Political Party Identification and Intergroup Attitudes: Exploring the Effects of Mediated and Direct Contact With the Opposing Party During a Presidential Campaign

MEI-CHEN LIN
PAUL M. HARIDAKIS
Kent State University, USA

YAN BING ZHANG
University of Kansas, USA

Drawing from intergroup contact theory and social identity theory, this study explored the indirect effects of out-group partisan media exposure (Fox News for Democrats; MSNBC and CNN for Republicans), and out-group interpersonal political discussions with members of the opposing political party on intergroup bias and intergroup competition through party identity as a mediator. We also accounted for the effects of in-group partisan media exposure (Fox News for Republicans; MSNBC and CNN for Democrats) and interpersonal political discussion with members of one's own party. The results suggested that interpersonal political discussion with "the other side" (out-group interpersonal discussion) and exposure to in-group media increased prejudicial attitudes and competitive intergroup behaviors, not only directly but also through enhanced party identity.

Keywords: political identity, intergroup contact, social identity, presidential election, partisan media, political discussion

Research has suggested potential negative effects of partisan media coverage and political discussion on political intergroup outcomes such as political polarization (Haridakis, Lin, & Hanson, 2017). For example, individuals tend to expose themselves to in-group partisan media (i.e., slanted toward their party or ideology) and interpersonal discussion consistent with their political attitudes, and refrain from exposure to counter-attitudinal information, thus resulting in the potential creation of echo chambers (Lin & Haridakis, 2017). Interaction with similar others not only helps confirm individuals' opinions but also enhances polarized attitudes. Less attention, on the other hand, has focused on examining the influence of exposure to dissimilar others—through out-group partisan media (slanted toward the other party or opposing ideology) and political discussion with out-group members in explicating political attitudes/behaviors.

Mei-Chen Lin: mlin@kent.edu
Paul M. Haridakis: pharidak@kent.edu
Yan Bing Zhang: ybzhang@ku.edu

Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that social groups are in constant comparison and competition with each other to seek positive distinctiveness, self-esteem, and identification with meaningful in-groups. This, in turn, can lead to in-group favoritism and out-group derogation. These intergroup processes can be particularly salient in political settings, such as a presidential campaign, when interpersonal discussion of and media exposure to oppositional politics are increased and intensified, and one's political identity is subsequently likely to be aroused. Researchers guided by the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) and intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998) have attempted to capture contact conditions and processes where contact between groups may yield positive changes in intergroup attitudes (i.e., reduced prejudice). The current study was designed to contribute to intergroup contact research in the aforementioned political context by examining whether exposure to political out-group members through direct contact (i.e., interpersonal discussion) and mediated contact (i.e., media exposure) increases individuals' party identification, which in turn results in a greater sense of competition with the other political party, and a favorable intergroup bias toward their own party. Such inquiry is important because people at times seek or encounter counter-attitudinal political media content and out-group political discussion for debate or surveillance purposes. What is less clear is the influence such contact with the other side might have on intergroup relations among members of different political groups.

Partisan and Nonpartisan Media Exposure and Discussion

Although there has been a proliferation of partisanship in media coverage of politics, some research suggests that local TV and newspapers are the news media sources people turn to most often (Beam, Haridakis, Hutchens, & Hmielowski, 2017). Much of this coverage of news and politics tends to be more objective or neutral in tone (e.g., Ho, Binder, Becker, & Moy, 2011; Prior, 2013). That said, partisan channels that reflect partisan biases are widely available for selection by viewers who wish to select channels based on their political identities.

The growth in partisan media channels and claims of their partisan biases have been well documented (e.g., Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006, 2010; Stroud, 2011), and there is also a wide consensus that certain mass media outlets target a partisan audience (Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley, & Matsa, 2014). For example, Fox News tends to attract a disproportionately conservative and/or Republican viewership (Mitchell et al., 2014) and tends to present a conservative/Republican slant in its coverage (Jurkowitz & Holcomb, 2013). MSNBC, on the other hand, tends to attract a disproportionately liberal and/or Democratic viewership (Mitchell et al., 2014) and to present a liberal/Democratic slant (Jurkowitz & Holcomb, 2013). CNN, too, has been characterized as being a more liberal-leaning outlet, attracting liberal/Democratic viewers (Mitchell et al., 2014; Stroud, 2008). When given a choice, some research has suggested that people select TV programs (e.g., Dilliplane, 2011) and online sources such as news (Knobloch-Westerwick & Johnson, 2014) in accordance with their partisan predispositions.

