

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Social Identity, Selective Exposure, and Affective Polarization: How Priming National Identity Shapes Attitudes Toward Immigrants Via News Selection

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We use three online experiments—two selection-based and one forced-exposure—to demonstrate that increasing the salience of national identity can promote affective polarization toward undocumented immigrants, both directly and indirectly, via the selection of pro- and counter-attitudinal articles about immigration. As anticipated, across both selection studies, priming national identity exacerbates polarization among immigration opponents. For that group, priming national identity also indirectly increases polarization via enhanced exposure to pro-attitudinal (i.e., anti-immigration) news. In one selection study, however, the prime's polarizing effect is attenuated by increased exposure to counter-attitudinal (i.e., pro-immigration) news. These polarizing effects do not emerge among immigration supporters. Finally, a forced-exposure experiment more rigorously tests the causal model by assessing polarization when both the identity prime and message exposure are randomly assigned. We discuss practical and theoretical implications.

Keywords: Social Identity, Media Choice, Selectivity, Affective Polarization, Immigration.

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Intergroup animosities have reached troubling levels in the United States. Americans are increasingly hostile toward their partisan opponents (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015), ethnic relations continue to be one of the most challenging issues of the century (Mastro, 2015), and growing tensions surround immigration (Johnston, Newman, & Velez, 2015). What are the reasons behind these animosities? Many scholars focus on the media, especially in the context of selective exposure (Sunstein, 2009). The unprecedented availability of news sources and online content facilitates exposure to like-minded information (Stroud, 2008), and this, in turn, can polarize individual attitudes (Garrett et al., 2014; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011; Stroud, 2010). An immigration

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opponent can easily access anti-immigrant content, leading her to be more strongly opposed, fueling polarization and intergroup conflict.

Research on these processes has focused almost exclusively on the strength or importance of prior attitudes (e.g., [Levendusky, 2013](#); [Peralta, Wojcieszak, Lelkes, & de Vreese, 2017](#)). The influence of social identity on media selection, in contrast, is rarely examined in the political domain (see [Reid, 2012](#) for hostile media perceptions; see [Harwood, 1999](#); [Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter, 2007](#) for non-political contexts). We aim to fill this gap and make contributions to the literature on selectivity and media effects on polarization.

Theoretically, we attend to social identity as a valuable corrective to the tendency to characterize media exposure decisions in terms of attitudes and media availability alone. Few would deny that attitudes operate within the context of social identity—individuals' sense of who they are based on their group membership ([Tajfel, 1982](#))—and we argue that this relationship has important implications for media choice and its effects on polarization (see [Huddy, 2003](#)). Specifically, increasing the salience of a particular social identity should lead people to put greater weight on their identity-relevant attitudes and, when these are negative toward the outgroup, to promote affective polarization and influence information seeking.

This project focuses on national identity, examining its effects on the selection of attitude-affirming or counter-attitudinal news about immigration and, ultimately, on affective polarization toward undocumented immigrants, here assessed in terms of negative trait evaluations, relative ingroup favorability, social distance ([Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012](#)), and perceived common intergroup identity ([Gaertner et al., 2000](#)). National identity is an important factor that has far-reaching consequences for people's attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors ([Kymlicka, 2001](#)). Many Americans feel a strong sense of belonging to their country, and even among those whose national identity is weaker, social contexts can strengthen it. Those contexts can range from seeing American symbols in one's surroundings (e.g., a flag, see [Butz, Plant, & Doerr, 2007](#)) to celebrating the July 4th holiday ([Levendusky, 2018](#)). Also, the issue of undocumented immigration is well-suited to testing affective polarization, because this issue continues to divide the American public ([Pew Research Center, 2016](#)).

We used three online experiments conducted with diverse samples of Americans, first focusing on immigration opponents, then including supporters. In two selection-based experiments, we compared citizens who are primed to think about their national identity to those who are not, observing their selection of articles from a mock news site, and then surveying them about their attitudes toward undocumented immigrants. This methodological approach has several strengths. Exposure data collection is unobtrusive, avoiding the limitations of self-reported exposure measures ([Prior, 2013](#)) and of more traditional experiments, which do not accurately reflect everyday selection patterns ([Feldman, Stroud, Bimber, & Wojcieszak, 2013](#)). Also, the mock site resembled a real-world news site, with a mix of political and non-political content. These two experiments used quota sampling to recruit participants with characteristics that approximated the general population. As such, our findings generalize beyond studies

based on students, as so often used in experimental work on selectivity. Furthermore, manipulating identity allowed us to conclude that it is making one's social identity more salient, and not other factors, that drives the effects observed. Lastly, we relied on a third, forced-exposure experiment to complement the quasi-experimental tests of exposure's effects used in the other two studies.

The power of social identity

Social identity (Tajfel, 1982) and self-categorization (Turner, 1985; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994) theories suggest that individuals have a natural tendency to categorize people with whom they share important characteristics as members of their ingroup, while placing those who differ from them in an outgroup. Whether others are viewed as members of the ingroup or the outgroup has important consequences. People are more likely to have a positive emotional reaction to ingroup members than outgroup members, and also are more favorable toward and more willing to cooperate with the ingroup. In some cases, ingroup favoritism is accompanied by a negative outgroup bias, and—in extreme cases—people may experience outright hostility toward outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The influence of social identity is highly context sensitive: “group membership can powerfully cue beliefs and action in one context and yet have no effect in another” (Huddy, 2004, p. 959). Social context can increase the salience of a category by priming its accessibility (Huddy, 2004). The more accessible the category, the more pronounced intergroup biases may be. We argue that priming thoughts about social identity—in our case, national identity—will influence both citizens' attitudes and their news selection behaviors.

National identity and attitude

National identity is a uniquely powerful form of social identity (see Levendusky, 2018). Nations are “imagined communities,” groups of people with a common “we-feeling,” a sense of mutual belonging and obligation (Anderson, 1991). National identity involves subjective membership in that imagined community, together with people's loyalty, solidarity, and dedication to the common good (see Kymlicka, 2001).

Priming thoughts about national identity should bring to mind attitudes related to it. Consistent with self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985), this could enhance the salience of group boundaries, focus people's attention on differences between the ingroup and the outgroup, and increase the importance of those values and beliefs that are unshared and represent a threat.¹ This effect is most likely to emerge among those who hold negative outgroup attitudes. For those citizens, priming national identity should increase their readiness to categorize fellow Americans as members of the (good) ingroup and others—undocumented immigrants in our case—as members of the (bad) outgroup, leading to negative, even hostile, outgroup attitudes (see Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992 for meta-analytical evidence that intergroup bias increases when an ingroup is made salient). We thus predict:

H1: Relative to a no-prime condition, immigration opponents (but not supporters) primed to think about their national identity will exhibit greater affective polarization: namely, more negative trait evaluations, greater relative ingroup favorability and social distance, and also lower common intergroup identity with undocumented immigrants.

National identity, news selection, and attitudes

A central goal of this project is to show that the effects of priming national identity are not limited to increasing affective polarization directly: priming national identity should also influence message selection, having an indirect effect on polarization. Whereas most work on selectivity focuses on prior attitudes or news interest as crucial to the selection of pro- versus counter-attitudinal sources or messages (Leeper, 2014; Levendusky, 2013), media consumption is also influenced by people's social identity (Slater, 2007; see Harwood, 1999; Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter, 2007; Mastro, 2003 for evidence in non-political contexts).²

When it comes to pro-attitudinal exposure, social identity theory posits that people are motivated to maintain, protect, or enhance a positive view of the self and their ingroup (Reid & Hogg, 2005). When a particular ingroup identity becomes cognitively and/or emotionally salient, people engage in various behaviors aimed at positively distinguishing their ingroup and defending its value (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see Huddy, 2013). This should translate into seeking information that is consistent with the identity and protects the ingroup. For example, young media recipients prefer positive portrayals of the young ingroup, whereas their older counterparts prefer positive portrayals of the older ingroup and negative portrayals of the young outgroup (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010). These processes should emerge especially among those with negative outgroup attitudes. In our case, salient national identity should promote attention to pro-attitudinal articles among immigration opponents. This effect is not expected for immigration supporters, for whom national identity salience does not necessarily translate into seeing undocumented immigrants as outsiders or into the motivation to defend the ingroup against the outgroup threat.

