Of two minds: The interactive effect of construal level and identity on political polarization

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Construal level and identity salience interact to predict political polarization.
- When partisan identity is salient, high level construal leads to greater polarization.
- When national identity is salient, high level construal leads to less polarization.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Construal level theory posits that that when people are thinking abstractly (vs. concretely) they rely more on their core and consistent attitudes and values. However, past research has been mixed on whether abstract thinking causes liberals and conservatives to become more or less polarized. In the current research, we examine how identity salience moderates the effect of construal level on political polarization. Results from two studies suggest that identity salience (political vs. national) plays a key role in predicting how construal level affects attitude polarization. When people's political identity was made salient, liberals and conservatives were more polarized about political issues when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely). Conversely, when national identity was salient, liberals and conservatives were less polarized when in an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset. Broadly, this research highlights the importance identity salience has in understanding the role abstract (vs. concrete) thinking has on people's attitudes and values.

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, research on construal level theory has uncovered myriad ways in which individuals' mindsets affect how they view, perceive, and interact with their environment. When people are thinking *abstractly*, they tend to focus on core and consistent features of the self that transcend any specific situation. Individuals thinking *concretely*, by contrast, tend to be more influenced by secondary and contextual factors (Trope & Liberman, 2000; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). The question of how construal level affects political attitudes and polarization has been the focus of much recent research, but the findings have been mixed: some work has shown that abstract thinking reduces attitude differences between liberals and conservatives, whereas other work has found the opposite to be true. The current research aims to explain this discrepancy by looking at how different concepts of the self (or different identities) moderate the relationship between abstract thinking and political attitudes.

Some past work on construal level suggests that abstraction allows people to rise above situational and social influence and act more in line with their core values and beliefs (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008; Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, 2010; Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, 2010). Ledgerwood et al. (2010a) argued that "ideological values can be considered broad principles that apply to attitude objects across situations, relate to their central and defining features, and tend to be socially shared within ongoing and important relational contexts" (p. 35). They predicted that political polarization should be greater when people are thinking abstractly (vs. concretely) because political ideology will influence attitudes and behaviors more. This hypothesis was supported: when participants were in an abstract mindset, they were less likely to be influenced by situational factors (i.e., the attitude of a potential interaction partner), and more likely to report attitudes in line with their previously reported political ideology (see Studies 3 and 4). Thus, some research is in line with the notion that liberals and conservatives show increased polarization when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely) because political ideology is a core and consistent belief system.

However, other research has shown the opposite effects: when liberals and conservatives are thinking abstractly (vs. concretely), they become more *similar* on various dimensions, including out-group

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attitudes (Luguri, Napier, & Dovidio, 2012), moral values (Napier & Luguri, in press), and political attitudes (Yang, Preston, & Hernandez, 2013). For example, Yang et al. (2013) found that although liberals and conservatives are normally polarized in their attitudes about building a mosque near Ground Zero, construal level impacted their beliefs, such that abstract (vs. concrete) thinking led conservatives and liberals to become more moderate on their stances, thereby reducing polarization.

These conflicting findings raise an important question: Does construal level influence political attitudes in any systematic way? We propose that a focus on *identity salience* can illuminate the seeming inconsistencies among these findings. That is, we propose that construal level theorists are correct to assert that abstract (vs. concrete) thinking increases people's adherence to attitudes that are central to their self, but that the self is composed of many group identities, some of which might lead to conflicting attitudes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Indeed, some recent work within the construal level literature has begun to highlight the important role that identity, particularly group identity, might play in illuminating when and how construal level will affect attitudes (Ledgerwood & Callahan, 2012; McCrea, Wieber, & Myers, 2012). For example, recent research by Ledgerwood and Callahan (2012) found that people are more likely to conform to group norms when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely). They found that students evaluating public policies (e.g., affirmative action) were more likely to be influenced by the voting behavior of other students when in an abstract, as compared to concrete, mindset. Ledgerwood and Callahan (2012) argue that while an abstract mindset allows people to rise above incidental or unimportant social influences, groups are a consistent and important influence and therefore people will be more attuned to group norms when thinking abstractly.

In a similar vein, McCrea et al. (2012) found that people report higher levels of group identification and engage more in self and group stereotyping when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely). For example, participants identified more with their respective genders and were more likely to self-stereotype themselves based on gender after they were induced to think abstractly (vs. concretely; Studies 3a and 3b). Along with the Ledgerwood and Callahan (2012) findings, this research suggests that groups have a larger influence on attitudes when people are in an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset.