In addition to exposure to political news coverage, perceptions of political parties and their respective members may be influenced by interpersonal contact. People engage in political discussion for various reasons, such as acquiring political information, sharing their political views, and making sense of the political news they learn from the media (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Haridakis et al., 2017). In fact, Beam et al. (2017) found that word-of-mouth communication was one of the most used sources of news during

the 2016 presidential campaign, with the exception of local news. Ultimately, political discussion has been considered as helping individuals make voting decisions (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944).

Selective exposure processes occur in mediated contexts, and political discussion in interpersonal communication contexts is selective as well. Research has suggested that people tend to prefer discussing politics with others who share their partisan predispositions (see Cho, 2005). That said, they nonetheless engage in discussion with those in political out-groups or politically dissimilar others, too (e.g., Feldman & Price, 2008; Haridakis et al., 2017; Ponder & Haridakis, 2015).

Intergroup Contact Theory

Intergroup contact theory (ICT) stems from Allport's (1954) formative contact hypothesis, a precursor to ICT. The theory suggests that contact with an out-group can diminish intergroup prejudice. Allport's contact hypothesis has been used extensively to examine conditions (e.g., equal status, common goals, cooperation, institutional support) in which intergroup contact is considered optimal for improving intergroup relations or reducing prejudice and biases. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis of research on the contact hypothesis provides evidence that the effect of intergroup contact goes beyond the individuals in the immediate contact context and can affect perceptions toward the entire target group (see also Brown & Hewstone, 2005), or even other out-groups not involved in the contact. In addition, even when some of the theorized conditions and processes are not met, contact, if not blatantly negative, still makes a difference for the improvement of intergroup attitude outcomes (Imamura, Zhang, & Harwood, 2011; Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Pettigrew, 1998; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Bachelor, 2003). Thus, rather than focusing on specific conditions, more recent ICT research has attempted to identify underlying processes (e.g., mediating role of self-disclosure or anxiety) that affect whether contact yields positive or negative results. Fleshing out the contact–effects process is important because there may be a myriad of factors in various contact contexts that influence the effects of contact that have not been accounted for in earlier research or formative explanations of earlier ICT research. As this is one of the few studies to examine political contexts using ICT, we consider political identity as a potentially important mediating factor in the contact–effect relationship among members of different political parties.

Contact between members of different political parties can take many forms, such as direct contact (e.g., interpersonal discussion with political out-group members) and mediated contact. As partisan media primarily represent specific political ideologies (see the above discussion), the current study thus considered partisan media networks themselves (as opposed to specific programs) as institutional in- or out-groups. Partisan media networks (e.g., CNN, MSNBC, Fox News) attract different partisan audiences (e.g., MSNBC disproportionately attracting Democratic viewers and Fox News disproportionately garnering Republican viewers; see Mitchell et al., 2014). These partisan media networks, whether it is in the programs, the tone of the coverage, or the content, seek to advance certain political agendas to create "a coherent conservative or liberal interpretation of the day's events" (Levendusky, 2013, p. 566). As a result, viewers tend to associate specific partisan media networks with specific political ideologies/parties. A politically "us versus them" mentality may extend to partisan media networks reflecting political ideologies that are both unlike and similar to those of viewers' political in-group. We not only view members of the opposing political party

as out-group members but we might also view any institutions/organizations (such as cable television networks) that uphold or endorse opposing political positions and ideologies as out-groups.

