Article

The Problem of Citizens: E-Democracy for Actually Existing Democracy

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Abstract

This article argues that many contemporary e-democracy projects, particularly in the United States, have at their heart a model of atomistic, independent, rational, and general-interest citizens. As such, these projects, variously grouped under the labels of e-governance, online deliberation, open government, and civic technology, often assume a broad shared consensus about collective definitions of "public problems" that both does not exist and sidesteps debates over what these problems are and what potential solutions can and should be. Drawing on recent theories of political parties, social identity, and cultural cognition, this article argues that e-democracy efforts need to account for the fact that the citizens practitioners appeal to see themselves by default as members of social groups, and that this has implications for politics and what Jasanoff calls "civic epistemology." Presenting the case of attempting to change Republican opinions about climate change, I argue that e-democracy initiatives should seek to foster collaboration and deliberation *within*, not between, parties and among partisans. To do so, e-democratic reformers need to explicitly structure the collaborative and deliberative environment so there is a range of intra-party opinions and beliefs as part of the consultative and policy-making process.

Nearly a decade ago, Andrew Chadwick (2006) made the well-known and oft-cited declaration that "with the notable exceptions of some community networks . . . the road to e-democracy is littered with the burnt out hulks of failed projects" (p. 102). While Chadwick was writing at a time before the explosion of "social media" platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, contemporary academic writings on the subject generally take a similarly dim view. Margolis and Moreno-Riaño (2013, p. 17), for instance, concluded both that the Internet has failed to spur revolutionary changes in political participation and that even if it had the ends toward which this participation was directed would not necessarily be democratically desirable. Katz, Barris, and Jain (2013) argue that

> Rather than relying on: "the wisdom of the crowd" to set policy, opposition and confrontation at the leadership level are far more important dimensions of the political process. Conflicts over broad national policy cannot, and should not, be avoided or short-circuited through reliance on ever-more-powerful social media tools. In the final analysis, social media-based town halls and aggregations of "likes" and Tweets do not add up to representative democracy. (p. 5)

The course of the literature over the last decade reflects a movement away from the early utopian hopes that the Internet would create a more participatory and deliberative polity and attenuate the power of elites. Refreshingly, scholars have embraced more political realist views of the value of representative democracy and the limits of public attention and engagement, and, as such, have seen the meager capacity of digital and social media to create better democracy. Even in comparatively more optimistic accounts, for instance, there are prevalent concerns over the lack of inclusiveness of many e-democracy efforts and the possibility of exacerbating existing participatory inequalities (Firmstone & Coleman, 2015; Shane, 2012).

And yet, despite the skeletal frames of burned out e-democracy projects and general failure to incorporate social media into policy-making processes, the ghost of digital democracy still animates much of the trade literature and the dreams of funders at powerful organizations such as the Knight Foundation, particularly in the United States. For

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example, in November, the US General Services Administration launched the "US Public Participation Playbook" (2015), a collaborative document of the Public Participation Working Group (itself a collaboration between federal agencies, foundations, and nonprofit organizations), designed to further "open government," a diffuse concept spanning transparency and public participation. The GovLab (2015), hosted at New York University in partnership with Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Media Lab and funded by the MacArthur and Knight Foundations, "brings together thinkers and doers who design, implement, and study technology enabled solutions that advance a collaborative, networked approach to reinvent institutions of governance." In 2015, the organization announced the launch of the GovLab academy designed to mentor and teach "civic entrepreneurs" (GovLab Academy, 2015). The idea of harnessing the power of social and digital media to create new and more robust forms of democracy is alive and well.

How might we reconcile academic skepticism about e-democracy in many quarters with practitioner enthusiasm about the power of digital and social media to restore the health of contemporary democracy? This article seeks to make a contribution to the literature on, and practice of, e-democracy in its many guises by embracing the empirical and normative importance of something that is almost entirely absent from the literature and reform projects in all their guises (except in explicitly and implicitly pejorative terms): parties and partisanship in representative democracy. I use the expansive "e-democracy" throughout this article as the umbrella term that refers to various projects of e-governance, civic technology, online deliberation, and civic technology (for a similarly expansive view, see Chadwick, 2008). While there are differences between these things that would be the subject of an article in its own right, my argument is that they generally share the same model of atomistic, independent, rational, and general-interest citizens.

I argue that we need to take better account of parties and partisanship on both empirical and normative grounds. Empirically, political scientists, Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2004), demonstrate that partisanship is rooted in citizens' social identity, and scholars working under the emerging paradigm of "cultural cognition theory" have shown how identity shapes epistemology, at the broadest level perceptions as to what constitutes a fact versus an opinion. Normatively, I draw on political theorist Nancy Rosenblum's (2008) arguments that parties form the organizational and symbolic basis of democracy to argue for the value, both on practical and democratic terms, for using social media to foster *intra-party* collaboration and deliberation.

