Seeing the Other Side: Reducing Political Partisanship via Self-Affirmation in the 2008 Presidential Election

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The 2008 presidential election brought the partisan divide between U.S. Republicans and Democrats to the forefront. In such contested situations, people who identify with the parties and their candidates experience pressure to adhere to their group's core beliefs and behaviors. This research hypothesized that providing individuals a chance to affirm their self-integrity would relieve some of this pressure and facilitate greater openness to the opposition. In the 2 days prior to the 2008 election, Democrats (N = 50) and Republicans (N = 60) who affirmed their self-integrity by writing about important personal values (versus those who did not self-affirm) were less driven by partisan preferences in their evaluations of Barack Obama's debate performance, more favorable to opposition candidates, and more generally open to alternative viewpoints. Additionally, 10 days after the election, affirmed Republicans thought Obama would make a better president than did nonaffirmed Republicans. Discussion centers on how motivational factors can exacerbate—and attenuate—the divide between "red" and "blue" America.

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"Barack Obama is right and John McCain is wrong."
  —Nancy Pelosi, speaking at the Democratic National Convention, August 25, 2008.

"I hope he fails."
  —Rush Limbaugh, speaking about President-elect Obama on *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, January 16, 2009.

Political partisans often seem unwilling to compromise on their views of "the other side." Social science evidence suggests that there are systematic motivational concerns that contribute to partisan intransigence (Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). The premise of this research is that one reason why partisans fail to see the merits of the other side is because doing so in the heat of conflict poses a threat to their perception of self-integrity. That is, opening up to the other side can actually call into question an individual's sense of being good and virtuous and place the self at risk for potential rejection and denigration from fellow ingroup members (Cohen et al., 2007; Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). Moreover, we propose that recognizing self-integrity concerns as a source of partisanship highlights one path toward reducing partisanship. We present one experiment conducted in the days immediately surrounding the 2008 U.S. presidential election that examined whether an experimentally induced self-affirmation would enable self-identified Democrats and Republicans to "open up" and become more favorable toward John McCain and Barack Obama, respectively.

Self-Affirmation and Open-Mindedness

People strive to maintain a sense of self-integrity, that is, a perception of the self as good, moral, and efficacious (Steele, 1988; see also Binning, 2007; Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Critically, this desire encompasses all valued aspect of the self, including the aspects that are bound up in valued social or group identities. That is, because people derive part of the self-concept from the groups they belong to (Cohen, 2003; Sherman & Kim, 2005; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), part of maintaining one's sense of self-integrity is rooted in adoption and maintenance of group identity-consistent beliefs (Cohen et al., 2007; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). For self-identified Democrats and Republicans, belonging and allegiance to the ingroup are associated with specific attitudinal and behavioral guidelines (Cohen, 2003). When a presidential election approaches, for instance, Democrats are expected to support Democratic candidates, and Republicans are expected to support Republican candidates. Support for ingroup candidates helps sustain the perception that one's group is "the correct group," that is, a worthy group possessing desirable attributes that one should be a member of and support (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Conversely, openness to the other side could threaten how one is seen within the group, and to the extent that group membership is an important component of self-identity, openness could threaten an individual's self-integrity.

If partisanship is partly attributable to the desire to maintain self-integrity, then affirmations of self-integrity should soften partisan preferences (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Steele, 1988). That is, assuming that individuals desire to maintain their self-integrity, satisfying this desire should remove the pressure for partisanship in their social judgments (Sherman & Cohen, 2002). A growing body of research now supports the idea that affirmations of self-integrity in one domain can enhance people's willingness to tolerate threats to integrity in other, altogether different domains. For instance, for groups that are stigmatized for their academic ability (e.g., African Americans), self-affirmation of nonacademic values (e.g., sense of humor, athletics, spending time with friends) appeared to undermine the threat to integrity associated with academics and improve academic performance (Cohen et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2007). Similarly, for individuals whose strongly held beliefs about abortion were made salient, affirmation of self-integrity increased concession making in a negotiation over abortion policy (Cohen et al., 2007). Other studies have shown that value affirmations can reduce defensiveness against information suggesting one's behavior puts one at risk for disease (see Harris & Epton, 2009, for review) and more generally against existential threats to mortality (Landau & Greenberg, 2006; Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). Indeed, the typical demonstration that mortality salience leads to greater worldview defense was attenuated when individuals had the opportunity to affirm an alternative valued identity (Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). These studies share the common thread that affirmation of self-integrity made people more willing to tolerate the threats associated with a salient social identity (e.g., as academically stigmatized African Americans or as partisans debating abortion). In this way, self-integrity affirmations can be conceptualized as a psychological safety net that frees people to engage in behaviors that would otherwise be threatening to a particular focal identity (also see Sherman, Kinias, Major, Kim, & Prenovost, 2007).