News exposure, in turn, has effects on people's attitudes. Extensive evidence suggests that pro-attitudinal content influences attitudes in ways that are consistent with the message, reinforcing one's prior position (e.g., Garrett et al., 2014; Stroud, 2010). We thus expect that enhanced attention to pro-attitudinal stories—namely, those negative toward undocumented immigrants—will increase affective polarization among immigration opponents. Thus, an indirect influence of a national identity prime via media exposure is expected for this group.

H2: Among immigration opponents (but not supporters), priming national identity will indirectly enhance affective polarization via exposure to pro-attitudinal articles (those negative toward undocumented immigrants).

How priming national identity will shape counter-attitudinal content selection and subsequent attitudes remains an open question. Counter-attitudinal exposure—that is,

exposure to content favorable to the outgroup or critical of the ingroup—might decline among immigration opponents encouraged to think about their national identity. Priming national identity could bring to the fore outgroup hostilities, motivating people to avoid information that challenges their attitudes and that “threatens” the ingroup (akin to avoiding dissonance, [Festinger, 1957](#)). However, counter-attitudinal exposure might be unrelated to social identity salience when the status of the ingroup is high and certain (see [Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010](#)). Immigration opponents are likely to feel superior to undocumented immigrants and feel secure about their ingroup status, suggesting that the motivation to make favorable comparisons between the ingroup and the outgroup may not influence content selection. It is even possible that counter-attitudinal exposure will increase following a national identity prime. Attraction to pro-attitudinal content is not consistently correlated with an aversion to counter-attitudinal content ([Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013](#)), and many factors promote interest in both ([Chaffee, Saphir, Graf, Sandvig, & Hahn, 2001](#); [Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012](#)). Perhaps most importantly, ingroup salience can motivate people to gather information related to the group in general ([Mastro, 2003](#)), including counter-attitudinal content. In sum, it is not certain how the salience of national identity will influence attention to counter-attitudinal news.

It is also uncertain how people will respond to such news. There is evidence of direct persuasive-media effects under some conditions ([Barker & Lawrence, 2006](#); [Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998](#); [Feldman, 2011](#)), suggesting that counter-attitudinal news stories—those positive toward the outgroup—may decrease affective polarization. However, people tend to defend their prior positions against messages that challenge their beliefs. Counter-arguing, source derogation, and negative affective responses could minimize persuasive effects or even strengthen the original attitude (see [Bryne & Hart, 2009](#); [Taber & Lodge, 2012](#)). Given these distinct possibilities, we propose a research question.

RQ1: How does priming national identity influence affective polarization via exposure to counter-attitudinal articles (those positive toward undocumented immigrants)?

Study 1

Method

The data for Study 1 were collected in June, 2016, in the midst of an intense U.S. presidential election campaign in which immigration played a prominent role. Participants were drawn from a diverse opt-in online panel of American adults operated by Research Now, with recruitment managed by Qualtrics Panels. Panel members were invited to take part in a study about “how people select news about issues of the day.” In order for our sample to approximate the U.S. population, we set quotas for age, gender, education, and household income. Study 1 focused on immigration opponents: responders only qualified to participate if they “opposed” or “somewhat opposed” a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently in the United States.³

Those who were not born in the United States, whose parents were not born in the United States, or who self-identified as Asian, Hispanic, or Pacific Islander were also filtered out, as were those who failed an attention check on the pretest (“To check whether you are reading the questions, click on the second answer option”). We also excluded those who did not take the identity task seriously (e.g., did not type anything, gave nonsensical responses; $n = 16$).

The final sample included 218 participants, 49% of whom were females, with a mean age of 47 years old, and with “some college” being the modal education (31%; 2% some high school; 22% high school graduates; 7% technical, trade, or vocational school; 29% college graduates; and 10% some post-graduate training). Half the sample (51%) identified as conservative, another 42% as moderate, and 7% as liberal.

Procedure

After a pretest, participants were randomly assigned to a national-identity prime or a no-prime control condition.⁴ Those in the national-identity condition received the following directions: “Before we continue, please take a few minutes to reflect on what it means to be American. That is, what do you have in common with other American people? It may be the fact that we all speak the same language, we were all born here, our parents are American, etc. Please take up to five minutes to write about *one essential quality that you share with other Americans, something that unites us as a people.*” Those in the control group were not given a writing task. Participants were then redirected to a mock news site, where they could select as many or as few stories as they wanted, for up to four minutes (see Figure 1). When participants finished reading, either because their time was up or because they chose to leave the news site, they were redirected to the posttest.⁵

Mock news site. News article selection was based on titles and brief headlines (see Appendix A). The mock news site included sixteen articles: six favoring immigration and the rights of undocumented immigrants, six opposing them, and four non-political articles adapted from stories “trending” online at the time of our study (about celebrities, nutrition, technology, and sports). Although there are comparatively few entertainment stories, their inclusion has an important effect on exposure decisions (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2015; Feldman et al., 2013), and enhances external validity. The articles were presented in random order across two columns: immigration-related articles were shown under the heading “top immigration stories” and entertainment articles under the heading “top entertainment stories.” When participants clicked on the title or headline, the content was displayed. The articles ranged in length from 270 to 289 words.

Measures

Posttest measures. We included four measures of affective polarization, all coded such that higher values indicate more negative attitudes toward undocumented immigrants.

Negative trait evaluations. Participants indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”) the extent to which they felt that “illegal immigrants in

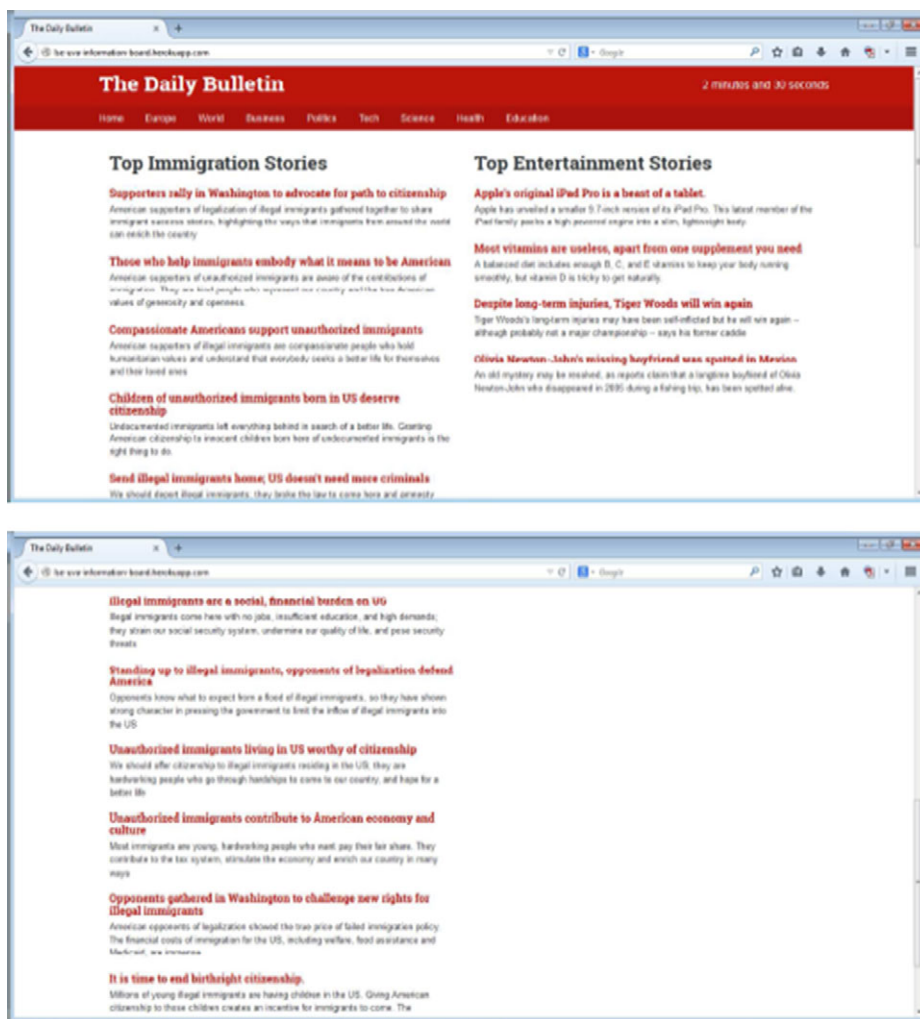


Figure 1 Screenshots of the mock news site.

the U.S. are” (a) honest, (b) intelligent, (c) trustworthy, (d) good, and (e) hardworking. These were reverse coded and averaged (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$, $M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.11$; higher values indicate more negative evaluations).