Social Identity Theory

To consider the role of political identity in the process of intergroup contact, we drew on theoretical assumptions of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). SIT posits that individuals' social identities serve as powerful filters for social information and motives that drive individual perceptions and behaviors, and they are central to their sense of self and well-being (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For instance, Hollander (2010) found those who strongly identified with their political party used news media more than did those who identified less strongly, and they also were more likely to use partisan media. Given individuals' social identity is crucial to their sense of self, an attack on their social group could be viewed as a threat to their identity (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). An identity threat could evoke out-group derogation and could also enhance in-group identity and lead to intergroup competition (Branscombe et al., 1999). In light of these findings, it is logical to consider that political party members could experience a heightened identity when exposing themselves to out-group partisan media or direct contact with out-group members. Their political identity, in other words, could be evoked.

As suggested by SIT, there could be two likely attitudinal responses resulting from a heightened political identity. The first one is an affective attitude–intergroup bias. Intergroup differentiation for positive social identity, according to SIT, is manifested in in-group favoritism and out-group derogation (i.e., intergroup bias). People have a favorable attitude toward their in-group members, experience positive emotions with in-group members, and are more willing to help in-group members than out-group members (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003).

The second possible attitudinal response to a heightened political identity is a behavioral attitude–intergroup competition. According to SIT, group members may engage in different strategies to alter (if their group status is low) or maintain (if their group status is high) intergroup status because group status is associated with how people feel about their social identity. Intergroup competition is one such strategy in which collective actions are called to challenge the existing hierarchy of group status. In a democratic society, political elections are legitimate venues for political parties to test how electorates respond to their political ideologies, issues, and candidates. Political elections, therefore, become routine platforms for political parties to compete for status. When group members come into contact with supporters of the opposing political party and media sources perceived to support the opposing political party, and the results of a presidential election affect political groups' relative status and power, intergroup competition is a likely response strategy to ensure its political leaders, ideologies, and issues remain relevant.

A goal of the current study was to apply assumptions of the ICT and SIT to a political context by examining intergroup contact in both direct and mediated forms around the 2012 U.S. presidential campaign. Investigations of the portrayal of the 2012 presidential election in the mainstream media, especially the two presidential candidates, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, indicated that it was highly negative ("Winning the Media," 2012). In addition, negative political advertising was rampant during the campaign (Fowler & Ridout, 2013). Thus, it is an informed assumption that the valence of intergroup contact could have been largely

negative, or at least intense. As we tend to look at each presidential election separately, an understanding of previous presidential elections may help us put the current political sentiments into context. Each presidential election is a reflection and manifestation of voters' interpretations of political affairs that happened during the previous election cycle. Thus, even though the 2012 data may seem dated, the findings can inform the readers the evolvement of political climate in the U.S. in the past few years.

We treated exposure to partisan media networks that are contrary to one's viewpoint (i.e., Fox for Democrats; MSNBC and CNN for Republicans) as a form of mediated out-group contact and interpersonal discussion with members of the opposing party as a form of direct out-group contact.

An examination of the role of political identity is in part in response to Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) call for the inclusion of other important mediating variables in addition to intergroup anxiety to explain the relationship between contact and intergroup attitudes. Though the direct effect between out-group exposure and intergroup bias and intergroup competition was still the interest of this study, the hypothesized model tested centered on the following two hypotheses considering the potential mediating role of political identity in the contact–effects process:

H1:   *Out-group partisan media exposure (Fox News for Democrats; MSNBC and CNN for Republicans) will have a significant positive indirect effect on intergroup bias and social competition through party identification.*

H2:   *Out-group political discussion (with members of the opposing party) will have a significant positive indirect effect on intergroup bias and social competition through party identification.*

Methods

Sample

Students from various majors who were enrolled in an introductory communication course at a large Midwestern university were recruited. Those who participated completed the survey. To increase representation of the sample, they were also instructed to disseminate the survey to a quota sample of adults in specific age groups (i.e., 18–21; 22–35; 36–55; 56 and older), for which they received extra course credit. Students were randomly assigned to one specific age group and were instructed to disseminate only one survey to an individual in the assigned age group. All completed surveys were returned to researchers one week before the presidential Election Day, November 6, 2012. Participants were first asked to choose a political party with which they most closely identify (i.e., Democratic, Republican, Independent, Other). Those who chose "Independent" or "Other" were asked to indicate if they identified more with Democrats or Republicans. Based on their response, they were characterized as Democratic-leaning or Republican-leaning. Of the 341 participants, 215 self-identified as Democrats or Democratic leaning, 115 as Republicans or Republican leaning (Mage = 28.73 years, SD = 15.55 years, age range: 18–84, male = 129, female = 209). More than half of the participants had some college education (62.5%), followed by high school graduates (15.1%), college graduates (11.8%), and 9.6% of the participants had graduate-level education. Research has suggested that those who classify themselves as "independent" tend to also see themselves

