theory, the theory of motivated reasoning, and the elaboration likelihood model better explains the way individuals learn from and are persuaded by messages in the evolving political media landscape. Partisanship is a social identity that biases the processing of new political information. The current dissertation employs an experimental design (with replication) to test the process of identity-motivated elaboration and structural equation modeling to test hypothesized relationships. The results reveal that the insertion of partisan cues to a political message, indicating partisan social group norms, conditions persuasion by partisan social identity, limits learning, and valences elaboration. Citizens engage in partisan motivated reasoning, not just to defend prior beliefs, but to defend their partisan social identity. Identifying with the Democratic or Republican Party creates a partisan lens through which all new political information is processed. The integration of the three psychological theories avails a new perspective on the political persuasion process, one that is more nuanced and extensive than that provided by any isolated theoretical perspective. The current study extends our understanding of this complex political communicative process by synthesizing the social identity approach, partisan motivated reasoning, and valenced cognitive elaboration into a unified theory of political persuasion.

Chapter 1: Introduction, Rationale, and Justification

Persuasive political messages comprise much of the evolving political media landscape. Through most of the 20th century, a norm of "objectivity" was observed by most journalists reporting the news (Schudson, 2001). The role of a reporter, then, was to convey information, not offer opinions. Additionally, individuals were limited in their options of information sources; for example, television viewers in the broadcast era of American media were limited to three channels (Prior, 2007). Because the primary objective of political news was informative, information-presentation media theories (e.g., agenda setting, framing, priming, gatekeeping) were utilized to understand the informative more subtle persuasive consequences of media exposure (e.g., Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kennamer, 1992; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Linsky, 1986; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997; Miller & Krosnick, 1996; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). However, with the emergence and proliferation of cable/satellite television and the invention of the Internet, information seekers have a larger variety of sources, and partisan media became more common and influential (Levendusky, 2013a, Prior, 2007). As such, we have seen a shift in the political information landscape to emphasize persuasive presentation of current events (Schudson, 2001). Political programs like *The Sean Hannity Show* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* contain explicit persuasive appeals. They are not attempting to be objective, balanced, or neutral. Partisan media represent a fundamental evolution that invites greater focus on theories of persuasion when analyzing political media effects. The current dissertation enhances our understanding of persuasive political messaging by developing a model of identity motivated elaboration that blends insights from the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), partisan motivated reasoning (PMR), and social identity theory (SIT).

Evolution of the Political Media Landscape

Citizens learn about political issues and are persuaded by partisan messages. The proliferation of sources of political information allows individuals to obtain their political "news" from outlets that support their political dispositions (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Prior, 2007; Stroud, 2011). These partisan sources of information present ideological opinions and political perspectives alongside the news such that information is "framed, spun, and slanted so that certain political agendas are advanced" (Jamieson, Hardy, & Romer, 2007, p. 26). Partisan media are becoming more common and more popular (Levendusky, 2013b). In fact, even the President of the United States, Donald Trump, is an avid partisan media viewer and has publicly praised Fox News (Nussbaum, 2017). Partisan media interpret the news and present it from a distinct point of view framed to fit a political narrative (Baum & Groeling, 2008; Levendusky, 2013b; Levendusky, 2013a). Such "opinionated media" construct and maintain this narrative to provide a coherent liberal or conservative interpretation of the news, which helps citizens make sense of a confusing political world (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Levendusky, 2013a; Rosensteil, 2006). Partisan media do not simply provide information, nor provide a venue for political argumentation (Levendusky, 2013b); rather, from the perspective of partisan media, the argument is over and the "right" side is presented (Rosensteil, 2006). Partisan media, as the name implies, provides a political perspective aligned with one political party and indicates to message receivers the position of their ingroup. This partisan signaling has the ability to influence the political opinions of partisan viewers/readers, providing them with decision-making heuristics. Viewers are no longer simply looking to the "news" as a source of information, but also as a guide to interpreting current events

(Levendusky, 2013b). Though partisan media help citizens make sense of the world (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Rosensteil 2006), they have been found to result in negative normative democratic outcomes like polarization (e.g., Dvir-Gvirsman, 2014; Stroud, 2010) and attitudinal certainty (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Ziemke, 1980). The apparent audience demand for opinion news pressures nonpartisan media outlets to present news in a more partisan format (Jones, 2002). However, partisan media may influence message receivers differently when compared to more traditional, nonpartisan presentation of current events and issues. Viewers want news that agrees with their political opinions. Though they do not actively avoid counterattitudinal messages, individuals seek out likeminded media (Garrett & Stroud, 2014) and find it more credible (Stroud, 2011). Thus, partisan cues that indicate whether a message is counterattitudinal or proattitudinal can influence both the persuasiveness of the message and the amount of knowledge one acquires from exposure. Partisan media are not limited to television. Partisan messages can be found in movies (e.g., *Fahrenheit 9/11*), radio shows (e.g., *The Glenn Beck Program*), podcasts (e.g., *Pod Save America*) newspapers (e.g., *Las Vegas Review-Journal*), magazines (e.g., *Mother Jones*), television shows (e.g., *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*), and Internet sites (e.g., Breitbart.com). Partisan arguments are even delivered on the local news in the millions of households that receive their broadcast from a Sinclair affiliate (Fortin & Bromwich, 2018). Partisan media do not simply present the truth; they deliver carefully crafted persuasive arguments with the aim of advancing a certain political perspective.

Identity-Motivated Elaboration

The current dissertation investigates the informative and persuasive influences of partisan political messaging. The evolution of the political media landscape necessitates new perspectives to understand political media effects. In this dissertation, the interaction of the elaboration likelihood model, the theory of motivated reasoning, and the social identity theory are investigated through an experimental approach. At the core of the current investigation, is the adoption of partisan affiliations as social identities (See Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Levendusky, 2013a). Partisanship is not simply an ideological alignment; it is also a social and psychological attachment (Mason, 2014). Partisan attachments create political anger and enthusiasm that extends beyond issue differences (Mason, 2016). Polarization, which has traditionally been viewed as an ideological divide, is now more commonly understood to be affective. Affective polarization is a polarization in one's feelings toward the ingroup and outgroup, driven by greater hostility toward the outgroup (while ingroup favorability has remained stable across time). Republican and Democrats increasingly dislike one another. In other words, Iyengar and colleagues (2012) demonstrate that political parties do not just represent ideological differences but are social identities which underlie affective polarization. This assertion stands at the center of the current research, as the elaborative, learning, and persuasive effects of an individual's partisan social identity are investigated. If political parties are truly social identities, core assumptions of the social identity approach should apply to the political cognition of partisans. The process of identity-motivated elaboration hypothesizes that partisan social identities motivate biased processing and elaboration on a persuasive political message, which influences the informative and persuasive outcomes of the message.

Citizens employ PMR to defend prior beliefs and opinions (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Tormala & Rucker, 2007). In other words, when new information supports what individuals already believe, they will accept the message with little scrutiny. However, if the new information runs counter to their prior opinions, they will dismiss the information as invalid or counterargue the message. For example, Redlawsk (2002) found that when partisans were exposed to negative information about their candidate of choice, they expressed greater support for that candidate rather than updating their opinions in the direction of the new negative information. Attitudes and opinions can be updated or changed—but this is an affectively stressful experience, which individuals are cognitively motivated to avoid (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Redlawsk, Civettini, & Emmerson, 2010). Though it is well established that motivated reasoning is used when individuals hold prior opinions, it is undetermined what role PMR has in the attitude formation process. The social identity theory argues that individuals engage in favorable evaluation of information that would benefit their ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Because partisanship is a social identity, it is hypothesized that partisans will engage in biased evaluation of a political policy that would favor one party over the other. The existing literature on motivated reasoning undertheorizes the role of partisanship as a social identity. The current study, therefore, examines whether individuals engage in the same biased cognitive processes to construct attitudes in order to defend their partisan social identity as they do to defend prior beliefs.

For deliberative theorists, motivated reasoning is problematic because individuals are not open to other ideas or compromise; debate is no longer rational (instead rationalizing); biased information and knowledge is created; and it redefines what it

means to be informed (Lodge & Taber, 2013). The unwillingness to compromise and the resulting gridlock hampers the government's ability to solve social problems in the American democracy (Gutmann & Thompson, 2012). Party victory is prioritized over the welfare of the citizenry, and partisans view members of the opposition party as competitors, not allies (Mason, 2018). Republicans decline to work with Democrats, and Democrats refuse to compromise with Republicans—as elected officials have cleanly divided among ideological lines into distinct, competing groups (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2008). This partisan divide, Abramowitz (2010) demonstrates, has filtered down to the electorate, as citizens have become more divided among partisan lines as well. The previously blurred line between parties is clearer and wider than ever before (McCarty et al, 2008), as the partisan groups differentiate from each other. Greene (1999) attributes the growing partisan divide and increasing interparty polarization to partisan social identities, where citizens are placing personal value and emotional significance on their partisan social groups.

The current study proposes that partisan social identities provide motivations for individuals to process information (See Kunda, 1990; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In fact, rather than individuals choosing partisan loyalties based on issue preferences, Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002) argue that individuals decide their issue stances based on their more enduring partisan affiliations because they seek to support their social group. Social identification is fundamental to partisanship in the American democracy, as psychological investment in a party contributes to political attitude formation and behavior among the citizenry (Greene, 2004; Mason, 2016). Partisan media intensifies already biased motivated processing (Levendusky, 2013b). Individuals may be motivated

to discount (Revlin, 2013) or counterargue crosscutting information (Taber, Cann, and Kucsova, 2009) but be motivated to give selective attention to proattitudinal messages (Dodd & White, 1980). Partisan social identities have great influence on an individual's political beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Partisan group identification even influences the way we view ourselves and others (Mason, 2018). Because parties are incorporated into our social identities, individuals support a political party similarly to the way a sports fan roots for his favorite team (Miller & Conover, 2015). As such, individuals may be motivated to elaborate on messages that support their team. Both emotional attachment to one's partisan team and an individual's political attitudes are aspects of one's social identification with a political party (Green et al., 2002). A counterattitudinal message, where new issue-related information is incongruent with one's partisan preference, may create cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), and individuals, subsequently, process such information in a different manner. If they have the ability, individuals may expend greater cognitive energy to develop counterarguments (Kunda, 1990). However, they could engage in perspective taking, where individuals place themselves "in the shoes" of the political other. It is important to note that an individual needs both the motivation and ability to elaborate on a message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Partisan media provides individuals with the motivation (partisan social identity salience) and ability (knowledge) to elaborate on many political issues.

Not all people process information in the same way, and, in fact, individuals do not think about all information to the same extent (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). PMR influences the manner in which individuals process information and may help explain the amount and valence of cognitive elaboration. Both the amount and valence of elaboration

on a message can be influential to the persuasive and informative outcomes of new political information. First of all, cognitive elaboration with a message is essential to persuasion, with peripheral processing resulting in smaller, more ephemeral changes and central route processing having the potential to result in longer-lasting attitude change (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) Secondly, research measuring the amount of elaboration has demonstrated that, overall, greater elaboration results in more retention of knowledge (e.g., Bandura, 2002; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Shrum, 2002), but it is undetermined what the influence of negatively valenced elaboration (counterarguing) will have on the learning process. The current study independently investigates the influence of positively and negatively valenced elaboration on the informative and persuasive outcomes of a political message because partisan affiliations should motivate individuals to engage in valenced elaboration.

Partisan Media and Partisan Cues

Partisan media prime partisan identities, and partisanship colors the lens through which an individual views the world (Green et al., 2002; Levendusky, 2013b). A social identity framework has been employed to explain partisan media effects (e.g., Garrett et al., 2014; Levendusky, 2013a). By definition, partisan media presents information to support one party and ideology. Because a majority of Americans are uninformed on most issues (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Fowler & Margolis, 2014), citizens rely on partisan cues to establish their own political stances (Arceneaux, 2007). Partisan media provides clearer partisan cuing than more traditional political media. In a two-party system, partisan cues indicate if a political action is proattitudinal or counterattitudinal. Proattitudinal and counterattitudinal messages have different influences on viewers or

readers. Proattitudinal messages result in more extreme attitudes and greater polarization (Feldman, Myers, Hmielowski, & Leiserowitz, 2014; Levendusky, 2013c). Because most partisan media employ a one-sided information presentation without opposing opinions, the arguments are even more convincing and result in more extreme attitudes and higher polarization (Lodge & Taber, 2000). In these cases, the information reinforces, strengthens, and deepens an individual's prior opinions on an issue and against the opposing party. This reaffirmation increases confidence and results in individuals holding their political stances with greater certainty (Sunstein, 2009). Sunstein (2009) argues that partisan media provide viewers and readers with information to form, reinforce, and strengthen their political perspective, while it also is an avenue for partisan cues to be conveyed from political elites to the general public.

However, though individuals actively seek out likeminded media, they do not avoid counterattitudinal messages (Garrett & Stroud, 2014). Therefore, partisans regularly encounter messages that cut against their political leanings. In fact, Stroud (2011) found that 16% of people watch exclusively counterattitudinal news. Proattitudinal messages lead to more extreme attitudes and greater polarization, but what is the influence of counterattitudinal information? The results are less clear. Predominantly, research has found support for message-consistent persuasion (e.g., Feldman, 2011; Stroud, 2011), which leads to more centrist ideas and less polarization. Even if individuals are not completely persuaded to support the ideas in the message, their resistance and opposition to competing political positions are lessened. However, Levendusky (2013a) found that counterattitudinal messages lead to depolarization and moderation only if the viewers consider the outlet trustworthy, which he argues is rare,

especially among strong partisans. Though some receivers take the perspective of the message source, others develop counterarguments to defend their original disposition. As such, other researchers have found evidence suggesting a boomerang effect (e.g., Redlawsk, 2002; Taber & Lodge, 2006). A boomerang effect results in individuals holding stronger, more certain stances on a political message in the direction of their original beliefs, in the opposite direction of the persuasive information presented. The mixed results indicate that there are differences in either the counterattitudinal messages or the viewers receiving these messages—or both—and invitation for further research into the processing mechanism and effects of counterattitudinal political messages. Partisan media may activate partisan social identities and motivate biased processing of information and valenced elaboration, which may influence whether a partisan viewer/reader is persuaded by or learns from a political argument.

Persuasive and Informative Outcomes of Partisan Political Messages

The change in information flow, medium, and content may have many influences on the American electorate. Specifically, this dissertation will look at two potential outcomes of political messaging: persuasion and learning. These two outcomes are fundamental to the attitude formation process and have implications for a democracy. The information that an individual consumes affects one's attitudes, which predict behavioral decisions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). To observe persuasive effects, researchers are interested in attitude formation and attitude change. Political media may result in more extreme attitudes towards an issue or more centrist perspectives. Attitudes can be strengthened or weakened, and in relatively rare occurrences, they may even be changed. Effective political communication either encourages action—such as voting,

displaying yard signs, volunteering, or simply talking to friends and coworkers—from one's own partisan loyalists or discourages action from members of the opposing party. Political communication has shifted to accomplish these goals of activation and deactivation. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2011) explain that the transition from the centrist strategy (where candidates try to win independent swing voters) to the base strategy (where candidates focus on mobilizing partisan supporters and demobilizing opponents) has led to more divisive rhetoric. Persuasive efforts to influence attitudes are not limited to direction, but messages also target the strength and intensity of attitudes.

Individuals may change their position on an issue after learning new information about the topic. Though Americans have access to nearly infinite informational sources, they are often described as uninformed (e.g., Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Fowler & Margolis, 2014; Neuman, 1986). Learning about politics requires time and cognitive resources (Huber, Kernell, & Leoni, 2005), effort that many Americans are unwilling to dedicate to political matters. Learning requires an individual to acquire, process, and integrate new information into existing mental schemas (Grabinger & Dunlap, 2016). Because political communication is, at its core, the sharing of information to persuade voters, individuals learn through exposure (e.g., Atkin, Bowen, Nayman, & Sheinkopf, 1973). Because this information typically advocates for one political perspective over another, the source of the information is extremely important in the formation of opinions and prediction of behavior (Stroud, 2011). Political messages provide individuals with information, and this information enables citizens to participate.

Project Overview

In this chapter the process of identity-motivated elaboration was introduced. The evolving political communicative landscape and emergence of partisan media require researchers utilize new, innovative perspectives to study political communication. Political communication is most often persuasive in nature and contains partisan cues. The purpose of the dissertation is to integrate SIT, PMR, and ELM into a unified theory of political persuasion. The following chapter will provide an overview of relevant literature. The political persuasive process will be examined in the second chapter, and the process of identity-motivated elaboration will be developed. SIT, PMR, and ELM will be discussed in more detail, as the theories are integrated to develop a set of hypotheses and one research question. The hypothesized relationships form a moderated mediation structural model. The third chapter outlines the experimental design utilized to test the hypothesized model. An online experiment was conducted on a convenience student sample (Study 1) testing the influence of partisan social identities and cognitive elaboration in the learning and persuasive process. A direct replication of the experiment was conducted on a sample obtained through Amazon Mechanical Turk (Study 2). A total of 557 participants took part in the two studies, which utilized the issue of Puerto Rican statehood. Three conditions were created (control condition, persuasive argument condition, and the partisan cue condition) to examine the influence of a persuasive political message with or without partisan cues.

In Chapter 4, I present the results of Study 1 and Study 2, followed by an analysis of the combined samples. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze data and test the hypothesized model. Both Study 1 and Study 2 largely supported the hypothesized moderated mediation model. The follow-up analysis provided more statistical power to

better analyze the few hypotheses that received mixed support in Study 1 and Study 2. The fifth and final chapter discusses the implications of findings. By applying an up-to-date theoretical framework to political information processing, the current study extends our understanding of how people respond to persuasive political messages, which are much more common in the contemporary media environment. Six core findings contribute to the political persuasion literature; each finding is discussed. The study reinforces the previous findings that partisanship functions as a social identity and that it conditions the persuasiveness of political communication. In addition, the findings reveal four novel contributions. First, individuals engage in PMR, not just to defend prior beliefs, but to defend partisan social identities. Additionally, though elaboration is theoretically discussed as valenced, previous studies have predominantly operationalized the concept as simply the amount of message analysis—the study demonstrates the value of differentiating positively and negatively valenced elaboration. Third, partisan cues hinder learning from exposure to a political message. Lastly, negatively valenced elaboration and counterarguing does not increase learning about a political issue. The findings support the process of identity-motivated elaboration and an integration of SIT, PMR, and ELM into a unified theory of political persuasion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Political communication plays a fundamental role in the attitude formation process. Theoretical underpinnings of persuasion are outlined in this chapter, followed by an explanation of factors that may influence this process. Partisan cues embedded in political messages maintain and reinforce an individual's identification with and social attachment to a political party. Literature on the social identity approach is presented to illustrate how partisanship is, first and foremost, a social identity. The chapter will then engage the information processing and cognitive elaboration literature to develop theoretical hypotheses about how political messages are integrated to affect both learning and persuasion, a process I call identity-motivated elaboration. If political parties are social identities, theoretical expectations of group psychology will be observed in the persuasion, learning, and elaboration resulting from partisan political messages. This influence is largely conditional on one's partisan social identity, so the social identity theory will be summarized and applied to the political context.

Attitudes are Responsive to Media Environment

Political opinions are formed from relevant information that is momentarily most accessible (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Persuasive arguments may result in attitude change because the new information is the most salient and easily recalled when a person forms an issue-related attitude. As such, Zaller (1992) posits that attitudes are not fixed or static; a well-constructed argument enters new information into consideration for an individual and has the power to influence opinions on an issue (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). An individual's political opinions and attitudes are shaped, in a large part, by the political communication to which they are exposed (Franz & Ridout, 2007; Lodge & Taber, 2013;

McKinney & Warner, 2013; Stroud, 2011; Zaller, 1992). An individual is responsive to their media environment through a process of active, real-time cognitive engagement with messages (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Redlawsk, 2001). When individuals encounter new information, they affectively react to and process that information. Through the process of online updating, individuals integrate affective responses into existing mental schemas—specific information may be forgotten after it is used to update a global affective evaluation (or the online tally) of the subject under consideration. Affective online tallies, Lodge and Taber (2013) posit, are used to generate an overall feeling that serves as the basis for a decision or judgement. Kim and Garrett (2012) developed a hybrid model of information processing in which both memory-based and online processing are used simultaneously. They argue that individuals utilize online affective updating and also recall specific information from long-term memory when making a decision. Citizens' attitudes and opinions, thus, are responsive to the information to which they are exposed.