Relative ingroup favorability. Feeling thermometers (0 = “cold or unfavorable,” 100 = “warm or favorable”) measured participants’ feelings toward “illegal immigrants currently in the U.S.” ($M = 25.58$, $SD = 24.33$) and “Americans in general” ($M = 77.83$, $SD = 19.13$), allowing us to create a difference score ($M = 52.25$, $SD = 33.02$; higher values represent more negative feelings toward immigrants vis-à-vis Americans).⁶

Social distance. Participants reported how they would feel to have an illegal immigrant as (a) a close personal friend, (b) someone they have to work closely with at their job,

(c) a close relative by marriage, or (d) a neighbor on the same street on a 7-point scale (1 = “extremely uncomfortable,” 7 = “extremely comfortable”). These items were reverse coded and averaged (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$; $M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.68$; higher values point to higher social distance).

Common intergroup identity. Participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”) with two statements: “Despite some differences, immigrants and American citizens represent one and the same group” (reverse coded) and “American citizens and immigrants represent different groups.” These items were averaged ($r = .66$; $M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.33$; higher values indicate lower shared identity).⁷

Control. In mediation models, which test the indirect effects from national identity prime to affective polarization through exposure, we also controlled for prior attitudes, which may contribute to both selection patterns and posttest attitudes. At the pretest, participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”) with two statements: “Anyone who comes to the U.S. illegally should be sent home” and “Immigrants who come to the U.S. illegally have no right to be here.” These items were reverse coded and averaged ($r = .70$; $M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.63$; higher values indicate more favorable attitudes).

Observational measures. Software running on the web server hosting the mock news site automatically recorded which articles a participant selected and the length of time the article was displayed. Using these data, we computed the number of articles read for, against, and unrelated to immigration, and the total time spent reading articles in each category.

Results

Before turning to the hypotheses, we examine selection patterns across our sample (see Table 1). On average, participants showed greater interest in pro-attitudinal (i.e., anti-immigration) content than in counter-attitudinal (i.e., pro-immigration) content. They read twice as many pro-attitudinal articles as counter-attitudinal articles, and spent twice as much time on the former. These differences are highly significant (at $p < .001$). Also, participants read fewer entertainment stories than counter-attitudinal ones and spent less time reading entertainment content ($p < .01$). However, because the site featured twelve immigration stories and only four entertainment stories, choosing entertainment was less likely (see Feldman et al., 2013).

The average number of stories read and the time reading are relatively low, yet it needs to be emphasized that participants could move forward with the study without selecting any content. Allowing them to finish at any time rather than requiring them to spend several minutes on the site, as typically done in lab studies on selectivity, more closely resembles real-world selection. The increased ecological validity comes at a price: 52 people (24% of the sample) choose not to engage with any content. Given our theoretical interest in how identity salience promotes polarization via voluntary news election, this tradeoff is justified.

Table 1 Number of Articles Selected and Time Spent Reading the Articles by Condition

	Study 1			Study 2		
	No prime	National identity prime	Total	No prime	National identity prime	Total
Number of pro-attitudinal articles selected	0.87 (1.06) <i>n</i> = 127	1.29 (1.36) <i>n</i> = 91	1.04 (1.21) <i>n</i> = 218	0.78 (0.99) <i>n</i> = 414	0.81 (1.04) <i>n</i> = 481	0.80 (1.02) <i>n</i> = 895
Time spent reading pro-attitudinal articles	52.41 (68.86) <i>n</i> = 127	67.55 (65.68) <i>n</i> = 91	58.73 (67.81) <i>n</i> = 218	58.23 (73.59) <i>n</i> = 414	54.71 (69.75) <i>n</i> = 481	56.34 (71.53) <i>n</i> = 895
Number of counter-attitudinal articles selected	0.43 (0.77) <i>n</i> = 127	0.67 (0.87) <i>n</i> = 91	0.53 (0.82) <i>n</i> = 218	0.41 (0.75) <i>n</i> = 414	0.46 (0.77) <i>n</i> = 481	0.44 (0.76) <i>n</i> = 895
Time spent reading counter-attitudinal articles	20.78 (37.44) <i>n</i> = 127	35.05 (56.00) <i>n</i> = 91	26.74 (46.52) <i>n</i> = 218	29.38 (54.62) <i>n</i> = 414	32.06 (58.46) <i>n</i> = 481	30.82 (56.53) <i>n</i> = 895
Number of entertainment articles selected	0.27 (0.53) <i>n</i> = 127	0.37 (0.78) <i>n</i> = 91	0.31 (0.65) <i>n</i> = 218	0.35 (0.66) <i>n</i> = 414	0.33 (0.64) <i>n</i> = 481	0.34 (0.65) <i>n</i> = 895
Time spent reading entertainment articles	12.62 (32.79) <i>n</i> = 127	18.76 (41.61) <i>n</i> = 91	15.18 (36.77) <i>n</i> = 218	26.77 (53.16) <i>n</i> = 414	22.16 (46.96) <i>n</i> = 481	24.29 (49.95) <i>n</i> = 895

Note. Cell values denote mean (standard deviation) and cell subsample size.

Direct effects on polarization

We first predicted that priming national identity would promote affective polarization (increasing anti-immigrant attitudes) among immigration opponents. A MANOVA model with the experimental condition as the main factor found that, relative to the control, priming national identity indeed led to more negative trait evaluations of immigrants ($M_{\text{prime}} = 4.64$, $M_{\text{control}} = 4.09$; $p < .001$) and greater ingroup favorability ($M_{\text{prime}} = 57.58$, $M_{\text{control}} = 48.43$; $p < .05$). Although patterns were in the predicted direction for social distance ($M_{\text{prime}} = 4.21$, $M_{\text{control}} = 3.97$; $p = .29$) and common intergroup identity ($M_{\text{prime}} = 5.39$, $M_{\text{control}} = 5.17$; $p = .22$), the differences were not significant. H1 is partially supported: priming national identity enhances some indicators of affective polarization.

Effects on polarization via selection

Our primary goal is to understand how priming national identity influences affective polarization via content selection. We rely on regression-based path-analytic mediation tests, using bootstrapped confidence intervals estimated with 10,000 samples (PROCESS Model 4, Hayes, 2013). The models test both pro- and counter-attitudinal exposure as mediators, such that when examining the indirect effects of one we control for the other. To account for the loss of experimental control at this stage of the design (i.e., exposure was not manipulated) pretest immigration attitudes enter as a control. We detail the significant indirect paths only, graph all significant paths in Figure 2, and present the full models in Appendix B. We report 90% confidence intervals for the directional hypothesis regarding pro-attitudinal exposure and 95% confidence intervals when examining the research question regarding counter-attitudinal exposure.

Immigration opponents primed to think about their national identity paid more attention to pro-attitudinal (or anti-immigration) articles than the control group, both in terms of the number of articles selected and—marginally—the time spent reading. This, in turn, led to affective polarization. Reading more anti-immigrant stories was related to ascribing more negative traits to immigrants, greater relative ingroup favorability, and lower common intergroup identity, but not greater social distance. A similar pattern emerged for reading time.

These significant paths provide some evidence for the expected indirect effect; formal tests confirm it. Priming national identity promotes polarization via pro-attitudinal exposure for several affective polarization indicators. The prime indirectly led to more negative trait evaluations ($a1b1 = 0.070$, $SE = 0.041$ [CI 0.020, 0.160]), greater relative ingroup favorability ($a1b1 = 2.534$, $SE = 1.217$ [CI 0.947, 5.139]), and reduced common intergroup identity ($a1b1 = 0.134$, $SE = 0.060$ [CI 0.051, 0.251]), but not social distance ($a1b1 = 0.047$, $SE = 0.051$ [CI -0.015, 0.155]). Parallel indirect effects emerged via reading time, significant for trait evaluations ($a1b1 = 0.042$, $SE = 0.031$ [CI 0.006, 0.111]), ingroup favorability ($a1b1 = 1.067$, $SE = 0.859$ [CI 0.116, 3.189]), and common identity ($a1b1 = 0.051$, $SE = 0.042$ [CI 0.036, 0.149]) but insignificant for social distance ($a1b1 = 0.015$, $SE = 0.034$ [CI -0.020, 0.095]). H2 received partial support.