leaning toward a particular party (Democratic or Republican) and tend to share similar views on political issues with those who identify with the said party (Laloggia, 2019). Even though Independents may have a lower level of political participation or a lower level of identification with either political party than those party identifiers, in an election primarily dominated by a two-party system, these independents will almost have to choose between a Democrat or Republican presidential candidate, not an independent candidate, to make their voting decision. Accordingly, their political leaning may still influence their viewpoints of the oppositional party and its candidate (i.e., the party they do not feel close to). Thus, the current study chose to combine the party identifiers and party leaners.

Procedures and Measurements

Participants responded to a series of questions assessing their media use for information pertaining to the 2012 presidential campaign; identification with their preferred political party; political discussion with family, friends, acquaintances, and other political in-group and out-group members; and their perceptions of and attitudes toward their own political party and opposing party (i.e., intergroup bias and intergroup competition).

Although our hypotheses focused on out-group contact, we also collected data on in-group mediated and interpersonal contact with politically in-group members to account for any influence in-group contact may yield.

Exposure to Out-Group and In-Group Media

Participants responded to questions assessing how often they used specific cable media outlets (i.e., Fox News, CNN, MSNBC) for presidential campaign-related information on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*; Haridakis et al., 2017). To measure out-group media, Democrat participants' use of Fox News (one item) was considered their out-group media. Republican participants' uses of CNN and MSNBC (two items) were summed and averaged (overall $M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.15$). A measure of participants' in-group media exposure (overall $M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.27$) also was created: Democrats' and Democrat-leaners' exposure to CNN and MSNBC and Republicans' and Republican-leaners' exposure to Fox News.

Political Discussion With Out-Group and In-Group Members

Participants were asked how frequently they discussed the political campaign with members of the opposing political party (Haridakis et al., 2017; one item; 1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*; overall $M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.06$), and with members of their own political party (Haridakis et al., 2017; one item; 1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*; overall $M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.20$).

Political Party Identity

The Identification with a Psychological Group scale (Mael & Tetrick, 1992) was used to measure participants' political party identification. This 10-item index reflected the level of emotional attachment and evaluative valence with one's political party (e.g., "My political party's success is my success"; "When

someone criticizes my political party, it feels like a personal insult"; 1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*; overall *M* = 2.65, *SD* = 0.76, *a* = .88).

Intergroup Bias

Intergroup bias was measured with a modified version of the Turner and Crisp (2010) attitude thermometer. Two items were created to measure participants' feelings toward their own political party and the opposing party (1 = *unfavorable*, 7 = *favorable*). Individuals' level of intergroup bias was obtained by subtracting participants' rating for the opposing party from that of their own party. A positive number reflected a positive bias toward their preferred political party and a negative number reflected a positive bias toward the opposing political party. The overall mean is 3.07 (*SD* = 2.12).

Intergroup Competition

One item from the Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, and Mielke (1999) study measuring social competition was adopted, and four additional items were created based on the concept of the social competition strategy delineated by SIT to assess participants' attitudes toward the presidential election as a competition with the opposing party (e.g., "We will show to the opposing party and its followers in this election that we are the most efficient political party"; "We will show to the opposing party and its followers in this election that our presidential candidate is the leader of our future"; "The results of the 2012 presidential election are critical for my preferred party"; "We need to encourage more people of my preferred party to come out and make a stand"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*, *a* = .84; overall *M* = 3.50, *SD* = 0.72).