I do so to argue that scholarship and e-democracy initiatives alike need to account for parties as the broader symbolic carriers of social affiliation and identification, and the primary organizational, ideological, social, and psychological locus of representative democracy. Unfortunately, the one thing that has not changed since Chadwick's review of the

literature and two decades of technologically enabled government reform efforts more broadly is the stubborn persistence of models of atomistic, independent, rational, and general-interest citizens. Michael Schudson (1998) referred to this as the idealized "good" citizen first formulated during the progressive era, yet stubbornly persistent in our own time. Jeffrey Alexander (2006) usefully (but a-historically) argued that this idea of the citizen is a durable part of the cultural structure of civil life. Regardless of the origins of thinking about citizens as unattached agents free of prior commitments, political values, and social identity, it is a fiction that guides how many reformers and scholars alike think about e-democracy projects, and it has stymied our ability to think creatively and realistically about the potentials for harnessing social media in pursuit of more justifiable policy ends.

How would e-democracy theory and practice look if they more fully accounted for the role of parties, partisanship, and social identities in democracy, and ultimately embraced them as an empirical starting point? First, instead of celebrating and, indeed, presuming that those participating in projects of e-democracy through social media are unattached, unaffiliated, rational, and general-interest citizens, the model citizen should be seen as partisan-affiliated and having existing social attachments, identities, and values. Indeed, one irony is that "model citizens" in terms of engagement, participation, attentiveness, and knowledge are precisely those who are most partisan (or act in ways indistinguishable from partisans) and ideological (Bartels, 2009). Second, we would have more e-democracy initiatives that seek to foster collaboration and deliberation *within*, not just between, parties and among partisans (and, by extension, the social groups they are containers and proxies of). Third, we would have more e-democracy projects explicitly *designed* to support intra-partisan and intra-social group deliberation and collaboration (in addition to current inter-group and inter-party project models). In contrast to the literature on deliberation (Wright & Street, 2007), this would entail presenting citizens with contrasting information *from people within their own partisan social group*. Fourth, the outcomes of e-governance would be measured in terms of change within parties and partisan groups in terms of the platforms and issues they support or prioritize, as well as the facts they accept. Finally, we would have more e-democracy projects that are attuned, as a matter of course, with a *defined goal or end* (in stark contrast with procedural theories of democracy). As Walker, McQuarrie, and Lee (2014, p. 8) conclude their sweeping indictment of what they call "the new public participation," the challenge to "activists, citizens, and scholars" is to "think through what kinds of participation yield the positive outcomes we seek and what prevents their realization" (see also Lee, 2014).

Why do we need an approach to e-democracy that accounts for actually existing democracy? This approach would change the way practitioners and scholars design technical platforms and participatory processes, moving these

efforts away from a presumption of general-interest citizens and toward the explicit goal of fostering intra-party deliberation and collaboration. If successful, intra-party communication potentially would have the effect of broadening partisans' understanding of the range of existing and possible debate, values, and ideologies within their own party and social groups. At its best, this approach would foster more opportunities for "party-network" (Skinner et al., 2012) wide discussion of the values, beliefs, goals, and aims of parties and their affiliated groups, strategies for governance, paths to achieve power, and ways to achieve public policy aims. To illustrate this potential, this article provides a brief discussion of how e-democracy platforms for intra-party deliberation and collaboration might work, taking up the well-documented US Republican intransigence on accepting human-caused climate change as a matter of scientific consensus.

This article proceeds in three parts. First, I briefly review the current literature on e-democracy, focusing on the United States, and show how it generally presumes deliberative, atomistic, and non-partisan citizens as both a normative good and empirical fact. I then take up both political philosophy and empirical political science on parties and social identification processes to suggest that parties, partisanship, and social attachments are not only indelible features of democracy, they serve important social and psychological ends. Third, I suggest how accounting for partisanship and social attachments can potentially change approaches to e-governance through a case study of how we can create intra-party deliberation around climate change.

E-Democracy

Since the widespread adoption of the Internet, and even much earlier in works stretching from Eric Fromm to Ithiel de Sola Pool, scholars and public intellectuals alike have held up the hope that computers and networked digital technologies more generally would create new forms of civic participation and citizen engagement in the policy-making process. Over the past decade, with the advent of and growth in social media, there has been an explosion of work looking at how the affordances of these platforms may facilitate everything from crowdsourcing municipal services to soliciting public input onto the workings of the legislative and executive branches.