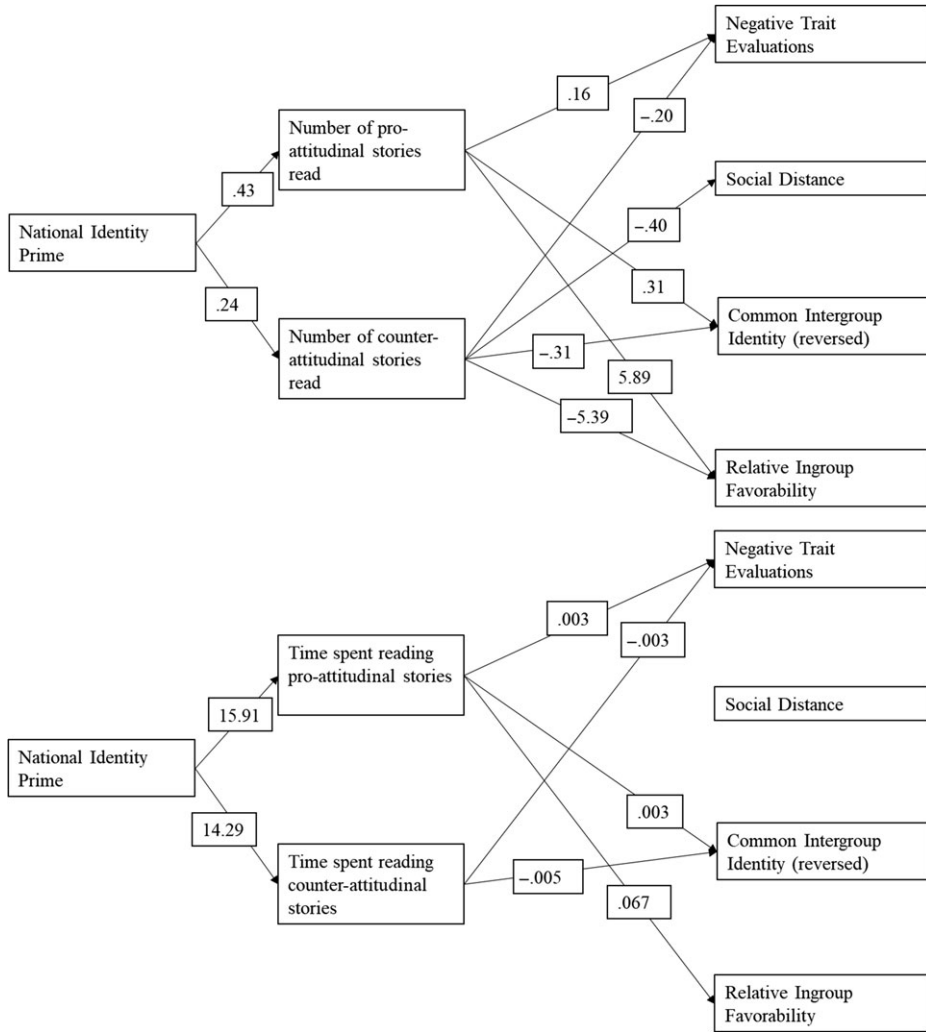


Figure 2 Study 1: Mediation model 4 from national identity prime to affective polarization (top panel: through the number of articles selected; bottom panel through time spent reading). *Note:* Only significant paths are depicted. Pro-attitudinal exposure uses one-tailed significance tests; counter-attitudinal exposure uses two-tailed significance tests. Continuous lines are significant at $p < .05$, dotted lines are significant at $p < .10$. Unstandardized coefficients are presented.

RQ1 asked about the effects of national identity prime on affective polarization via counter-attitudinal (i.e., pro-immigration) exposure. First, making national identity salient led immigration opponents to select more counter-attitudinal articles compared to the control, and to spend more time reading them. In turn, exposure to a greater number of counter-attitudinal articles was significantly negatively associated with all indicators of affective polarization. Time spent reading such articles predicted fewer negative trait evaluations and greater common intergroup identity with undocumented immigrants.

Therefore, priming national identity indirectly—via counter-attitudinal exposure—led to more positive trait evaluations ($a1b1 = -0.048$, $SE = 0.029$ [CI $-0.114, -0.012$]), reduced relative ingroup favorability ($a5b5 = -1.288$, $SE = 1.139$ [CI $-4.071, -0.109$]), reduced social distance ($a4b4 = -0.095$, $SE = 0.052$ [CI $-0.207, -0.029$]), and greater common intergroup identity ($a2b2 = -0.073$, $SE = 0.045$ [CI $-0.162, -0.016$]). The indirect path through time spent reading was significant in three tests (trait evaluations, $a3b3 = -0.041$, $SE = 0.029$ [CI $-0.106, -0.006$]; social distance, $a3b3 = -0.052$, $SE = 0.042$ [CI $-0.152, -0.005$]; and common identity, $a3b3 = -0.066$, $SE = 0.045$ [CI $-0.163, -0.012$]), and insignificant for relative ingroup favorability ($a3b3 = -0.792$, $SE = 0.949$ [CI $-3.085, 0.176$]). Answering RQ1, priming national identity *reduces* affective polarization via counter-attitudinal news exposure.

For each model, we used the contrast command in PROCESS to see whether the indirect effects via attention to pro- versus counter-attitudinal articles were of similar magnitude. Across all the models, the mediation via pro-attitudinal content was significantly stronger than via counter-attitudinal content (results available upon request).

Discussion

Study 1 shows that making national identity salient polarizes immigration opponents. It also increases exposure to both pro- and counter-attitudinal content. Although each works in the opposite direction, the polarizing effects from pro-attitudinal articles are stronger. Study 1 leaves several questions unanswered. Explicit manipulation checks were not included, and so it is possible that the results are due to some other mechanism(s). For instance, the prime may have increased topical interest or issue involvement, which would be consistent with enhanced exposure to both pro- and counter-attitudinal articles. Also, because the control group did not engage in any task, the differences observed could be due to the writing task in the identity condition, not the prime itself. Lastly, the sample encompassed immigration opponents only. Our theoretical model suggests that it is this group that should be influenced by these dynamics, but it is not possible to evaluate that claim with these data.

Study 2

Method

To address these issues, Study 2 was conducted in August, 2017, on a sample recruited by Qualtrics Panels from an opt-in online panel maintained by Lucid/Federated, with the same quotas enforced as in Study 1. Study 2 included both immigration opponents and supporters, automatically filtering out at the pretest those who reported neutral attitudes toward a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently in the United States. Those who were not born in the United States; whose parents were not born in the United States; who self-identified as Asian, Hispanic, or Pacific Islander; or who did not pass the attention check were also automatically filtered out. From the final sample, we also excluded those participants who did not take the prime seriously ($n = 13$).

The final sample includes 895 participants. The sample was 61% female, with a mean age of 24 years old, and with “college graduate” being the modal education (33%; 7% some high school; 17% high school graduate; 5% technical, trade, or vocational school; 22% some college; and 16% some post-graduate training). A third of the sample (33%) identified as liberal, another 23% as moderate, and 44% as conservative.⁸

Procedure

After the pretest, participants were randomly assigned to a national identity prime condition ($n = 481$) or the control group ($n = 414$). In Study 2, the control group was given a task to write about “what you are seeing in your surroundings right now. It may be your living room, office, a park, or a café.”⁹ After the prime, manipulation checks tested whether the results were the product of increased salience of national identity. The rest of the design was unchanged from Study 1. Participants engaged in news selection, choosing as many or as few articles as they wished from the news site for up to four minutes, with the freedom to move forward with the study whenever they wished. After browsing, participants completed a posttest. To ensure comparability of the results, the same mock news site and news articles were used.

Measures

Prior attitudes. To assess whether the effects differ for immigration supporters and opponents, pretest attitudes were included as a moderator. In addition to the two statements from Study 1, four additional items tapped symbolic and realistic threat on a 7-point scale (e.g., “American norms and values are being threatened because of the presence of undocumented immigrants”; 1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”). These items were averaged ($\alpha = .94$; $M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.81$; higher values indicate more negative attitudes).