When a person encounters a political message, especially about a low information issue, the new information remains on the "top of the head" and is used to make political decisions (Taylor & Fiske, 1978). Zaller (1992) challenges the idea that voters have only one true preference; instead he presents a model where individuals have conflicting views on specific issues and the "winning" view at any given time is determined by the information that is most accessible at the moment—often the most recent information. In this model, Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS), individuals' stated opinions reflect considerations they have 1) received: the information to which one has been exposed; 2) accepted: considered consistent (or at least not inconsistent) with prior attitudes or

predispositions; and 3) sampled: used in the decision-making process in relevant situations. A bucket analogy is employed by Zaller (1992) to explain the process: Considerations and relevant information enter into one's head, and when individuals are asked to make a decision on the issue, they reach into a "bucket" of considerations. The individual picks a sample of considerations (those near the top are most likely to be selected); the considerations are averaged to form that individual's opinion on the issue. Thus, new information is more influential in the attitude formation process. Lodge and Taber (2013) present a competing view that can be used to augment the RAS model. They demonstrate the influence of prior affect in biasing the reception, acceptance, and sampling processes of cognition. As such, though new information may be influential, prior attitudes influence the way new information is received.

Political messages most often fall into three categories: 1) campaign messages; 2) messages from news media; and 3) partisan media messages. Two of these three types of messages are explicitly persuasive. This new information, especially when a counterview is absent (Sunstein, 2003), has the ability to influence the thoughts, opinions, and even behavior of the receiver of the message. The direct persuasion hypothesis, explained by Feldman (2011), argues that opinionated partisan media is more influential in the attitude formation process than traditional, more balanced, and non-opinionated news because it does not provide both sides of an issue, which may interfere with attitude change. Audiences are persuaded by opinionated media regardless of "how much journalist opinion is blurred with fact" (Feldman, 2011, p. 166). Persuasion is conceptualized as the shaping, reinforcing, or changing of attitudes (Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010; Miller, 2002). Persuasive political messages have the ability to weaken opposition (Franz &

Ridout, 2007) or strengthen attitudinal extremity (Stroud, 2011; Sunstein, 2009), and these persuasive effects are most evident when individuals are moderately aware, ill-informed, or undecided on an issue (e.g., Huber, & Arceneaux, 2007; Kaid, Fernandes, & Painter, 2011; McKinney & Warner, 2013). More politically aware and informed citizens are more likely to be exposed to persuasive political appeals; however, these individuals are also the most able to resist persuasion (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013; Zaller, 1992). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) explain that an individual must have the motivation and ability to cognitively engage a message. Cognitive engagement is essential to the process of attitude change, and political awareness predicts greater intellectual and cognitive engagement with a message (Zaller, 1992). Though political awareness provides both ability and motivation to engage many political messages, an individual with high political awareness may still lack motivation to engage a low-salience issue and the ability to engage a low-knowledge issue.

If people lack either the motivation or ability to elaborate on a message, they are unable to counterargue new information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Thus, people react critically to political communication only to the extent that they are knowledgeable about the issue (Zaller, 1992). Moreover, it requires cognitive energy to engage in motivated reasoning and develop counterarguments (Kunda, 1990; Lord et al., 1979), especially for low-knowledge issues. If an issue is also low in salience, an individual may lack motivation to expend the cognitive resources necessary to counterargue and resist persuasive efforts. When individuals have "no particular view" on an issue, their attitudes are greatly influenced by new information and reasonable opinions on the matter (Sunstein, 2003). Citizens update their attitudes in the direction of new information

(Feldman, 2011; Green & Gerber, 1999). Thus, with a low-salience, low-knowledge issue, a well-constructed argument is hypothesized to elicit message-consistent persuasion.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Exposure to a political argument will result in message-consistent persuasion among readers.*

Social Identities Create Predispositions

A central argument in the current dissertation is that partisanship functions as a social identity, marshalling biased information processing even when there are no prior attitudes present because PMR does not only protect attitudes and beliefs, it also protects identities. As such, it plays a fundamental role in the persuasive process, influencing both the attitudes and behaviors of partisan group members. In other words, political information may affect members of one political party differently than members of the opposing party. When exposed to new political information, partisans view the message through a partisan lens and biasedly process the information. In order to explain the motivations that underlie social group formation and the social implications of group identification, the social identity approach will be explained in the following section.

Social Identity Approach

An individual's self-concept, and understanding of who they are as a person, derives from their personal and social identities. Each individual is part of multiple social groups, and these groups have implied shared behaviors and social norms (Tamborrini, Cinnirella, Jasen, & Byden, 2015). The social identity approach explains the influence of group membership on an individual. A social identity, or collective self, informs an individual of group norms, which influence that person to the extent that the individual

feels connected and committed to a specific group and social categorization (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). At the core of this argument, Reicher, Spears, and Haslam (2010) explain, are three principles: 1) A social identity is a relative term in which an individual is a function of similarities and differences with others; 2) a social identity, being shared with other group members, provides a basis for shared social action; 3) as products of culture and history, social identities are links between an individual and society. The social identity approach is a psychological explanation for the influence of a group on an individual's attitudes and behavior. The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), and the theory of social comparison processes (Festinger, 1954) explicate the complicated processes through which group membership helps define who we are and how we relate to others. An individual's personal and social identities work simultaneously in powerful ways.

Origins of Social Identity Theory

Human history is filled with examples of horrific atrocities, such as war or slavery, between groups of people. During the Second World War, German Nazis killed millions of Jews. The Holocaust led many researchers to question what caused such hatred and discrimination. Sherif (1954) designed the well-recognized Robbers Cave experiment to investigate hostility between groups. A group of 11-12-year-old boys were arbitrarily divided into two groups: the Rattlers and the Eagles. As the two teams battled for limited resources, the competition quickly turned negative with name-calling, burning of the other team's flag, a cabin ransacking, and even physical confrontation. The social psychological aspect of group interactions demonstrated the core principles of the

realistic conflict theory (Campbell, 1965). According to this perspective, in a competition between resources—where one group's gain is the other group's loss—members of opposing groups feel and behave hostilely toward one another (Sherif, 1966).

Henri Tajfel, however, believed that competition for resources may not be necessary for intergroup discrimination. Along with his colleagues, Tajfel designed and conducted experiments to test the minimal group paradigm (e.g., Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). In one experiment, the researchers divided participants into arbitrary groups (based on preference of painter: Klee or Kandinsky) and observed participants awarding points to members of their own group despite never actually meeting, interacting with, or learning anything about other group members. The study was designed to eliminate alternative motivations for behavioral differences, such as social pressure or self-interest. The researchers concluded that even when participants were not competing over resources, they still demonstrated ingroup favoritism; in other words, competition was sufficient, but not necessary. At times, participants demonstrated highly unfavorable bias against unidentified outgroup members at the expense of not maximizing absolute gain for the ingroup. In other words, participants showed greater preference in maximizing the ingroup's relative profit over the outgroup rather than for maximizing the total amount of profit for the ingroup if it meant the outgroup would also attain a higher profit. From these experiments, Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed the social identity theory (SIT) to explain ingroup favoritism and outgroup denigration. Even when confronted with counterevidence, individuals will evaluate members of their group higher than members of an outgroup (Lalonde, 1992).

The social identity theory extends the realistic conflict theory beyond hostile attitudes and behavior toward a competing group to explain a greater range of group phenomena. The two theories challenged the dominant assumption that those who hate are hateful people to provide nuance to our understanding of discrimination and violence (Reicher et al., 2010). SIT explains why groups are formed and the implications of group formation. Social identities not only produce hostility and hegemony, but they also provide the psychological structure for prejudice and discriminatory power to be resisted. Though the Holocaust provided the basis for much of the motivation and established the significance of social identity theory, the social upheavals of the 1960s in the United States provided a different background for viewing and understanding group action. Collective action based on race, gender, and sexuality was transforming the political landscape and "pointed to the group not only as a cause of social injustices but also as their solution" (Reicher et al., 2010, p. 47). As such, social context and structure are fundamental to group formation, belief systems, and collective action.

Motivations for Group Identification

An individual's desire for a positive self-concept and social certainty is fundamental to the social identity explanation. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals are motivated to improve their self-concept through their individual identity (e.g., personal achievements, skills, or abilities) and their social identities (positive group evaluations). Tajfel (1981) defined social identity as "the part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 255). Social identities are primarily constructed as a means of self-enhancement

through boosting self-esteem and fostering a sense of security (McGregor, Reeshma, & So-Jin, 2008). In times of uncertainty, individuals have an epistemological desire for belonging. The uncertainty reduction hypothesis, articulated by Mullin and Hogg (1999), argues that individuals seek certainty about how to think, feel, and act. This, ultimately, provides a more certain self-concept. Individuals gradually learn the norms and expectations that characterize a particular group or team. Adoption of these normalized behaviors and attitudes imparts a sense of certainty and alleviates anxiety (Hogg & Abrams, 1993). According to this hypothesis, Mullin and Hogg (1999) argue that individuals facing greater subjective uncertainty will be attracted to and commit more strongly to a social group, and, thus, a social identity will have a greater impact on these individuals. Instability of group status or the permeability of group boundaries may lead to insecurity amongst members in times of uncertainty (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An individual's desire for a positive self-concept operates separately from an individual's quest for certainty.

Tajfel (1972) argues that an individual will maintain group memberships and seek new group memberships if belonging to that group enhances positive aspects of one's self-concept and provides cognitive satisfaction. Ingroup favoritism and outgroup denigration can enhance an individual's ingroup evaluation and, thus, an individual's self-esteem. Individuals seek to maintain high evaluations of the groups to which they belong because doing so subsequently improves their perceptions of themselves (Tarrant, MacKenzie, & Hewitt, 2006). In other words, people feel better about themselves when they belong to a successful group. An individual's self-value, to the extent one identifies with and defines oneself through a group membership, is tied to the fate of the group and

fellow members. Because of this, an individual is motivated to help other group members excel to advance the group overall, which, in turn, boosts one's own sense of value. This is known as the self-esteem hypothesis (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). An individual's drive to acquire a positive self-concept and heighten self-esteem is pursued through a positive social identity. The argument rests on the idea that group members will seek positive distinctiveness between their own group and the outgroup. Members of a high-status group will emphasize differences between themselves and outsiders. Marginalized groups can overcome a low social status in two ways: social creativity or social movement (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When groups employ social creativity strategies, they compare groups based on alternative dimensions that favor their own group. Secondly, members of a low-status group may seek to better the image of the group. This social change approach relies on competition between groups for the resources that contribute to the comparative dimension. Achieving positive distinctiveness or successful intergroup discrimination will improve the perceived value of a social identity and, as a result, improve an individual's self-esteem. However, self-esteem is not only a dependent variable; Abrams and Hogg (1988) also argue that a depressed self-esteem may motivate the pursuit of a more valuable social identity and promote intergroup discrimination. Although, the details and terminology are debated among social identity scholars, the pursuit of a positive self-concept through a positive social identity remains at the core of the social identity approach (e.g., Long & Spears, 1997; Turner & Reynolds, 2001).

Three Stages of Social Identity

Social identity research has expanded into multiple distinct, yet complementary sub-theories (Hogg & Terry, 2001). These components are collectively known as the

social identity perspective or the social identity approach. The social identity approach functions in three stages: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (McLeod, 2008). Individuals, inevitably, place themselves and others into categories. As individuals become immersed in the culture of a group, they begin to identify more closely with that group and take on the perceived traits of that group. Finally, an individual favorably compares one's own group (ingroup) with the outgroup (Taylor & Doria, 1981). These three steps construct much of what is known as the social identity approach.

Self-categorization. Before positive distinctiveness, which enhances an individual's self-concept, can be achieved, social categories must be constructed and cognitively employed. Social identification is in a state of constant evolution. At times, one social identity may be more salient and, thus, more impactful, yet, at other times, that social identity may provide little more than peripheral cues. As one group becomes more salient, Turner and colleagues (1987) argue, other identities become less relevant. Additionally, many social categories are enduring (e.g., ethnicity, religion, or nationality); others, however, are more dynamic (McGregor et al., 2008). Individuals may join new groups and even leave others. As social identities transform, uncertainty is created and then reduced. The goal for individuals is to be associated with groups that enhance their self-concept. Categorization of people into distinct social groups has a depersonalizing effect, where individuals see all members of a group (even themselves) as sharing core values and characteristics (Turner et al., 1987). Four types of social categorizations are laid out by Lickel, Hamilton, and Sherman (2001): intimacy groups (e.g., friends and family); task groups (e.g., teams and coworkers); social identities (e.g.,

race, ethnicity, and gender); and loose associations (e.g., fans of the same team). McGregor and colleagues (2008) note that enduring identities provide greater social certainty and tend to have a greater influence on attitudes and behaviors.

Similarities between social groups (e. g., Cuban-Americans and Mexican-Americans) pose a threat to a group's distinctiveness and challenge the certainty that members of a group have about their position in the social environment. A distinct group identity is a prerequisite for collective behavior and social cues (Baumeister, 1986). Individuals typically identify more strongly with distinct groups and marginalized groups. For that reason, minorities typically hold stronger racial group identification than members of a majority group (Simon & Brown, 1987) despite the negative stereotypes and perceptions often associated with minority groups (Blanz, Mummendey, & Otten, 1995). In fact, Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1999) argue that a distinct social identity may be more important than a positive one. When another group threatens a group's distinctiveness, members must find a way to differentiate the two groups to maintain strong group cohesiveness and identification. To minimize social uncertainty, individuals categorize themselves and others.

Social identification. The social identity theory, first coined by Turner and Brown (1978) and further articulated by Tajfel and Turner (1979) the following year, is the theoretical output of the experiments and research led by Henri Tajfel over the previous decade. The minimal group experiments (e.g., Tajfel et al., 1971) demonstrated that group categorization, even arbitrary distinctions, could produce social identities that influence the behavior of individuals. The imposed categorizations were accepted as impactful and relevant to self-definition. Social groups, full of emotion and connotations,

influence the way in which an individual understands oneself and the surrounding world. Therefore, the manner in which individuals view their social groups informs the way they view themselves. This has implicit and explicit attitudinal and behavioral influences. The more closely an individual identifies with a group and derives one's self concept from membership, the more powerful the effects of that social identity will be (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social stereotyping occurs when individuals stereotype ingroup and outgroup members as they cognitively form categories. Moreover, individuals stereotype themselves (Marques, 1990; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1999). In forming a conceptual definition of a group and what it means to be a member of that group, individuals set normative expectations. As a social identity becomes more integral to one's own self-concept, an individual begins to enact these stereotypical expectations in everyday life. Stereotypes, though they may vary from member to member, often derive from a perceived prototypical figure. A prototypical member of a group embodies the essence of what it means to be a group member and most clearly expresses a group's shared social identity (Turner, 1991). The meaning and significance of a social group cannot be designated with simple labels but requires a more complex set of values, traits, and characteristics that are known as prototypes. Simply, a prototypical member differs greatly from members of an outgroup and little from ingroup members. Prototypes, then, are used to differentiate a group from other social collectives (Reid & Hogg, 2005). The more a member is perceived as prototypical or representative of group norms, the more influence that individual will have in intergroup interactions and intragroup decisions (Turner, 1999). Individuals engage in self-stereotyping to pursue self-perceived

prototypicality, in which they view themselves as embodying the core characteristics of a group (Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). In fact, optimal distinction theory (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004) argues that individuals have both a need to belong and a desire to feel unique. Social identities and self-prototypical perceptions allow for both of these seemingly conflicting needs. Individuals may view themselves as a prototypical member that best fulfills what it means to be a group member. Because individuals develop perceptions of many aspects of group membership, one's social identity can affect the way individuals act, think, and even dress. For example, when young people enroll in university, they are likely to take on characteristics of a stereotypical college student.

Individuals may internalize their social identity to such an extent that norms and customs of a group become a fundamental aspect of their personal identities. As such, in times of personal uncertainty and personal identity salience, aspects of one's social identity may become more prominent (Eidelman & Silvia, 2010). In other words, when individuals internalize their social identity, a person's personal identity can activate their social identity. In an experimental setting, Eidelman and Silvia (2010) sat participants in front of a mirror, which has been demonstrated to activate one's personal identity rather than social identity. Following the treatment, the researchers asked participants the degree that they identify with a series of traits. Participants with a strong identification as Americans identified with stereotypical American traits, even negative stereotypes, such as aggression and materialism. The researchers concluded that the activation of the personal identity for strong group identifiers simultaneously activated those individuals' social (national) identities.

Social identification can have a dramatic influence on individuals. The groups in which an individual belongs can alter perceptions, attitudes, and behavior, especially in times of uncertainty or high salience. Individuals may embrace the values and demonstrate the behaviors that they perceive to best epitomize their social group (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Tajfel, 1972). In doing so, they stereotype themselves and others; then they interpret actions of other people to fit their group's stereotype (Gagnon & Bourhis, 1996). Uncertainty, group interaction, and competition with other groups activate a social identity so that it has a greater impact on an individual. Social identities can have negative or positive effects on an individual's beliefs and behavior depending on the group norms associated with that social identity (Worchel, 1998).

Social comparison. Social comparison theory states that individuals compare their own group to opposing groups in order to gain an accurate self-evaluation to reduce uncertainty. Subsequent research (e.g., Wills, 1981) has furthered Festinger's (1954) theory to explain how social comparisons are used for self-enhancement. In the social identity approach, comparison between social groups plays an important role. As individuals accentuate similarities within a group and differences between groups, distinct groups are created that are necessarily comparative. In other words, humans define themselves not only by who they are, but also in reference to who they are not. Part of forming an ingroup is forming an outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Self enhancement comes from a positive comparison, in which an individual perceives oneself to be better than another individual. This comparison takes place to create a positive distinction between one's own group and the competing group among value dimensions (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). When positive distinctiveness is achieved, individuals

ascribe the positive attributes of a group to themselves and negative traits to the competing group (Long & Spears, 1997). Thus, it is important in the self-concept building process to distinguish one's ingroup from the outgroup in a way that is favorable to the ingroup (Tajfel, 1974). Turner (1999) explains that people have "a need for positive social identity, expressed through a desire to create, maintain, or enhance the positively valued distinctiveness of ingroups compared to outgroups on relevant dimensions" (p. 8). The concept of a self-enhancement motivation from group distinctiveness is derived from Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison processes.

Building on and diverging from Bruner's (1957) explanation of worth and perception, Tajfel (1959) developed the accentuation principle, in which individuals accentuate differences among various groups and similarities within the same category. In other words, differences between groups are heightened, and differences within a group are minimized. Through this process, an individual magnifies a group's emotional and value relevance to generate positive group values and, thus, a more positive self-concept. Peripheral distinctions, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation, may be used to distinguish groups with magnified inter-category differences and intra-category similarities. This categorization process, Tajfel (1969) advocates, often leads to stereotypes—both positive ingroup stereotypes and negative outgroup stereotypes. This oversimplification fulfills an individual's need for cognitive parsimony (Markus & Zajonc, 1985).

Social Identity and Politics

Social identities have always, and will always, play an important role in the political arena. An individual's national identity has increasingly been studied as a social

identity (Schildkraut, 2014). Individuals form emotional and social connections with their country, and patriotic tendencies emerge. Waving flags and Olympic chants are expressions of national social identities. Nations, Emerson (1960) famously described, are made up of "a body of people who feel that they are a nation" (p. 102). This definition was utilized by Tajfel (1978) to explain how social identities can have political consequences on individuals' behavior and attitudes. For example, Myrdal (1944) coined the American Creed, arguing that the values of individualism, hard work, freedom, equality, and rule of law are the defining characteristic of what it means to be an American. This creed and American identity has been tested by a number of scholars that have found agreement among many social groups about the normative characteristics of Americans (e.g., Citrin, Reingold, & Green, 1990; Schildkraut, 2014). National identities and political identities, moreover, can have important political consequences.

The social identity perspective helps to explain the existence of prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice has a cognitive, affective, and behavioral component (Ostrom, 1969). The cognitive component explains the beliefs, often stereotypes, we hold of a group or individual. The affective component addresses the way in which we feel toward that group or individual. Finally, the behavioral component explains the manner in which we treat that group or individual. Behaving negatively toward a group or individual because of prejudice is known as discrimination. The social identity approach predicts that the simple existence of multiple groups will inevitably lead to prejudice and discrimination yet may also provide the means to resist such discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1970). Social identities are associated with discrimination, hate, and violence (e.g., Holocaust) and historic social movements to resist oppression (e.g., Civil Rights

Movement). Below, these two opposite outcomes of social identities on society are discussed.