Within much scholarship on these efforts, however, there seems to be disappointment. To take one prominent example, the Minnesota e-democracy project has lasted for more than 20 years and has been cited many times for its potential to realize a more deliberative online public sphere (see Dahlberg, 2001a). And yet, as Dahlberg (2001b) himself pointed out, and more recent analyses have confirmed (Jensen, 2006), participants in the project are those already most politically engaged. More broadly, scholars have presented growing evidence that shifts in digital technologies do not overcome the lack of resources and interest among

citizens to participate in democratic life, the lack of will among bureaucrats, agency staffers, and elected officials to use technologies for participatory, as opposed to broadcast, purposes, and finally the legal and institutional strictures that limit certain forms of civic input (often for very good reasons) (for a review, see Chadwick, 2006; Davis, 2010; Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013).

In the face of such limits, some contemporary mediated democratic reform efforts by both practitioners and scholars have creatively embraced projects that require very little conscious citizen participation at all. The first falls under the rubric of "civic technology" or "civic tech." A group of foundations, public intellectuals, and practitioners promote civic tech as a way to create good governance through technology. While seldom made explicit, the efforts around civic tech are primarily oriented toward those individuals, programmers or otherwise that are already the most likely to be engaged, or intrinsically interested, in civic reform efforts. In other words, civic tech projects do not require a broad-based, or especially diverse, group of individuals to participate (although that is certainly a desirable goal in that literature and for practitioners). Civic tech orients itself around civic entrepreneurs using technology to improve government and create public goods.

A useful survey of the field comes from the Knight Foundation's report on civic tech. The Knight Foundation (2013) report defines civic tech in terms of a diffuse array of private and nonprofit organizations that are pursuing, often with foundation and private support, technology-oriented projects around data access and transparency, improved public services, participation in deliberative democratic and community planning projects, interaction with government officials, voter participation, peer-to-peer civic crowd funding, social campaigns, and local information and goods sharing. Prominent examples include projects such as Code for America (2015), which is dedicated to leveraging technology to make "governmental services simple, effective, and easy to use," and GovLab, which leverages technology to enable institutions and people to better collaborate to solve public problems. In these efforts, there is little explicit reference to who is participating outside of a broad call to participate. At the same time, many of these civic tech projects can be achieved by highly motivated individuals, often with specialized skills, that leverage technologies to create public goods such as improvements in public infrastructure.

Another set of recent efforts in the e-democracy movement and literature espouse a form of what David Karpf (2012) has termed "passive democratic feedback." Passive democratic feedback encompasses the ways governmental institutions and civic organizations leverage data on generally anonymous users to improve upon services or respond to public preferences. The examples of this form of e-democracy are numerous, from the ways that Google search data can be harnessed to predict the emergence or spread of contagious diseases and the use of "smart meters" in homes to

create greater efficiencies in electrical power, to the monitoring of traffic patterns in order to design more efficient transit systems (Marres, 2010; Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013; Morabito, 2012). The general approach of these efforts lies in the leveraging of "big" and ambient data to engender forms of passive participation. Digital devices produce the data that reveal aggregate patterns in social life.

While an extensive review of these projects and their associated academic and practitioner literature is well beyond the scope of this essay, what unites these two contemporary efforts around e-democracy are the very small demands placed on, and expectations for, citizens themselves. While these efforts may or may not be conscious of the earlier failings of citizen-centric e-governance, these projects all work around the problem of the general lack of interest among citizens by developing alternative mechanisms, from focusing on those most engaged to collecting valuable citizen input with little to no conscious effort required at all. These projects reflect what Chadwick (2008) calls for in terms of a new e-democracy movement that accounts for both the limited capacities of citizens and the unique affordances of digitally networked technologies.

These and other reform efforts have no doubt led to many important, and positive, innovations in e-democracy. However, many of these projects and much of the literature generally lacks a theory of the citizen that goes beyond a default notion of general interest, independent, and ideologically pragmatic participants in these projects. In other words, many technologically oriented projects of democratic reform espouse the idea of *pure* citizens counter-posed to the workings of ideology, partisanship, social attachments, and governing elites and institutions, echoing more broadly a comparatively older deliberative democracy literature and centuries of popular strains of democratic wishfulness (Morone, 1998). When ideas of partisanship, ideology, and social attachment are addressed at all, many practitioners and scholars generally hold these things to be corrupting general-interest citizens both as an empirical fact and a normative ideal. For example, in their recent comprehensive review of the literature on e-government and various projects of open government reform encompassing 80 articles from 44 different journals, Hansson, Belkacem, and Ekenberg (2015) argue that

> The issue of who actually participates is not addressed. The public is seen as one homogenous group, without diverse needs or political interests. Of all reviewed articles, only 7 define "the public" or "citizens" as heterogeneous groups that consist of individuals with different interests or with unequal means to participate. (p. 8)

Schudson (1998) has traced the history of this ideal citizen from the progressive era onward showing how this rational, engaged, apolitical citizen is still held up by reformers and scholars as a normative democratic ideal. Furthermore,

this ideal still has animating force even after six decades of empirical work on the American public that suggests the limited interest in and knowledge citizens have of public policy matters, as well as the stubborn persistence of partisan and group interests in politics (see Bartels, 2009 for a review).