Importantly, research suggests that affirmations of self-integrity should be most effective at reducing threat when they affirm values other than those associated with the relevant threat (Blanton et al., 1997; Sivanathan, Molden, Galinsky, & Ku, 2008). For instance, asking political partisans to affirm political values would not only prime those values, but the threats associated with those values as well, making an individual's self-worth more contingent upon the threatened domain. If, instead, partisans affirmed values that are unrelated to politics, it should boost a sense of self-integrity more broadly, as the affirming activity expands the bases of the self-concept from which individuals derive self-integrity (Sherman & Hartson, in press).

Study Hypotheses

Based on the above analysis, we hypothesized that affirmation of self-integrity should make Democrats and Republicans less favorable toward their own side and more open to the opposition candidates in the days just prior to the 2008

presidential election. Drawing a regionally diverse sample of Internet respondents, we tested this hypothesis in four different ways with a study that randomly assigned self-identified Republicans and Democrats to either the self-affirmation or the no-affirmation condition in an experimental design.

First, we tested the hypothesis by examining judgments of the candidates' performance in a portion of a televised debate. Specifically, we presented participants with video clips from the third presidential debate, in which the candidates summarized their economic policies. It was hypothesized that in response to Obama's discussion of his policy, affirmed Republicans would evaluate Obama's performance (e.g., strength of argument, knowledge of economic issues) more favorably than nonaffirmed Republicans, and affirmed Democrats would evaluate Obama's performance less favorably than nonaffirmed Democrats (i.e., both sides would become less partisan when affirmed). For participants' evaluations of McCain's debate performance, we predicted the reverse pattern (affirmed Republicans would become less favorable, affirmed Democrats would become more favorable).

Second, we predicted that in terms of general levels of support for the two major presidential candidates, affirmed Democrats would become more supportive of John McCain's presidential candidacy, and affirmed Republicans would become more supportive of Barack Obama's presidential candidacy. By contrast, we predicted that nonaffirmed participants would not change their stance toward the candidates.

Third, we examined whether the affirmation would induce a sense of general openness to opposing viewpoints. We used a subset of items from the Need for Closure Scale (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996) to see whether affirmation would make all participants, regardless of their party affiliation, more generally open to the other side.

Finally, we were interested in how participants responded to the outcome of the election. In particular, in the wake of the election of Barack Obama and the victories of the Democratic Party in the Senate and the House of Representatives, we were interested in the repercussions of these defeats for supporters of the Republican Party. As such, 10 days after the election, we recontacted Republican participants for a small follow-up study to see if those who had been affirmed prior to the election showed evidence of being buffered from the threat associated with the loss after the election. We hypothesized that compared to nonaffirmed Republicans, affirmed Republicans would judge Obama as likely to make a better president and to govern in a less partisan fashion.

Method

Participants

During the 2 days prior to the 2008 presidential election, 129 adults (92 men and 37 women; 80% White, 13% African American, 3% Asian, and 4% from

other categories; $M_{Age} = 38.17$ years, $SD = 13.36$, range: 18–77 years) were recruited from the Internet in exchange for a $5 dollar gift certificate to an online retailer or for a chance to win one of several $25 dollar gift certificates to an online retailer. Participants were either recruited via online advertisements, which appeared to users who searched for election-related words (e.g., "election") on Yahoo.com ($N = 79$), or from an email list-serve maintained by the Stanford Graduate School of Business ($N = 50$). Those recruited from the list-serve were preselected based on whether they were listed in the database as a Democrat or a Republican (independents were not recruited). Of the full sample, 110 participants provided complete or almost complete data and, when asked to indicate with which party they most strongly identify, reported identifying with one of the two major political parties (60 Republicans and 50 Democrats), and were therefore included in the analyses below. Unlike the nation as a whole, in this sample women were no more likely to identify as a Democrat as they were to identify as a Republican, $\chi^2 (1) = 1.73$, $p = .188$. Republicans and Democrats also did not differ in terms of age, education (median education was "College graduate"), or income (median household income was "$60,000–$90,000"), $ts < 1.0$, ns.