Prejudice, Discrimination, and Oppression

Oakes, Haslam, and Turner (1994) identified five key variables that relate to the occurrence of discrimination between groups. The first is the strength of identification an individual has with a particular group. The more closely one identifies with a group, the more an individual will discriminate against competing groups. Secondly, it is important how salient that social categorization is in the given circumstance. In many situations, a social categorization is simply not relevant and, thus, plays a lesser role in attitudes and behavior. As mentioned above, social identities become more salient in times of uncertainty. Kugihara (2001) found that in times of high anxiety (i.e., fire drills), individuals were more likely to replicate the aggression of colleagues. The third variable is the relevance of the comparative dimension to the ingroup's identity. Simply, if two groups are being compared along a dimension that is not central or important at all to a group, then the members of that group will not act as strongly to demonstrate relative superiority in that particular area. Different groups value different characteristics and traits and will fight more strongly (discriminate more) to demonstrate superiority. Fourth, discrimination will be stronger if the two groups are more similar in the comparative dimension. The closer two groups are in a given comparison, the more group members will discriminate against the outgroup in an attempt to establish the relative advantage among that particular comparative dimension. Finally, the status or perceived status of both groups has an influence on any intergroup interaction.

Discriminatory practices are often enacted by those in power to maintain and extend that power. An experiment by Fowler and Kam (2007) found that strong partisan identifiers were motivated to participate politically to acquire benefits for their own party; moreover, these benefits were perceived as more advantageous by the partisans if they were at the expense of the opposing party. Similar to the hostility displayed by the boys in Robbers Cave (Sherif, 1954), competing social groups explain much intergroup conflict that creates social divides, lessens national identity salience, and fosters intolerance (Huddy, 2001). Citrin and colleagues (1990) found that individuals who viewed whiteness and Christianity as essential to the American identity were more likely to oppose policies that benefited minorities or immigrants. Strong political identities promote feelings of antipathy and perceptions of threat from an outgroup (Gibson & Gouws, 2003). This antagonistic perception can have negative influence on a political system as individuals begin to view the political other as an enemy, which can result in violence (Mouffe, 2013). Unexplainable actions, such as those during the Holocaust, may be related to the dark side of social identity. Conover (1988) explains that group membership plays an important role in shaping political attitudes and encouraging particular behaviors. This can be positive or negative. When a political group is encouraging destructive and adverse behavior, social identities may put pressure on an individual to conform to group norms (Huddy, 2001). Thus, political social identities can lead to intergroup conflict and oppression.

Social Change

While the Holocaust and other horrific events were the basis for early group interaction studies (e.g., Sharif, 1954), Tajfel envisioned group dynamics also functioning

in a more positive manner. The revolutionary 1960s provide the social backdrop for Tajfel's early studies. During this time, the United States made important strides in perceptions, treatment, and rights of many disenfranchised social groups, including African-Americans and women. The Civil Rights Movement demonstrated that social groups could foster collective action to produce change and combat oppression. Social groups, thus, were both the cause of many social injustices and the solution to discrimination. Reicher and colleagues (2010) argue that for many marginalized groups (e.g., women in a sexist society and minorities in a racist society), social identity provides a means to resist discrimination. As such, social identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, or religion can foster political cohesion and collective action to boost a group's political impact (Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, & Weisberg, 2008). For example, the development of a feminist social identity has played a vital role in the success of the movement (Huddy, 1998). More than a collection of similarly interested individuals, social identities can be activated to generate awareness and mobilize resources (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Research on the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) has found that perceived injustice, efficacy, and social identity individually have a moderate effect on collective action, but when individuals perceive an injustice, see a viable path of resistance, and feel a strong identity to the marginalized group, collective action is more likely and successful (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). SIMCA situates social identity as the strongest psychological predictor of relatively powerless individuals joining together in a powerful voice. Social identities, when salient, motivate an individual to act on the behalf of the group. As such, social identities are a "stepping stone" to the politicization of an individual (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013) and

a cornerstone of collective action and social change. Social categories must be present and salient for group discrimination to take place; however, this may result in greater group salience for those facing discrimination, which leads to greater collective action in resistance.

As a social identity becomes more salient and thus more influential on attitudes and behavior, individuals tend to think in terms of "we" instead of "I" and are more likely to engage in collective action (Turner, 1999). Van Stekelenburg, Oegema, and Klandermans (2010) argue that the minimal group paradigm tested by Tajfel and colleagues (1971) does not capture the history and culture of real-world conflicts, which they describe as the "maximal group paradigm." When members of a low-status group perceive a status-differentiation as illegitimate, they may join other members in protest to challenge for higher status (Ellemers, 1993; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). Because groups often differ in power and status, changes in relative status are the motivation for much intergroup conflict. For groups without social power, collective action is the primary resource available to challenge their subjugation (Reicher et al., 2010). The primary concern and key issue for the social identity theory, according to its original developer, is social change (Tajfel, 1972).

Partisan Social Identities

Another important political social identity is partisanship. Party affiliation can be a powerful predictor of both political attitudes and behavior (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). In their seminal book, *The American Voter*, Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) described political parties as central components of political behavior. The authors define partisan identification as an "affective attachment" (p. 143). As Tajfel

(1981) noted in his explication of social identity theory, there must be an emotional connection between an individual and a group for the social identity to affect that person's attitudes and behavior. Likewise, party loyalty is not simply a cognitive commitment, but one full of affect and emotion. Partisan identity is very stable over a person's lifetime despite the continuously changing political issues and environment (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002). Goren, Federico, and Kittilson (2009) explain that partisan identities are grounded in group attachments that are more enduring than political values. Others argue, however, that partisanship is less stable than commonly assumed; this can be largely explained, Josefson (2000) argues, by self-categorization theory. Party stereotypes, which previously Wattenberg (1994) referred to as "party images," define what party membership means to individuals. Being a Republican (or Democrat) may mean different things to different people. A lack of clarity, which may be the result of a weak or challenged prototype, can lead to instability. In times of a more homogeneous and agreed upon platform, party stability increases (Josefson, 2000). According to Turner and colleagues (1987), individuals form stereotypes of both ingroups and outgroups. In politics, this can be applied to party stereotypes, where an individual forms stereotypes of Republicans, Democrats, and members of other political parties.

Greene (1999; 2004) applied social identity theory to party identification, expanding Campbell and colleagues (1960) definition of a political party. Greene (2004) argues that citizens have a "psychological investment" in a political party because party identification is similar to one's association with other social groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious identities. Studies across the world—including Australia (Duck,

Hogg, & Terry, 1995), Great Britain (Kelly, 1990), Hong Kong (Bond & Hewstone, 1988), India (Ghosh & Kumar, 1991), Scotland (Abrams, 1994), and the United States (Greene, 1999)—have found that social identities play an important role in party loyalties and political behavior. However, party identities can be vague in the United States since American citizens are not required to officially join a party to engage the political system. In fact, Greene (2004) found that many individuals claiming to be independents actually behave in a partisan manner. This, Greene (2004), argues is largely due to the fact that identity as an independent is only quasi-related to Republican/Democrat partisan identity. In other words, an individual can have identities as both a Democrat (or Republican) and as an independent. Though this may seem contradictory, social identities are not necessarily grounded in policy stances. Because independents and Democrats are not in strong competition like Republicans and Democrats, an individual may hold a partisan identity and an independent identity simultaneously. Greene (2004) used Mael and Tetrick's (1992) Identification with a Psychological Group (IDPG) scale to measure both partisan identity and Independent identity, finding that social identities play a conceptual and analytical role in understanding the influence of parties in the American political system.

Polarization and Attitude Extremism

Increased polarization is one of the effects of the adoption of partisanship as a social identity. Partisan political messages lead to more extreme position stances (Sunstein, 2009) and sides are less likely to work with one another (McCarty et al., 2006). As animus increases across party lines, there is an unwillingness to compromise or accept the actions of the outparty as legitimate (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Individuals

seeking positive distinctiveness from competing groups will emphasize differences between groups (Turner et al., 1987), and the gap between groups (e.g., political parties) will expand. In American politics, the two dominant political parties are continuing to diverge. McCarty and colleagues (2006) clearly documented elite polarization in their analysis of congressional roll-call votes. The authors found that in the 108th House of Representatives (2003-2004) the most conservative Democrat in the House was to the ideological left of the most liberal Republican, so that there was no partisan overlap. Likewise, there is a growing divide among official party platforms (Layman, 1999). While there is little debate about whether political elites (potential prototypes) are becoming more polarized, the degree to which this polarization has filtered down to the electorate remains somewhat unclear. Many researchers have observed a growing divide among political, social, and economic issues (e.g., Abramowitz, 2010; Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Jacobson, 2016), while others argue that this polarization remains among the partisan elite and has not trickled down to result in any mass polarization (Fiorina et al., 2011; Levendusky, 2009). This debate centers on ideological polarization, where the parties (and partisans) stand on the issues, yet many voters do not even know many of the political stances held by party leaders (Campbell et al., 1960; Iyengar et al., 2012; Oliphant, 2016). There is another form of polarization which may be more relevant.

Affect polarization, Iyengar and colleagues (2012) argue, is a more appropriate way to view polarization in American politics. Both Democrats and Republicans feel more distant and have more unfavorable evaluations of the other party and its members. The social identity theory argues that individuals will have favorable attitudes toward ingroup members and negative views of outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). If

parties operate as social identities, Democrats will dislike Republicans, and vice versa. It may not be a policy-based division that is responsible for the growing polarization in the United States but, instead, a growing dislike of the political outgroup with which one's own party is in competition. To measure this affect polarization, Iyengar and colleagues (2012) utilized ANES's feeling thermometers asking how "warm" or "cold" an individual felt toward each political party. Affect polarization was calculated by subtracting an individual's feeling thermometers score for the outparty from that of the in-party—the higher the result, a greater affect polarization score was assigned to the individual. The researchers found that affect polarization was inconsistent with issue stances. In other words, feelings of dislike toward the political other were not always rooted in policy disagreements; a Republican may dislike a Democrat simply because they are a Democrat. Additionally, affect polarization is related to social distance (Bogardus, 1947; Iyengar et al., 2012), in that more affectively polarized individuals were less open to the idea of having a close relationship or family member of the opposite party and more likely to hold negative stereotypes toward the political other. Feeling thermometers in time-series data reveal a growing affective divide among supporters of the two parties since the mid-1970s (Iyengar et al., 2012). Not only were racial and religious divides decreasing, they exist at a much lower level than the partisan divide. Similarly, Iyengar and Westwood (2015) found greater discrimination due to partisan differences than racial differences. The authors speculate that we live in a society where racial prejudices are often viewed as unacceptable, yet partisan animus is accepted.

Partisan Cues and Biased Processing of New Information

Selective exposure and attention. Partisan allegiances polarize the American electorate, resulting in more extreme attitudes, in a number of ways. First of all, in their quest of self-enhancement, individuals seek information that confirms their political beliefs, which increases the certainty and confidence in which they hold these beliefs (Stroud, 2010; 2011). They expose themselves to likeminded media and information sources. As a result, most new information confirms, expands, and strengthens an individual's preexisting political opinions. Individuals seek political information consistent with their partisan attachments because it may improve their personal self-concept and political confidence by confirming "correct" political opinion (Feldman et al., 2014) or because individuals may perceive likeminded sources to be more credible (Matheson & Dursun, 2001; Stroud, 2011). Lodge and Taber (2013) argue that individuals use information to rationalize preexisting beliefs rather than using new information to rationally construct opinions. In other words, people typically do not become Democrats because they support universal healthcare, LGBTQ rights, and more social programs; they likely support universal healthcare, LGBTQ rights, and social programs because they are Democrats. Exposure to attitudinally consistent information strengthens an individual's political self-concept and makes them more certain in their beliefs (Feldman et al., 2014). Partisanship is socialized early in life and party allegiances are fairly consistent over the course of a person's lifetime, despite changing party platforms (Lyons, 2016). Opinion formation, thus, is a rationalizing process rather than a rational one.

The way individuals, in political and nonpolitical contexts, think, feel, and behave is a function of heuristic processing and affect-driven cognition (Arceneaux, 2007;

Druckman, 2001; Lodge & Taber, 2013). Cognitive heuristics are decision-making strategies derived from similar experiences in the past, which have become rules-of-thumb for making judgments (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Heuristics allow an individual to conserve cognitive energy (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As individuals become more polarized, less concerned with counterevidence, and increasingly motivated to rationalize previous beliefs, they tend to turn to attitudinally consistent sources of information. Republicans turn to the Wall Street Journal and Fox News, while Democrats turn to The New York Times and MSNBC (Stroud, 2008). The United States has seen a drastic increase in partisan media. In fact, to command a sufficient share of the market, news outlets, Jones (2002) argues, are compelled by market pressure to produce more one-sided coverage in order to provide viewers with the more homogeneously likeminded opinions in which they seek. Though debate exists between the direction of causality of polarization and partisan media (See Stroud, 2011), it is likely a recursive or reinforcing spiral (Slater, 2007), where polarized individuals turn to partisan media, and partisan media makes these individuals more polarized.

However, individuals cannot (or do not wish to) avoid all counterattitudinal messages (Garrett, 2009; Garrett & Stroud, 2014). When exposed to cross-cutting information, many individuals pay selectively little attention to information with which they disagree. After all, mental elaboration requires both ability and motivation to cognitively process message content (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Selective attention occurs when an individual is not motivated to spend cognitive energy processing a particular (often counterattitudinal) message. Potential voters are exposed to an overwhelming number of political messages during a campaign, yet they make decisions from relatively

little information (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Because of the vast amount of political information available to citizens, selective attention is a necessary method of filtering out information that people do not perceive to be important (Dodd & White, 1980). As a result of the selective attention process, individuals dismiss most information that runs contrary to their political beliefs. Political predispositions influence what information individuals are exposed to and the selective attention that information receives. Alternatively, individuals may be motivated to counterargue the message through negatively valenced elaboration (Kunda, 1990). Partisan social identities affect the way individuals process that information and any information that challenges their beliefs (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Taber & Lodge, 2006). The information to which an individual is exposed, and the manner in which it is processed, can have a polarizing influence (Hart & Nisbet, 2012). Partisanship does not reflect an individual's political beliefs as much as it shapes them (Campbell et al., 1960).

Cognitions are affectively charged and, as a result, feelings (positive or negative) play a fundamental role in our mental processes (Damasio, 1994). In fact, all considerations and evaluations are significantly influenced by one's initial affective reaction (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Additionally, Lodge and Taber (2013) explain, in their affective contagion hypothesis, that affect can be transferred from one object to another, from one cognition to subsequent thoughts. If an individual feels favorably about a candidate or party, then that person is likely to support the policies of that candidate or party. For example, a Democratic supporter of President Barrack Obama will likely feel positively about the Affordable Care Act, and a Republican supporter of President Donald Trump will likely support the policy of building a wall between the United States

and Mexico. Simply, there is too much political information available for an individual to cognitively process (Rahn, 1993), and political issues are too complex for individuals, with time and cognitive limits, to accurately evaluate (Redlawsk, 2004). In fact, studies have confirmed that voters make candidate evaluations and voting decisions using very limited information (e. g. Feldman & Conover, 1983; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Rahn, 1993; Sniderman et al., 1991). Citizens rely on heuristic cues, such as party platform or candidate likeability, to make political decisions. Many individuals rely on partisan cues to shape their own political beliefs (Bartels, 2002). Republican supporters do not need to understand the complexity and nuance of the Affordable Care Act to believe that "ObamaCare" is a terrible healthcare policy; the political elites (including Republican politicians and conservative news personalities) inform their opinions. In this way, elite polarization, which has dramatically increased over the past few decades (McCarty et al., 2006), can filter down into the electorate (Druckman, Peterson, & Slothuus, 2013). In their research, Druckman and colleagues (2013) argue that competition between polarized elites influences the extremity of citizen opinions.

Motivated Processing

Partisan individuals are often selectively exposed to different media and information, yet even when they are exposed to the same messages, they can derive various meanings from the same information. Individuals engage in motivated reasoning with directional goals to reach desired cognitive outcomes (Kunda, 1990). The prior-belief hypothesis, proposed by Lord and colleagues (1979), relates to the way in which individuals evaluate arguments. They argue that individuals confirm and strengthen their preexisting opinions when exposed to new information. In their study, individuals who

already supported the death penalty interpreted articles about the effectiveness of the death penalty drastically differently than those who opposed the practice. In fact, the information had a polarizing effect on participants, where preexisting opinions were strengthened for both pro- and anti-death penalty supporters. In other words, the same information had opposite influences on different people as a result of motivated processing. It was not the information, but the interpretation of the message that resulted in the differences. Gaines, Kuklinski, Quirk, Peyton, & Verkuilen (2007) investigated perceptions of the war in Iraq to demonstrate that individuals have similar understandings of the facts on many issues yet employ "partisan bias" to interpret these facts in very different ways. These partisan interpretations drive differing policy opinions. Likewise, Bartels (2002), in his analysis of perceptions of economic success, found that individuals interpret objective economic reports in a way that favors their own party and blames or takes credit away from the competing party. Selective exposure may influence the facts that an individual knows or believes, but the motivated processing of information is an additional explanation for differing political opinions.

Taber and Lodge (2006) find that individuals often lack the motivation, not ability, to process information in an accurate and even-handed manner. Instead, individuals engage in what the authors refer to as "motivated skepticism." Information is processed according to motivations or goals, which are "desired endpoints" (Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007) in the decision making-process (Fazio, 2007). Kunda (1990) outlined the theory of motivated reasoning to explain how and why individuals process information differently. Individuals, Kunda (1990) argues, have different cognitive goals. Many individuals have accuracy goals which motivate them to process information to reach the

correct conclusion. Many others, however, are motivated by directional goals. While there are multiple directional goals, the most common is the motivation to support pre-existing opinions. Taber and Lodge (2006) illustrate that individuals, especially those who are more politically sophisticated, employ directional partisan motivations when evaluating new information. Their concept of "political skepticism" refers to partisans' tendency to accept information that supports their pre-existing opinions with little scrutiny yet argue against or dismiss counterattitudinal messages. This processing bias creates a "perceptual screen" that affects the influence of all new information in the decision-making or attitudinal change process (Campbell et al., 1960). Thus, an individual's partisan leanings have a cognitive influence on the evaluation of political candidates (e.g., Lebo & Cassino, 2007) and issues (e.g., Taber, Cann, & Kucsova, 2009)

Motivated reasoning operates according to two key concepts: the confirmation bias and the disconfirmation bias (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Individuals seek likeminded information that confirms preexisting beliefs and integrate it into their political belief system without thoroughly vetting the source or content of the message (Garrett & Stroud, 2014). In this sense, the confirmation bias hypothesis combines the theories of selective exposure and motivated reasoning. Although Garrett and Stroud (2014) argue that individuals do not purposefully avoid counterattitudinal messages, individuals process that information with a disconfirmation bias by developing counterarguments (Ditto and Lopez 1992; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Taber et al., 2009; Taber & Lodge, 2006); engaging in a longer, more thorough "refutational analysis" (Edwards & Smith, 1996); and dismissing the source of the information as biased and unreliable (Matheson & Dursun, 2001; Stroud, 2011). These processes allow an individual to maintain a political

behavior or belief while reducing cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In the theory of cognitive dissonance, which lays much of the foundation for the theory of motivated reasoning, Festinger (1957) argues that individuals avoid holding beliefs and behaviors that are not in accordance. An inconsistency between a belief and behavior leads to an uncomfortable feeling of cognitive dissonance. An individual will seek to reduce dissonance by aligning their beliefs and behaviors. This can be done through modifying the belief or the behavior. Motivated processing allows individuals to discredit or biasedly process new information so that it does not integrate into one's belief system in a way that creates cognitive dissonance. As an example, a Bush supporter may refuse to believe reports that weapons of mass destruction were not actually found in Iraq (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010).

While directional goals encourage partisan interpretations, accuracy goals lead individuals to look beyond partisan cues and evaluate the information in a more objective manner (Druckman, 2012). Accuracy goals, though not the motivation for most political information processing, can be stimulated through presentation, priming, and encouraging individuals to consider alternative possibilities (Lord, Lepper, & Preston, 1984). Though Kunda (1990) originally spoke of accuracy and directional goals as competing motivations, Druckman (2012) advocates a more nuanced view of the two models of opinion formation in which accuracy and directional goals coexist. Individuals seek to confirm preexisting opinions and at the same time want to hold correct beliefs. Similarly, Kruglanski (1989) argues that individuals can pursue multiple processing goals simultaneously, with varying levels of cognitive effort. Directional goals can fade and accuracy goals may become more influential when an individual encounters

counterevidence (Redlawsk, 2002). On the other hand, when faced with counterattitudinal messages, many individuals will dismiss the new evidence or justify preexisting opinions despite the counterevidence (Festinger, 1957; Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Varying responses to counterattitudinal messages can be explained by individual differences, including political sophistication (Taber & Lodge, 2006) and strength of attitudes (Taber et al., 2009). Taber and Lodge (2006) found that strong partisans with a greater interest and understanding of the political system are the most susceptible to directional motivated reasoning or, to use their term, "motivated skepticism."