The problem with the idea of pure citizens is that people are rarely the unattached and general-interest individuals many reform efforts and scholars assume and hold up as an ideal. Scholars have often presumed that civil society is the realm of social solidarity through democratic participation (for a review and critique of this idea, see Walker, McQuarrie, and Lee, 2015. This view posits that partisan identity falls away outside of the arena of formal, agonistic politics and neglects all the ways that contemporary political parties are made up of networks of civil society and movement organizations (Kreiss, 2014). Even more, many reformists imagine that there are universal values such as "good government service" that stand outside of politics and partisanship itself, a view that seems to overlook much of the nature of contemporary political debates. What do we do, for instance, with a US political party and philosophy that values government not working at all in many domains so as to ultimately shrink its role in public and civic life (an entirely legitimate political position)? At their best, many efforts at reform ignore such complications or assume a broad shared consensus about collective definitions of "public problems" that sidesteps debates over what these problems are and what potential solutions can and should be.[1] In doing so, many e-democracy efforts evacuate the political from democracy in assuming that innovations in civic engagement can be neutrally directed toward broad, shared ends.[2] This is why many of the civic technology projects detailed above celebrate individuals wielding technologies according to their own vision of the "public good," given the assumption ends are shared and non-controversial. At a deeper level, many e-democracy projects seem to assume that technology will bring us to an apolitical, communitarian state of nature, and away from agonistic institutional democratic processes that are conceived of being a bug, not a feature of social life. At their worst, some e-democracy projects smuggle liberal progressive values into the public sphere under the guise of reform, without the hard work of addressing the broader fight over political values.

There is much to commend within the e-democracy movement. Who, after all, but the most extreme among us would take issue with such things as more efficient government and expanded participation in democratic processes? The problem is that a significant proportion of the membership of an American political party, in a two-party system, rejects precisely the starting point of many efforts at e-democratic reform (as they do efforts to provide health care to citizens and create a more sustainable society in the face of overwhelming scientific consensus about environmental devastation.) Indeed, it would be interesting to see the conservative goal of lessening government, perhaps through

truncating the ability of government to research itself (*see* Baumgartner & Jones, 2014), to be a stated aim of civic innovators utilizing the online tools of the GovLab Academy.

Rethinking Parties and Social Identity

As detailed above, the common thread linking many and diverse approaches to e-democracy is the presumption that citizens are, prior to participating in civic technology projects, independent, free of cultural and social identities that make them particularistic, and non-partisan.[3] In the process, this model of the citizen presumes that people are oriented to a general interest, or seek to achieve it through their civic participation, and that participatory projects can somehow be free from political values in finding common, shared ground. The problem is that citizens are not only always socially embedded and have pre-existing cultural identities and attachments, how they are socially located shapes the political values they have, the ends they seek, and the motivations they have to participate. There is no discrete realm of "civic" participation that can be separated from political values and partisan identity. Consider, for instance, the striking finding that only ideological progressives value more walkable communities and sustainable houses (Pew, 2014). In this world, where is good government to start?

Political philosopher Nancy Rosenblum's (2008) On the Side of Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship and Green et al.'s (2004) Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters make this point in various ways and using different language. Both of these works make, to varying extents, three key points that undermine many of the assumptions of the e-democracy efforts (and a broader literature on normative democratic and civil society theory) cited above. First, partisan and social group identification come prior to the individual's political interests, values, and drives (see also, Dewey, The Public and Its Problems on this very point). Second, parties, and the cultural groups that citizens perceive them to be made up of, structure politics and, in turn, shape political identity, values, and attitudes. Third, deliberation should take place within parties and social groups. In essence, this shifts the emphasis from deliberation between parties to within parties. And, as a fourth point worth considering here, Rosenblum argues that parties are normatively desirable from a democratic perspective, and to that end seeks to develop an explicit ethics of partisanship.

As Rosenblum (2008) argues, "antipartyism" and "antipartisanship" have long and distinguished histories in both political philosophy and culture. When contemporary political philosophers discuss parties at all, an extraordinarily rare occurrence, they are often the target of a reactive antipartyism that animates much political discourse. And, while political scientists have parties at the center of (most) theories of electoral outcomes, normatively they are viewed with the same skepticism. In the field of communication, the philosophers and empiricists that have laid the groundwork for much normative theorizing exhibit the same general tendency. Habermas is, of course, famously skeptical of political groups and organized interests as the perversion of rational, general-interest-oriented individuals in the bourgeois public sphere (*see* Fraser, 1990, for her critique of the philosopher's neglect of "actually existing democracy"). Meanwhile, two decades of work on e-deliberation, e-governance, and political participation and civic engagement online often implicitly or explicitly embrace the same normative models (Chadwick, 2006, 2008).