Results

To test our hypotheses, bootstrap analyses with 5,000 iterations were conducted using PROCESS (Model 4; Hayes, 2013).[1] Age, sex, and education were considered as covariates, as studies have found these factors may affect political perceptions and behaviors (e.g., Elder & Greene, 2003; Hollander, 2010). In each model estimation, either exposure to out-group media, in-group media, and political discussion with out-group members or in-group members was entered as the *X* variable (i.e., independent variable) with the other three as the control variables. One dependent variable was entered as the *Y* variable each time, and participants' political party identity was entered as the *M* (i.e., the mediator) variable. The indirect path was interpreted as significant when the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the effect did not contain zero (Hayes, 2013). The specific results of the direct, indirect effects, and total effects are shown in Table 1.

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[1] Before we tested our hypotheses, participants' party affiliation was entered as the moderator using PROCESS (Model 7; Hayes, 2013) and found no differences between Democrats and Republicans on the variables of interest. Accordingly, Model 4 was run with a combined sample to test our hypotheses.

Table 1. Direct, Indirect (Through Political Identity) and Total Effects of In-/Out-Group Media Exposure and In-/Out-Group Political Discussion on Intergroup Bias and Intergroup Competition.

X	Direct effect on Y				Indirect effect				Total effect				Y
	Effect	95%CI	SE	p	Effect	95%CI	SE	p	Effect	95%CI	SE	p	
1	−.82	−1.37; −.259	.28	.00	.15	.012; .344	.09	.07	−.66	−1.23; −.092	.23	.02	Intergroup
2	−.19	−.404; .017	.11	.07	.01	−.043; .059	.03	.76	−.19	−.403; .031	.11	.09	bias
3	.77	.277; 1.26	.25	.00	.05	−.072; .173	.06	.44	.82	.310; 1.32	.26	.00	
4	.23	.027; .430	.10	.03	.08	.019; .141	.03	.02	.30	.099; .509	.10	.00	
1	−.22	−.391; −.053	.09	.01	.11	.011; .208	.05	.03	−.12	−.309; −.078	.10	.24	Intergroup
2	.01	−.052; .075	.03	.72	.00	−.031; .039	.02	.82	.02	−.058; .089	.04	.67	competition
3	.19	.041; .338	.08	.01	.03	−.049; .118	.04	.41	.22	.052; −.396	.09	.01	
4	.04	−.017; .105	.03	.16	.05	−.017; .092	.02	.01	.10	.027; .166	.04	.01	

Note. X variables: 1 = out-group political discussion; 2 = exposure to out-group media; 3 = in-group political discussion; 4 = exposure to in-group media.

For all participants (i.e., Democrats and Republicans), political discussion with political out-group members had a significant direct effect on both intergroup bias and intergroup competition. In addition, out-group discussion influenced intergroup bias and intergroup competition through political identity. Specifically, the significant direct effect indicated that political discussion with political out-group members reduced intergroup bias ($b = -.82$, $p < .001$) and intergroup competition ($b = -.22$, $p < .05$). However, political discussion with out-group members also enhanced party identity ($b = .10$, $p < .001$), which consequently increased intergroup bias ($b = .75$, $p < .01$)[2] and competition ($b = .52$, $p < .001$).

Overall, the significant total effect indicated that political discussion with out-group members played a positive role in improving intergroup relations in the political presidential campaign context. Exposure to out-group media, on the other hand, did not predict a heightened political identity, intergroup bias, or intergroup competition (see Figure 1; though its direct effect on intergroup bias approached significance; $b = -.19$, $p = .07$). Hence, H1 was unsupported, whereas H2 was supported.

Results also indicated that political discussion with in-group members predicted both intergroup bias ($b = .77$, $p > .01$) and intergroup competition ($b = .19$, $p < .05$). In addition, exposure to in-group partisan media positively predicted political identity ($b = .10$, $p < .01$), which in turn positively predicted intergroup bias ($b = .75$, $p < .01$), as well as intergroup competition ($b = .52$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, the direct effect of exposure to in-group partisan media on intergroup bias was significant ($b = .23$, $p < .01$; see Figure 1).