Partisan motivated reasoning and attitude extremity. Attitude extremity, a result of ideological polarization, is an important persuasive outcome of partisan political messages (Holbert et al., 2010). Opinionated news is often targeted at a likeminded audience with the goal of aligning and reinforcing opinions (Jones, 2002). However, partisans still encounter attitudinally incongruent information (Garrett & Stroud, 2014), and an academic debate has emerged investigating whether citizens are *motivated reasoners* or *rational updaters*. On one hand, research has found that when individuals are exposed to negatively valenced information countering their preferred position—rather than rationally updating opinions in the direction of the new information—they may express more positive evaluations on the matter, in the direction of their prior opinion (Redlawsk et al., 2010). Citizens, in this case, operate as motivated reasoners, processing new information to confirm preexisting beliefs (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Redlawsk, 2002). As such, even when partisans from opposite ends of the political spectrum are exposed to an identical message, the

polarization hypothesis predicts that partisan identities and motivated reasoning will result in the strengthening of initial convictions and, subsequently, widen the attitudinal gulf in American politics (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Conversely, the *direct persuasion hypothesis* predicts voters operate more rationally and that members of both parties will express message-consistent attitude change following exposure to opinionated media (Feldman, 2011; Popkin, 1994). Utilizing a Bayesian updating process, as described by Green and Gerber (1999), citizens update their prior evaluations in the direction of new information. In other words, negative information results in less favorable evaluations and positive information produces more favorable evaluations. However, partisanship still factors into the effectiveness of a message, as members of the in-party are more persuaded by a message than members of the out-party (Feldman, 2011). Regardless, persuasion is constrained by partisanship, and predispositions result in greater resistance to attitude incongruent messages. Redlawsk and colleagues (2010) argue that the answer to the debate is more nuanced; drawing on the theory of affective intelligence (See Marcus & Mackuen, 1993), they found that citizens are both motivated reasoners and rational processors. Though individuals initially behave like motivated reasoners, defending their predispositions, an "affective tipping point" exists where enough counterattitudinal information can overwhelm predisposition and individuals will rationally update their evaluations on a position.

Opinions on political matters are often based on partisan affiliation. As partisan social identities strengthen, individuals align themselves more closely with a political party and rely more heavily on group norms when making decision in a process known as "social sorting" (Mason, 2014). As a result of this aligning of personal and partisan

identities, an individual becomes less tolerant of the outgroup or opposing party (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), as attitudes are strengthened, intensified, and reinforced (Holbert et al., 2010). Party elites communicate partisan cues to party members, which act as mental shortcuts in the decision-making process (Druckman, 2001; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Because one's partisan identity does not simply reflect one's political stances— it forms and shapes them (Campbell et al., 1960)—partisan cues influence the effectiveness of a political message. As a result, individuals form different political opinions from a message containing partisan cues than they would if they had processed all issue-relevant information without partisan influence (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Partisan cues inform receivers what the appropriate policy stance is for the ingroup and receivers defend this stance employing cognitive biases (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Individuals find information and arguments from their ingroup more credible (Stroud, 2011), and positive affect for a political party is transferred to the party's issue stance (Lodge & Taber, 2013). The closer one identifies with a political party, the more positive affect will be transferred and the more favorably an individual will evaluate the party's political argument.

Tajfel (1972) explains that individuals demonstrate ingroup favoritism in analyzing a group's attitude and are motivated to defend the position of their social group in order to enhance their group's identity. By including partisan cues in a political message about a low-salience and low-knowledge issue, partisans are motivated to express more attitude agreement with one's political party. Motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990) and motivated skepticism (Lodge & Taber, 2013) predict a psychological response to counterattitudinal messages that is constrained by partisanship. Individuals may exhibit slight message-consistent attitude change, maintain existing opinions, or even express

stronger opinions in the direction of their party's stance, depending on the quality of the argument and the strength of their partisan attachment (Lodge & Taber, 2013). If political parties are, in fact, social groups, theoretical underpinnings of the psychology of groups should be observed in the attitudes and behaviors of partisan group members. Partisan cues function to communicate attitudinal and behavioral expectations from prototypical leaders. Because the two political parties are engaged in intergroup competition, partisans are more likely to support policies that advantage their own party (ingroup favoritism) and oppose policies that advantage the opposing party (outgroup denigration). As a result, a political argument that activates one's partisan social identity through partisan cues will have disparate effects on opposing partisan members. Thus, when an article states that an action will benefit the Democratic Party, it should increase the persuasive effectiveness for Democratic readers and increase resistance among Republican readers.

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): *The influence of a political argument with pro-Democratic partisan cues will be moderated by partisan social identity, such that Democrats will exhibit more attitudinal congruence than Republicans.*

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): *The influence of a political argument without partisan cues will not be moderated by partisan social identification.*

The Role of Elaboration in Attitude Formation

The influence of a persuasive message is strongly connected to the amount of elaboration that it elicits from the message receiver. Social cognition is "an orientation toward the cognitive processes that occur in social situations" (Shrum, 2002, p. 71), and it plays an important mediating role between a given stimulus and its effect on attitudes (Furnham & Procter, 1989; Markus & Zajonc, 1985). Cognitive elaboration influences

the way an individual acquires, interprets, and uses information (Bandura, 1986). Elaboration thus helps explain varying effects of political messages on different individuals (Baum, 2004). The elaboration likelihood model argues that individuals can process information peripherally or centrally (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). When an individual utilizes the central route of persuasion, an argument is thoroughly scrutinized and examined. Decisions are made through careful consideration and deliberate thought processes, and, as a result, they are more stable, enduring, and predictive of behavior (McNeill, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Alternatively, Petty and Cacioppo (1984) explain, the peripheral route relies on source or contextual cues rather than logical evaluation of an argument. Each message is laden with positive or negative cues that can affect a receiver's decision-making process (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). When employing peripheral processing, an individual relies on nonissue-relevant concerns, such as speaker attractiveness or likeability. Partisanship serves as a peripheral cue such that individuals need not examine the nuance and complexities of all political matters (Kam, 2005), which would be too great of a cognitive burden (Rahn, 1993). Instead, party elites communicate political stances, which loyal party members adopt with little scrutiny. Individuals often learn what to believe about a political matter before they know the reasons; rather than forming a rational opinion, people rationalize the stances that they have adopted from the party elites (Lodge & Taber, 2013).

Mental elaboration and cognitive effort are central to attitude formation and change (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), learning (e.g., Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002), and political polarization (e.g., Fernbach, Rogers, Fox, & Sloman, 2013). Because an individual is socialized with partisan allegiances from an early age (Lyons, 2016), a great

deal of elaboration and cognitive effort are necessary for a change in political perspective. When faced with varying options, including political choices, elaboration plays an important role in the social judgment and decision-making processes (Trope & Liberman, 1996). Greater elaboration is essential for lasting attitudinal shifts and behavioral changes (Bandura, 1986). Though peripheral cues can promote attitudinal congruence, persuasion is typically more successful through the central route when an argument is strong (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Young, 2008). Argumentative strength refers to an argument's ability to withstand inspection and scrutiny. A message lacking argumentative strength, which will break down under great elaboration, will be more effective when relying on peripheral cues, such as source credibility, attractiveness of speaker, or partisan cues (Arceneaux, 2007). Additionally, individuals will acquire and retain more information when they exert cognitive effort elaborating on a message (Bandura, 2002; Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Shrum, 2002). Because elaboration necessitates both the motivation and ability (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), a fundamental level of issue-relevant knowledge is required for an individual to have the ability to engage in cognitive elaboration. As such, when individuals are exposed to new information they will obtain more knowledge from a message through the elaborative process (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002). Finally, Fernbach and colleagues (2013) found that elaboration reduces polarized attitudes. The authors explain that political extremism is built on an "illusion of understanding," but elaboration on other perspectives leads to more moderate political stances. The researchers prompted elaboration on political issues by having participants explain their political stances. The results revealed that elaboration diminishes political polarization. However, motivations and predispositions inform

processing goals (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Kunda, 1990), and, as such, elaboration can either be positively or negatively valenced (O'Keefe, 2012). In sum, Petty, Priester and Brinol (2002) explain that an individual's cognitive response to persuasion variables "depends" on their processing of the message.

Prerequisites for Elaboration: Motivation and Ability

Understanding of the importance of cognitive elaboration prompts the question: When exposed to political information, who will elaborate on the message? Petty and Cacioppo (1986) answer that individuals with both the ability and motivation will engage in greater elaboration. If individuals lack the cognitive resources (e.g., knowledge and time) or motivation/desire to thoughtfully analyze and consider a message, they will rely on peripheral cues to make a decision (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Prior knowledge, the presence of distractions, and time constraints all affect an individual's ability to elaborate on a message (Wegener, Downing, Krosnick, & Petty, 1995; Petty, Wells, & Brock, 1976). Moreover, even when individuals have the cognitive resources to elaborate on the message, they may still lack the motivation to engage in the cognitive task. Johnson and Eagly (1989) found in their metanalysis of elaboration studies that personal relevance or issue involvement was a strong predictor of motivation to elaborate. *High involvement* is likely to provide the motivation for an individual to centrally process new information; however, an individual with *low involvement* will typically rely of heuristic cues (Chaiken, 1980; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). A persuasive message, situating an issue among partisan lines, may activate intergroup competition between partisans and, thus, enhance personal involvement with an otherwise low involvement issue. Furthermore, prior attitudes on the issue may

predispose an individual to heavily scrutinize or outright dismiss a counterattitudinal message (Festinger, 1957; Lodge & Taber, 2013) or readily accept a partisanship consistent one (Kunda, 1990). That is to say, the manner and depth of information processing of political messages is predicted by an individual's partisan beliefs (Allahverdyan & Galstyan, 2014; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). Finally, an individual's need for cognition may affect their likelihood to elaborate on a message. An individual high in need for cognition enjoys thinking about complex issues and will spend more time carefully considering issues before making a decision (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Such individuals seek out information and utilize a more central route to critically evaluate arguments (Geers & Lassiter, 2003; Suri & Monroe, 2001). Personal relevance, political predispositions, and need for cognition may provide the motivation for elaboration. If an individual also has the ability or cognitive resources—including information, time, and lack of distractions—they are more likely to engage in deeper elaboration through the central route of information processing.

When individuals are exposed to new information, they must exert cognitive effort to understand the argument and issue. To form an opinion and make an educated decision on the issue, message receivers analyze the arguments using central and peripheral elaborative processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Though people tend to elaborate less on messages that are of low personal involvement (Chaiken, 1980; Petty et al., 1981; Petty et al., 1983), exposure to an article on the issue will likely increase the salience of that issue. With an article advocating for an action, the resulting elaboration is hypothesized to be positively valenced if individuals are not motivated to counterargue the message (Kunda, 1990). A political message on a low-salience issue absent partisan

cues provides little motivation for readers to engage in negatively valenced elaboration. Instead, readers will engage in message-consistent elaboration and spend cognitive energy understanding the advocated position in a political argument.

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): *Exposure to a political argument will result in positively valenced elaboration on the issue among readers.*

Elaboration valence. When exposed to a persuasive message, it is not only the amount of elaboration that influences political opinions, but the valence of that elaboration. Elaboration can be either positively or negatively valenced (O'Keefe, 2012). It is insufficient to analyze the amount of cognitive elaboration in which an individual engages—researchers must examine its valence. Through a process of selective acceptance, counterattitudinal messages often generate greater negatively valenced elaboration, as receivers exert cognitive effort to counterargue persuasive arguments; conversely, proattitudinal messages result in more favorable thoughts about the advocated issue (Lodge & Taber, 2000; Malone, 1998). When new information is received, it is affectively charged and viscerally "hot," resulting in an affective response that drives systematic and biased evaluation, interpretation, and retrieval of the information in order to achieve affectively congruent rationalization (Lodge & Taber, 2013). The related affect and desirability of certain outcomes are powerful determinants of the way individuals think about political issues (Kunda, 1990). On low-salience political issues, partisan cues influence the issue stance of relatively uninformed partisans (Baum & Groeling, 2009; Goren et al., 2009). Citizens retrospectively rationalize their stances on issues that are set by these partisan cues (Lodge & Taber, 2013). This rationalizing process necessitates elaboration, which can be either positively or

negatively valenced. Politically aware and sophisticated individuals engage in greater intellectual and cognitive elaboration on a political message, as they have greater ability to defend or counterargue political information (Zaller, 1992). If the stance of one's party is consistent with the message, the elaboration will likely be positively valenced. However, it will likely be negatively valenced if the position of one's party is inconsistent with the advocated position. Kunda (1990) explains that individuals engage in biased processing of information to support predispositions; an individual, as noted above, is predisposed to support policies advantaging their social group or party. Therefore, Democrats will process information differently than Republicans when exposed to a political message embedded with partisan cues. One side will be motivated to find greater support for the policy that benefits its party; the other side, however, will be motivated to counterargue the message advocating the same policy. Thus, it is hypothesized that one's partisan social identification will moderate the influence of a political argument on positively and negatively valenced elaboration when the message contains partisan cues.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): *A political argument containing pro-Democratic partisan cues will result in greater negatively valenced elaboration among Republican readers.*

Hypothesis 3c (H3c): *A political argument containing pro-Democratic partisan cues will result in greater positively valenced elaboration among Democratic readers.*

The cognitive response model posits that attitude change is a function of elaboration (Greenwald, 1968). Greater persuasion takes place when individuals engage in perspective taking, which refers to an individual's ability and willingness to view an issue from a different vantage point, to understand an argument from the author's point of

view (Galinsky, Maddux, Filin, & White, 2008). In other words, persuasion occurs only to the extent that a message prompts an individual to engage in cognition compatible with the message (Killeya & Johnson, 1998). Perspective taking to understand an argument is a form of positively valenced elaboration, which is particularly persuasive because individuals are able to recall their cognitive responses to a message better than they can remember the information itself (Greenwald, 1968). The willingness for a reader to analyze and consider a persuasive argument will foster attitude congruence; those opposed to the argument may weaken their opposition, and those already in agreement may strengthen their opinion. As opinions on any issue lie on a continuum from complete opposition to total agreement, any change that results in more agreement with or less opposition to the message indicates enhanced attitudinal congruence or message-consistent persuasion.

Conversely, elaboration can be negatively valenced. Individuals may engage in cognitive effort to develop counterarguments to the information encountered (Tormala & Petty, 2004). The development of counterarguments allows for resistance to a persuasive message. In fact, the development of counterarguments may lead to even greater certainty in one's original opinion (Lord et al., 1979; Tormala & Petty, 2002; Tormala & Rucker, 2007). Kelley (1972) argues that the effectiveness of a message depends on the situation and the strength of the argument because both influence one's willingness and ability to counterargue, which hinders the effectiveness of a persuasive message. It is thus insufficient to consider the influence of elaboration on the persuasiveness of a message without considering the valence of that elaboration. When elaboration is high, O'Keefe (2012) argues, "persuasive effects will depend most centrally on the predominant valence

of the receiver's issue-relevant thoughts" (p. 139). When exposed to a persuasive message, perspective taking and favorable thoughts (positively valenced elaboration) are hypothesized to elicit greater persuasion in the advocated direction, yet counterarguing and unfavorable thoughts toward the message (negative valenced elaboration) likely hinder the persuasive process.

Hypothesis 4a (H4a): *Positively valenced elaboration will increase persuasion.*

Hypothesis 4b (H4b): *Negatively valenced elaboration will decrease persuasion.*

Hypothesis 5 (H5): *A political argument will indirectly increase attitude congruence through increased positively valenced elaboration.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6): *The indirect influence of a political argument on persuasion through positively valenced elaboration will be moderated by partisan social identification.*

Learning from Persuasive Messages

An important component of the attitude formation process is the information one acquires and the knowledge one obtains. Citizens glean knowledge from persuasive messages (Hample, 2003) and learn issue-relevant information from exposure to political messages (Eveland, 2001). Individuals learn about political issues and candidates from a variety of sources, including presidential debates (Benoit, McKinney, & Stephenson, 2002; McKinney, Dudash, & Hodgkinson, 2003), political advertisements (Valentino, Hutchings, & Williams, 2004), political comedy (Baum, 2003; Hardy, Gottfried, Winneg, & Jamieson, 2014; Jennings, Bramlett, & Warner, 2018), partisan news (Stroud, 2011), and newspapers (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996). Political learning is more pronounced when an individual has relatively little preexisting knowledge on an issue (Baum, 2002).

Thus, when individuals are exposed to a political argument advocating a low-salience, low-knowledge issue, they will learn new information from this exposure.

Hypothesis 7 (H7): *Readers will acquire issue-relevant information from a political persuasive argument.*

It requires effortful cognition and ability to analyze an issue and form a rational attitude. However, heuristics provide a short-cut that minimizes the amount of cognitive effort required; this makes knowledge acquisition less important. For example, rather than examining each political issue in detail, individual may rely on their party to signal appropriate position stances—these political signals are known as partisan heuristics or partisan cues (Arceneaux, 2007; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Partisan political communication may inhibit political knowledge acquisition (Dancey & Sheagley, 2012; Mutz, 2002). Stroud (2011) found that individuals do learn from partisan political messages, but the ability of partisan news to inform may be impeded by the activation of heuristics. In other words, when individuals utilize partisan heuristics, they are less motivated to learn the issue-relevant information that is no longer needed to make a political decision. This mental shortcut may conserve cognitive resources, but it often results in different attitudinal outcomes than a decision based on full information (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Partisan cues are more influential among "less-familiar opinion objects" than those more salient to an individual (Xenos, Moy, & Becker, 2011, p. 59). Thus, for a low-salience, low-knowledge issue, it is hypothesized that when individuals are provided partisan cues, they will rely more on heuristic decision-making. Because partisans are making decisions to advantage one's social group, rather than through informed, rational evaluation of the argument, specific information or issue-relevant

knowledge becomes less essential. Despite the overwhelming amount of information available, citizens make political decisions based on very little information (Sniderman et al., 1991; Rahn, 1993); the stance of prototypical leaders may be sufficient. As a result, intergroup partisan competition will lead to less information acquisition from a message containing partisan cues, as less information is required to make a judgment.

Hypothesis 8 (H8): *Partisan readers will learn less from a political argument when it is accompanied by partisan cues.*

In a variety of circumstances and situations, increased cognitive elaboration increases information acquisition (e.g., Greene, 1992; Miller, Alway, & McKinley, 1987; Rohwer, Raines, Eoff, & Wagner, 1977; Schmeck & Grove, 1979). When individuals encounter information in the newspaper, through online media, or on television, elaboration is necessary for information acquisition and knowledge retention (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Jennings, Coker, McKinney, & Warner, 2017). However, as previously mentioned, elaboration can be either positively or negatively valenced (O'Keefe, 2012). When individuals engage in perspective taking, they will more closely analyze the information found in the arguments of a message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). When messages are engaged with attention and cognitive effort rather than heuristic cues, individuals will be aware of and retain more information. The influence of negatively valenced elaboration on the learning process is undetermined. On one hand, individuals may require issue-relevant information to develop counterarguments, and, thus, acquire more information from the persuasive argument. On the other hand, individuals may exert more cognitive resources to develop counterarguments and, consequently, spend less cognitive energy learning. As a result, the influence of negatively valenced

elaboration on information acquisition is posed as a research question. The effect of positively valenced elaboration, though, is hypothesized to increase learning outcomes (See Figure 1 for complete hypothesized model and Table 1 for a list of hypotheses and research question).