Contra this quite powerful "democratic wish" (Morone, 1998), Rosenblum (2008) advances a theory of the "moral distinctiveness of partisanship" (p. 7). While her arguments in a 588-page book are too extensive to recapitulate here, it is worth drawing out a few of her broad claims that are relevant to the e-democracy efforts detailed above. Rosenblum argues that partisanship both actively acknowledges and embraces (not just bemoans) pluralism, as partisans adopt a worldview that explicitly acknowledges they are one among many social groups in a multicultural society and representative democracy. Parties produce partisans (not the other way around) and more broadly create the issues, positions, and divisions upon which democracy is based. In other words, parties do not so much reflect or represent issue positions in the electorate; they produce them. Partisans are responsible for hashing out a running intra-party consensus amid heterogeneity, and the issue positions adopted by the two parties (in the United States) come to define not only lines of division, but also the political center. Deliberation occurs within parties in the course of partisans' attempts to pursue power, and parties also play a distinctive role in democracy in having the burden, and responsibility, of mobilizing citizens to participate in democratic life. Parties also have the broad responsibility to balance the interests that make up their coalition (which civil society groups and movement organizations do not have to do, although as recent scholarship has pointed out, these groups are a part of party networks; for a review, see Kreiss, 2014). And, finally, from a normative perspective but also as a general matter of practice, partisans should strive for democratic inclusion, comprehensiveness of issues, and a commitment to compromise to get the business of the party, and the polity, done. When partisans and parties fail to do these things, they are extremists. Indeed, Rosenblum notes the irony that the celebrated "civil society organization" is the foremost example of political extremism, given that it often pursues single issues at the expense of multi-issue coalitions and tends to be the most uncompromising.

Meanwhile, Green et al. (2004) argue that partisanship is a social identity. In these authors' formulation, partisanship is analogous to religious identification in that it comes *prior* to adopting a set of policy preferences and political values: "When people feel a sense of belonging to a given social group, they absorb the doctrinal positions that the group advocates" (p. 4). This means that partisan identification

formed during early adulthood is not rooted in the rational consideration of the issue positions of the two parties, but in social identification that then creates partisans and political attitudes. As these authors argue, "Democrats" and "Republicans" (and "Independents") are relatively enduring social groups perceived by voters to have certain symbolic and stereotypical qualities forged in history.[4] Stereotypes concerning the Democratic Party include it being the party of the working class, unions, poor, minorities, and common people, while Republicans are associated with business, capitalists, and those in a high socio-economic class (p. 9). As the authors summarize, "the terms *Democrats* and *Republicans* clearly call to mind different constituent groups, and how people feel about these social categories has a great deal to do with whether they identify with a partisan group, and if so, which one" (emphasis in the original, p. 10). Furthermore, Green, Palmquist, and Schickler's argument implies that partisanship is a meta-identity that encompasses a number of different social groups. Given the nature of the American two-party system, many groups band together under the banner of a common political party, which in turn means that citizens with different forms of social identification and attachment (and who may not agree on all matters of political and cultural value) will share a common partisan orientation. This is a key point for creating intra-party deliberation, returned to below.

Young adults not only come to associate the two parties with these groups, they see themselves in relation to them, and ultimately categorize themselves in partisan terms on the basis of their social identity. From a policy perspective, as suggested above, parties *produce* what partisans believe. In the context of political debates, parties "instruct partisan supporters on how right thinking Democrats or Republicans view" issues (p. 27), although those identifying with parties can, and do, disagree with party leaders (and on some issues, these elites may be divided themselves). The authors conclude by arguing that partisan attachments structure politics by creating "team" memberships that drive political participation, care about the outcomes of elections, and the impetus to choose leaders that help the team, which in turn create broad stability in electoral politics and governance. Partisan identification also shows no signs of waning: "people continue to identify as partisans, continue to vote on the basis of these identifications, and seem to cheer for one of the parties" (p. 20). At the same time, the core of Green, Palmquist, and Schickler's argument is that social identification theory suggests probabilistic tendencies, not deterministic relationships. In other words, the relationships between parties, social groups, and political preferences are not ironclad, but probabilistic.