Procedure and Measures

After providing consent, all participants immediately responded to three items assessing presidential candidate preferences: "If you had to choose between the presidential candidates from the two major parties, which one would you choose?" "Of the two major political candidates who are running for president, which one do you think would make a better president?" and "Who will be better able to solve America's economic problems (e.g., the financial crisis)?" All items were completed on scales anchored at 1 (*Barack Obama*) and 9 (*John McCain*). The items were averaged together to form a highly reliable composite ($\alpha = .98$, $M = 4.76$; $SD = 3.49$). Broken down by party, the means for these composites revealed a highly polarized sample, as Democrats were strongly pro-Obama ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 1.44$) and Republicans were strongly pro-McCain ($M = 7.49$, $SD = 2.05$).

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (self-affirmation or no affirmation). In the self-affirmation condition, participants ($n = 55$) encountered a list of 10 nonpolitical values (e.g., "sense of humor," "social skills," "creativity") and were asked to mark the value that was most important to them. On the next page, participants were asked to type the value they selected and, in one or two sentences, describe a time when the value was important to them or had affected them in some way. Participants assigned to the no affirmation condition ($n = 55$) encountered the same list of 10 values, but these participants were asked to indicate which item they valued least and to write one or two sentences about why someone else would find the value important. This commonly employed manipulation of self-affirmation (see McQueen &

Klein, 2006, for a review) is theorized to secure self-worth by bringing on-line important self-resources unrelated to a potential threat for those in the affirmation condition while having participants in the no-affirmation condition engage in a similar writing task.

All participants then viewed two video clips from the third presidential debate (see the transcript of the debate portions in Appendix). The third presidential debate took place on October 15, 2008, at Hofstra University, in Long Island, New York, and focused on domestic policy. All participants watched two clips (each about 45 seconds in length): one depicting McCain and one depicting Obama. The order of candidates was counterbalanced for each participant. After each clip, participants responded to items assessing the performance of the candidate they had just seen.

Participants evaluated the candidate's performance on the following dimensions: "How strong was the argument that Barack Obama (John McCain) made in this segment of the debate?" (1 = *Not strong at all*; 9 = *Very strong*), "How balanced and objective was Obama's (McCain's) argument?" (1 = *Not balanced or objective at all*; 9 = *Very balanced and objective*), and "How knowledgeable about economic issues is Barack Obama (John McCain)?" (1 = *Not knowledgeable at all*; 9 = *Very knowledgeable*). The measures for both candidates were highly reliable (αs = .95 and .95). After viewing the first clip, all participants encountered for a second time the three items assessing presidential preferences (α = .98, M = 4.90, SD = 3.49).

Near the conclusion of the study, participants completed three items that tapped general levels of openness to opposing viewpoints. Specifically, participants responded to three items from the Closed-Mindedness subscale of the Need for Closure Scale (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996): "When considering most conflicts, I can usually see how both sides could be correct," "I prefer interacting with people whose opinions are very different from my own," and "Even after making up my mind, I am always eager to consider a different opinion." All items were completed on scales anchored at 1 (*Strongly disagree*) and 9 (*Strongly disagree*) (M = 5.82, SD = 1.39). The measure displayed acceptable reliability (α = .63).

Ten days after Barack Obama won the election, a follow-up email was sent to the Republicans who provided consent for us to contact them after the election (N = 54). Of these, 33 participants (61%) replied,[1] reported whom they voted for, and provided their predictions about what type of president Obama would be with the following statements, preceded by the prompt "As president, Barack Obama will...": "govern in a balanced and objective fashion," "govern as an extreme liberal" (reverse scored), and "govern as a centrist." All items were completed

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[1] Democrats were not sent a postelection email invitation. Of participants who responded, 16 were from the affirmed condition and 17 were from the nonaffirmed condition. Additionally, Republicans who responded did not differ in their premanipulation candidate preferences from Republicans who did not respond (Ms = 7.53 and 7.45, SDs = 2.04 and 2.09, for responders and nonresponders, respectively) t < 1.00, p = .870.

on scales anchored at 1 (*Strongly disagree*) and 9 (*Strongly disagree*) and were combined into a composite with good reliability ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.20$).