Hypothesis 9 (H9): *Positively valenced elaboration will result in an increase in information acquisition.*

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *Will negatively valenced elaboration influence the learning process?*

Hypothesis 10 (H10): *A persuasive argument will indirectly increase knowledge acquisition through positively valenced elaboration.*

Chapter 3: Method

The experiment was originally conducted on a convenience student sample (Study 1). A direct replication (Study 2), substituting only the sample (DeAndrea & Holbert, 2017), was conducted on a sample obtained using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Though numerous scholars have called for a greater replication in the social sciences (e.g., Campbell & Jackson, 1979; Lamal, 1990; Schmidt, 2009), there remains a dearth of replication studies in the field of communication (Boster, 2002; DeAndrea & Holbert, 2017). Replication is an important aspect of the scientific process that corrects scientific errors, builds reliable and more generalizable knowledge, and examines the validity of theoretical relationships (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Hersen & Barlow, 1976; Hull, 1988). Not only does it confirm the existence of an effect, Ioannidis (2005) explains that replication also provides more precise estimates of effect magnitude. Without replication separating true hypotheses from false positives, unverified and potentially incorrect findings persist unchallenged (Ioannidis, 2005; McElreath & Smaldino, 2015). Replication is vital to DeAndrea and Holbert's (2017) prescription to improve communication research in order to "foster more reasoned debate between scholars, produce better informed judgments concerning publication worthiness, allow weaker work to be discarded with less error, and provide an efficient means for the building of stronger, more cogent lines of research" (p. 168). If a finding is real and robust, a similar effect should be observed through the same procedure, with adequate power, on a different sample (Simons, 2014). Because there is a publication bias against replication studies (Franco, Malhotra, & Simonovits, 2014; Mahoney, 1987), inter-study replication

is a way researchers can increase validity and strengthen trust in their findings (Easley, Madden, & Dunn, 2000).

Participants

Study 1. Participants were recruited from fundamental communication courses at a large Midwestern university in November of 2017. Three hundred and thirty-two participants completed the online experiment using Qualtrics online software. Participants were awarded five points of extra credit in their communication course. The majority of the sample identified as female (n = 195; 58.73%) with an average age of 19.76 (SD = 1.15). There were 26 (7.83%) participants that identified as African-American/Black, 12 (3.61%) identified as Asian, 11 (3.31%) identified as Hispanic, and 275 (82.83%) identified as Caucasian/White; eight (2.41%) participants identified as another race/ethnicity. Politically, the sample was rather balanced: 21 (6.33%) identified as strong Democrats; 52 (15.66%) identified as Democrats; 61 (18.37%) leaned Democrat; 56 (16.87%) expressed no preference; 64 (19.28%) leaned Republican; 59 (17.77%) identified as Republican; and 19 (5.72%) were strong Republicans.

Study 2. Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) was utilized to recruit participants on November 29, 2017. Each MTurk participant was provided a link to the Qualtrics online experiment. At the completion of the study, the participant received a unique code in which they entered into the MTurk site to receive $.90 in compensation for participating in the study. A total of 225 American participants completed the study with an average age of 36.52 (SD = 11.36). Over half of the participants identified as male (n = 118; 52.44%). A majority of the participants identified as Caucasian/White (n = 186; 82.67%); 15 (6.67%) identified as African-American/Black; 12 (5.33%) identified as

Asian; 8 (3.56%) identified as Hispanic; 2 (.89%) identified as Native American; and 2 (.89%) identified as a race/ethnicity not specified. The sample contained 38 (16.89%) strong Democrats; 51 (22.67%) Democrats; 43 (19.11%) participants who leaned Democrat; 36 (16%) who expressed no preference between political parties; 30 (13.33%) participants leaning Republican; 19 (8.44%) Republicans, and 8 (3.56%) strong Republicans.

Stimulus and Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned by the Qualtrics online software into one of three conditions: the control condition [Study 1: n = 116(34.94%); Study 2: n = 71(31.56%)]; the persuasive argument condition[Study 1: n = 114(34.34%); Study 2: n = 77(34.22%)]; and the partisan cue condition[Study 1: n = 102(30.72%); Study 2: n = 77(34.22%)]. First, basic demographic information was collected (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, party affiliation, and partisan strength). Next, participants were exposed to a constructed op-ed article. In the control condition, participants read about the benefits of owning pets (See Appendix A; 492 words). Participants in the persuasive argument condition were presented an article advocating Puerto Rican statehood. The issue of Puerto Rican statehood was selected because it was a low-salience, low-knowledge issue.

A pilot study was conducted to identify a low salience issue (N = 48). When asked if Puerto Rico should be admitted as the 51st state, half of the participants in the pilot study responded neutrally (4: “Neither agree nor disagree”) on a 7-point Likert-type scale (M = 4.33, SD = 1.59). Though the pilot study did not assess knowledge, the control group in the main study was used as a validity check to illustrate low overall knowledge about the issue of Puerto Rican statehood. Across the two studies, 187 participants were

assigned to the control condition and received no issue-relevant information. On average, these participants correctly answered less than three (M = 2.97, SD = 1.46) of eight knowledge questions about the Puerto Rican statehood issue. In addition to being of low salience and low knowledge, the issue of Puerto Rican statehood was selected because it could be easily manipulated to include partisan cues because the admittance of Puerto Rico as a state could increase Democratic senators, representatives, and electoral votes.

The pro-statehood argument was constructed by drawing information from advocates of Puerto Rican statehood. It focused on 1) economic benefits, 2) the will of the Puerto Rican people, 3) the high U.S. military enlistment rate of Puerto Rican citizens, and 4) the ethical implications of taxation without representation (See Appendix B; 492 words). Participants in the partisan cue condition were exposed to the same pro-statehood article with partisan cues inserted into the second paragraph. The following sentences were added (See Appendix C; 569 words):

> The admittance of Puerto Rico, a notoriously liberal territory, as the 51st state would primarily advantage the Democratic Party. Puerto Rico would be expected to send two Democratic senators and as many as six Democratic representatives to Congress. In total, this would increase the number of Electoral College votes Democrats could be expected to receive in presidential elections by eight…. A partisan divide has emerged. Democrats support statehood, and Republicans oppose it.

Most notable, the line stating that Puerto Rican statehood "would primarily advantage the Democratic Party" was inserted to activate readers' partisan social identity. According to Social Identity Theory, partisans behave similarly to sports fans cheering on their favorite

team (Miller & Conover, 2015). As such, a move advantaging one side should encourage intergroup competition. Additionally, stating the stance of the two dominant parties provides partisan heuristics, which influence the processing of subsequent information.

A partisan breakdown of participants in each condition is provided in Table 2. A randomization check was conducted to ensure that the conditions did not vary by partisanship. Though Republicans are slightly overrepresented in the persuasive argument condition and Democrats are overrepresented in the partisan cue condition of Study 1, the randomization test revealed no significant variation of partisanship by condition [Study 1: $F(2) = 2.49$, $p = .09$; Study 2: $F(2) = .94$, $p = .39$; Combined: $F(2) = .93$, $p = .4$].

After reading the stimulus, participants were asked their opinions on the admittance of Puerto Rico as a state, followed by two open-ended prompts measuring elaboration, and concluding with issue-relevant knowledge questions. To ensure that the manipulation of partisan cues was effectively observed, the open-ended responses were reviewed to see if political parties were discussed by more participants in the persuasive cue condition than the persuasive argument condition. The manipulation check revealed that participants in the partisan cue condition effectively received the partisan prime; in their open-ended responses, participants exposed to the partisan cues were nearly four times as likely to discuss the potential partisan effect of Puerto Rican statehood (32.16%) when compared to participants exposed to the political argument without political cues (8.25%).

Measures

Political social identity. The strength of a social identity, including a partisan social identification (Iyengar et al., 2012) can influence attitudes and behaviors,

especially when relevant to a given situation (Turner, 1999). Partisan social identity was measured with the question, "To what extent do you consider yourself a Democrat or Republican?" Participants responded on a 7-point scale ranging from "Strong Democrat" (1) to "Strong Republican" (7). Rather than simply establishing the partisan affiliation of participants, the scale was divided to best suit the variable *partisan social identity*. Specifically, participants that indicated the lean either Democrat (3) or Republican (5) were grouped with those who had no political preference (4) to create the group, "unaffiliated" (Study 1: n = 181, 54.5%; Study 2: n = 109, 48.4%). Though these weak partisans may behave like partisans in the voting booth, the objective of the study was to isolate participants for whom partisanship was an important social identity. As such, those who identified as "Democrat" (2) or "Strong Democrat" were deemed to have a democratic social identity (Study 1: n = 73, 22%; Study 2: n = 89, 39.6%). Likewise, those identifying as "Republican" (6) or "Strong Republican" were grouped together as Republican partisans (Study 1: n = 78, 23.5%; Study 2: n = 27, 12%).

Elaboration. Cognitive elaboration indicates how deeply an individual thinks about a message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Elaboration influences the effectiveness of persuasive messages (e.g., Angst & Argawal, 2009; Polk, Young, & Holbert, 2009). For persuasive political communication, the concept of cognitive elaboration is therefore pertinent to the field. However, not all elaboration is equal; though some elaboration may be positively valenced, individuals may engage in negatively valenced elaboration to counterargue a persuasive message. As such, positively and negatively valenced elaboration was measured separately. Just as elaboration has commonly been measured

by listing thoughts (e.g., Krosnick & Petty, 1995; LaMarre & Walther, 2013), the valence of elaboration was gauged through free-response items.

The concept of perspective taking refers to the tendency of an individual to see an issue from another's point of view (Galinsky et al., 2008). Following exposure to a persuasive argument, positively valenced elaboration is conceptualized as the extent that an individual views an issue from the author's perspective. The variable of positively valenced elaboration will be measured in a free-response item: "Some people believe Puerto Rico should become a state. Can you see why some people would think this way? Please LIST and NUMBER all of the reasons you can think of why someone would support Puerto Rican statehood." Positively valenced elaboration was quantified by the number of distinct issue-relevant responses that state a possible reason for an individual to support Puerto Rican statehood (Study 1: $M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.22$; Study 2: $M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.27$; Combined: $M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.24$). Conversely, negative elaboration is conceptualized as the amount of counterarguing in which an individual engages. The variable was measured by the following free-response item: "Some people believe Puerto Rico should not become a state. Can you see why some people would think this way? Please LIST and NUMBER all of the reasons you can think of why someone would NOT support Puerto Rican statehood." The number of distinct issue-relevant responses was used to quantify the variable, negatively valenced elaboration (Study 1: $M = 1.99$, $SD = 1.07$; Study 2: $M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.13$; Combined: $M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.1$).

Attitudinal congruence. Because most political messages are persuasive in nature, it is important to measure the effectiveness of the communication in achieving that objective. To do so, participants responded to three items on a Likert-type scale

designed to measure their agreement with the opinions in the political message: “Puerto Rico should be admitted as a state;” “It would be a good idea to allow Puerto Rico to become an American State;” and “We should make Puerto Rico our 51st state.” Participants responded from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (7). A latent variable was constructed from the three highly reliable items (Study 1: $M = 4.97$, $SD = .91$, $\alpha = .97$; Study 2: $M = 5.67$, $SD = 1.03$, $\alpha = .97$; Study 1: $M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.02$, $\alpha = .97$).

Information acquisition. In 1948, Postman, Jenkins, and Postman noted that to measure learning, researchers must observe an individual’s ability to both recall and recognize relevant information. Subsequent researchers (e.g., Kim & Vishak, 2008) have reaffirmed the necessity of measuring both recall and recognition. In the current study, the amount of information acquired from a political communication message was measured through both recall (four fill-in-the blank short answer questions) and recognition (four multiple-choice questions) The recall items were, “Which organization stated, ‘We support the right of Puerto Rico to be admitted to the Union as a fully sovereign state if they freely so determine?’” (Correct answer: United Nations); “Approximately how many billions of dollars does it cost the United States annually to maintain Puerto Rico as a territory?” (Correct answer: $22 billion); “Other than Spanish, what language is also taught as a first language in Puerto Rican schools?” (Correct answer: English); “What percentage of Puerto Rican voters in the most recent referendum supported statehood?” (Correct answer: 97%). On average, participants in both studies responded correctly to 1.83 ($SD = 1.09$) of four questions (Study 1: $M = 1.64$, $SD = .94$; Study 2: $M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.24$). Respondents scored better on the four recognition,

multiple-choice questions (Study 1: *M* = 2.35, *SD* = 1.3; Study 2: *M* = 2.68, *SD* = 1.24; Combined: *M* = 2.48, *SD* = 1.29). The four recognition questions were, “Puerto Ricans have now twice voted to become a U.S. State--most recently this year, but in what year was the first successful referendum for statehood?” (Correct answer: 1992); “If Puerto Rico was admitted as a state, it would contribute approximately how much annually to the American economy?” (Correct answer: $2 billion); “Why can't Puerto Ricans serve in the U.S. military?” (Correct answer: They can and do serve in the U.S. military); “What is the current official status of Puerto Rico?” (Correct answer: Commonwealth).

Chapter 4: Analysis and Results

The hypothesized model was examined through path analysis utilizing Lavaan (Rosseel, 2012) in the R ecosystem. Structural equation modeling allows for both factor and path analysis. *Attitude congruence*, which was justly identified with three indicators, was the only latent variable in the structural model; as such, the model was saturated and model fit was perfect (Bamber & van Santen, 2000). Two variables were created to indicate which experimental condition the participant was assigned, one for those who read the political argument without partisan cues and one for those who read the political argument with partisan cues. The effects of these variables thus represent differences from the control condition. The model also consisted of two mediating variables (positively and negatively valenced elaboration), two outcome variables (information acquisition and attitude congruence), and a moderating variable (partisan social identity). Each hypothesis was examined through a 5000-bootstrap resampling analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). This analysis provided unstandardized path estimates, standard errors, and 95% confidence intervals for each hypothesized pathway (See Table 3). Changes in chi-square ($\Delta\chi 2$) and p-values associated with these chi-square difference tests are reported in text. Chi-square difference tests represent tests of nested models to determine if the saturated model is the most parsimonious explanation of the data (Holbert & Grill, 2015). The structural model was fit to test ten hypotheses and one research question. The results are reported in the following section.

Results

Study 1: Student Sample

Persuasion: The first hypothesis investigated the persuasiveness of political arguments. It hypothesized that individuals who read a persuasive political argument would express attitudes more consistent with the opinion being advocated in the argument. Results from a chi-square difference test revealed that exposure to political arguments did result in greater attitudinal congruence [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 17.68$; $p < .001$]. This was true for messages with partisan cues [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 11.69$: $p < .001$] or without partisan cues [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 14.64$; $p < .001$]. When individuals read an article advocating statehood for Puerto Rico, their attitudes toward the issue of Puerto Rican statehood were more favorable. In fact, those who were exposed to an argument in favor of Puerto Rican statehood were almost half a point (B = .49, *se* = .11, on the seven-point agreement scale) more likely to express support for statehood when compared to those in the control condition (See Figure 2 for unstandardized path estimates and confidence intervals). Thus, the first hypothesis was supported.

The second hypothesis predicted that partisan cues would have differing effects for the in-party and the out-party. In other words, when the article stated that Democrats support Puerto Rican statehood and Republicans oppose it, and that statehood would directly benefit the Democratic party, there would be more persuasion among Democrats than Republicans. To test this hypothesis, those politically unaffiliated were excluded in the analysis as it is a comparison between those who identify as Democrat and those who identify as Republican. Though the persuasive argument without partisan cues persuaded both Democrats (B = .97; *se* = .32; β = .4; LLCI = .4; ULCI = 1.65) and Republicans (B = .59; *se* = .28; β = .28; LLCI = .05; ULCI = 1.14), Republican viewers were no longer persuaded by the persuasive message when partisan cues were included (B = .15; *se* = .3;

β = .06; LLCI = -.44; ULCI = .74). The message with partisan cues, however, was still persuasive among Democrats (B = .71; *se* = .28; β = .32; LLCI = .22; ULCI = 1.3). A chi-square difference test, though, did not reveal a significant difference in persuasion between the partisan groups [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = .92$]. Though it appears that the argument with partisan cues was only persuasive for Democrats, there was not sufficient statistical power to rule out chance as an explanation for this apparent difference. Figure 3 depicts the significant persuasive effect for Democrats and the nonsignificant effect for Republicans, as well as the overlapping confidence intervals that resulted in the nonsignificant chi-square difference test. H2a was, therefore, partially supported. Conversely, H2b predicted no partisan moderation when partisan cues were absent. The results were consistent with the hypothesis. The persuasive message without partisan cues persuaded both Republicans (B = .59; *se* = .29; β = .28; LLCI = .02; ULCI = 1.16) and Democrats (B = .59; *se* = .2; β = .4; LLCI = .21; ULCI = .97). The very similar effect sizes, accompanied by similar standard errors, suggest that it is exceedingly unlikely that there is differential persuasion in the nonpartisan condition. Similarly, the chi-square difference test revealed no significant difference between those who identify as Republicans and those who identify as Democrats [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = .86$]. No partisan moderation was observed for the political argument without partisan cues.

The third hypothesis predicted that a political message advocating for Puerto Rican statehood would increase positive elaboration on the political issue. The results reveal that the political argument increased positively valenced elaboration [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 7.67$; $p < .001$]. After reading the article supporting Puerto Rican statehood, readers expressed greater positively valenced elaboration, providing an average of .39 (*se* = .14)

more reasons why Puerto Rico should become a state. However, readers did not engage in greater negatively valenced elaboration [B = -.19; *se* = .12; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 2.32$], on the issue. H3a was supported. H3b and H3c predicted opposite effects of partisan cues on partisans. It was hypothesized that Republicans would engage in greater negative elaboration when exposed to pro-Democratic cues, and Democrats would engage in greater positive elaboration. Republicans did engage in more negative elaboration ($p <$ .05), providing an average of .55 (*se* = .26) more reasons why Puerto Rico should not be a state. Though Democrats in the partisan cue condition, on average, provided .59 more reasons why Puerto Rico should become a state, a large standard error (.39) resulted in a larger 95% confidence interval, which included zero—indicating a nonsignificant estimate. A larger sample and the subsequent increase in power would likely reduce the standard error, which may result in a significant effect. In Study 1, H3b was supported, while H3c was not.

The influence of elaboration on persuasion was investigated in the fourth hypothesis. It was predicted that positively valenced elaboration would increase the persuasiveness of a message, while negatively valenced elaboration would decrease persuasion. H4a was supported; a persuasive message was more effective when it generated positively valenced elaboration by the reader [$\Delta\chi^2 (1) = 80.78$; $p < .001$]. For each additional positively valenced comment that a participant provided about Puerto Rican statehood, she moved more than half a point on the seven-point attitudinal congruence scale (B = .52; *se* = .06). However, negatively valenced elaboration did not significantly reduce persuasion [B = -.11; *se* = .06; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 3.34$]. The modest negative unstandardized coefficient suggests the existence of a small effect—however, the null

hypothesis cannot be rejected given the current power associated with the sample. Though the relationship approached significance (p = .07), H4b was not supported.

The fifth hypothesis predicted a mediated relationship, where a political argument indirectly predicts a change in attitude by increasing the amount of positively valenced elaboration. H5 was supported [$\Delta\chi^2(2) = 96.71$; $p < .01$]. Exposure to a political argument advocating Puerto Rican statehood increased positively valenced elaboration which led to greater support for the statehood of Puerto Rico. Indirect effects were tested following the procedure recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008); using 5000 bootstrapped resamples of the product of these direct effects, a significant indirect effect was observed (95% LLCI = .05; ULCI = .32). This indirect influence was predicted to be moderated in the sixth hypothesis. This moderated mediation hypothesis was supported. The indirect path was significant for Democrats (B = .3; *se* = .12; LLCI = .11; ULCI = .57), but not for Republicans (B = .05; *se* = .12; LLCI = -.18; ULCI = .3). This provides support for the sixth hypothesis, as the persuasive argument influenced attitudes through positively valenced elaboration, but only for Democrats.

Learning. Beyond persuasion, a political argument was also hypothesized to educate readers about a political issue. The seventh hypothesis predicted that when individuals read a political article, they will learn important information about the issue. This hypothesis was supported [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 49.66$; $p < .001$]. Individuals exposed to the pro-statehood argument, on average, correctly answered 1.5 (B = 1.53; *se* = .2) more of the eight knowledge questions about the issue than people who did not receive the argument. Reading an argument about the issue of Puerto Rican statehood resulted in greater information acquisition.

Analysis of the seventh hypothesis found that individuals would learn from reading political arguments. However, the eighth hypothesis predicted that including partisan cues in a political argument would decrease learning among partisans. The hypothesis was generally supported, as individuals learned less (B = -.64; *se* = .38) when partisan cues were present (*M* = 4.31; *SD* = 1.9) than when cues were absent (*M* = 4.7; *SD* = 2.01). However, there was not enough precision in the estimates to rule out the possibility that the effects were the same. The chi-square difference test revealed no significant difference [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 2.48$]. The relationship, though, approached significance in the hypothesized direction ($p < .1$). To provide further details, an ANOVA was conducted to compare the amount of learning in the two political arguments. Though Democrats, Republicans, and politically unaffiliated readers all learned more from the article with no partisan cues (Democrats: *M* = 5.55 ; *SD* = 1.64; Republicans: *M* = 4.26; *SD* = 1.84; unaffiliated: *M* = 4.65; *SD* = 2.13) than the article containing partisan cues (Democrats: *M* = 4.54; *SD* = 1.71; Republicans: *M* = 3.55; *SD* = 2.31; unaffiliated: *M* = 4.48; *SD* = 1.79), the difference was only significant for Democrats ($p < .05$). Therefore, some support was found for H8; this effect was larger but I cannot statistically rule out the possibility that the apparent difference is due to chance.