Yet the question still remains: if people thinking abstractly (vs. concretely) are more likely to base their attitudes on those of their groups, which groups do they use as reference points? People integrate many different groups into their self-concepts (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), and these groups can have divergent influences on attitudes. McCrea et al. (2012) offered an important insight to this question by looking at role of identity salience. They found that people induced to thinking abstractly (vs. concretely) were more likely to self-stereotype themselves based on their gender, but only when people were asked to indicate their gender *before* the stereotyping measures. This finding suggests that identity salience can play an important moderating role in construal level effects.

This new framework, which illustrates the importance of identity salience, can perhaps help explain the prior inconsistent literature on how construal level affects political polarization. People have multiple political identities, and these identities can have divergent influences on attitudes. For example, someone thinking of their identity as a Democrat might have a different view on immigration than if that same person was conceiving of their identity as an American.

Past research on the common ingroup identity model has demonstrated that subgroup identities (like political parties) tend to be divisive, whereas superordinate identities (like nationality) can reduce the perceived difference between the subgroups, and lead people to make decisions that benefit the group as a whole (Gaertner, Dovidio, Nier, Ward, & Banker, 1999; Smith & Tyler, 1996). Similarly, studies

have shown that even subliminal exposure to a national symbol (i.e., a flag) can reduce political polarization (Hassin, Ferguson, Shidlovski, & Gross, 2007). Therefore, political identity salience should increase polarization between liberals and conservatives, and national identity salience should decrease polarization, at least to the extent that people are thinking abstractly.

Considering past research, it is possible that certain identities related to political attitudes were unintentionally made salient through the manipulations and dependent variables. For example, in Yang et al.'s (2013) work, which found that abstract (vs. concrete) thinking *decreased* polarization, participants were shown pictures of the 9/11 attacks, which potentially made their American identity salient. In the Ledgerwood et al. (2010a) studies, which found abstract (vs. concrete) thinking *increased* polarization, participants were told that they would be taking about a political policy issue, potentially making their partisan identity salient.

In the current set of studies, we seek to directly test whether identity salience moderates the effect of construal level on political polarization among liberals and conservatives. To the extent that abstract (vs. concrete) thinking encourages people's adherence to their central values, but that different identities are associated with different (and sometimes divergent) sets of values, we hypothesize that construal and identity salience will have an interactive effect on political attitudes. Specifically, thinking abstractly with a focus on one's identity as a Republican (or Democrat) should increase conservative (or liberal) opinions, thereby increasing political polarization. Thinking abstractly with one's national (e.g., American) identity salient, however, should encourage attitude consistency with a broader (and more diverse) group, and thus should promote more moderate stances on political issues and reduce polarization.

Current research

In two studies, we manipulate both construal level and identity salience and examine their interactive effects on political polarization. We predict that when people's political identity is salient, abstract (vs. concrete) thinking will lead to greater political attitude polarization; when people's national identity is made salient, by contrast, we predict that abstract (vs. concrete) thinking will be associated with reduced polarization.

In Study 1, identity salience is manipulated through priming a political (liberal or conservative) identity or a national identity. Study 2 was conducted to show the replicability of the results of Study 1, both in terms of an increased sample size, and with a specific focus on American politics. We compared American participants who were primed with their partisan (Democrat or Republican) identity or their national, American identity.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 137$) were recruited from a university-hosted online subject pool in exchange for a chance to win a gift certificate. Nine participants were removed from this sample because they failed to fill out the construal manipulation correctly (i.e., they left multiple or all parts of the ladder questionnaire blank, or gave one answer repeatedly), yielding a final sample of 128 participants (average age = 35.40 years, $SD = 13.24$, 76 female).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to construal condition (abstract or concrete), in which they were asked to fill out a ladder questionnaire about good physical health. In the abstract condition, participants started at the bottom of the ladder and "moved up," generating

increasingly superordinate answers to the question of *why* they would maintain good physical health; in the concrete condition, they "moved down" the ladder with increasingly subordinate answers to the question of *how* they would maintain good physical health (see Freitas, Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004; Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-Sagi, 2006).

Following the construal manipulation, participants were randomly assigned to an identity condition: political or national. After indicating their political orientation (liberal/conservative) or their national identity, participants in all conditions responded to four questions intended to reinforce the identity salience (e.g., "I like to be seen as a member of the _____ population.").