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[2] Because outgroup discussion predicted identity ("a" path) and political identity predicted bias ("b" path), we discussed this result in the article. However, it should be noted that the indirect path approached significance (p = .07).
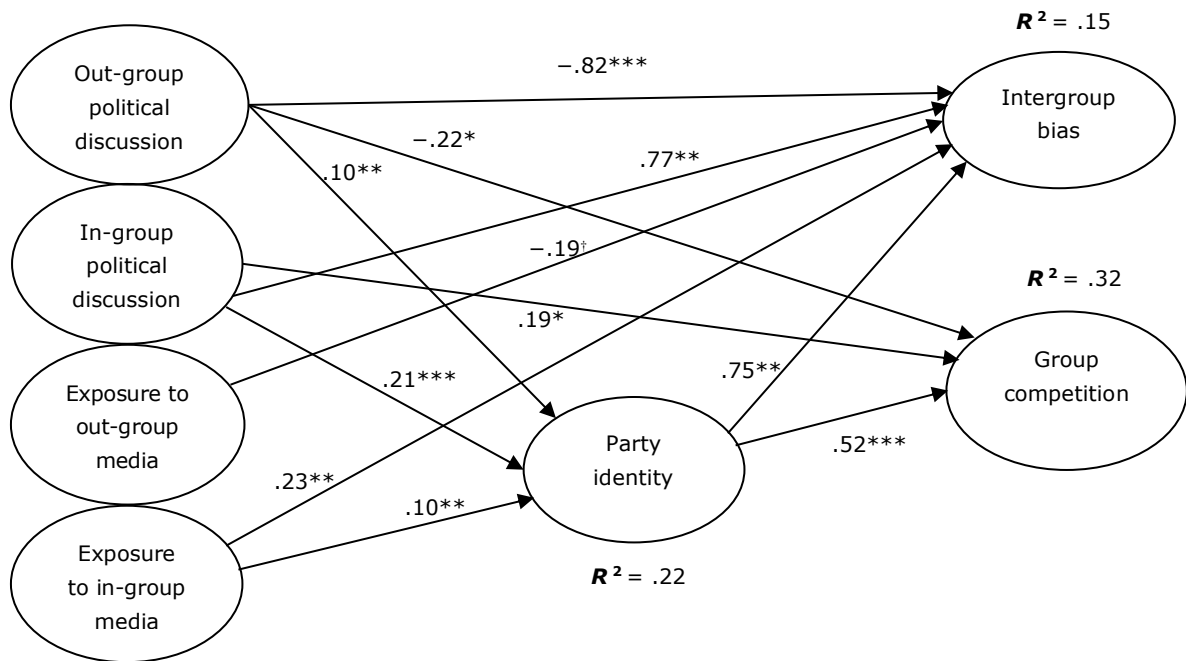
Figure 1. Results of mediated contact with in- and out-group partisan media, and interpersonal contact with political in- and out-group members. Note. The two dependent variables in the models were tested separately using Hayes's (2013) Macro Process Model 4. Reported coefficients are unstandardized. ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05; †p = .07; N = 323 for intergroup bias; N = 325 for intergroup competition. Only significant paths are reported.

Discussion

In light of our underlying premise that a presidential campaign is inherently intergroup in nature, the current findings generally supported the hypothesis that out-group contact, at least interpersonal discussion with "the other side" influenced party members' intergroup bias in favor of their own party and tendency to adopt a social competition strategy through an enhanced political party identity.

Specifically, the results showed that out-group contact tended to enhance political identity, which in turn increased both intergroup bias and competition. When working indirectly through an enhanced political identity, out-group discussion increased intergroup bias and competition. However, when not working through identity, out-group discussion reduced bias and competition. Thus, the results suggest that political identity is a significant factor in the contact–effects process that must be accounted for to assess the effects of intergroup contact.

Although out-group mediated contact (via out-group partisan media use) did not significantly predict either bias or competition, its impact in reducing bias approached significance ($b = -19$, $p = .07$). Out-group mediated contact also did not enhance political identity, and therefore did not influence intergroup bias and competition through political identity.