The ninth hypothesis investigated the effects of increased positive elaboration on learning. The results revealed support for the hypothesis, as positive elaboration was associated with greater information acquisition [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 68.74$; $p < .001$]. For every reason a participant provided supporting Puerto Rican statehood, she was able to answer an average of .57 (*se* = .09) more questions correctly, indicating greater elaboration leads to more information acquisition. The first research question investigated the influence of

negatively valenced elaboration on learning. The findings suggest no relationship [B = .03; *se* = .11; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .09$]. Participants did not require information from the political message to make counterarguments. The more one positively elaborated on a pro Puerto Rican statehood argument, the more information she acquired from the article. However, negatively valenced elaboration did not result in an increase in learning from a pro-statehood argument. Elaborating on a message increased learning, but only if that elaboration was consistent with the message.

Finally, the tenth hypothesis predicted a mediated influence of the pro-statehood message on knowledge about the Puerto Rican statehood issue. This influence was expected to be indirect through positively valenced elaboration. The findings reveal that the persuasive argument increased positive elaboration which then increased the amount of knowledge acquired. 5000 bootstrapping resamples revealed a significant indirect effect of the article on knowledge (LLCI = .12; ULCI = .65). Thus, the final hypothesis was supported.

Study 2: MTurk Sample

Persuasion. The first hypothesis predicted that political arguments can influence the attitudes of readers. In other words, political arguments are persuasive. The first hypothesis was supported, as readers expressed more favorable attitudes toward Puerto Rican statehood following exposure [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 9.39$; $p < .01$]. This was true for political argument with partisan cues [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 3.85$; $p < .05$] or without partisan cues [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 11.63$; $p < .001$]. Overall, participants exposed to a pro-statehood argument, expressed attitudes .45 (*se* = .16) higher (more congruent) on a seven-point scale. This reinforced findings from Study 1 (See Figure 2).

The influence of partisan cues was hypothesized to be conditioned on partisan social identity. H2a predicted that the argument with pro-Democrat cues would be more effective among Democratic readers. Similar to Study 1, Study 2 found that the message with pro-Democratic cues persuaded Democrats (B = .51; *se* = .25; β = .18; LLCI = .07; ULCI = 1.04), but not Republicans (B = -.55; *se* = .62; β = -.24; LLCI = -1.61; ULCI = .75). The chi-square difference test, however, revealed no significant difference [$\Delta\chi2(1) = 1.84$], so H2a was partially supported. H2b hypothesized there would be no partisan moderation when partisan cues were absent from a political argument. Results were consistent with this hypothesis (H2b), the argument was persuasive for both Republicans (B = .59; *se* = .29; β = .26; LLCI = .02; ULCI = 1.16) and Democrats (B = .61; *se* = .28; β = .29; LLCI = .09; ULCI = 1.19), as very similar path estimates and standard error were revealed for partisans on both sides of the political aisle. Likewise, the chi-square difference test revealed no significant difference [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = .01$]. In both Study 1 and Study 2, H2a was partially supported and H2b was fully supported.

The third hypothesis investigated the influence of the political message on cognitive elaboration about the issue of Puerto Rican statehood following the political article. The article resulted in greater positively valenced elaboration [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 8.18$; $p < .01$], as participants listed an average of .52(*se* = .18) more reasons that Puerto Rico should be a state. This was observed for the article with partisan cues [B = .41; *se* = .2; LLCI = .02; ULCI = .76; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .33$; $p < .05$] and the one without partisan cues [B = .66; *se* = .2; LLCI = .28; ULCI = 1.05; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 10.19$; $p < .001$]. Thus, H3a was fully supported. The argument, however, had no significant influence on negative elaboration [B = .01; *se* = .16; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .01$]. When partisan cues were added to the political

argument, conditional partisan effects were hypothesized. Though in the hypothesized direction, neither H3b nor H3c were supported in Study 2—because of large standard errors, an effect of zero cannot be ruled out. Unlike Study 1, Republicans (B = .18; *se* = .43; LLCI = -.67; ULCI = 1.06) did not engage in significantly more negative elaboration. Consistent with Study 1, Democrats (B = .19; *se* = .3; LLCI = -.38; ULCI = .77) did not engage in significantly more positive elaboration. Large standard errors, once again, hindered the precision of estimates.

Elaboration was hypothesized to influence the persuasive outcome of the political argument; specifically, positively valenced elaboration was hypothesized to result in greater attitude congruence, while negatively valenced elaboration was hypothesized to result in less persuasion. Replicating Study 1, H4a was supported in Study 2, as positively valenced elaboration on Puerto Rican Statehood increased persuasion [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 30.99$; $p < .001$], resulting in greater support for statehood. For each additional reason an individual provided as to why Puerto Rico should be admitted as a state, an increase of .36 (*se* = .07) was observed on the attitudinal congruence scale. However, no significant relationship was observed between negatively valenced elaboration and attitude change [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = .23$]. As in Study 1, the effect predicted in H4b, though in the right direction (B = -.03; *se* = .06) was not significant. The support of H4a and the lack of support for H4b in Study 2 are consistent with the findings in Study 1.

An indirect pathway was predicted in the fifth hypothesis. The political argument was hypothesized to increase support for Puerto Rican statehood indirectly by increasing positively valenced elaboration. Remarkably similar to Study 1, this mediation path was supported (LLCI = .05; ULCI = .33); the article led to greater positively valenced

elaboration, which, in turn, increased attitudinal congruence. The sixth hypothesis predicted that this indirect influence would be conditioned by party. Similar to Study 1, the indirect path was significant for Democrats (B = .28; *se* = .15; LLCI = .02; ULCI = .69) but not for Republicans (B = -.19; *se* = .17; LLCI = -.52; ULCI = .28). The sixth hypothesis was supported.

Learning. Not only were political arguments predicted to persuade readers, it was hypothesized that the pro-statehood article would provide readers with knowledge about the Puerto Rican statehood issue. The seventh hypothesis was supported, as the readers acquired issue-relevant information from the article [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 86.23$; $p < .001$] and were able to answer nearly three B = 2.71; *se* = .23) more knowledge questions correctly. Consistent with Study 1, the findings reveal that individuals learn from reading persuasive political arguments.

Partisan readers were predicted to learn more from the article without the partisan cues than the one with the cues. The eighth hypothesis was not supported [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 1.2$], as partisan cues did not significantly reduce information acquisition. Similar to Study 1, the amount of learning was lower (B = -.53; *se* = .42) among readers of the article with partisan cues (*M* = 5.48; *SD* = 2.17) than for readers that were not exposed to partisan cues (*M* = 5.81; *SD* = 1.89). This was true for Democrats, Republicans, and those politically unaffiliated, as each group learned more from the message with partisan cue (Democrats: *M* = 6.38; *SD* = 1.35; Republicans: *M* = 5.86; *SD* = 1.68; unaffiliated: *M* = 5.26; *SD* = 2.21) than the message without cues (Democrats: *M* = 6; *SD* = 2; Republicans: *M* = 4.86; *SD* = 2.12; unaffiliated: *M* = 5.25; *SD* = 2.27). However, perhaps as a result of low power to detect real differences, these differences were not significant. The

decreased amount of information acquisition for each group does suggest that an effect, though undetectable with the current power, may be present.

The ninth hypothesis and the first research question examined the influence of positively and negatively valenced elaboration on the learning process. The hypothesis predicted that positively valenced elaboration on a pro-statehood argument would result in greater information acquisition from the message [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 28.74$; $p < .001$]. For each additional positively valenced comment that a participant expressed about Puerto Rican statehood, she was able to correctly answer an average of .7 (*se* = .12) more knowledge questions correctly. Negative elaboration, however, did not significantly influence the amount of information a reader acquired from the political argument [B = -.08; *se* = .13; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .29$]. Consistent with Study 1, H9 was supported, and RQ1 was negatively answered.

The final hypothesis tested the indirect influence of the persuasive political argument on information acquisition through the mediator, positive elaboration. This hypothesis was supported as the persuasive argument predicted greater positively valenced elaboration which led to more learning. The indirect effect of the political argument on issue-relevant knowledge through positively valenced elaboration was significant (LLCI = .45; ULCI = .85). Therefore, like Study 1, 5000 bootstrap resamples revealed an indirect effect, and the tenth hypothesis was supported in Study 2.

Follow-Up Analysis

In general, the results from Study 1 and Study 2 generate a consistent set of findings about the theoretical hypotheses (See Table 4). However, there were a few tests in which support for the hypothesis was mixed or the observed effects were in the

hypothesized direction, but the estimates were not precise enough to rule out the null hypothesis. In other words, a lack of statistical power may have resulted in some Type II errors. To increase statistical power, the two samples were combined for follow-up analysis. The same ten hypotheses and one research question were examined. However, before two samples can be combined, model invariance must be established (Little, 2013). Cross-group inequality in either the loadings or intercepts would indicate that an individual's true score may be dependent on group or sample membership (Wu, Li, & Zumbo, 2007), suggesting students may systematically respond to items differently than the more diverse MTurk sample.

First, loading (weak) invariance was examined. A model that is invariant across sample indicates that each item of a scale loads on its respective variable approximately the same for each sample. Factor loadings for the latent variable (i.e. attitude congruence) were fixed as equal across groups, and a test of invariance was conducted. The model invariance test examined change in fit, and a change in CFI was reported. The CFI was reduced by less than .01 (CFI = .994; ΔCFI = .006), and, thus, loading (weak) invariance was achieved (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Secondly, intercept (strong) invariance was examined. To achieve intercept invariance, the two groups must demonstrate equivalent mean structures (Note: this does not suggest that means cannot change between groups). In other words, intercept invariance indicates that corresponding indicator mean structures are equivalent across groups and all mean differences reflect true differences between groups on the latent contract. In calibrating the centers of the latent variable identically across groups, intercept invariance is tested (Wu, Li, & Zumbo, 2007). However, with a change in CFI of greater than .01 (CFI = .979; ΔCFI = .015), intercept

invariance was not achieved (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Further investigation revealed a slight variance in the mean structures, and the third indicator ("We should make Puerto Rico our 51st state") of the latent variable was freed to vary between groups. Another model invariance test was conducted; this time revealing a reduction in CFI of less than .01 (CFI = .994; ΔCFI = .000). Thus, partial intercept invariance was achieved, which is sufficient in continuing the sequence of invariance testing (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Finally, the groups were examined for regression invariance. By fixing all regression paths in the model equal between groups, it is possible to determine if there is an external causal factor (e.g., group sample population) influencing causal pathways in the structural model (Millsap, 2007). The regression invariance test revealed no significant influence of sample/group membership (CFI = 291.25; ΔCFI = 20.027; Δ*df* = 12; *p* = .067). In other words, the observed path coefficients in the student sample were statistically equivalent to the path coefficients in the MTurk sample. Having achieved loading invariance, partial intercept invariance, and regression invariance, the two samples were combined for follow-up analysis (See Little, 2013; Little, Preacher, Selig, & Card, 2007). Table 4 indicates which hypotheses were supported in Study 1, Study 2, and the combined analysis.

Persuasion. The first hypothesis, which predicted persuasion resulting from exposure to the persuasive message, was supported in both Study 1 and Study 2. As such, it was expected that even stronger support would be observed in the follow-up analysis (See Figure 2). As hypothesized, this relationship was significant [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 25.9$, $p < .001$]. The hypothesis was supported for both the article containing partisan cues (B = .42; *se* = .11; β = .19; LLCI = .22; ULCI = .62) and the one absent such cues (B = .51; *se*

= .1; β = .24; LLCI = .33; ULCI = 71). The first hypothesis was supported—political arguments can result in message-consistent persuasion, as those exposed to the pro-statehood messages indicated they were .47 (*se* = .09) points more favorable on the seven-point attitude congruence scale.

Hypothesized conditional effects by partisan identity were partially supported in the first two studies. The second hypothesis predicted that the persuasive message containing pro-Democratic partisan cues will be more effective among Democrats than Republicans. The combined sample finds full support for the hypothesis (See Figure 3); the message was persuasive for Democrats (B = .54; *se* = .16; β = .25; LLCI = .25; ULCI = .86) but not for Republicans (B = -.04; *se* = .16; β = -.02; LLCI = -.5; ULCI = .48). An increase of more than half a point was observed for those who socially identified as Democrat when a message was shown with pro-Democratic partisan cues. Moreover, the hypothesis met the more stringent criteria for significance, the chi-square difference test [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.04$, $p < .05$]. The combined sample provided sufficient power to detect the conditional effect (H2a) that was partially supported in the two separate studies (See Figure 3). As in both Study 1 and Study 2, H2b was fully supported. No conditional effect was observed for the message lacking partisan cues [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = .03$], as the message was persuasive for both Republicans (B = .51; *se* = .23; β = .24; LLCI = .06; ULCI = .98) and Democrats (B = .56; *se* = .15; β = .35; LLCI = .28; ULCI = .86).

The third hypothesis received varying support in the first two studies: H3a was supported in both studies; H3b was supported in Study 1, but not Study 2; and H3c was supported in neither. In the combined sample, H3a was supported [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 16$, $p < .001$]. The political argument advocating for Puerto Rican statehood increased the amount of

positively valenced elaboration on the issue. Those exposed to the pro-statehood message provided an average of .44 (*se* = .1) more reasons to support Puerto Rican statehood. With additional power, the conditional effects of partisan cues on valenced elaboration were detected. When partisan cues were included in the article, negative elaboration among Republicans increased [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 3.79$; $p < .05$]. In other words, Republicans were able to think of .46 (*se* = .22) more reasons why Puerto Rico should not be a state when they were told it would advantage the Democratic Party. H3b was supported. Similarly, Democrats were able to think of .47 (*se* = .25) more reasons to support statehood [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 3.89$; $p < .05$]. H3c was supported.

The fourth hypothesis investigated the influence of the different forms of elaboration—positively and negatively valenced—on the persuasive outcome of attitudinal congruence. It was hypothesized that positive elaboration would increase persuasion, while negative elaboration would hinder it. Similar to Study 1 and Study 2, H4a was supported. Positively valenced elaboration resulted in greater attitudinal congruence [$\Delta\chi2(1) = 116.87$, $p < .001$]. Providing an additional reason to support statehood increased an individual's attitude congruence by .46 (*se* = .04) points. Conversely, negatively valenced elaboration limited the effectiveness of the persuasive message [$\Delta\chi2(1) = 6.52$. $p < .05$], with each negatively valenced comment lowering an individual's attitude congruence by .12 (*se* = .04) points. The smaller impeding influence of negatively valenced elaboration hypothesized in H4b, though in the hypothesized direction, was not supported in Study 1 nor Study 2; a small yet significant effect, however, was observed in the follow-up analysis. The increased power generated by

combining the samples increased the precision of estimation and therefore allowed for a conclusion against the null hypothesis.

The fifth hypothesis predicted an indirect influence of the message on persuasion through positively valenced elaboration. It was supported in both studies. As expected, H5 was also supported in the follow-up analysis [LLCI = .09; ULCI = .28]. The political message increased positively valenced elaboration which led to greater attitudinal congruence with the pro-statehood message. The final persuasive hypothesis (H6) predicted a moderated mediation model. As in both studies, this was supported. The indirect effects of the fifth hypothesis were significant for Democrats (B = .29; *se* = .08; LLCI = .15; ULCI = .46) but not for Republicans (B = -.03; *se* = .1; LLCI = -.24; ULCI = .15). Because the indirect effect, not observed for Republicans, was present for Democrats, the sixth hypothesis was supported.

Learning. The seventh hypothesis predicted that readers would acquire information through exposure to a political message. After reading an article advocating for Puerto Rican statehood, participants performed better on issue-related knowledge questions [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 127.33$, $p < .001$], answering an average of two (B = 2.02; *se* = .15) more questions correctly than those not exposed to the message. This is consistent with the two separate studies, and the informative influence, predicted in the seventh hypothesis, was supported.

It was hypothesized that partisans, both Republicans and Democrats, will learn less from an article containing partisan cues. Study 1 and Study 2 found only mixed support for this hypothesis. However, when the samples were combined, the diminished learning among partisans reading an article which contained partisan cues was significant

[$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 5.86$; $p < .05$]. On average, partisans answered .64 (*se* = .3) fewer questions correctly when partisan cues were present compared to partisans exposed to the same political argument without partisan cues. This finding indicates that when a partisan reader is provided with the position of their political party, she learns less from the article.

Message-consistent, positively valenced elaboration was predicted to increase learning in the ninth hypothesis. The hypothesis was strongly supported in the follow-up analysis [$\Delta\chi^2(1) = 68.74$, $p < .001$]. For each additional positively valenced comment, an individual was able to correctly answer .67 (*se* = .08) more knowledge questions about the issue of Puerto Rican statehood. However, negative elaboration did not significantly influence information acquisition [B - .06; *se* = .09; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .5$]. In other words, counterarguing a pro-statehood message did not result in any additional knowledge on the issue. As in Study 1 and Study 2, the ninth hypothesis was supported, and the research question was answered negatively.

The tenth and final hypothesis, supported in Study 1 and Study 2, predicted a mediated model. It was hypothesized that the persuasive message would increase positively valenced elaboration and that this elaboration would positively predict information acquisition. The hypothesis was supported as readers did learn about the political issue indirectly through positive elaboration (LLCI = .23; ULCI = .65). Exposure to the article advocating for Puerto Rican statehood resulted in greater positively valenced elaboration on the issue. The more one engaged in positive elaboration, the more information she acquired from the article. Thus, the final hypothesis, predicting an indirect influence of the article on learning, was supported.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Contributions to the Literature

The current study examines the interplay of three psychological theories: social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and the theory of motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). The primary objective of the current study is to integrate the three theories in a unified theory of political persuasion. Through a process of identity-motivated elaboration, political messages play an important role in constructing the political opinions of the American electorate. Attitudes and behaviors are influenced by the political communication to which an individual is exposed, as citizens learn from and are persuaded by the messages. The current study employs a social identity approach to better understand the influence of political messages on the citizenry. This perspective helps to explain why all people do not process political information, especially when embedded with partisan cues, in the same way. Moreover, the elaboration likelihood model was utilized to understand the process through which a political message influences the audience. Finally, partisan motivated reasoning (PMR) was theoretically situated as the mechanism through which partisan social identities influence biased elaboration. The results support a unified theory of political persuasion and the process of identity-motivated elaboration. The study contributes to the existing literature by reinforcing two previous findings (i.e., partisanship is a social identity and partisanship conditions the persuasiveness of political messages) and adding four novel findings: 1) PMR operates even when prior attitudes are either weak or non-existent because people are motivated to defend their partisan ingroup the same way they would defend a strong attitude; 2) the opposing direction of their influence on attitude congruence demonstrates the value of distinguishing between positively and negatively valenced elaboration; 3) though people learn from political

persuasive messages, partisan cues interfere with the learning process; 4) negatively valenced elaboration, unlike positively valenced elaboration, does not predict information acquisition. I will discuss each of these six core findings as support for the process of identity-motivated elaboration—beginning with the reinforcement of existing knowledge, followed by the new knowledge that has emerged.

The social identity theory, elaboration likelihood model, and theory of motivated reasoning, in combination, help explain how partisans respond to political messages and work to enhance partisan group identification though identity-motivated elaboration. The theories are integrally connected and complement one another. Partisan social identity is fundamental to the proposed theory of political persuasion is. This affirms a definition of partisanship grounded in social identity (e.g., Green et al., 2002; Greene, 2004; Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2014; Mason, 2018). Support for the partisan social identity hypothesis was observed through analysis of the elaboration, persuasion, and information acquisition resulting from exposure to a political message. Campbell and colleagues (1960) defined partisanship as an affective connection with a political party, which implies significant influence of the party on the political attitudes and behaviors of partisans. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) explain that, because partisanship is a social identity, it is influenced by intergroup processes (See Tajfel & Turner, 1979) that result in the growing affective divide in American politics. The functioning of political affiliations as social identities is therefore central to political polarization and interparty animus. If, indeed, political parties do operate as social identities, the psychology of social group influence should be evident in political behavior. SIT states that an individual engages in ingroup favoritism and outgroup

denigration as a means to enhance one's group identity, which subsequently enhances one's own self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The results of the study demonstrate that partisans engage in group enhancement strategies when exposed to a political argument embedded with partisan cues. Normative group expectations, established by prototypical group leaders, are communicated to social group members to align the attitudes and behaviors of a group (Turner, 1991). In the partisan version of the pro-Puerto Rican statehood argument, partisan cues communicated stances of partisan elites (prototypes) and activated group identity-based processing by framing the issue as an interparty competition. Partisan readers responded consistent with the expectations of SIT. The elaboration, persuasion, and learning outcomes of a political message with partisan cues thus support the partisan social identity hypothesis.