An extensive body of recent work has shown how social identity, and by extension partisanship, conditions the acceptance of scientific facts. The most developed line of work falls under the theory of "cultural cognition." In work on the "science of science communication," scholars have generally attempted to understand the paradox that "never have

human societies *known so much* about mitigating the dangers they face but *agreed so little* about what they collectively know" (Kahan, 2015, p. 1, emphasis in the original). While early works on science communication focused on a lack of information among the public and the need to create science literacy as well as psychological biases, cultural cognition theory posits that when facts are associated with different social groups, "individuals selectively assess evidence in patterns that reflect their group identities," whether they are grounded in morality, sociality, value, or partisanship (Kahan, 2015). In other words, individuals in different cultural groups will take opposing sides on factual issues depending on how those facts are viewed by the peer group they see themselves belonging too (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Nyhan et al., 2014).

Partisanship plays into this (for differences among Republican, Democratic, and Independent-identifying citizens' attitudes in relation to science, see Blank & Shaw, 2015; see E. C. Nisbet, Cooper, & Kelly Garrett, 2015 for how conservatives and liberals alike respond similarly to dissonant information). As detailed above, people imagine themselves affiliated with particular parties that consist of groups aligned with their broader social identities. What people accept as "facts" is often associated, in turn, with what those party groups are willing to accept. In other words, to retread the discussion above, parties "instruct partisan supporters on how right thinking Democrats or Republicans view" (Green et al., 2004, p. 27) scientific facts and controversies. For example, Kahan, Hank, Tarantola, Silva, and Braman (2015) argue that partisan media can undermine acceptance of expertise and contribute to polarization given the ways these outlets associate facts with social groupings.

What is clear from this literature, on balance, is that many e-democracy initiatives need a more sophisticated account of citizens in order to design better reform interventions and create more robust collaborative, consultative, and policy-making processes. For example, the insights of the literature on partisanship and cultural cognition challenge the underlying models of citizenship prevalent in much of the e-democracy literature and many recent efforts at civic reform, particularly those in the United States that hold out the hope for technologies of participation. What would be different about this literature and these projects if we took seriously the insight that, as a matter of course, the citizens scholars and practitioners appeal to see themselves by default as members of social groups, and that this has implications for politics and what Jasanoff (2011) calls "civic epistemology," or "public ways of knowing"? For one, scholars and practitioners would create more opportunities for deliberation within, not exclusively between, parties and those individuals that identify with them. At the same time, in efforts aimed explicitly at political change, scholars and practitioners would seek out a balance of intra-group opinion. I turn now to the case of climate change to suggest how this might work in practice.

The Problem of Climate Change

Climate change is a partisan issue. It was not always this way. In their history of the evolution of the issue, Dunlap and McCright (2008) characterize the debate over climate change as a "widening gap" between the scientific establishment and Democratic Party on one side, and the conservative movement and Republican Party on the other, that began taking shape in the 1980s. The partisan division over environmental issues and the Republican turn from science began during the Reagan administration, with the party increasingly embracing a framing of environmental policy issues that emphasized differences and trade-offs between environmentalism and economic growth. This led Republicans to downplay increasing scientific concerns about climate change and its potential consequences, and emphasize economic growth (itself a false trade-off with respect to the environment). The divergence of the Republican Party from scientific consensus and the Democratic Party accelerated in the 1990s after the 1994 Republican revolution, as conservatives in think tanks, anti-climate change research organizations, and government actively worked to undermine the state of scientific consensus on climate change and any effort toward crafting public policy that would seek to address the issue, in part through mounting a large-scale media misinformation effort. This "Republicanization" of the denial of climate change science has, in turn, produced significant differences in public opinion toward the issue depending on partisan affiliation, social identification, and ideology (Hoffman, 2015).

The Republicanization of the denial of climate science was the product of a deliberate set of actions by conservative business and movement groups. As McCright and Dunlap (2003) argue, the failure of the Kyoto accords was a decade in the making with the framing of the "non-problematicity" of climate change among the conservative, anti-environmental countermovement. As these authors argue, despite scientific consensus, growing public concern about the issue, and agenda setting in the professional press, from the 1990s on the conservative movement was successful in challenging the legitimacy of global warming and, even more, was able to construct it as a "non-problem" (see Freudenburg, 2000). Indeed, what is important, and subtle, about McCright and Dunlap's study is that they show how a countermovement removed an issue *already on the public agenda.* Meanwhile, Bill Clinton's embrace of the state of climate science and efforts at public education in advance of the Kyoto accords served to increase the issue public around climate change among Democrats, and further made the issue a matter of partisan identity (Krosnick, Holbrook & Visser, 2000).