These results are in line with prior research suggesting that contact with out-group members can affect attitudes toward the broader group to which they belong (e.g., Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998). The results also echo concerns of scholars who urge caution about the effectiveness of out-group communication in reducing prejudice, and the possibility that out-group contact can, in fact, worsen an already negative intergroup relationship (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010; Shim, Zhang, & Harwood, 2012).

But, more importantly, this was found to occur only when political identity was heightened. Otherwise, out-group contact actually reduced intergroup bias and competition (in the case of interpersonal contact) or did not significantly reduce or enhance these intergroup attitudes (in the case of mediated out-group contact) when political identity was not heightened by contact. The results suggest some room for optimism in that at least interpersonal contact (perhaps because of its personal nature) can positively improve intergroup relations by mitigating intergroup bias and competitiveness, even during a heated political campaign. However, again, those positive outcomes can turn negative when contact enhances in-group identification.

Therefore, it is clear that individuals' political identity played an important role in this study, and perhaps in a direction that has not been explained entirely under the current premises of ICT. In fact, previous studies in politics and identity have suggested both positive and negative outcomes associated with an enhanced political identity. For example, political identity has been found to predict active participation in political activities (e.g., Greene, 2004). But political identity also is associated with negative evaluations of out-group political candidates (e.g., Ehrlich & Gramzow, 2015). In the framework of ICT, then, individuals' political identity seems to serve as a double-edged sword. When it is enhanced, individuals may demonstrate both constructive and not so constructive, so to speak, political engagements.

Though political engagements undoubtedly create, arouse, and strengthen one's political identity, future research should continue to examine contexts and conditions in which individuals' political identity can function to benefit a healthy political environment. This likely requires settings in which political identity can be deemphasized or reframed. For example, prior research suggests that members of different groups can establish a superordinate identity with which members of the different groups can identify (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Perhaps for positive evaluations to occur, a superordinate identity with which members of both groups can identify must be made salient in the contact contexts.

Our findings also indirectly support the claims of Branscombe and colleagues (1999). They suggested that when group members perceive threat (such as discussion with out-group members about the election in the current context), their social identity is aroused, resulting in negative attitudes/responses such as intergroup competition toward out-groups and favorable attitudes toward one's in-group. Our findings also emphasize the value of incorporating an intergroup approach to understand better the sociopsychological impetus that influences intergroup affective and behavioral attitudes in a politically charged environment. Thus, future research should examine the ways in which quality of intergroup contact may increase/decrease identity threat, in addition to a heightened political identity, and how they influence intergroup relations.

We should note that we did not examine the actual "quality" of the contact. That is, we did not content analyze the partisan media coverage or ask participants to report the valence of their mediated and direct contact with the out-groups or in-groups. That said, the political climate was intense and divisive during the 2012 presidential campaign. According to Pew Research ("Partisan Polarization Surges," 2012), the value gaps between the voters of the two parties were greater than gender, age, race, or class divides. Thus, it is logical to assume that intergroup contact between members of different political parties/leanings was more likely to be negative during this time.

Paolini and associates (2010) suggested that negative contact tends to fit within our preconceived expectations about the out-group and is more likely to increase group salience. This could mean that a strong party identification can be enhanced, which in turn associates positively with intergroup bias and competition for the sake of intergroup distinctiveness. When considering the valence of intergroup contact and party identity together, it is possible that intergroup contact that triggers or increases political identification has a negative valence and contact that does not enhance identity may have a positive or less negative valence. Future research should examine the role of political identity in the process mechanism in such contact, and how it might work in conjunction with other factors such as contact valence.

Though the nuance of these findings warrants future research, we should offer some speculation for the two specific types of contact that enhanced political identity, and in turn, influenced intergroup bias and competition. These were out-group discussion and in-group media use. In the case of out-group discussion, the contact hypothesis suggests that unstructured intergroup contact may be less likely to achieve satisfactory results. Interpersonal political discussion, an unstructured interaction, may foster preexisting stereotypes and prejudice (Paolini et al., 2010). It is possible, for example, that participants might have felt under attack when discussing politics with out-group members and sensed the need to defend their party and/or candidate, as a result of an enhanced political identity. Even though research has documented the benefits of discussing politics with dissimilar others (e.g., political tolerance, openness to political disagreement; Morey, Eveland, & Hutchens, 2012), the timing and the relative power between political parties may influence the content of the discussion and people's psycho-socio motives during the discussion.