Results and Discussion

All statistical tests were conducted using a two-tailed test with alpha level of $p < .05$. There were no gender main effects and participant gender failed to moderate any effects reported below, and thus it is not discussed further. Additionally, neither the sample source nor the order in which the video clips were presented interacted with any effects reported below, and thus we collapsed across these variables.

We used analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to control for participants' preexisting presidential preferences, measured prior to the manipulation. In this way, the present analyses isolate changes in presidential preferences as a function of participants' categorical identification as Republicans or Democrats and experimental condition.

Debate performance evaluation. After participants watched Obama discuss his economic policy, we predicted that affirmed Republicans would evaluate Obama more favorably than nonaffirmed Republicans, and that affirmed Democrats would be less favorable toward Obama than nonaffirmed Democrats. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a 2 (affirmation status: affirmation vs. no affirmation) × 2 (political party: Republican vs. Democrat) ANCOVA, with participants' Time 1 (premanipulation) candidate preferences entered as a covariate, and with Obama's debate performance evaluation as the dependent variable. This analysis yielded a marginally significant main effect for party, $F(1, 105) = 2.82$, $p = .096$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, such that Democrats tended to evaluate Obama more favorably (Adjusted $M = 6.51$, $SD = 1.38$) than did Republicans (Adjusted $M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.91$). The main effect for affirmation status was not significant, $F < 1.0$, $p = .357$. However, there was a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 105) = 5.77$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. The interaction, depicted in Figure 1, was largely consistent with hypotheses.

Simple effects tests revealed that affirmed Republicans were significantly more favorable toward Obama (Adjusted $M = 6.11$, $SD = 1.89$) than Republicans who were not affirmed (Adjusted $M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.89$), $F(1, 104) = 5.94$, $p = .017$. Conversely, affirmed Democrats were slightly, though not significantly, less favorable toward Obama (Adjusted $M = 6.31$, $SD = 1.66$) than Democrats who were not affirmed (Adjusted $M = 6.75$, $SD = 1.04$), $F(1, 104) = 1.01$, $p = .314$. Simple effects tests also revealed that even with prior preferences controlled, there was a clear partisan gap between nonaffirmed Republicans and Democrats in their evaluation of Obama's performance, $F(1, 104) = 6.15$, $p = .008$, which was eliminated for affirmed Republicans and Democrats, $F < 1.00$,
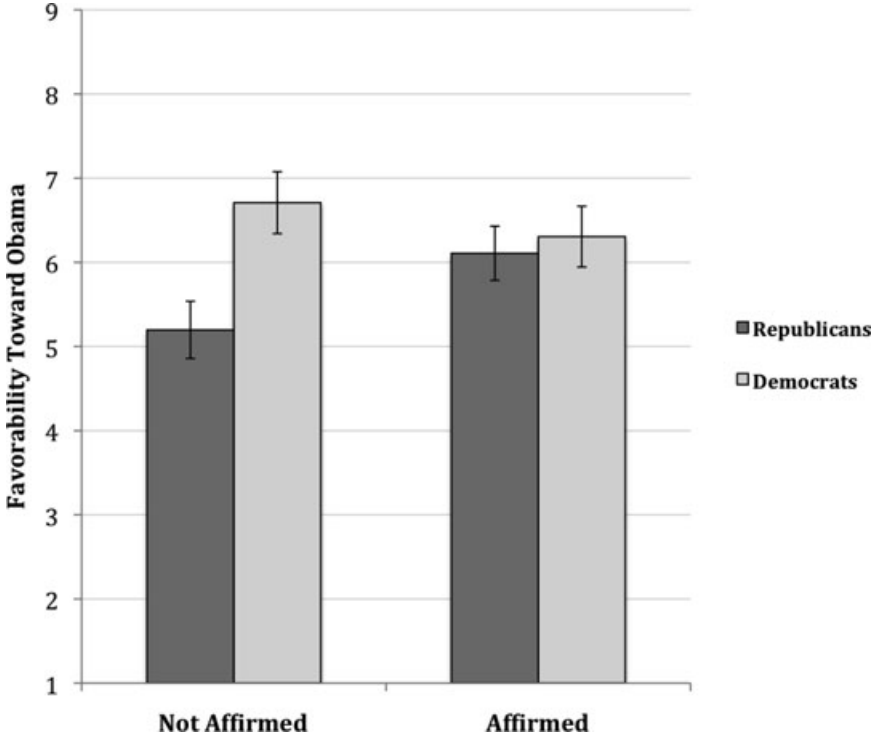
Fig. 1. Estimated mean evaluations of Obama's debate performance as a function of affirmation status and political party, controlling for premanipulation candidate preferences.