Posttest measures. The same affective polarization measures were used, and higher values again reflect more negative attitudes¹⁰: negative trait evaluations ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 3.53$ $SD = 1.27$), relative ingroup favorability ($M = 27.95$ $SD = 37.97$),¹¹ social distance ($\alpha = .96$, $M = 3.13$, $SD = 2.02$), and common intergroup identity assessed with three items ($\alpha = .71$, $M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.42$).

Social desirability. The results from Study 1 may have been biased by social desirability concerns, as respondents may have been hesitant to call undocumented immigrants dishonest or not intelligent. To account for this, the pretest assessed one’s susceptibility to social desirability (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Participants responded yes, no, or unsure to five questions (e.g., “Have you sometimes taken unfair advantage of another person?”). These items were recoded and added ($M = 11.19$, $SD = 9.18$; higher values indicate greater susceptibility to social desirability).

Observational measures. The software unobtrusively recorded each participant’s selection. Based on these logs, the total number of stories read for, against, and unrelated to immigration, as well as the total time spent reading stories in each category was computed. Because this study focused on immigration supporters and opponents, measures of pro- and counter-attitudinal exposure were created by accounting for each

participant's prior attitude (e.g., an opponent who selected an article critical of immigration was coded as selecting a pro-attitudinal article; see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Manipulation checks

Measuring identity salience is a complex issue. Some studies that manipulate American identity do not include manipulation checks, because they may undermine the salience induction (Reid, 2012, p. 388), while others use a national identity strength battery (Levendusky, 2018; Study 1). We took a slightly different approach. Because we are concerned with identity salience, participants were presented with a list of 20 qualities, 10 of which were related to American identity (e.g., "Pursuing the American dream") and 10 to personal lives ("The places to which I have travelled"), and asked to check all those that best described them. Participants in the prime condition checked significantly more qualities related to American identity than those in the control ($M = 5.75$ vs. $M = 5.19$, $p = .002$), indicating that the manipulation made American identity more salient. There were no differences in the number of personal qualities selected ($M = 5.32$ vs. $M = 5.31$, $p = .96$).

The prime's influence on other factors was also tested. Five questions tapped national identity strength, e.g., "How important is being American to you?" ($\alpha = .919$, $M = 6.13$, $SD = 1.07$). There were no differences between the prime and the control ($M = 6.13$ vs. $M = 6.13$, $p = .998$), suggesting that the prime did not affect identity strength. Attitude strength and importance ("How strong your opinions are about immigration," "How important immigration is to you personally"), and interest ("How interested are you in the issue of immigration") were also measured. Interestingly, the prime decreased attitude strength ($M_{\text{prime}} = 5.02$, $M_{\text{control}} = 5.27$, $p = .01$) and interest ($M_{\text{prime}} = 4.87$, $M_{\text{control}} = 5.14$, $p = .01$), but had no influence on importance ($M_{\text{prime}} = 5.20$, $M_{\text{control}} = 5.35$, $p = .10$).¹²

Results

The selection patterns parallel those from Study 1 (see Table 1). Participants read twice as many pro-attitudinal as counter-attitudinal articles and spent twice as much time on the former ($p < .001$). Also, participants selected fewer entertainment stories than counter-attitudinal ones and spent less time reading this content ($p < .05$). As in Study 1, the low means are due to the fact that about a quarter of the sample (24%; 217 participants) did not read any articles.

Turning to our hypotheses and research question, in aggregate the national identity prime had no significant direct effects on affective polarization (see Appendix C Table 1 and 2). One of the key strengths of Study 2 is the fact that it included a manipulation check, which allows for a more complete test of the theoretical model. This model asserts that the prime should make national identity more salient, and that this drives affective polarization among immigration opponents.

H1 was tested using PROCESS model 58, estimating the effects of national identity prime on affective polarization through enhanced national identity

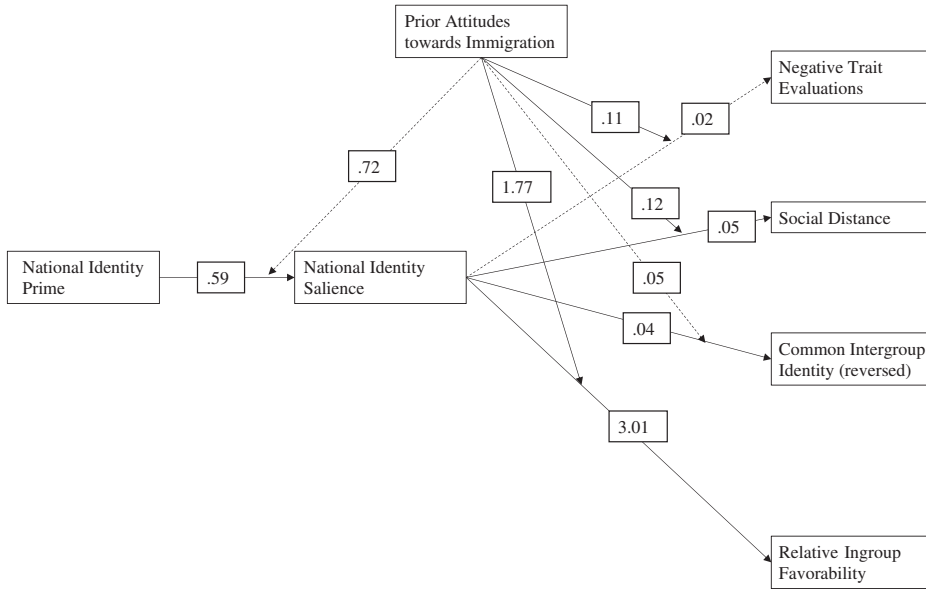


Figure 3 Study 2: Moderated mediation model 58 from national identity prime to affective polarization through national identity salience.

Note: Only significant paths are depicted. Continuous lines are significant at $p < .05$, dotted lines are significant at $p < .10$. Unstandardized coefficients are presented.

salience, with prior immigration attitudes entered as a moderator. We detail the indirect effects, plot the significant individual paths in Figure 3, and present the full models in Appendix D. As predicted, the prime led to affective polarization through greater salience of national identity among immigration opponents. The prime indirectly led to attribution of more negative traits to immigrants ($a_1b_1 = 0.072$, $SE = 0.027$ [CI 0.036, 0.128]), enhanced relative ingroup favorability (i.e., colder feelings toward immigrants vis-à-vis the Americans; $a_1b_1 = 3.601$, $SE = 1.079$ [CI 2.026, 5.589]), increased social distance ($a_1b_1 = 0.107$, $SE = 0.039$ [CI 0.054, 0.190]), and lowered common intergroup identity ($a_1b_1 = 0.064$, $SE = 0.023$ [CI 0.0032, 0.111]). These indirect effects did not emerge among immigration supporters. The results support H1.

Turning to the role of content selection, both the national identity prime and the consequent salience of national identity should influence affective polarization through attention to pro-attitudinal articles. To test H2, a serial mediation model (model 6) estimated the indirect effect of the prime via national identity salience and pro-attitudinal exposure on affective polarization, controlling for counter-attitudinal exposure, gender, and susceptibility to social desirability. PROCESS does not allow moderation of a serial multiple mediation, hence the analyses were run among immigration opponents and supporters separately (Figures 4 and 5, respectively; based on dichotomized pretest attitudes). Appendix D shows the full models.