Next, I will explain how the social identity approach interacts with the theory of motivated reasoning. Partisan social identities create predispositions, and individuals are motivated to process new information in a manner that supports these dispositions. The findings of the current study support previous research that has found greater attitudinal congruence following exposure to a political persuasive message (e.g., Franz & Ridout, 2007; McKinney & Warner, 2013; Stroud, 2011; Sunstein, 2009). However, when partisan cues were inserted, persuasion was conditioned by partisan social identity. Republicans and Democrats reacted differently to the political message, as they employed partisan heuristics to arrive at an issue stance consistent with their partisan social group. The partisan cue condition indicated that Puerto Rican statehood would advantage the Democratic Party. Partisan social identities created predispositions, and individuals employed partisan motivated reasoning to evaluate the issue of Puerto Rican statehood.

SIT predicts intergroup competition that will result in group members acting to enhance their social group's identity (Huddy, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and individuals employ partisan motivated reasoning to achieve this objective. Though members of both parties were persuaded by the political argument that lacked partisan cues, the insertion of social group partisan cues activated PMR and resulted in a conditional influence of the message.

A unified theory of political persuasion extends and integrates existing theoretical knowledge. Viewing partisanship as a social identity can be traced back to Campbell and colleagues (1960) and has emerged as a more dominant perspective recently (e.g., Green et al., 2002; Greene, 2004; Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2014; Mason & Wronski, 2018). The current study presents the concept if identity-motivated elaboration to further our understanding of partisanship by illustrating the implication of partisan social identity on the persuasive process. The theory of motivated reasoning has established that individuals are motivated to defend prior beliefs (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Lord et al., 1979; Tormala & Rucker, 2007). However, even absent strong prior beliefs, PMR was observed when partisan cues were present. People did not enter the experiment with strong prior opinions about Puerto Rican statehood—as is evidenced by the pilot study and the attitudes in the control group. Therefore, the counterarguing in the partisan prime condition was not a defense of a prior attitude, a finding that has been demonstrated in previous research on PMR (e.g., Lodge & Taber, 2013; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Furthermore, counterarguing was not inevitable. Those in the non-primed condition absent partisan cues were persuaded by the argument. PMR is often advanced as a reason that political persuasion is impossible, as people will default

to their partisan predispositions. My results demonstrate that PMR is not inevitable, that in the case of weak attitudes, it is present only when primed by messages that activate identity defense through social group competition. Individuals, thus, do not simply defend prior opinions, but they construct political opinions to defend their social identity.

Another novel contribution to theories of political persuasion is demonstrating the need to disentangle positive from negative valenced elaboration. SIT and PMR intersect to influence the biased processing of new information, affecting attitudinal congruence both directly and indirectly. Motivated reasoning, resulting from partisan social identities, affects the valence of message elaboration. There were two aspects of elaboration that were investigated and merit discussion: 1) the influence of the political message on elaboration (amount and valence) and 2) the persuasive outcomes of valenced elaboration. Though elaboration has previously been studied in the persuasive processes (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), it is typically examined simply as the *amount* of elaboration. Identity-motivated elaboration is observed in both the amount and valence of elaboration. Cognitive elaboration can be either positively or negatively valenced (O'Keefe, 2012). The unification of SIT, PMR, and ELM necessitates the measuring of the valence, not just the amount, of elaboration. Simply, partisan social identities predispose an individual to engage in motivated reasoning, which influences the amount and type of elaboration. When partisan cues were present and one's partisan social identity was activated, individuals were motivated to process information in a biased manner. Democrats (ingroup members) positively elaborated on the pro-Democratic message, while Republicans (outgroup members) developed counterarguments. Partisan cues in the argument established predispositions based on ingroup norms and preferences,

and readers engaged in PMR to defend or support their predispositions. People defended their ingroup through the same cognitive processes that have been demonstrated to operate in defense of prior beliefs and attitudes (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Lord et al., 1979). As a result, negatively valenced elaboration, which was not a significant outcome of a message lacking partisan cues, was evident in the partisan cue condition—but only among Republicans. Just as the conditional persuasive outcome supported the application of the social identity approach to the realm of politics, biased processing of the information and valenced elaboration indicate ingroup favoritism and outgroup denigration. Though ELM scholars acknowledge the valence of elaboration, it is not common practice to measure elaboration valence. In treating elaboration as a bidirectional valenced construct, the current study is able to investigate the causes of both positively and negatively valenced elaboration, as well as analyze the persuasive outcomes of both types of elaboration independently. The addition of PMR to the model illustrates the centrality of valence in the integration of theories.

Persuasion, or attitudinal congruence, is the outcome variable of proposed theory of political persuasion. As such, it is important to understand the effects of valenced elaboration on attitudes. Positively and negatively valenced elaboration had differing effects on the persuasiveness of a message. Greater positively valenced elaboration resulted in an increase in persuasion. When individuals used cognitive energy to understand the reasons Puerto Rico should be a state, they expressed greater attitudinal congruence with the message advocating for statehood. Conversely, individuals engaged in negatively valenced elaboration to counterargue the Puerto Rican statehood message were more likely to express an oppositional attitude to the issue. Though greater

cognitive elaboration has repeatedly been linked to greater persuasion (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), surprisingly few studies in the ELM framework distinguish between positive and negative valenced elaboration. Therefore, it is recommended that the valence of elaboration be considered alongside the amount of elaboration in future studies.

Learning. SIT, PMR, and ELM intersect to form a unified theory of political persuasion, but the theories and the process of identity-motivated elaboration also underlies the learning process. An informed electorate is fundamental to a deliberative democracy (Dahl, 1956; Habermas, 1962). Citizens must have issue-relevant knowledge to form opinions on political issues. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Baum, 2003; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Eveland, 2001; McKinney et al., 2003; Valentino et al., 2004), individuals acquired knowledge from exposure to a political argument. However, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) demonstrate that the electorate is fairly uninformed. One possible explanation is that there is an abundance of partisan cues, and, as a result, citizens lack incentive to engage with the details of political messages. Popkin's (1994) "low information rationality" assumes that these partisan cues make actual information acquisition less important because voters can make informed decisions based on heuristics. The current study found that partisanship, as a social identity, constrained information acquisition if the message contained partisan heuristics, which reduce the need to evaluate the content of the message. The social identity perspective predicted that social group members would base their decisions on group norms and prototypical leader expectations (Turner, 1991). Findings were consistent with this social identity expectation. In other words, partisan group members relied heavily on prototypical partisan leaders to formulate opinions on the political issue, and, as a result, were less

motivated to learn specific issue-relevant information that was required in constructing opinions when partisan cues were not available.

The hindering influence of partisan cues on learning outcomes has implications for journalism. If a media outlet has an objective to educate viewers and contribute to the formation of an informed electorate, the outlet should consider how, when, and if partisan cues are presented. It is common practice to include a quote from a leading Republican and Democrat in any story about a political controversy. Television outlets often have politicians appear on news programs. The media tends to present political information through the frame of partisan conflict (Lee, McLeod, & Shah, 2008) and engage in the simplification of complex issue into two opposing stances supported by competing parties (Bennett, 1988). This practice of issue dualism may result in the activation partisan social identity and result in the reliance on partisan cues in decision-making. My findings suggest that this practice undermines learning about the issue. Journalists would do better to inform the electorate if they explained an issue without indicating to the reader the stance of the various parties or saving that information for the end of the article after higher cognitive engagement has occurred. My findings suggest that the common practice in news of framing issues as a partisan conflict likely results in a less informed electorate.

In addition to the direct effect of exposure on learning, an indirect effect was observed through positively valenced elaboration. If readers considered the arguments of the author, they learned more than those who did not elaborate on the message or those who counterargued the message. Readers learned about the Puerto Rican statehood issue when they spent the cognitive resources in order to understand the pro-statehood

argument, affirming Rojas' (2008) finding that an understanding orientation is associated with numerous pro-democratic outcomes, including political knowledge. However, negatively valenced elaboration neither positively nor negatively predicted a change in the amount of learning. In other words, those negatively elaborating on the message did not score significantly better than those that had not read a message on the issue. This may indicate that though individuals need some information to make counterarguments, they utilize relatively low amounts of knowledge to do so. When individuals have the motivation to make counterarguments, they make no additional effort to engage with and learn about the material to improve counterarguments.

Limitations and Future Research

The researcher attempted to identify and resolve or mitigate potential limitations. However, like any research, the current study has limitations to its findings, which will be acknowledged and addressed in this section. The findings of the experiments, despite the limitations, contribute significant and meaningful knowledge to our understanding of political communication, partisan social identities, cognitive biases, and valenced elaboration. First, the sample of any study limits the generalizability of the findings. The first study consisted of a convenience sample of students from a single university. The objective of the current study, though, was to make a process inference, not a population inference. When making a population inference, a researcher generalizes the findings of a study to the population from which the sample was derived; thus, sampling bias is a major concern (Hayes, 2005). However, a process inference tests theoretical relationships between variables, and internal validity is a greater concern than sampling bias (Hayes, 2005; Mook, 1983). Though generalizability is not the core objective of experiments

(Mook, 1983), the findings could be limited to young adults who attend college at a public Midwestern university if there was an unobserved moderator of effects (e.g., age, political knowledge). In anticipation of this limitation, a replication of the experiment was conducted on a different sample. Replicating findings allows for greater certainty in the validity of findings by minimizing the possibility of unobserved moderators (DeAndrea & Holbert, 2017; Hull, 1988; Simons, 2014).

Thomas and Clifford (2017), in their review of the validity of Amazon Mechanical Turk samples, found that research utilizing a MTurk sample was as reliable and internally valid as research conducted in a lab. Moreover, research utilizing MTurk samples, generally with a more representative sample, is more externally valid and generalizable than research conducted on other convenience samples (Thomas & Clifford, 2017). Though, the sample in Study 2 had limitations of its own (e.g., the sample was left-leaning politically), it replicated the findings from the first study in almost every instance. In other words, an unobserved moderator is unlikely, and both samples appear appropriate to make a process inference. In fact, the two samples passed a test of measurement invariance indicating that participants in each sample interpreted study items in a similar way. This allowed for follow-up analysis of a combined sample. Study 2 replicated and supported the findings of Study 1 in 14 of the 15 hypotheses and also for the research question. The one exception (H3b) tested the influence of pro-Democratic partisan cues on the amount of negatively valenced elaboration in which Republicans engaged. Though Study 1, with a partisan-balanced sample, was able to detect the difference, Study 2, with only 7 Republicans in the partisan cue condition, lacked the power to observe if an effect was present. Thus, the Democratic partisan

imbalance limited the findings of the second experiment. This limitation, though not affecting the nature of the effect, reduced the precision of the estimates. Specifically, the low number of Republicans (especially in the partisan cue condition), resulted in imprecise estimation of conditional partisan effects, as illustrated with the wide 95% confidence intervals shown Figure 3.

Extending the limitations of the samples, both Study 1 and Study 2 lacked the size for adequate power in detecting some effects and relationships. In political communication, some effects are small, yet meaningful. With 332 (Study 1) and 225 (Study 2) participants, the two studies separately lacked the power necessary to detect differences that were observed in the combined sample of 557 participants. In particular, both studies failed to support H3c and H8 when analyzed independently; both hypotheses predicted conditional effects. Analysis of conditional hypotheses excluded individuals who were politically unaffiliated, which was easily the largest of the three partisan groups in both studies, to focus on differences between those belonging to the Democratic partisan social group and those identifying with the Republican Party. However, the combined sample, with greater power, was able to detect significant partisan group differences, and both H3c and H8 were supported in the follow-up analysis. A random sampling or, at least, replication among different samples of the American populace would better test the hypothesized model, which was supported in the current study.

Additionally, the validity of measures should be addressed and examined. First, partisan social identity was measured with a single item. Though empirical research on partisan social identities is somewhat limited, the concept has been measured primarily in two ways: 1) through a 1-7 scale of partisan identification (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2012); 2)

by adapting Mael and Tetrick's (1992) Identification with a Psychological Group (IDPG) scale to measure partisan social identities (e.g., Greene, 1999, 2004). The decision to utilize the single item partisan identity scale was based on the face validity of items. This item was determined to measure the variable of interest better than the adapted IDPG scale. However, there was an important grouping decision to be made. Individuals that replied that they leaned either Democrat or Republican were classified as politically unaffiliated. Individuals with a strong partisan social identity were those that claimed to be a "strong Democrat," "Democrat," "Republican," or "Strong Republican." In other words, those that indicated they leaned toward a political party were considered outside that partisan social group. Though political leaners may often vote along partisan lines (Greene, 2004), individuals who closely identified with a political party were the population of interest. Social identification entails that people think of their group membership as a salient identity. If an individual is unwilling to adopt the group label and classify themselves as a Republican or Democrat, they cannot be thought of as members of a partisan ingroup—even if they vote like partisans. Secondly, positively and negatively valenced elaboration was measured by having participants list and number reasons why Puerto Rico should and should not become a U.S. state. Though elaboration has often been measured through listing of thoughts (e.g., Krosnick & Petty, 1995; LaMarre & Walther, 2013), the measuring of positively and negatively valenced elaboration through this manner is novel. Also, because positively and negatively valenced elaboration proved to be distinct constructs, with different predictors and outcomes, the distinct concepts should both be measured and analyzed in future research—rather than simply looking at the amount of total elaboration.

Finally, the topic of Puerto Rican statehood may have an influence on the generalizability of findings. The topic was chosen as a low-salience, low-knowledge issue in the American political landscape. However, it was important that partisan cues could realistically be inserted into the story to activate readers' partisan social identities. The devastation of Hurricane Maria in September, 2017 resulted in a potential for Puerto Rican statehood to become more salient among American citizens. To allow time for the focus of the American public and salience of the issue to subside, data collection was pushed back until November. A manipulation check asking about the importance of the Puerto Rican statehood issue was administered, and participants responded that the issue was of low salience. Additionally, people of Puerto Rican heritage were excluded from participation. Future research should examine the hypothesized model for various political issues, including those of higher salience/knowledge among the American electorate. Additionally, futures studies should examine political messages in a variety of contexts (e.g., social media, partisan media, and interpersonal conversations). Finally, researchers should examine the influence of other social identities (e.g., race, religion, and gender) on the elaborative, persuasive, and learning outcomes of non-political messages. Results of a single study on one topic cannot confirm the moderated mediation model found in the current study; however, replication of the experiment on a variety of issues in various contexts could strengthen the claims of the current study. Specifically, because the current study utilized an issue that would benefit the Democratic party, the findings should be replicated with topics that would spur positive Republican elaboration and negative Democratic elaboration.

Conclusion

This dissertation drew on three theories (SIT, PMR, and ELM) to generate a unified theory of political persuasion and develop the process of identity-motivated elaboration. The results demonstrated the value of this approach. Social identities inform an individual's decisions and attitudes. People categorize themselves and others to differentiate themselves and enhance their own self-concept (Festinger, 1954; Wills, 1981). To accomplish self-enhancement, individuals must create positive distinctiveness, which is pursued through ingroup favoritism and outgroup denigration (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As such, the way one acts and thinks are motivationally biased to enhance the identity of one's social group. Group members identify prototypical leaders, who embody group stereotypes and establish normative expectations; to be a *better* group member, an individual adheres to expected attitudes and behaviors (Turner, 1991). Political affiliations are not *cold*, rational decisions. Rather, an individual has an affective connection with the party (Campbell et al., 1960), and, as such, individuals' self-concepts are linked to their evaluation of the partisan social group. Partisan elites act as prototypical leaders who establish expected partisan attitudes and behaviors, and individuals are predisposed to positively evaluate their party's political stances. As a result, individuals are motivated to process new political information through a partisan lens—accepting arguments that advantage one's party and defending a party against opposing message through the construction of counterarguments (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2013; Lord et al, 1979). Consistent with previous research, (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002; Greene, 1992; Jennings et al., 2017; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the findings reveal that the amount of cognitive elaboration in which one engages influences the learning and persuasive outcomes of a political message. Additionally, the findings

extend our knowledge on elaboration by empirically differentiating the effects of positively and negatively valenced elaboration.

A deliberative democracy is reliant on an informed electorate discussing issues and presenting persuasive arguments (Habermas, 1962). A political argument lacking partisan cues proved to be both informative and persuasive. Consistent with normative political behavior, the attitudes of the citizenry were shaped by new information on an issue (Dahl, 1956). However, partisan cues interfered with this pro-democratic process. Partisan social identities became fundamental in the processing and outcomes of the political message. A message consistent with one's partisan predispositions resulted in greater positively valenced elaboration, which predicted increased attitudinal congruence with the advocated position. However, if the message ran counter to one's partisan predispositions, individuals engaged in more negatively valenced elaboration, which reduced the persuasive effects of the message. The insertion of partisan cues negatively predicted the amount of learning for both partisan sides, as individuals formed issue-relevant opinions from partisan social group norms.

As political communication becomes more partisan and advocates for one certain political side (Prior, 2007), political messages evoke more extreme political attitudes (Sunstein, 2009) and a more polarized citizenry (Stroud, 2011). The current study highlights the role of partisan social identities in generating motivated processing and biased integration of new information, extending the partisan social identity hypothesis (see Greene, 2004; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) to the elaborative, persuasive, and learning outcomes of political messages. Identifying with the Democratic or Republican Party creates a partisan lens through which all new political information is processed. The

findings evidence partisan social identities' role in creating predispositions, which partisans biasedly defend. The merits of a policy may become secondary to intergroup competitive outcomes in a polarized political environment. Even in the absence of strong prior beliefs on an issue, individuals construct political opinions to defend their partisan social identity. As a result, valenced elaboration, conditioned persuasion, and limited learning are observed. The integration of the three psychological theories to develop the process of identity-motivated elaboration avails a new perspective on the political persuasion process, one that is more nuanced and extensive than that provided by any isolated theoretical perspective. The current study extends our understanding of this complex political communicative process by synthesizing the social identity approach, partisan motivated reasoning, and valenced cognitive elaboration into a more comprehensive model and unified theory of political persuasion.

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Appendix A
Control: *The Benefits of Owning a Pet*

Pet owners know how much their furry friend improves their quality of life. But it's not all about unconditional love—although that actually provides a wellness boost, too. On an emotional level, owning a pet can decrease depression, stress and anxiety; health-wise, it can lower your blood pressure, improve your immunity and even decrease your risk of heart attack and stroke. But the positives don't stop there. Read on to discover other incredible benefits that can come with owning a pet.

Decreases Stress

In a 2002 study at State University of New York at Buffalo, researchers found that when conducting a stressful task, people experienced less stress when their pets were with them than when a spouse, family member or close friend was nearby. Promises Treatment Centers, which specializes in addiction, not only recommends its patients consider getting a pet, but even allows pets in its rehabilitation facilities, according to David Sack, MD, CEO of Promises. "One of Promises' core beliefs is that we need to remove obstacles that prevent people from getting help," Dr. Sack says. "We are committed to making Promises a safe and reassuring homelike environment. And what could be more like home than to have your pet accompany you?"

Improves Mood

A lot of the health benefits of owning a pet may stem from the mental and emotional benefits. "People who have pets are less harried; there's more laughter in their life," says Dr. Becker. "When you come home, it's like you're George Clooney. You're a star." This is a primary reason pets are used in various forms of therapy. "At Walter Reed Army Medical Center, they're using dogs to help soldiers dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder," says Katy Nelson, DVM, associate emergency veterinarian at the VCA Alexandria Animal Hospital in Alexandria, Virginia. "They're finding the guys who have a pet are able to re-enter society a little bit easier. They're showing a decreased suicide rate, one of the biggest health threats [veterans] face. These guys who have a pet have someone they're responsible for, someone who cares about them. And they don't have to explain what they've been through."

Helps People Socialize

While it may seem a bit counterintuitive, owning a dog actually increases a person's opportunities to socialize, according to Michael Landa, CEO of natural pet food brand Nulo and founder of Los Angeles–based dog-walking service The Pet Staff. "I take my dog for a two-mile walk every day, and I run into five to 10 people whom I stop and talk to," he says. Christie Keith, the online and social media editor at PetConnection.com, agrees. "A 1999 Canadian study found that pet owners were more 'socially engaged' than non–pet owners," she says. In addition, an Austrian study “found that pet ownership led to an increase in social contact, more socialization within neighborhoods [such as neighbors chatting as they walk their dogs], and even a greater perception to observers that the neighborhood seems ‘friendly.’”