$p = .741$. As such, these analyses were consistent with the idea that affirmation reduced the partisan gap in evaluations of Obama's economic policy position by improving Republicans' favorability ratings and decreasing Democrats' favorability ratings.

Participants' evaluations of McCain after the McCain clip did not support the hypothesized pattern, as all effects from the ANCOVA were not significant, $Fs < 1.0$, $ps > .787$. We return to this point in the discussion.

Openness to opposition candidate. To examine whether participants would become relatively more favorable toward the opposition candidate after being affirmed, a change score was calculated to represent movement in presidential preferences as a function of the affirmation manipulation. We subtracted Time 1 (premanipulation) support for McCain, relative to Obama, from the Time 2 (post manipulation, postdebate Clip 1) support for McCain, again relative to Obama,
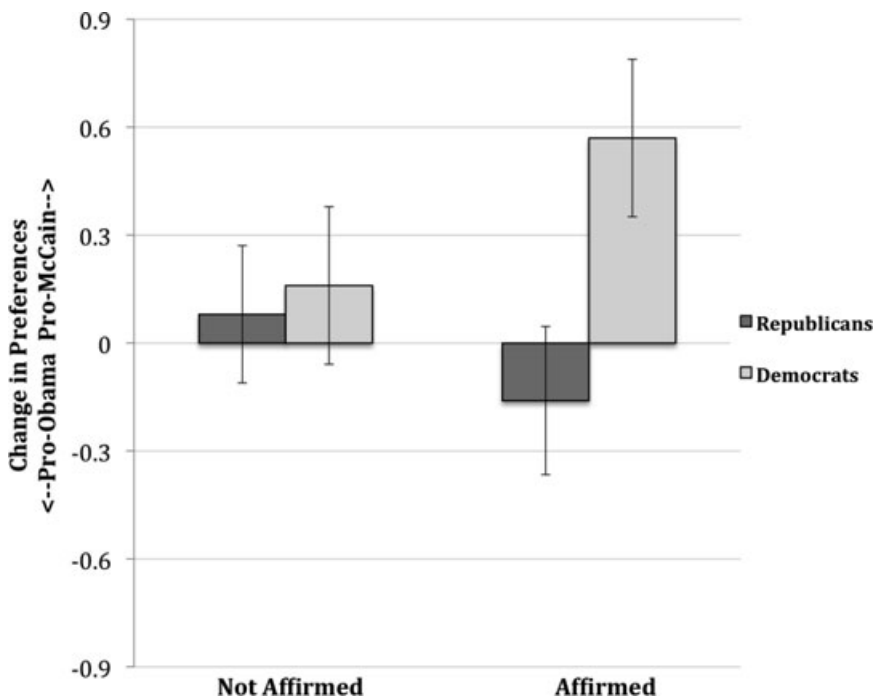
Fig. 2. Estimated mean change in candidate preferences as a function of affirmation status and political party, controlling for premanipulation candidate preferences.

such that higher numbers indicated greater change toward McCain. As in the above analyses, premanipulation preferences were entered as a covariate to isolate the incremental change in candidate preferences owing to the manipulation (see Cronbach & Furby, 1970), and participants' change scores were subjected to a 2 (affirmation vs. no affirmation) × 2 (Republican vs. Democrat) ANCOVA.