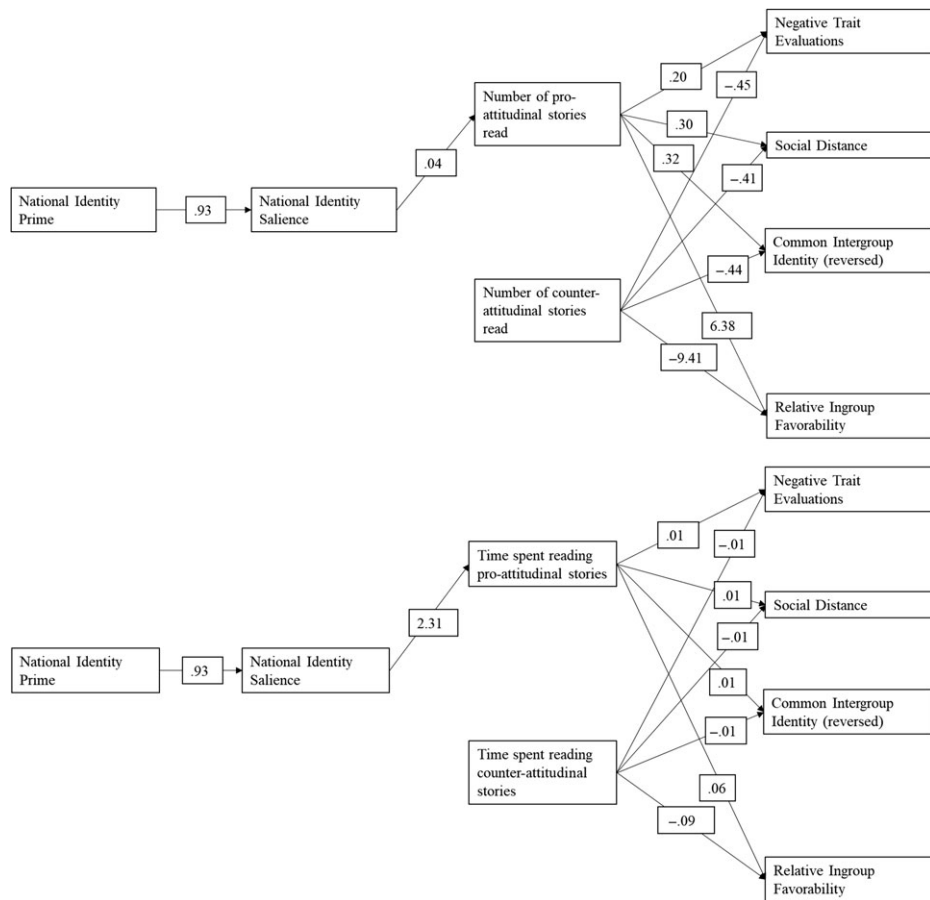


Figure 4 Study 2: Serial mediation model 6 from national identity prime to affective polarization through national identity salience and the number of articles selected for immigration opponents.

Note: Top panel, through the number of articles selected; bottom panel, through time spent reading. Only significant paths are depicted. Pro-attitudinal exposure uses one-tailed significance tests; counter-attitudinal exposure uses two-tailed significance tests. Continuous lines are significant at $p < .05$, dotted lines are significant at $p < .10$. Unstandardized coefficients are presented.

Among opponents, all the individual paths are significant, culminating in a significant multiple mediation for all outcomes. The national identity prime enhanced identity salience, prompting greater exposure to pro-attitudinal articles, ultimately leading to more negative trait evaluations ($a_1b_1 = 0.008$, $SE = 0.004$ [CI 0.003, 0.018]), greater relative ingroup favorability ($a_1b_1 = 0.251$, $SE = 0.129$ [CI 0.100, 0.561]), social distance ($a_1b_1 = 0.012$, $SE = 0.006$ [CI 0.004, 0.027]), and lower common intergroup identity ($a_1b_1 = 0.012$, $SE = 0.006$ [CI 0.005, 0.027]). Parallel indirect effects emerged for time spent on pro-attitudinal articles (negative traits, $a_1b_1 = 0.006$, $SE = 0.003$ [CI 0.002, 0.014]; ingroup favorability, $a_1b_1 = 0.122$, $SE = 0.082$ [CI 0.031, 0.333];

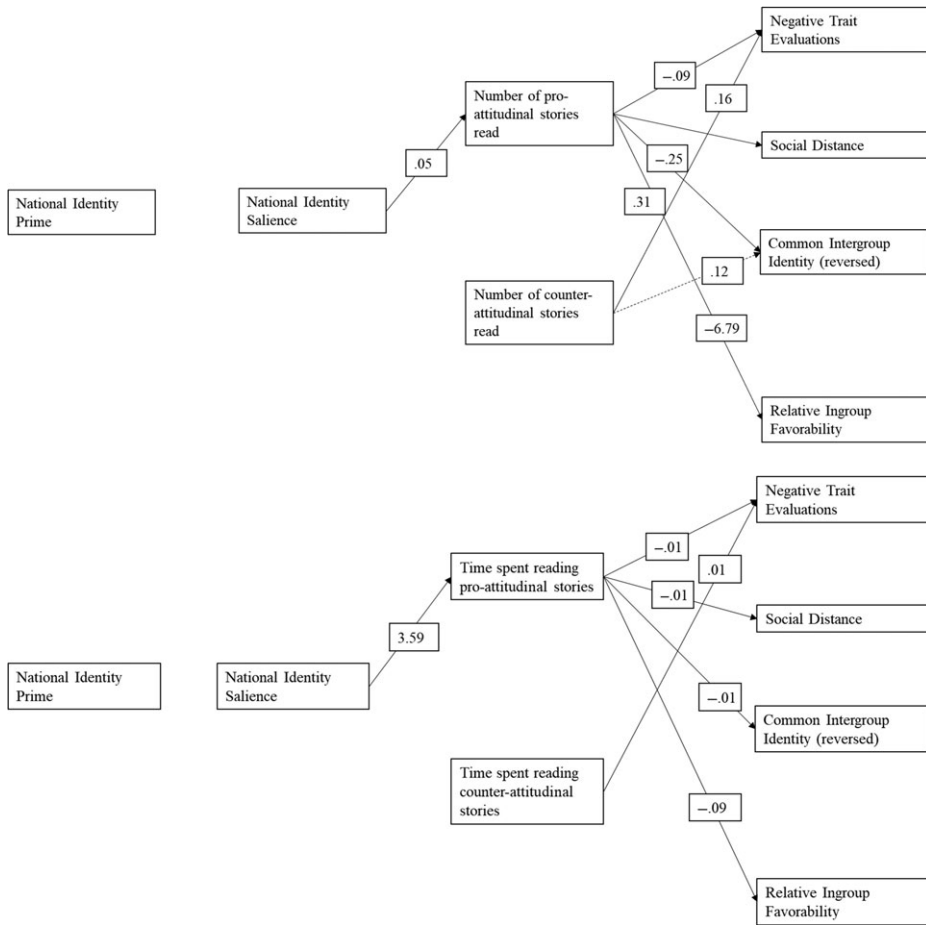


Figure 5 Study 2: Serial mediation model 6 from national identity prime to affective polarization through national identity salience and time spent reading for immigration supporters. *Note:* Top panel, through the number of articles selected; bottom panel, through time spent reading. significant paths are depicted. Pro-attitudinal exposure uses one-tailed significance tests; counter-attitudinal exposure uses two-tailed significance tests. Continuous lines are significant at $p < .05$, dotted lines are significant at $p < .10$. Unstandardized coefficients are presented.

social distance, $a_1b_1 = 0.006$, $SE = 0.004$ [CI 0.001, 0.016]; and common identity, $a_1b_1 = 0.007$, $SE = 0.004$ [CI 0.002, 0.017]). H2 is supported: national identity exacerbates affective polarization through pro-attitudinal exposure among immigration opponents. The serial indirect effects were not significant among supporters.

Lastly, we asked about the indirect effect of the prime on affective polarization through attention to counter-attitudinal content as influenced by national identity salience. For both immigration opponents and supporters, there were no significant effects of the prime via national identity salience and counter-attitudinal exposure, neither for the number of

articles selected nor the time spent reading. Answering RQ1, unlike in Study 1, salient national identity does not promote attention to counter-attitudinal content.

Discussion

Study 2 finds that a national identity prime exacerbates affective polarization through enhanced national identity salience, and also through increased attention to pro-attitudinal (but not counter-attitudinal) content. As expected, these effects emerged for immigration opponents only. This study has one limitation, as with Study 1: because exposure was not randomly assigned, we relied on a quasi-experimental approach to assess its influence. Although we controlled for participants' prior attitudes, without manipulating exposure, it is not possible to claim that it was exposure to the articles that influenced affective polarization.

Study 3

Method

To address this limitation, we conducted a forced-exposure experiment using participants recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk service. This experiment relied on immigration opponents and supporters, excluding those who reported neutral attitudes on immigration. As before, those who were not born in the United States; whose parents were not born in the United States; who self-identified as Asian, Hispanic, or Pacific Islander; or who did not pass the attention check were filtered out. The final sample included 242 participants, 49% male, with a mean age of 24 years, and with "some college" as the modal education (35%; 1% some high school; 13% high school graduates; and 14% some post-graduate training). Half of the sample (48%) identified as liberal, 16% as moderate, and 36% as conservative.¹³

Procedure

After a pretest, participants were first randomly assigned to the national identity prime condition ($n = 120$) or the control group ($n = 122$). The primes from Study 2 were used. Participants then completed the manipulation check and, later, were randomly assigned to a pro-attitudinal ($n = 120$) or counter-attitudinal ($n = 122$) immigration article, as determined by their pretest attitudes. After exposure, the posttest questionnaire was administered.