While the dynamics of partisanship, science, and public policy around climate change is considerably more complicated than I have the space to address here (for a book length work, see Hoffman, 2015), for my purposes, what is salient

are the ways the conservative countermovement engaged in the successful circulation of counter-claims to scientific consensus regarding the facts, causes, and impacts of climate change. What would it take to expand the discursive space within which Republicans discuss climate change in the attempt to move them in line with the overwhelming scientific consensus, which Naomi Oreskes (2004) prominently declared in 2004 on the pages of *Science* after analyzing 20 years of climate science? Much scholarly work under the rubric of the "public understanding of science" has sought to critique, and ultimately improve, journalistic coverage of the issue as strategic conservative actors seek to sow doubt, undermine scientific claims, and ultimately produce ignorance among the public (Stocking & Holstein, 2009). Civic tech efforts offer an alternative approach that goes beyond information, however. A Google search for "civic tech" and "climate change" returns over 200,000 results chronicling everything from how social media, network organizing, and "connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) lead to climate marches and efforts to create "resilient cities" that are environmentally sustainable, to using digital tools to "scale up" participation to confront macro-structures of power (Tufekci, 2014) and hundreds of projects to "Hack Climate Change."

While better communication about the state of climate science is certainly welcome, as is more (and global) participation around the issue, the discussion above and research in cultural cognition theory suggests that these efforts will be for naught if claims that embrace science, and human responsibility for climate change, do not come from the parties and social groups that skeptical citizens and their representatives belong to. This is not to say that public demonstrations and pressure including efforts organized through digital and social media do not have effects on policy-making (see Branton, Martinez-Ebers, Carey, & Matsubayashi, 2015). It is to say that we have generally relied too much on the seeming virtues of better information and participation among the converted, none of which are likely to win over those who do not identify with the sources of this information or the people in the streets. And, at least in America, where one party can wield enormous power to frustrate change, the social groups that these deniers belong to are associated with conservatism and the Republican Party (Dunlap & McCright, 2008; McCright & Dunlap, 2011; M. C. Nisbet, 2009; Villar & Krosnick, 2011).

Designing Intra-Party Deliberation Into Social Media Forums

How should we pursue e-democratic projects around climate change given the insights of theorists of political parties and social identity who suggest not only that people sort themselves into relatively enduring partisan groups, but that this also conditions what people accept as scientific facts? The answer to this question has implications not only for

efforts to create deliberative projects using digital media technologies, but also civic tech ones as well. It would be odd, after all, if in pursuing deliberative or individualized projects of social reform we remain agnostic about the *ends* of change, never seek to open them up to scrutiny, or treat them all as equally valuable and without partisan or social implications.

This is precisely the tendency in the existing literature around environmental deliberation (for a book length review, see Bäckstrand, 2010). Graham Smith (2003, p. 72; emphasis in the original), for instance, has written extensively about environmental deliberation, but in his emphasis on a procedural definition of democracy has expressly noted that "there is no *guarantee* that decisions emerging from deliberative processes will necessarily embody environmental values." Even still, many scholars and practitioners believe that deliberation will lead to positive environmental ends, a tendency that Lövbrand and Khan (2010, p. 60), in their review of the literature, conclude is "highly utopian" (p. 61) and rests on an "optimistic belief in the cognitive capacity and moral potential of the rational citizen," with the "hope that inclusive and unconstrained reason-giving will help to transform personal preferences in favor of cooperative and collective solutions to environmental problems."

What would an alternative approach look like? First, in contrast to procedural approaches, e-democratic projects around climate change should embrace clear, normatively desirable outcomes. Second, while Smith (2009, p. 81) has documented the use of stratified random sampling to ensure the representation of certain demographic groups ("mini-publics") in the context of deliberative projects, e-democratic projects should explicitly select participants based on partisan identity. In the American context of addressing the climate change issue, this means that social reformers should explicitly convene *Republican-identifying* citizens for the purposes of deliberation, participation, and collaboration around the issue (for different approaches to institutional design see Smith, 2001). In other words, following Rosenblum, the proper locus of deliberation is *within* the party because these individuals will be drawn from a perceived common social group, even though there are multiple groups within the Republican Party. Third, with this social group established, reformers should expressly recruit participants that are representative of the *range* (not the sum total) of views that exist within the Republican Party. The design of deliberative and participatory social media projects around climate change should take its cues from the intellectual framework provided by a body of positive first amendment theory that has underpinned reform efforts such as the public journalism movement, where "a collective right to hear is as important as an individual's right to self-expression" (Ananny & Kreiss, 2011, p. 6).

Namely, the important thing is not that everyone speaks, lest the voices of Republicans who embrace the facts, causes, and consequences of climate change in line with science get drowned out. The emphasis is on every argument having a chance to be heard. This would necessarily promote those voices in the Republican Party that have been comparatively marginalized, particularly with respect to conservative media outlets such as FOX News and the Koch brothers' network of advocacy organizations. Indeed, there is a bevy of work that suggests that while Republicans on the whole reject the idea that climate change is a fact and that it is man-made, there is a marked range of diversity within the party, exemplified not only in former presidential candidate Jon Huntsman's position on the issue, but also a range of Christian stewardship movements (see Berry, 2006; Wardekker et al., 2009). And, not only should the designers of e-democracy efforts seek to promote these voices, responsible journalism should provide these voices with a platform as well.