Although no main effects were significant, $Fs < 1.42$, $ps > .236$, there was a significant two-way interaction, $F(1, 104) = 3.96$, $p = .049$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. The interaction, depicted in Figure 2, supported the hypothesized pattern. For participants who were not affirmed, there was no difference in change in candidate preferences among Democrats (Adjusted $M = 0.16$, $SD = 0.36$) or Republicans (Adjusted $M = 0.08$, $SD = 0.40$), $F < 1.0$, $p = .832$. By contrast, in the affirmation condition, Democrats tended to become more pro-McCain (Adjusted $M = 0.57$, $SD = 1.59$), whereas Republicans tended to become more pro-Obama (Adjusted $M = -0.16$, $SD = 0.69$), $F(1, 104) = 3.90$, $p = .060$. Additionally, Democrats who were affirmed were marginally more pro-McCain than Democrats who were not affirmed, $F(1, 104) = 2.97$, $p = .091$, whereas Republicans who were affirmed

were slightly, though not significantly, more pro-Obama than Republicans who were not affirmed, $F(1, 104) = 1.17, p = .285$. In sum, the findings illustrated that self-affirmation produced a small, but systematic tendency for partisans to open up to the other side.

General openness. Our explanation for the effects of affirmation is based on the assumption that affirming self-integrity makes people more open to alternative views, opinions, and people. To assess this directly, we analyzed participants' openness scores with a 2 (affirmation vs. no affirmation) × 2 (Republican vs. Democrat) ANCOVA, with Time 1 presidential preferences entered as a covariate, once again, to isolate the effects of the manipulation net of prior presidential preferences. Consistent with expectations, the analysis yielded a significant main effect for affirmation status, $F(1, 103) = 4.49, p = .036, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Affirmed participants reported significantly higher openness (Adjusted $M = 6.16, SD = 1.45$) than nonaffirmed participants (Adjusted $M = 5.58, SD = 1.28$). Additionally, Democrats reported slightly, though not significantly, higher (Adjusted $M = 6.29$, $SD = 1.36$) openness than did Republicans (Adjusted $M = 5.46, SD = 1.43$), $F(1, 103) = 2.31, p = .132$. The interaction was not significant, $F < 1.00, p = .801$, indicating that the manipulation produced similar increases in openness for Republicans and Democrats.

Post-election follow-up. Of the 33 Republican respondents who completed the postelection follow-up survey, four reported they voted for Obama (two affirmed, two nonaffirmed), one did not vote, and the remaining 28 reported voting for McCain. We examined whether Republicans who had been affirmed would be less threatened about their party having lost the election, and potentially more optimistic in their views and expectations of President-elect Obama. A one-way ANCOVA supported this prediction, $F(1, 30) = 4.88, p = .035, \eta_p^2 = .14$. Specifically, using Time 1 preferences as a covariate, Republicans whose self-integrity had been affirmed more than 10 days previously held a significantly more favorable outlook on the Obama presidency (Adjusted $M = 3.84, SD = 1.25$) than participants whose self-integrity was not affirmed (Adjusted $M = 2.99, SD = 1.04$). Removing the four Obama voters did not alter this difference. Thus, the affirmation effects persisted over time, as the Republicans remained relatively open despite their electoral defeat.

Discussion

Although it often seems that political partisans are rigidly and uncompromisingly committed to their particular side, in this article we attempted to show circumstances under which the partisan divide may be more tractable than is commonly appreciated. Although Democrats and Republicans no doubt differ in

priorities and ideology, we suggest that these differences may be exacerbated by a desire to be a good group member. Moreover, to the extent that being a good group member is an important element of an individual's self-conception, partisanship may stem from the need for self-integrity. It may be possible, then, to attenuate partisanship when individuals' desire to maintain self-integrity is fulfilled in an alternative domain, removing the pressure to favor of the ingroup.

By experimentally affirming or not affirming the self-integrity of Republicans and Democrats in the days just prior to the 2008 presidential election, we demonstrated support for the above theorizing. Participants who were affirmed were less driven by partisanship in their evaluations of Barack Obama's televised depiction of his economic policy and in their support for their parties' presidential candidates. Affirmed participants also exhibited increased general levels of openness. Finally, demonstrating the persistence of the affirmation effects, 10 days after the election, Republicans who were affirmed thought Obama would be a more effective president. All the aforementioned effects were observed while holding premanipulation candidate preferences constant, which helped to isolate the variance in participants' responses attributable to the manipulation. As such, this experiment extends previous research on the ability of self-affirmation to reduce partisanship and pressure to go along with one's group (Cohen et al., 2007) by demonstrating effects that persist over time amid a hotly contested election.