Measures

Posttest measures. The same question wording and response options as in Study 2 were used. For all affective polarization measures, higher values indicate more negative attitudes toward immigrants (negative trait evaluations, $\alpha = .95$, $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.42$; relative ingroup favorability, $M = 23.24$, $SD = 36.35$ ¹⁴; social distance, $\alpha = .97$; $M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.88$; common intergroup identity, $\alpha = .85$; $M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.56$).

Social desirability. We summed up the three items used in Study 2 ($\alpha = .683$, $M = 10.93$, $SD = 1.92$; higher values indicate greater susceptibility to social desirability).

Results

Manipulation checks

The manipulation check from Study 2 confirmed that the prime was effective; participants in the national identity condition checked more American-related qualities than those in the control ($M = 5.69$ vs. $M = 4.87$, $p < .05$), with no significant differences in the number of personal qualities checked ($M = 5.66$ vs. $M = 5.39$, $p = .37$). In this study, those in the national identity condition reported marginally significantly stronger national identity than those in the control ($M = 5.72$ vs. $M = 5.44$, $p = .08$). There were no differences between the groups on attitude strength ($M = 5.24$ vs. $M = 5.16$, $p = .63$), attitude importance ($M = 5.20$ vs. $M = 4.95$, $p = .17$), or issue interest ($M = 5.19$ vs. $M = 5.13$, $p = .77$).

To assure that the pro- or counter-attitudinal articles were perceived accordingly, participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”) with five items (e.g., “I agree with the writer’s conclusion”; $\alpha = .99$, $M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.99$). Participants saw the pro- or counter-attitudinal article as intended (i.e., greater agreement with the message in the pro- than in the counter-attitudinal condition, $M = 5.66$ vs. $M = 3.17$, $p < .001$). Neither the salience of national identity ($M = 5.40$ vs. $M = 5.16$, $p = .52$), nor its strength ($M = 5.62$ vs. $M = 5.54$, $p = .65$) were affected by pro- versus counter-attitudinal exposure. Message agreement did not differ between the national identity and the control conditions ($M = 4.33$ vs. $M = 4.48$, $p = .54$).

Model test

A MANOVA model predicting the four indicators of affective polarization from exposure condition, national identity prime condition, and dichotomized pretest attitudes toward immigration, with education and susceptibility to social desirability as covariates, was estimated to test the effect of randomized exposure on affective polarization (see Appendix E Table 1 and Table 2).

As in Study 2, the national identity prime had no direct effects on affective polarization, but an additional analysis using PROCESS model 58 shows that the prime again did enhance affective polarization through increased identity salience among immigration opponents (results available upon request). One marginally significant effect of pro-attitudinal exposure emerged, such that those in the pro-attitudinal condition showed greater social distance relative to the counter-attitudinal group, an effect driven by immigration opponents. Prior attitudes had a significant effect; unsurprisingly, relative to immigration supporters, opponents were more negative toward immigrants on all the affective polarization indicators. There was one significant interaction between prior attitude and national identity prime; opponents in the national identity condition attributed fewer negative traits to immigrants compared to those in the control.

Germane here, the model found significant interaction between prior attitude and exposure condition. Relative to immigration opponents exposed to a counter-attitudinal (i.e., pro-immigration) article, opponents exposed to a pro-attitudinal

article attributed more negative traits to immigrants ($M_{\text{pro-attitudinal}} = 4.77$ vs. $M_{\text{counter-attitudinal}} = 4.14$, $p = .01$) and displayed greater social distance ($M_{\text{pro-attitudinal}} = 5.07$ vs. $M_{\text{counter-attitudinal}} = 3.85$, $p < .001$). There were no significant differences for the two other indicators (common identity, $M_{\text{pro-attitudinal}} = 5.13$ vs. $M_{\text{counter-attitudinal}} = 4.73$, $p = .17$; ingroup favorability, $M_{\text{pro-attitudinal}} = 54.4$ vs. $M_{\text{counter-attitudinal}} = 48.39$, $p = .38$). In contrast, relative to supporters in the counter-attitudinal (i.e., anti-immigration) condition, supporters in the pro-attitudinal condition reported lower polarization in terms of common intergroup identity ($M_{\text{pro-attitudinal}} = 2.89$ vs. $M_{\text{counter-attitudinal}} = 3.34$, $p = .03$) and social distance ($M_{\text{pro-attitudinal}} = 1.99$ vs. $M_{\text{counter-attitudinal}} = 2.47$, $p = .04$), with the other two indicators being unaffected by exposure (trait evaluations, $M_{\text{pro-attitudinal}} = 2.56$ vs. $M_{\text{counter-attitudinal}} = 2.82$, $p = .15$; ingroup favorability, $M_{\text{pro-attitudinal}} = 5.38$ vs. $M_{\text{counter-attitudinal}} = 11.58$, $p = .20$). There was no significant interaction between exposure and national identity prime conditions, and no significant 3-way-interactions.

Discussion

Study 3 relied on a forced-exposure design, in which—following the national identity or control prime—participants were randomly assigned to see a pro- or counter-attitudinal article on immigration. The results support our theoretical model, showing that the prime enhances national identity salience, thereby exacerbating affective polarization among immigration opponents, but not supporters. As importantly, these results offer some support for the causal direction of the relationships described; exposure to pro- versus counter-attitudinal articles has predictable, albeit not consistent, effects on affective polarization toward immigrants, validating the findings from mediational models in Studies 1 and 2.

General discussion

A prominent concern about the contemporary information environment is that the profusion of choice can foster spirals of attitude reinforcement (e.g., [Bennett & Iyengar, 2008](#)). A gentle nudge can send individuals in search of attitude-affirming information. This, in turn, strengthens prior attitudes, which again shapes future media selection ([Slater, 2007](#)). The question we posed is whether increasing the salience of a particular social identity can jump-start this process. Can seeing an American flag in a doctor's waiting room influence what people choose to read on their smart phones? Can a politician's speech emphasizing the importance of American identity influence the types of news citizens consume? And if so, what influence do these exposure choices have on affective polarization? We examined these processes in the consequential context of attitudes toward undocumented immigrants.

We offer several noteworthy findings. Three separate studies demonstrate that making national identity more salient exacerbates affective polarization among immigration opponents. Study 1 finds direct effects on two indicators of affective polarization: attributing more negative traits to immigrants and reporting colder feelings

toward them than to fellow Americans. Study 2 and Study 3 show that the prime works by enhancing the salience of national identity, ultimately leading immigration opponents to not only attribute more negative traits and report greater ingroup favorability, but also to perceive more social distance and lower common intergroup identity with immigrants. Taken together, the results suggest that priming ingroup identity promotes affective polarization by making the relevant ingroup identity more salient among people who are already negative toward the outgroup.

The media also play an important role. Priming national identity drives people toward like-minded political content. Across both studies, given choice, immigration opponents whose national identity was made salient selected more pro-attitudinal news stories—those negative toward immigrants—and spent more time reading these stories than their counterparts who did not receive the identity prime. Although the size of these effects was modest, the cumulative effects of pro-attitudinal selections could be substantial. Although in Study 1, priming national identity simultaneously encouraged immigration opponents to attend to counter-attitudinal content, the polarizing effects of national identity prime via increased attention to pro-attitudinal (anti-immigration) content were stronger than the positive effects associated with counter-attitudinal (pro-immigration) exposure. Also, in Study 2, identity salience promoted polarization via increased pro-attitudinal exposure, without the attenuating effect of counter-attitudinal exposure. Jointly, these patterns suggest that, among immigration opponents, salient national identity exacerbates affective polarization both directly and through seeking content reaffirming people's prior views.

Two additional findings are noteworthy. First, these patterns did not emerge among immigration supporters, indicating that the polarizing effects of the identity prime were limited to those who are negatively predisposed toward the outgroup, and who are more attentive to intergroup animosities, as suggested in our theoretical arguments. Second, Study 2 provides strong evidence that national identity salience is a core driver of these effects. Although it is plausible that enhanced attention to news could be due to the fact that thinking about national identity makes the issue of immigration more salient or increases issue attitude importance, we ruled out these alternative mechanisms.