In the case of in-group media use (Fox for Republicans; MSNBC and CNN for Democrats), intergroup bias and competition could have been enhanced by the amount and valence of media coverage of the presidential candidate of the other side. Through the lens of media channels that support one's political predispositions, media users are exposed to the political out-group as presented through that lens. Exposure to in-group media contact thus seemed to have more influence than exposure to out-group media. Though viewers tend to discount information from out-group media, they may perceive information from in-group media as credible and exhibit stronger intergroup attitude and behavior. This finding supports Levendusky (2013) study that viewers watching in-group media (like-minded media) exhibited a decreased positive feeling toward the other party, were less supportive of bipartisanship cooperation, and had less trust of the oppositional political leaders.

The current study considered individuals' political identity as a mediator based on the theoretical assumption of ICT. We recognize that other theoretical perspectives may suggest a reverse causality. That is, it is possible that voters' political identity can be heightened during a presidential campaign season,

which in turn affects voters' in- and out-group media contact. That said, both ICT and SIT emphasize the importance of contextual factors that increase one's identification with his or her social group. Contact and/or the presence of the other group is one such contextual factor and thus is treated as the antecedent of a heightened political identity pursuit to the adherents of these theories.

In short, the different effects of mediated and direct contacts suggest the complexity of understanding and explaining the effects of intergroup contact in politics. It also should be noted that political identity is only one of the many identities that is likely to be salient during a political campaign. Other group identities (e.g., family identity, religious identity, gender identity) can also be important perceptual filters that are equal (if not more important) in shaping intergroup attitudes than sheer media exposure. These other identities may work independently of or in conjunction with individuals' political identity. In an era with increased references to identity politics, other social identities also should be studied.

Future Research

Future research also should examine other intergroup mediators and moderators that may help to explain these different paths between intergroup contact and intergroup attitudes. For instance, out-group trust has been found to influence people's tendency to approach or avoid out-group members (e.g., Turner, West, & Christie, 2013). When there is a lack of trust of the opposing party and its party members, perhaps discussion with opposing party members may be more about defamation rather than constructive debates. Researchers can also examine the effect of perceived group status in moderating the relationship between contact and intergroup attitudes such as prejudice (e.g., Tropp, & Pettigrew, 2005) and intergroup bias (e.g., Ellemers & Barreto, 2003). Lastly, Pettigrew (1998) emphasized the essential role of friendship potential in reducing intergroup prejudice, as intergroup friendship may generate cross-group empathy and reshapes intergroup boundaries. Future research should examine whether such relationships holds in political contexts.

ICT has been viewed as a theory that focuses on finding ways for people to "get along" with the other side. Questions are raised about whether it can appropriately explain the nature of intergroup communication among members of different parties with different political ideologies when those parties are in constant competition for political power. We argue that democracy is accomplished through political engagement and participation where intergroup contact is a necessity. We should not expect that positive outcomes of contact (or to get along) require each side to abandon its ideologies or have less desire to compete. In fact, intergroup competition can be viewed as a positive outcome because it fosters political participation (e.g., voting, researching the policies proposed by the opposing party). Bipartisan cooperation, or reduced polarization, for instance, are possible positive outcomes of contact. As a result, identifying the mechanisms through which contact–effect is better or worse is critical. ICT, in this regard, offers a theoretical platform to test different mechanisms. ICT theorists should begin to articulate the different manifestations of "a better intergroup relation" in different contexts.

Understanding and canvassing counterarguments are critical for healthy debates. Our findings insinuate potentially counterproductive processes when political party members engage in communication. As partisan media and political enthusiasts continue to polarize on many political/cultural/social issues as we

continue to see today, it is fair to ask how we can better understand the implications and processes of intergroup contact in politics and whether some of its products—intergroup bias and intergroup competition—can foster or impede healthy competition between political parties and bring about better civic engagement.

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