However, not all of the predicted patterns materialized: We observed virtually no movement in evaluations of McCain's debate performance as a function of the affirmation. One explanation for the lack of symmetrical results with McCain is that the 2008 presidential election may have been seen as more of a referendum on Barack Obama than on John McCain (certainly, it was theorized that this was part of McCain's strategy; see, e.g., Harnden, 2008; Reeson, 2008). That is, Republicans may have been driven more by "anti-Obama" pressure than Democrats were driven by "anti-McCain" pressure. This reasoning is backed by the notion that Obama's racial and historical background made him an unusual, nonprototypical presidential candidate, and by research suggesting that nonprototypic category members tend to draw more attention and require more explaining than do prototypic category members (Miller, Taylor, & Buck, 1991). Of course, another caveat is that the sample used in this research was relatively small, which may have also affected our ability to detect effects on perceptions of McCain.

Effects over Time

The results suggest that a modest intervention, in which participants briefly thought and wrote about an important personal value, produced lasting effects over time: Republicans who were affirmed still appeared to be less partisan 10 days after losing the election to Obama and the Democrats. Lasting effects of affirmation have also been documented in research in the health domain

(i.e., affirmed participants were more responsive to threatening health information over time; Harris & Napper, 2005) and education (i.e., affirmed African-American students maintained engagement in threatening educational contexts over time; Cohen et al., 2006). Given the brevity of the affirmation relative to its effects over time, questions might be raised about the theoretical mechanism responsible for these effects. That is, during the passage of time, all participants undoubtedly experienced other events in their life that affirmed and threatened their self-integrity, which might have conceivably wiped out the effects of the experimental affirmation.

One plausible explanation for the time effects comes from research on how affirmation affects the way people process information (Correll, Spencer, & Zanna, 2002). Namely, with respect to issues that are of personal importance to the individual, affirmation appears to facilitate a more systematic mode of processing. That is, affirmation might cause people to consider information that they would not have otherwise—information that could change their attitudes in lasting and meaningful ways. This implies that while the affirmation itself might wear off over time, the attitude change induced by the affirmation might be relatively stable. Research is needed to directly test this proposition, perhaps by ascertaining if level of systematic processing predicts the duration of the affirmation effects.

Policy Makers and Seeing the Other Side

Another unanswered question in this research is the extent to which affirmations of self-integrity could make not just citizens but political policy makers less rigid, ideological, and closed-minded. As the opening quotes of this article imply, rigid adherence to party lines is by no means limited to citizens who identify with a political party. Evidence exists that to the extent policy makers care about being reelected, they are motivated to adhere to party lines and established policies, even when such policies are deemed ineffective (e.g., Dur, 2001; Kelman, 2006). As such, it seems that policy makers should be especially likely to experience pressure to conform to party lines and be closed off to the other side. To paraphrase Upton Sinclair (1878–1968), it may be difficult for a politician to see the other side of an issue when his or her chances of being reelected depend upon them not seeing it.

Although the present data are not able to speak to this possibility directly, basic research on self-affirmation theory gives some reason for optimism about reducing policy-maker intransigence. In particular, when individuals' political identity is made salient, and the motivational basis for their political beliefs heightened, self-affirmation induced the strongest effects on reducing the partisan divide (Cohen et al., 2007). To the extent that policy makers are in a chronic state of identity salience (given the typically strident and partisan nature of politics), it may be

possible to induce open-mindedness and reduce intransigence in policy makers by having them communicate about their important personal values unrelated to the focal issues. Although it is difficult to imagine an affirmation turning a "Yea" into a "Nay" or vice versa, as seen above it may be possible to reduce partisan polarization. In fact, anecdotal evidence suggests that some leaders and leadership styles might employ affirmation techniques when attempting to reconcile highly polarized factions.