The influence of social identity on selective exposure and affective polarization is fertile soil for future scholarship. We encourage scholars to extend this work into other domains. Do the effects generalize across other issues and identities? The mechanisms described here suggest that making other identities salient should have parallel implications for news selection and affective polarization among those with negative outgroup attitudes.

Another opportunity for future research is to explore how long the effects of priming social identity persist. As with most experiments examining media-induced polarization (but see [Stroud, 2010](#); [Wojcieszak, Azrout, & de Vreese, 2018](#), for panel surveys), the posttest was administered immediately after exposure. The effects, especially the indirect effects on attitudes, may have dissipated soon after the study was complete. However, inasmuch as various media messages or national symbols

continually revive national identity (Butz, 2009), the detected effects could be reinforced in naturalistic settings, a proposition open for future research.

Also, most news presents both pro- and con-issue perspectives, and—given the chance—people select as much or more balanced content than strictly pro- and counter-attitudinal content (Feldman et al., 2013; Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Peralta et al., 2017). Not including a balanced option in the choice set offered to the participants limits the external validity of our study. Similarly, it would be beneficial to offer content on more issues. We introduced immigration news as “top immigration stories” and included non-political articles, yet the external validity of our study and the robustness of our findings would be enhanced had the participants had the opportunity to select news about other issues (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011). These two limitations underscore the fact that our experiments reduced the complexity of the news selection process, and field experiments and observational studies could prove useful.

We also acknowledge the small effect sizes detected. It could be argued that limited exposure to the stimuli, or the lack thereof, could explain the weak mediating effects. Even though the effects are small, it needs to be emphasized that they emerged during one-shot experiments of about twenty minutes. As noted, repetitive exposure to images priming national identity could have reinforcing effects. Detecting these effects (albeit small) in the context of our design is quite telling.

In a similar vein, the low mean exposure to news across both selection studies was a consequence of allowing people to choose not to consume any news. This design maximized both ecological and external validity by allowing the subjects to select from a variety of stories at their convenience (e.g., at the place and time of their choosing), and by allowing them to move forward with the study without constraining their time on the site. As such, the low dose of exposure—even if partly responsible for the weak effects—is substantively important to the results. Importantly, the third study offers some evidence that exposure has the expected effects: pro-attitudinal (anti-immigration) news makes immigration opponents more negative, and the opposite effect emerges for supporters, who become more positive toward immigrants following pro-attitudinal (pro-immigration) exposure.

Despite these limitations, our findings extend prior work on selectivity and affective polarization by showing that both are promoted by a more salient social identity. We began by asking whether heightened attention to national identity could help to explain the extraordinary animosity toward immigrants and whether this was amplified by the high-choice media environment. The answer appears to be yes. When national identity is made salient, citizens not only become more negative toward a personally-disliked outgroup, undocumented immigrants in our case, but also more attentive to pro-attitudinal information, further fueling affective polarization. Given that the importance of American nationality is often evoked in the current political climate, we may see growing hostilities toward those who are seen as outsiders and are not considered a legitimate part of the American nation. The extent to which these results generalize to other social identities, prompting people to reflect on their race or party affiliation, for instance, may also lead to intergroup hostilities, due in part to increased exposure to

news favorable toward the ingroup and/or negative toward the outgroup. The mix of salient group identities and the nearly unlimited media offerings may ultimately undermine social cohesion.

Notes

- 1 This is a corollary of the common intergroup identity model, where priming common or shared intergroup identity decreases the salience of the differences (see Gaertner et al., 2000).
- 2 Partisanship and ideology also reflect one's social identity (Iyengar et al., 2012), and many studies test how these influence news selection (e.g., Democrats turn to MSNBC at greater rates than Republicans; Stroud, 2011). Some studies on media perceptions also account for viewers' social identity (Hartmann & Tanis, 2013; Stroud, Muddiman, & Lee, 2014), without, however, directly manipulating the salience of social identity, as we do here.
- 3 Participants were not told that they were selected based on their immigration attitudes. Instead, they indicated their positions on four policies (path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently in the United States; allowing Syrian refugees to enter the United States; allowing gays and lesbians to legally marry; and allowing a woman to get an abortion), and were then told that they had been randomly assigned to a study about immigration.
- 4 Study 1 included two additional identity prime conditions: individualistic and human. These had no effects on content selection, and so we do not analyze them here.
- 5 Random assignment to conditions was successful, with no significant differences on age ($F_{[1, 216]} = .168, p = .683$), education ($\chi^2_{[5, 218]} = 9.807, p = .081$), full-time employment ($\chi^2_{[1, 218]} = .504, p = .478$), ideology ($F_{[1, 216]} = .004, p = .947$), or gender ($\chi^2_{[1, 218]} = .536, p = .464$).
- 6 We focus on the relative ingroup favorability, because what matters to affective polarization is how people feel toward the outgroup vis-à-vis the ingroup. All models were retested with the two items separately. The prime led to significantly more positive feelings toward Americans, and did not influence feelings toward immigrants. The indirect effects on the individual items via selection were not significant.
- 7 Whereas the other measures refer specifically to illegal immigrants, these items asked about "immigrants" in general. We eliminated this inconsistency in subsequent studies.
- 8 Random assignment to conditions was successful, with no significant differences on age ($F_{[1, 893]} = 2.35, p = .126$), education ($\chi^2_{[6, 895]} = 5.501, p = .481$), full-time employment ($\chi^2_{[7, 895]} = 11.121, p = .133$), or ideology ($F_{[1, 888]} = .316, p = .574$). However, the control group included more females than the national identity condition ($\chi^2_{[1, 895]} = 4.19, p = .041$). We thus control for gender in the analyses.
- 9 Two minor changes to the national identity prime were made. Participants were required to spend at least one minute on the prime, and the sample response "we were all born here" was replaced with "we share a common set of values" to accommodate the inclusion of immigration supporters.
- 10 Because Study 2 included opponents and supporters, the measures refer to "undocumented" rather than "illegal" immigrants. Also, whereas the measure of common intergroup identity in Study 1 asked about "immigrants," Study 2 specified that it is "undocumented immigrants" who are the focus of the question.
- 11 The two feeling-thermometer items were tested separately. The prime did not directly influence feelings toward Americans and made the participants slightly less favorable toward immigrants. There were no interactions with prior attitude. When looking at the

indirect effects via national identity salience, immigration opponents became significantly more positive toward Americans and more negative toward immigrants. Also, among this group, the prime enhanced national identity salience, prompting greater attention to pro-attitudinal articles and leading to more negative feelings toward immigrants. No effects were found for feelings toward Americans. The indirect effects were not significant for immigration supporters.

- 12 It is not clear why the prime decreased attitude strength and issue interest. Post hoc analyses suggest that for immigration supporters (not opponents), decreased attitude strength and issue interest mediated (in some cases) the effects from the prime to affective polarization (results available upon request). Although investigating these nuanced relationships is beyond the scope of this paper, they merit additional scrutiny in future studies.
- 13 There were no significant differences on the key socio-demographics between (a) the national identity prime versus control (age, $M = 25.76$ vs $M = 22.89$, $p = .148$; ideology, $M = 4.46$ vs $M = 4.43$, $p = .424$; gender, $\chi^2_{[1, 242]} = .016$, $p = .90$) or (b) pro- and counter-attitudinal exposure conditions ($M = 24.78$ vs $M = 23.90$, $p = .196$; ideology, $M = 4.45$ vs $M = 4.43$, $p = .591$; gender, $\chi^2_{[1, 242]} = .017$, $p = .895$). The only difference emerged for education; those in the national prime condition and those in the pro-attitudinal exposure condition had significantly lower educational levels than the control and the counter-attitudinal exposure conditions ($M_{\text{prime}} = 5.11$, $M_{\text{control}} = 5.45$, $p = .024$; $M_{\text{pro}} = 5.09$, $M_{\text{counter}} = 5.47$, $p = .024$). We controlled for education in our models.
- 14 The two items were tested separately. The prime did not directly influence feelings toward Americans and made the participant less favorable toward immigrants. There were no interactions with prior attitude.

Acknowledgment

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at *Human Communication Research* online.

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