Appendix B
Persuasive Argument Advocating for Puerto Rican Statehood

In a status referendum held by Puerto Rico this June, 97 percent of Puerto Rican citizens expressed their desire for statehood. Despite low voter turnout, the 2017 referendum reaffirmed the results of the 2012 referendum, which also found that a majority wished for Puerto Rico to become a state. The U.N. has stated “We support the right of Puerto Rico to be admitted to the Union as a fully sovereign state if they freely so determine.” And now the citizens have spoken.

The legal path to Puerto Rico’s statehood is simple: An affirmative vote by the House and Senate and the signature of the President provides admission to the Union as a state. The political process, however, is more complicated. American politicians have refused to take action, as debate ensues.

The argument for Puerto Rican statehood is simple. Puerto Rican's have been American citizens for a century but it’s official status is as a commonwealth. This means that statutes and laws passed in the U.S. are applied to the people in Puerto Rico but they are not given the chance to vote on most issues. By making Puerto Rico a state, it would give all its citizens the right to vote on the things that impact them.

Since Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens, they have fought in every war. In fact, by percentage of population, there are more Puerto Rican's in our armed forces than from just about any state. Their commitment to the United States is therefore beyond dispute.

They fight for our freedom, yet cannot cast a vote in our elections.

Puerto Rican statehood would also bring a significant amount of extra revenue each year for the U.S. Treasury. Puerto Ricans have access to Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid. However, they currently only pay federal income taxes on work done within the United States. Making Puerto Rico a state would make them contribute taxes to the federal programs they benefit from. Puerto Rico is currently costing the US over $22 billion a year, but as a state, it would actually contribute nearly $2 billion to the American economy every year.

Though some worry about Puerto Rico entering the nation as a Spanish-speaking state, Puerto Rico is actually very bi-lingual. For many years both English and Spanish have been taught as first languages in Puerto Rican schools. Recent visitors to the island often remark about how English-speaking it has become.

The matter of the free determination is pretty well settled by both the 2012 and 2017 referendum. Puerto Ricans want statehood, and it is in the best interest of the U.S. to grant it. Puerto Ricans would get to vote on the laws that affect them. The same right for which Americans once fought. Additionally, it would improve the economy in Puerto Rico, and, in return, have great economic benefits for the United States. It is time we live up to our promise of representative democracy and grant Puerto Rico statehood.

Appendix C
Partisan Cues Inserted in a Pro-Statehood Persuasive Argument

In a status referendum held by Puerto Rico this June, 97 percent of Puerto Rican citizens expressed their desire for statehood. Despite low voter turnout, the 2017 referendum reaffirmed the results of the 2012 referendum, which also found that a majority wished for Puerto Rico to become a state. The U.N. has stated “We support the right of Puerto Rico to be admitted to the Union as a fully sovereign state if they freely so determine.” And now the citizens have spoken.

The legal path to Puerto Rico’s statehood is simple: An affirmative vote by the House and Senate and the signature of the President provides admission to the Union as a state. The political process, however, is more complicated. The admittance of Puerto Rico, a notoriously liberal territory, as the 51st state would primarily advantage the Democratic Party. Puerto Rico would be expected to send two Democratic senators and as many as six Democratic representatives to Congress. In total, this would increase the number of Electoral College votes Democrats could be expected to receive in presidential elections by eight. American politicians have refused to take action, as debate ensues. A partisan divide has emerged. Democrats support statehood, and Republicans oppose it.

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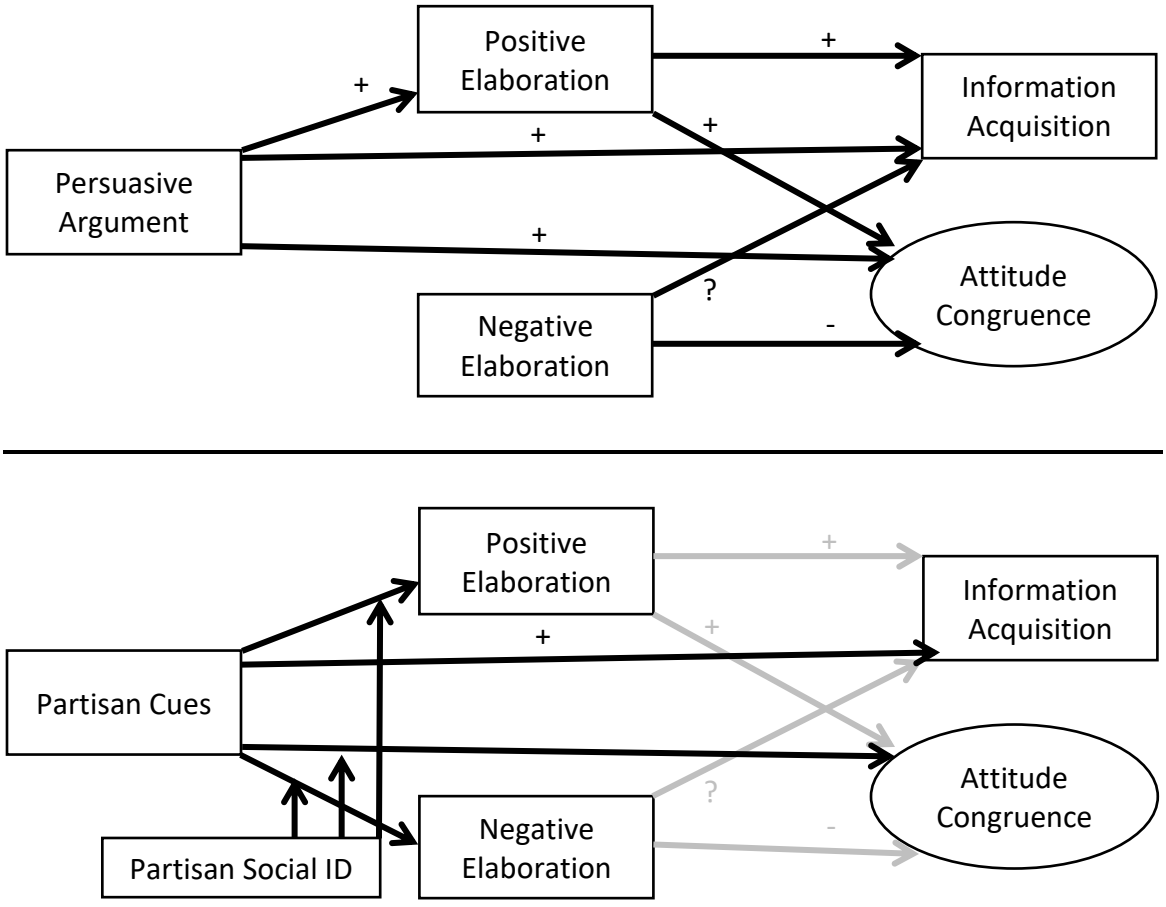
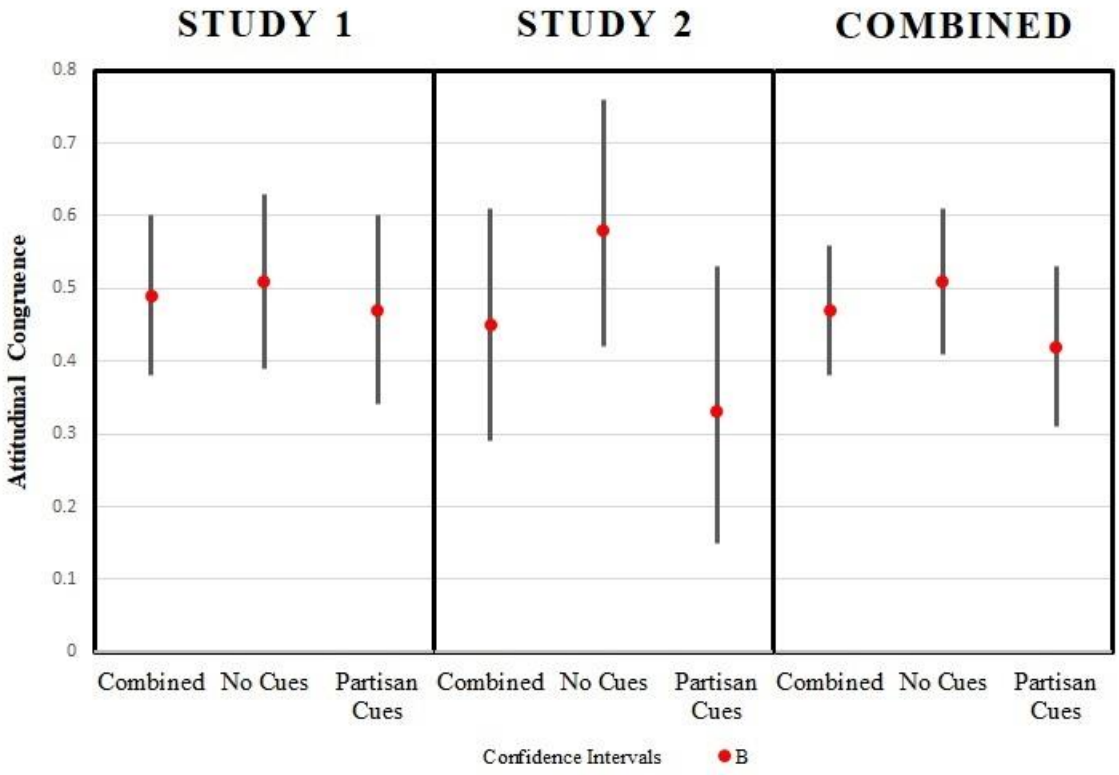
Americans once fought. Additionally, it would improve the economy in Puerto Rico, and, in return, have great economic benefits for the United States. It is time Republican set aside political issues to live up to our promise of representative democracy and grant Puerto Rico statehood.

Figure 1: Hypothesized models of 1) a political argument absent partisan cues; 2) a political argument with partisan cues.



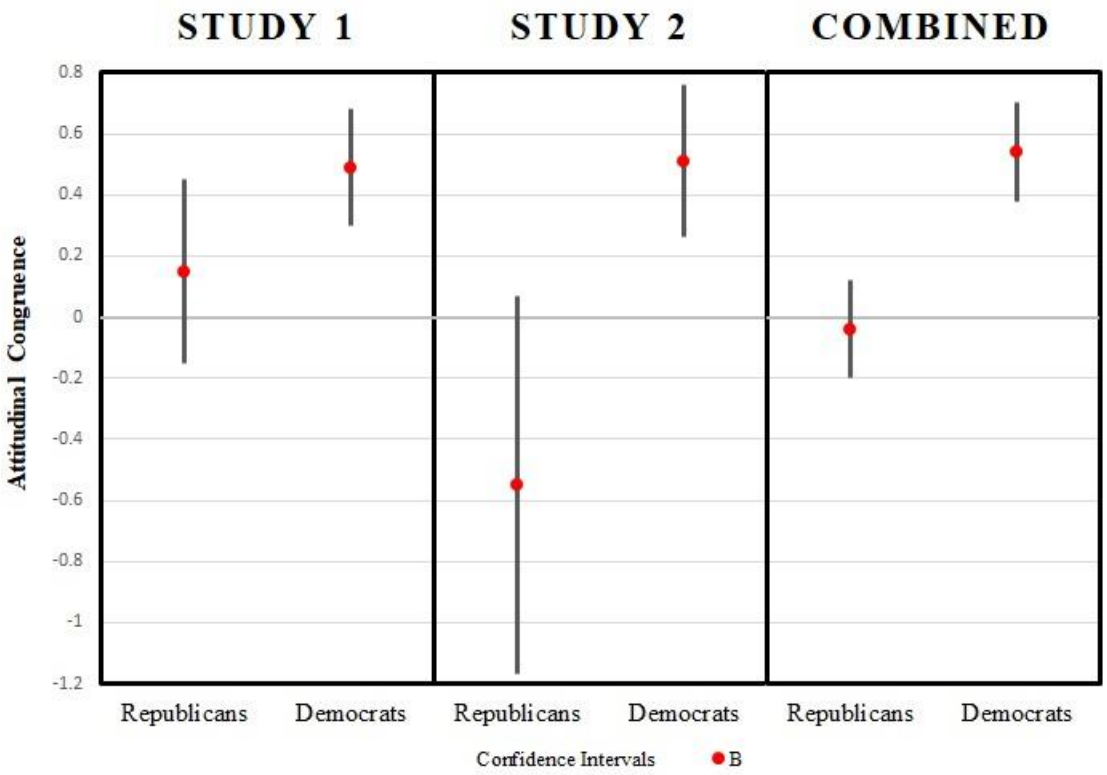
Note: When partisan cues are added to the political argument, the hypothesized model will be altered in four ways: 1) The path from persuasive argument to negatively valenced elaboration will be conditioned by partisan social identification, significant for Republicans but not for Democrats; 2) The path predicting positively valenced elaboration will be oppositely conditioned, where it will be significant for Democrats but not Republicans; 3) The direct path from the persuasive argument to attitude congruence will likewise be conditioned by partisan social identity, significant for Democrats but not for Republicans; 4) Information acquisition, while still positive, will be lower in the partisan cue condition.

Figure 2: The Persuasive Influence of Exposure to a Political Message.



Note: The y-axis indicates the estimated effect of the persuasive message when compared to the control group. The x-axis represents the two treatment conditions (readers of the persuasive message with and without partisan cues) and the two conditions when combined. The red dots represent point estimates, and lines represent two standard errors (95% confidence intervals).

Figure 3: The Persuasive Influence of a Political Message Containing Pro-Democratic Partisan Cues, by Partisan Social Identity.



Note: The y-axis indicates the estimated effect of the persuasive message when compared to the control group. The x-axis represents the two partisan social identities. The red dots represent point estimates, and lines represent two standard errors (95% confidence intervals).

Table 1: List of Hypotheses and Research Question

Hypothesis 1	*Exposure to a political argument will result in message-consistent persuasion among readers.*
Hypothesis 2a	*The influence of a political argument with pro-Democratic partisan cues will be moderated by partisan social identity, such that Democrats will exhibit more attitudinal congruence than Republicans.*
Hypothesis 2b	*The influence of a political argument without partisan cues will not be moderated by partisan social identification.*
Hypothesis 3a	*Exposure to a political argument will result in positively valenced elaboration on the issue among readers.*
Hypothesis 3b	*A political argument containing pro-Democratic partisan cues will result in greater negatively valenced elaboration among Republican readers.*
Hypothesis 3c	*A political argument containing pro-Democratic partisan cues will result in greater positively valenced elaboration among Democratic readers.*
Hypothesis 4a	*Positively valenced elaboration will increase persuasion.*
Hypothesis 4b	*Negatively valenced elaboration will decrease persuasion.*
Hypothesis 5	*A political argument will indirectly increase attitude congruence through increased positively valenced elaboration.*
Hypothesis 6	*The indirect influence of a political argument on persuasion through positively valenced elaboration will be moderated by partisan social identification.*
Hypothesis 7	*Readers will acquire issue-relevant information from a political persuasive argument.*
Hypothesis 8	*Partisan readers will learn less from a political argument when it is accompanied by partisan cues.*
Hypothesis 9	*Positively valenced elaboration will result in an increase in information acquisition.*
Research Question 1	*Will negatively valenced elaboration influence the learning process?*
Hypothesis 10	*A persuasive argument will indirectly increase knowledge acquisition through positively valenced elaboration.*

Table 2: Partisan Breakdown of Participants by Condition

	Study 1 (Student)			Study 2 (MTurk)		
	Control	Persuasive	Partisan	Control	Persuasive	Partisan
Democrat	25(21.6%)	20(17.5%)	28(27.5%)	28(39.4%)	34(44.2%)	27(35.1%)
Unaffiliated	64(55.2%)	63(55.3%)	54(52.9%)	30(42.3%)	36(46.8%)	43(55.8%)
Republican	27(23.3%)	31(27.2%)	20(19.6%)	13(18.3%)	7(9.1%)	7(9.1%)
Total	116	114	102	71	77	77

Table 3: Direct and Indirect Effects

	5000 Bootstrap Samples			
	B(se)	β	LLCI	ULCI
Argument → Attitudinal Congruence				
Combined Sample	.47(.09)	.22	.29	.64*
Student Sample	.49(.11)	.23	.28	.72*
MTurk Sample	.45(.16)	.21	.17	.78*
Argument → Positive Elaboration				
Combined Sample	.44(.1)	.17	.23	.65*
Student Sample	.39(.14)	.15	.11	.65*
MTurk Sample	.52(.18)	.19	.17	.86*
Partisan Argument → Negative Elaboration (Republicans)				
Combined Sample	.46(.22)	.19	.02	.9*
Student Sample	.55(.26)	.23	.03	1.03*
MTurk Sample	.18(.43)	.08	-.67	1.06
Partisan Argument → Positive Elaboration (Democrats)				
Combined Sample	.47(.25)	.19	.00	.96*
Student Sample	.59(.39)	.24	-.14	1.41
MTurk Sample	.19(.3)	.15	-.38	.77
Positive Elaboration → Attitudinal Congruence				
Combined Sample	.46(.04)	.51	.38	.55*
Student Sample	.52(.06)	.54	.39	.64*
MTurk Sample	.36(.07)	.41	.24	.49*
Negative Elaboration → Attitudinal Congruence				
Combined Sample	-.12(.04)	-.11	-.2	-.03*
Student Sample	-.11(.06)	-.1	-.22	.00
MTurk Sample	-.03(.06)	-.03	-.17	.08
Argument → Positive Elaboration → Attitudinal Congruence				
Combined Sample	.18(.05)	--	.09	.28*
Student Sample	.18(.07)	--	.05	.32*
MTurk Sample	.18(.07)	--	.05	.33*
Argument → Information Acquisition				
Combined Sample	2.02(.15)	.45	1..72	2.32*
Student Sample	1.53(.2)	.37	1.13	1.92*
MTurk Sample	2.71(.23)	.56	2.26	3.17*
Partisan Cues → Information Acquisition (Partisans)				
Combined Sample	-.64(.3)	-.16	-1.26	-.09*
Student Sample	-.64(.38)	-.16	-1.4	.14
MTurk Sample	-.53(.42)	-.15	-1.37	.25
Positive Elaboration → Information Acquisition				
Combined Sample	.67(.08)	.39	.52	.81*
Student Sample	.57(.09)	.36	.4	.76*
MTurk Sample	.7(.12)	.39	.45	.94*
Negative Elaboration → Information Acquisition				
Combined Sample	-.06(.09)	-.03	-.71	.47
Student Sample	.03(.11)	.02	-.19	.26
MTurk Sample	-.08(.13)	-.04	-.33	.18
Argument → Positive Elaboration → Information Acquisition				
Combined Sample	.44(.11)	--	.23	.65*
Student Sample	.39(.13)	--	.12	.65*
MTurk Sample	.66(.1)	--	.45	.85*

Note: se= standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval.
*Indicates that the 95% confidence interval does not contain zero.

Table 4: Support for Hypotheses and Research Question by Study and Follow-Up Analysis

Sample	Hypothesis (Persuasion)									
	H1	H2a	H2b	H3a	H3b	H3c	H4a	H4b	H5	H6
Combined	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Study 1	Yes	Mix	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Study 2	Yes	Mix	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	Hypothesis or Research Question (Learning)									
	H7	H8	H9	RQ1	H10					
Combined	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes					
Study 1	Yes	Mix	Yes	No	Yes					
Study 2	Yes	Mix	Yes	No	Yes					

Note: *Study 1* consisted of a student sample; *Study 2* consisted from a sample obtained using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk); *Combined* refers to the follow-up analysis of the combination of both samples.

VITA

Freddie Jennings is the proud husband of the amazing Anita Sarathi and father of the beautiful Avani Jennings. He was born in Southwest, MO to Fred and Kathy Jennings. He has two sisters (April Jennings & Tiffany Jordon), one brother (Jeremiah Jennings), and four nephews/nieces (Kimble, Natali, Emersyn, and Barrett). He graduated from Neosho High School (2001) before completing his B.A. (2005) and M.A. (2006) at the University of Arkansas. Over the next several years, Freddie travelled the world. This included spending 2.5 years in China, where in 2011, he suffered a traumatic brain injury from a three-story fall. Miraculously, Freddie recovered. He then decided to pursue his doctoral degree in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri. He successfully defended his dissertation in May, 2018.