This technique was nicely illustrated when former President Jimmy Carter was negotiating what would eventually become a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1978. As the talks between the leaders of the two nations threatened to break down in the final hours, Carter sought to save the peace process. He paid a personal visit to the Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, bringing photographs, which were autographed and personalized for each of Begin's eight grandchildren. As Carter later described in an interview (Babbitt, 1994, p. 379):

> I put each [grandchild's] name on one of the photographs and signed them. I took them over to his cabin to tell him good-bye, because he had been absolutely adamant. He had taken a blood oath that he would never dismantle an Israeli settlement. That was it. He looked at those eight photographs and tears began to run down his cheeks – and mine – as he read the names. I went back to my cabin. In just a few minutes he sent his Attorney General to tell me he was going to look at [the negotiations] again.

Begin continued to participate in the talks, collaborating in what would eventually be known as the Camp David Accords and a sustained peace between Israel and Egypt. We suggest that by helping Begin to affirm the values he placed in his family, Carter may have reduced the extent to which the political divide with Egypt was seen as unbridgeable (see Cohen, in press).

Red and Blue America: Is the Partisan Divide More Apparent than Real?

The present data also speak to understanding the political polarization between so-called "red America" (which refers to regions and individuals who adhere to conservative, Republican social and cultural values) and "blue America" (which refers to regions and individuals who adhere to liberal, Democratic social and cultural values). As noted by Seyle and Newman (2006), the very notion that fundamental political cleavages exist in America can serve to reinforce and perpetuate group differences (see also Sherman, Hogg, & Maitner, 2009). Simply categorizing one's self as a member of a group is enough to engender favoritism toward that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In fact, a great deal of research suggests that individual policy preferences are often driven by symbolic identities and attachments (e.g., Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980) and that people's support or opposition to a policy are often highly dependent on who the "winners" and "losers" of the policy will be (Fernandez & Rodrik, 1991; Lowery, Unzueta,

Knowles, & Goff, 2006). Thus, even if objective differences exist between the policy preferences and concrete behaviors of the two camps, individuals' very membership in their respective ideological groups can lead them to experience the two sides as ideologically further apart than they actually are on concrete issues. In this way, partisanship and polarization can increase independent of the objective issues at hand (Ross & Ward, 1994).

This research suggests that part of the engine driving actual polarization may be individual motivations to protect self-integrity. Specifically, in the clash between ostensibly Republican and Democratic values, individuals who choose to identify with one party and not the other are immediately taking on pressure to adhere to the preferences and behaviors prescribed by the ingroup. Such "identity politics" can create more polarization than might otherwise exist. Yet, this work found that affirmations of alternative domains of self-worth, unrelated to the focal issue of politics, the economy, or the election, reduced this partisanship and facilitated greater openness to the other side. These findings may be instructive, then, at times when there is a desire to reduce partisan divides. Apolitical events that serve to make people feel more secure in their self-integrity may provide one means of making America less red or blue, and as suggested by Seyle and Newman (2006), more "purple."

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Appendix

Transcript from Obama Video Clip

Obama: Now, Sen. McCain, the centerpiece of his economic proposal is to provide $200 billion in additional tax breaks to some of the wealthiest corporations in America. Exxon Mobil, and other oil companies, for example, would get an additional $4 billion in tax breaks.

What I've said is I want to provide a tax cut for 95 percent of working Americans, 95 percent. If you make more—if you make less than a quarter million dollars a year, then you will not see your income tax go up, your capital gains tax go up, your payroll tax. Not one dime.

And 95 percent of working families, 95 percent of you out there, will get a tax cut. In fact, independent studies have looked at our respective plans and

have concluded that I provide three times the amount of tax relief to middle-class families than Sen. McCain does.

Transcript from McCain Video Clip

McCain: You told him you wanted to spread the wealth around.

The whole premise behind Sen. Obama's plans are class warfare, let's spread the wealth around. I want small businesses—and by the way, the small businesses that we're talking about would receive an increase in their taxes right now.

Who—why would you want to increase anybody's taxes right now? Why would you want to do that, anyone, anyone in America, when we have such a tough time, when these small business people, like Joe the plumber, are going to create jobs, unless you take that money from him and spread the wealth around?

I'm not going to. . .

Obama: OK. Can I. . .

McCain: We're not going to do that in my administration.