Participants then answered several political policy questions in which they were asked to rate their feeling toward each policy from 1 ("strong negative feeling") to 9 ("strong positive feeling"). The policies were chosen to be relevant to current political discourse, including: "increased spending on the military;" "universal healthcare;" "gay marriage;" "tightening U.S. borders;" "labor unions;" "unemployment benefits;" "abortion rights;" "allowing prayer in schools;" "teaching evolution in schools;" and "lowering taxes on corporations." All items were recoded such that higher numbers indicated a more liberal stance, and then all items were combined into one attitude measure, $\alpha = .83$ (see Table 1 for means).

Finally, participants answered demographic questions, including an item that assessed their political orientation on a scale from 1 ("very liberal") to 7 ("very conservative;" $M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.63$).

Results

There was no effect of the construal manipulation, $b = .68$, $SE = .41$, $p = .10$, the identity manipulation, $b = .14$, $SE = .41$, $p = .73$, or, more importantly, their interaction, $b = -.30$, $SE = .57$, $p = .61$, on people's reported political orientation.

A measure of identity strength was created by averaging the four items asked after the identity prime (political, $\alpha = .94$; national, $\alpha = .95$). There was a main effect of type of identity on identity strength, $b = -.78$, $SE = .23$, $p = .01$, such that those in the national condition identified more strongly with the identity than those in the political condition. Construal had no effect on identity strength, nor did the interaction of construal and identity, p's > .90. The four-way interaction of construal level, identity type, political orientation, and identity strength was not significant, and including identity strength as a covariate in the models reported below did not affect the pattern or significance level of results.

To test our main prediction that identity salience would moderate the effect of construal level on political polarization, we conducted a linear regression model predicting public policy support with construal condition (concrete vs. abstract), identity condition (political vs. national), and political orientation (centered), all two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction of construal, identity, and political orientation as predictors. Construal level was a significant

predictor of policy attitudes, with those induced to think concretely reporting more liberal policy support than those induced to think abstractly, $b = -.53$, $SE = .26$, $p < .05$. The identity prime was also a significant predictor, $b = -.62$, $SE = .27$, $p = .02$, such that those in the political condition reported higher levels of liberal policy support than those in the national condition. Political orientation was also a strong predictor of policy support, $b = -.54$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$, with more liberal participants reporting higher levels of support for the liberal policies. The two-way interaction between construal level and political orientation was marginally significant, $b = -.30$, $SE = .17$, $p = .08$, as was the two-way interaction between construal level and identity type, $b = .83$, $SE = .37$, $p = .03$. The interaction of identity type and political orientation was not a significant predictor of liberal policy support, $b = .24$, $SE = .17$, $p = .15$. Importantly, as predicted, these effects were qualified by the three-way interaction of construal level, identity type, and political orientation, $b = .58$, $SE = .23$, $p = .012$ (See Fig. 1).

When people were reminded of their political identity, there was a marginally significant two-way interaction between construal level and political orientation, $b = .30$, $SE = .17$, $p = .08$, showing that concrete versus abstract thinking had divergent effects on polarization. Liberals and conservatives, therefore, were *less* polarized when they were thinking concretely, $b = -.54$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$, as compared to abstractly, $b = -.84$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$, when reminded of their political identity.

Whereas political identity salience increased polarization among abstract thinkers, we expected (and found) that national identity salience decreased polarization for those thinking abstractly. Specifically, there was a marginal two-way interaction between construal level and political orientation in the national identity condition, $b = -.28$, $SE = .15$, $p = .069$. When thinking about their national identity, the difference between liberals and conservatives was larger when they were thinking concretely, $b = -.78$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$, as compared to abstractly, $b = -.50$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$.