In other words, while there has historically been a reluctance in the literature on online deliberation, e-governance, and civic technology to posit any particular normatively desirable ends of change, those seeking to leverage social media for collaboration, consultation, deliberation, or public policy-making need to posit clear *ends* for change, specify the *extant and relevant* social groups given the *social context* for the rejection of scientific facts, and explicitly *structure* the deliberative and collaborative environment so there is a range of in-group opinions represented.[5]

In practice, this means putting Republican scientists who believe in human-caused climate change (scientists who self-identify as Republicans and can communicate their in-group status while embracing climate science) together with climate change deniers. It would involve putting religious conservatives who embrace, and deny, climate change together on social media to present their arguments or collaborate on an e-democratic project. It would also entail putting Republicans who are unsure what to think together with other Republicans on both sides of the intra-party debate. At the same time, following much of James Fishkin's (1991) work on deliberative polling, it would also entail providing information on the current state of scientific consensus, and as importantly information on the range of debate within the Republican Party.

Conclusion

Of course, the prospect for widespread change with any initiative around e-democracy is small. That said, despite the flowering of many recent efforts, scholars and practitioners alike need to rethink conventional views of who participates in e-democracy initiatives to take better account of the social, cultural, and political attachments of citizens. As new work suggests, providing more and better information alone is no panacea with respect to changing people's minds about scientific facts (Quiggin, 2015; Stobbe, 2015). Current work suggests that the best we can hope for is for issues to not become politicized in the first place (Nyhan, 2014), which does not help much when it comes to issues that are

already politicized. Politicization is, unfortunately, out of our hands in a democracy. Strategic actors, such as those who deny climate change, know they can manipulate public debate to achieve their own financial or social ends. Meanwhile, participation is roundly embraced as a democratic value, and for good reason. But calls for participation that are agnostic about the ends worth fighting for, are blind to the ways that participation among some social groups may cause retrenchment in others, and fail to confront "manufactured ignorance" (Solomon, 2014) head on, are unlikely to help much either.

As detailed above, one potential path to address issues such as climate change is to embrace, and manufacture, the range of debate within political parties and social groups. We can design deliberative and civic participatory spaces that account not only for the fact that citizens are socially embedded, but that they are differently situated with respect to their political values and "cultural expectations about how knowledge should be made authoritative" (Jasanoff, 2011, p. 249). While Jasanoff concerned herself with national and civilizational ways of knowing (i.e., western), we need to think of differences in public ways of knowing that exist within national, partisan, and social group cultures. Indeed, the Republican Party's current relationship to science more closely resembles what the technology theorist Ezrahi (2004) called "outformation" than information. Outformation rests on "cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and other dimensions of experience" serving as legitimate forms of public knowing. Outformation is a turn from an "independent reality against which claims of accurate or valid accounts can be checked and criticized" (Ezrahi, 2004, p. 268). Outformations engage people through emotional and aesthetic appeals, but in the process, they turn from public reason and undermine collective ways of acting on a shared basis according to independent ways of knowing the world (which science ideally serves). Despite 40 years of debates in the philosophy and sociology of science, the institution of science still makes the collective, difficult, agonistic, and durable process of fact-making the best path towards establishing the empirical grounds upon which we can act (see Latour, 1987, 2004).

If Ezrahi is correct, we have a crisis between information and outformation. To recover our collective ways of acting on the basis of a shared and verifiable reality (however imperfectly realized), we need to acknowledge different civic epistemologies, and work toward ends that we can justify and defend. To do so, reformers need to be more explicit about the design of deliberative and collaborative forums and give up the fiction that they can appeal to general-interest and undifferentiated citizens that do not exist, or else they will ride the middle of the road to nowhere.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. See, for instance, the framing of GovLab's coaching programs at: http://govlabacademy.org/coaching-programs.html
2. See, for instance, the ways in which "local lawmaking" is entirely vacated of the conflict that underlies democracy: http://govlabacademy.org/civic-tech-for-local-legislatures-and-legislators-detail.html
3. Legacy journalism has a similar model of its audience.
4. More research is needed on the cultural processes by which the symbolic images of parties come to be created.
5. The long-standing tradition in the deliberation literature, perhaps stemming from Habermas's formative emphasis of a procedural-, not ends-, based theory, has been to bracket any discussion at all of the ends of change. Online deliberative and civic tech projects have embraced this ends agnostic approach as well, in all likelihood based on both a theoretical commitment to process-oriented theories and a desire to appear non-partisan. While this may be a noble sentiment, we are well past the time of embracing a false equivalence between the two parties' respective positions on scientific issues.

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