

# Partisan Media and Political Discussion as Regulators of Identity

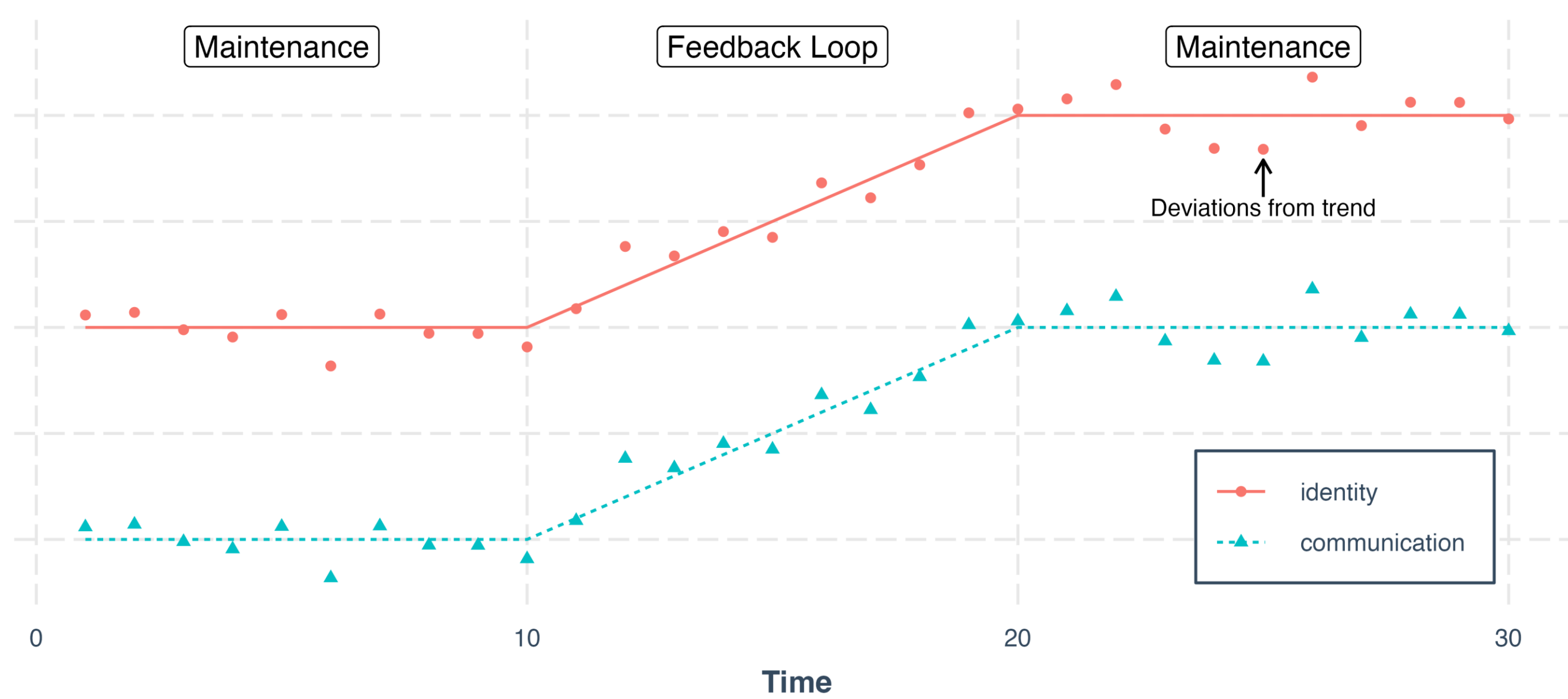
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## Reinforcing Spirals Model

- Mutual effects of communication and beliefs/attitudes/identity
- In rare cases, they reinforce to create extreme behavior + identity
- More often, **homeostasis**: Just enough communication to counteract *decay* and maintain current level of identity