Analyses of the simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991) revealed that when political identity was salient, construal level had an effect on conservatives' $(+1\ SD)$ attitudes, such that conservatives were more favorable toward liberal policies when thinking concretely as opposed to abstractly, $b = 1.03$, $SE = .41$, $p = .01$; liberals $(-1\ SD)$ did not differ as a function of construal level, $b = .03$, $SE = .37$, $p = .94$. In the national condition, conservatives were less favorable toward liberal policies when thinking concretely as opposed to abstractly, $b = -.77$, $SE = .38$, $p = .042$, and liberals were unaffected by the construal level manipulation, $b = .18$, $SE = .35$, $p = .62$.
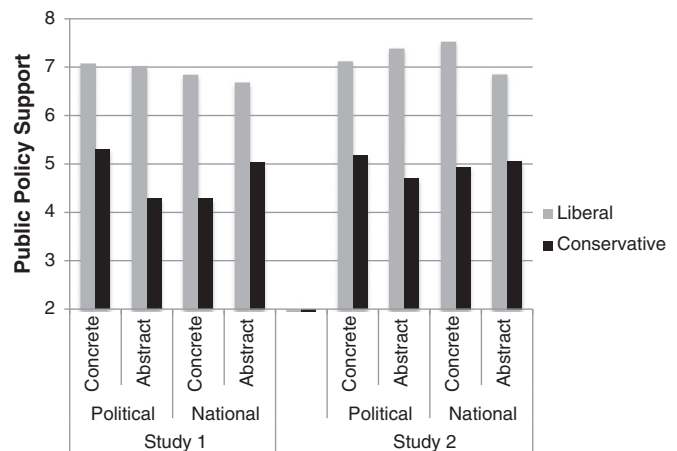
Table 1
Means (and standard deviations) of policy issue endorsement.

	Study 1	Study 2
Lowering taxes on corporations	3.65 (2.32)	3.50 (2.49)
Increased spending on the military	3.99 (2.18)	3.71 (2.34)
Allowing prayer in schools	5.11 (2.84)	4.57 (3.07)
Labor unions	5.59 (2.36)	5.65 (2.39)
Tightening U.S. borders	6.02 (2.22)	6.04 (2.38)
Abortion rights	6.17 (2.49)	6.84 (2.74)
Unemployment benefits	6.21 (1.99)	6.63 (2.03)
Gay marriage	6.25 (2.82)	6.70 (2.94)
Teaching evolution in schools	6.55 (2.45)	6.74 (2.65)
Universal healthcare	6.67 (2.41)	6.47 (2.77)
Affirmative action	–	5.07 (2.59)
Legalization of marijuana	–	6.15 (2.81)
Raising taxes on the wealthiest 10% of Americans	–	7.09 (2.51)

Fig. 1. Predicted endorsement of political policies (higher numbers indicate more endorsement of the liberal position) as a function of construal condition (abstract vs. concrete), identity condition (national vs. political), and political orientation (conservative or liberal, graphed one standard deviation above and below and mean, respectively).

The pattern of results from Study 1 supported our hypotheses. Specifically, the three-way interaction between construal level, identity salience, and political orientation revealed that when liberals and conservatives had their political identities made salient, they were more polarized when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely). However, when their national identities were salient, they were less polarized when in an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset.

Study 2

Study 2 was conducted to extend the findings from Study 1 in two ways. First, the sample size was increased to show the robustness and replicability of the effects. Second, we used identities that were more "group-based," and specifically focused on American politics. Instead of priming a liberal/conservative identity (as was done in Study 1), participants were asked to indicate their political party (Democrat or Republican) in the identity condition.

Method

Participants

Participants for Study 2 ($N = 224$) were recruited from Amazon's "Mechanical Turk." Six participants were removed from the sample because they were not American citizens, and an additional six were removed because they failed to fill out the construal manipulation correctly, yielding a sample of $N = 212$ (average age = 33.81, $SD = 13.01$; 107 female).

Procedure

Participants completed the same construal level induction as Study 1. They were randomly assigned to construal condition (abstract or concrete), in which they were asked to fill out a ladder questionnaire about good physical health (Freitas et al., 2004). Following the construal manipulation, participants were randomly assigned to an identity condition specific to the American political system, and were asked to either indicate that they were American (national condition) or were asked to indicate their political party (Democrat or Republican). Participants were then asked to fill out the same four identity strengthener questions as in Study 1.

Participants then answered the same ten political policy questions used in Study 1. Three additional policies were added due to becoming popular in public discourse, namely: raising taxes on the wealthiest 10% of Americans; affirmative action; and the legalization of marijuana. All items were recoded such that higher numbers indicated a more liberal stance, and then all items were combined into one attitude measure, $\alpha = .84$ (see Table 1 for means).

Finally, participants answered demographic questions, including an item that assessed their political orientation on a scale from 1 ("very liberal") to 7 ("very conservative;" $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.65$). Participants were also asked to indicate their political party, Democrat or Republican. If participants selected "Independent" they were asked to indicate which of the two parties more closely matched their political opinions (71.20% Democrats).

Results

As in Study 1, there was no effect of the construal manipulation, $b = .31$, $SE = .33$, $p = .35$, the identity manipulation, $b = .07$, $SE = .32$, $p = .82$, or their interaction, $b = -.40$, $SE = -.11$, $p = .39$, on people's reported political orientation.

Type of identity was a significant predictor of identity strength (political, $\alpha = .96$; national, $\alpha = .95$), $b = -1.25$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$, such that those in the national condition identified more strongly with the identity than those in the political condition. Construal had no effect on identity strength, nor did the interaction of construal and identity, p's > .63. The four-way interaction including identity strength

on policy support was not significant, and including identity strength as a covariate in the models reported below did not affect the pattern or significance level of results.

A linear regression model was run to test to three-way interaction between construal condition (concrete vs. abstract), identity condition (American vs. political party), and political orientation (centered) on public policy attitudes. Construal level was not a significant predictor of policy attitudes, $b = -.28$, $SE = .20$, $p = .16$, nor was the identity prime, $b = -.08$, $SE = .19$, $p = .68$. Political orientation was a significant predictor of public policy attitudes, $b = -.78$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$, with more liberal participants showing more agreement with the liberal policies. Results showed that the two-way interaction between construal level and political orientation was marginally significant, $b = .24$, $SE = .13$, $p = .063$, as was the two-way interaction between identity type and political orientation, $b = .19$, $SE = .11$, $p = .095$. The interaction of construal level and identity was not a significant predictor of liberal policy support, $b = .17$, $SE = .28$, $p = .55$. Importantly, as predicted, these effects were qualified by the three-way interaction of construal level, identity type, and political orientation, $b = -.46$, $SE = .17$, $p = .007$ (See Fig. 1).

When people's political party identities were made salient, there was a significant two-way interaction between construal level and political orientation, $b = .22$, $SE = .11$, $p = .048$, showing that concrete versus abstract thinking had divergent effects on polarization. Liberals and conservatives were *less* polarized when they were thinking concretely, $b = -.58$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$, as compared to abstractly, $b = -.81$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$.

In the national identity salience condition, there was also evidence of a two-way interaction between construal level and political orientation, albeit marginally, $b = -.24$, $SE = .13$, $p = .063$. Liberals and conservatives were *more* polarized when thinking they were thinking concretely, $b = -.78$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$, as compared to abstractly, $b = -.54$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$.

Looking at the data broken down by political orientation, construal level was a marginally significant predictor of liberal policy support in the political condition for conservatives ($+1$ SD), $b = -.48$, $SE = .28$, $p = .08$, such that conservatives reported more support for liberal policies when thinking concretely (vs. abstractly) and reminded of their partisan identity. Liberals (-1 SD), on the other hand, were unaffected by the construal level manipulation, $b = .261$, $SE = .26$, $p = .33$. In the national condition, however, conservatives did not move as a function of construal level, $b = .12$, $SE = .28$, $p = .68$, whereas liberals reported more liberal policy support when thinking concretely as compared to abstractly, $b = -.67$, $SE = .30$, $p = .03$.

We also analyzed Study 2 using political party (rather than liberal/conservative ideology) as a moderator. A 2 (Construal: Concrete or Abstract) × 2 (Identity: Political vs. American) × 2 (Party: Democrat or Republican) ANOVA revealed a similar pattern of results, with a significant 3-way interaction between construal, identity, and party, $F(1,203) = 6.90$, $p < .01$.

In the partisan identity condition, there was a marginally significant two-way interaction between construal and party, $F(1,103) = 2.87$, $p = .093$, such that Democrats and Republicans were more polarized when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely). Construal level had a marginally significant effect on Republicans, such that Republicans thinking concretely ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.92$) reported more liberal policy support than Republicans thinking abstractly ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .91$), $F(1,26) = 2.93$, $p = .099$. However, Democrats did not significantly differ as a function of construal level, $F(1, 77) = .45$, $p = .50$, such that Democrats thinking concretely ($M = 6.78$, $SD = .97$) did not differ from Democrats thinking abstractly ($M = 6.94$, $SD = 1.09$).

In the national identity condition, the two way interaction between construal and party was significant, $F(1,100) = 4.06$, $p = .047$, showing that Democrats and Republicans were less polarized when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely). There was a trend such that Democrats had higher liberal policy support in the concrete condition ($M = 6.88$,

$SD = 1.10$), compared to the abstract condition ($M = 6.53$, $SD = 0.99$), $F(1,70) = 1.84$, $p = .18$. For Republicans, on the other hand, there was a trend such that they had lower liberal policy support when thinking concretely ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.18$) compared to abstractly ($M = 4.83$, $SD = .99$), $F(1, 30) = 2.28$, $p = .14$.