Theoretical Reinforcing Spirals Process



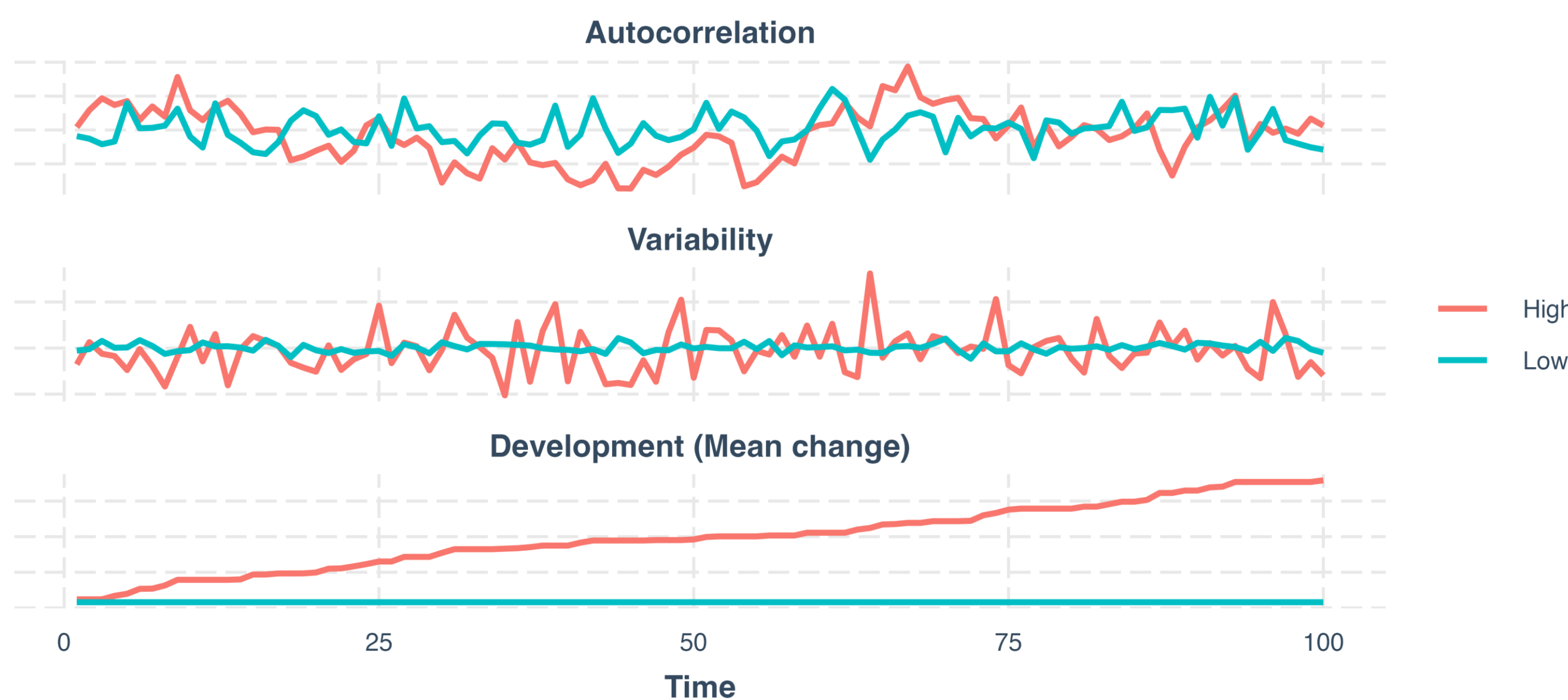
Graphic inspired by Thomas et al. (2021), *Journal of Communication*

## Stability and Change

We can model not just media effects (mean change), but stability also (Long, 2023, *International Journal of Communication*)

- Autocorrelation: After a change, how long to get back to normal? More autocorrelation, longer time
- Variability: When you are different from normal, just how big of a difference is it?

These two are conceived as *temporary*, as opposed to longer-lasting media effects



## Quick Summary

- Political partisanship is very stable; is there room for media effects?
- Novel model and longitudinal design allows to test for effects on both **strength** and **stability** of partisan identity
- Findings:
  - Without in-party communication, strong partisans experience identity **decay**
  - In-party communication increases stability *and* strength of identity

## Hypotheses

- In-party communication will increase stability of partisan identity strength (decrease variability + autocorrelation)
- In-party communication will increase partisan identity strength
- Those with stronger identity will experience decay in absence of in-party communication
- RQ: How does non-in-party communication compare in its effects?

Note: “communication” is broken down into media and discussion separately.

## Methods

- N = 270 US undergraduates
- 1 long-form introductory survey, then **20 daily short-form surveys** measuring communication and identity
- Daily surveys continue to send despite non-response
- Respondents kept as long as >3 surveys completed
  - Multiple imputation used to account for missingness
  - Average respondent completed 14 surveys
- Modeling using “brms” R package and Stan Bayesian estimation software — “location-scale” model allowing to model causes of lasting change (media effects) and variance (stability)

Read the full manuscript with *many* more details at [jacob-long.com](http://jacob-long.com), accessible via QR code:



## Simplified Statistical Model

$$identity_{i,t} = \overline{identity}_i + \beta_{1i} \cdot time + \phi_i \cdot \Delta identity_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \cdot \Delta media_{i,t-1} + \beta_3 \cdot \Delta discussion_{i,t-1} + \beta_4 \cdot \overline{media}_i + \beta_5 \cdot \overline{discussion}_i + \varepsilon_{i,t}$$

Autocorrelation (pointing to  $\phi_i \cdot \Delta identity_{i,t-1}$ )  
Variability (pointing to  $\varepsilon_{i,t}$ )

$$\phi_i = u_1 \cdot \overline{identity}_i + u_2 \cdot \overline{media}_i + u_3 \cdot \overline{discussion}_i$$

$$\varepsilon_{i,t} = \bar{\varepsilon}_{i,t} + \gamma_1 \cdot \Delta identity_{i,t-1} + \gamma_2 \cdot \Delta media_{i,t-1} + \gamma_3 \cdot \Delta discussion_{i,t-1} + \gamma_4 \cdot \overline{media}_i + \gamma_5 \cdot \overline{discussion}_i + \omega_{i,t}$$

i = individual participant; t = time point

## Results

In-party *discussion*...

- Decreases variability
- Increases strength
- No effect on autocorrelation

In-party *media*...

- May decrease variability (marginal statistical support)
- Increases strength
- No effect on autocorrelation

Evidence of identity decay for those with strong identities

Non-in-party communication...(RQ)

- Decreases (media) or has no effect (talk) on identity strength
- Increases variability of identity strength



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