General discussion

Results from two studies consistently showed that identity salience (political or national) plays a key role in predicting how construal level affects political polarization. When participants were reminded of their political selves, liberals and conservatives were *more* polarized about political issues when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely). Conversely, when participants were thinking about themselves in terms of their nationality, liberals and conservatives were *less* polarized when in an abstract (vs. concrete) mindset.

This work helps explain an important discrepancy within the construal level literature on how abstract (vs. concrete) thinking affects political polarization—in some cases abstract thinking reduces polarization (Luguri et al., 2012; Napier & Luguri, in press; Yang et al., 2013) whereas in other cases, it exacerbates differences (Ledgerwood et al., 2010a). The present study suggests that identity salience is a key factor in determining how construal level will influence attitudes. While construal level theory posits that people should adhere more strongly to their core and consistent values when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely), the current research highlights the important role group identity salience has in this process. Broadly, this finding has important implications for construal level theory because it underscores the importance of people's self-concepts in understanding the effects construal level has on attitudes and values. Additionally, it adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting that group influence on attitudes is stronger when people are thinking abstractly (vs. concretely), but that this influence is dependent on contextual cues (Ledgerwood & Callahan, 2012; McCrea et al., 2012).

It also opens up doors for future research looking at how and when group identities become salient and influence attitudes. In the past research on construal level and political polarization, it is possible that certain identities were unintentionally made salient through the manipulations and dependent variables. In the current work, although we did not include a "no identity" condition in our studies, we suspect that this condition would have shown increased political polarization among abstract (vs. concrete) thinkers because our political policy questions presumably would have activated people's political identities. It is conceivable that questions about international affairs (e.g., foreign aid, nuclear proliferation) would have activated people's national identity, thus decreasing polarization among liberals and conservatives. If this were the case, it would suggest that people are sensitive to identity cues, and these unintended cues should be taken into account in research designs and interpretations.

In the current research, the effects of construal level and identity on political polarization were remarkably consistent across the two studies. However, it is important to note that there were some differences between the two studies in terms of who was affected by the manipulations: When national identity was made salient, conservatives (and not liberals) were less ideological (reporting more liberal attitudes) in the abstract (vs. concrete) condition in Study 1, whereas liberals (and not conservatives) were less ideological (reporting less liberal attitudes) when thinking abstractly (vs. concretely) in Study 2. The political atmosphere under which Study 1 (March 2011) and Study 2 (October 2012) were conducted were very different (including, among other things, proximity to the 2012 presidential election), and thus there are myriad potential reasons for this different movement between the two studies. It is worth noting that across both studies, political conservatives were more consistently affected by the construal induction. This result is consistent with several other studies that have shown that conservatives seem to be more

susceptible to construal manipulations than liberals (Luguri et al., 2012; Napier & Luguri, in press; Yang et al., 2013). Future research should explore why this might be the case.

Beyond the implications the current research has for construal level theory, it also opens up new avenues to reduce political polarization. The current political divide in the United States between liberals and conservatives has been increasing over time, and in some sense, may seem insurmountable (Pew Research Center, 2012). Our research suggests that this polarization is malleable and reducible, when mindset level and identity are paired in certain ways. For example, though research on identity suggests that invoking a superordinate group identity like "American" might reduce polarization, our work suggests that this strategy might have the opposite effect and actually increase polarization if people are in a concrete (vs. abstract) mindset.

This work also has important applied implications for how policies are debated among political elites. To the extent that most people think abstractly about public policy issues (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987), our work suggests that the context in which these issues are discussed may have a direct influence on whether or not bipartisan consensus will be reached. For example, in congressional meetings, partisan identities are presumably especially salient, and thus may promote ideological adherence and prevent bipartisan compromise. Indeed, our research seems to lend empirical credibility to the potential impact of organizations such as Jon Huntsman Jr.'s "No Labels," whose mission is to promote problem solving by deemphasizing political identities among lawmakers.

Overall, this research adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting the important role construal level plays in when and how group membership influences individuals' attitudes. Additionally, it brings identity salience to bear on the question of when construal level will bring people together and when it will push them apart, and opens up avenues for future research seeking to understand how and when construal level and identity interact.

Acknowledgments

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