

Proposal for 2016 ANES Pilot:

Untangling Dislike for the Opposing Party from a Dislike of Parties

Keywords: Partisan polarization; social distance; political parties

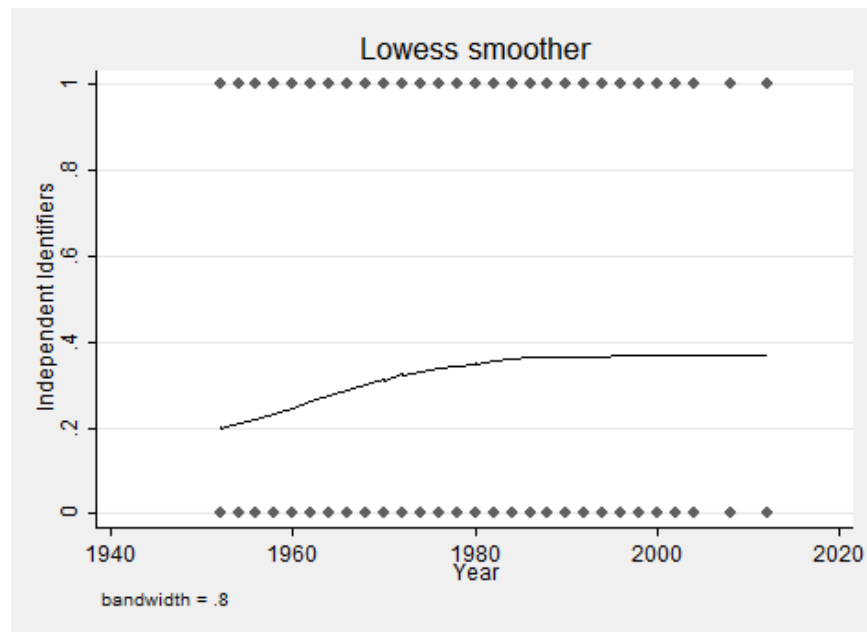
Recent scholarship suggests unprecedented levels of polarization among the American public. In particular, this polarization is not founded in ideological leanings, but rather in *affect*. People, it seems, dislike the other party more than they ever have before (Iyengar et al. 2012). In fact, as Iyengar and Westwood (2014) argue, partisanship creates a sharper divide amongst individuals than race. This affective polarization has deepened over the last decade (Iyengar et al 2012).

As affective polarization has increased, American partisan identification has also undergone another change: more and more people have begun to identify as political independents (see figure 1 below), eschewing identification with one of the two major parties. To be sure, these independents do admit to leaning toward one party versus another, but the fact alone that they first report that they are independent can send an important message and signal dissociation from their partisan identification (Klar and Krupnikov 2016).

At first glance, these shifts in partisanship seem contradictory: Americans cannot possibly be becoming *more* affectively polarized, but simultaneously feel *less* of a connection to their party. The goal of this proposal is to reconcile these two points using a set of new measures. We argue that existing measures overstate affective polarization by conflating two factors: dislike for the opposing party and

dislike for *partisan politics in general*. Once these two factors are disentangled, we aim to show that while some segments of the American party have certainly grown more polarized, many more dislike the idea of partisanship much more than they dislike the opposing party.

Figure 1. The increasing numbers independent identifiers in the American National Election Study



Affective Polarization

Affective polarization rests on the idea that the partisan divide is not the result of growing ideological differences but, rather, in affect towards the opposing party (Iyengar et al. 2012). While, spatially, liberal and conservatives may not be farther apart on issues, Democrats and Republicans dislike each other a good deal more than they ever did before (Mason 2014). Hence, even if the public is not as

ideologically polarized as Congress, many have argued their dislike for the other side is similar to the level of hostility among political professionals.

Measures of affective polarization take a number of forms. Some scholars have provided new theoretical arguments about partisan identity and the way this identity manifests itself in the affective divide (Mason 2014). Others, however, have relied on measures – including those in the American National Election Study – that ask people to rate the opposing party. It is these ratings of the opposing party that have shown consistent over time changes.

Using rating thermometers, for example, Iyengar et al (2012) demonstrate that ratings of the opposing party have sharply decline over the last decade, although, curiously, ratings of one's own party have remained stable. Similarly, measures that ask people how upset they would be if their child married someone of the opposing party have also shown consistent changes: Democrats appear to be more upset than ever at the thought of their child marrying a Republican, and Republicans feel no happiness at the thought of their child marrying a Democrat.

While these results may suggest a growing affective polarization, we argue they are not as clear as they may initially seem. In particular, we suggest that these findings on growing affective polarization are the product of two different forces: (1) actual growing dislike for the opposing party and (2) growing dislike for *partisanship in general*. Indeed, the percentage of people reporting they dislike *both* parties has also increased (Smith 2015). Moreover, both a dislike of partisanship *and* a genuine dislike of the opposing party would manifest itself in lower ratings of the *opposing party*. Indeed, research suggests that people are much more willing to

publically downgrade the opposing party (Groenendyk 2013). Moreover, even when people dislike partisanship, they are often more hesitant to publically air their grievances with their own political side (Klar and Krupnikov 2016).

It is important to note that we are not suggesting that people like the opposing party. Rather we are suggesting that for some individuals the dominant force is the dislike for partisanship in general, while a dislike of opposing party is secondary.

Is it Party or Partisanship?

In order to disentangle dislike for partisanship in general from dislike for the opposing party in particular, we propose a new set of measures. These measures stem from our previous research. In our previous work, we demonstrate that when people dislike partisanship their dislike centers on its expressive components. Put another way, people dislike partisanship because they believe that (strong) partisans will be vocal about their political positions and will engage in consistent political discussions about politics (Klar and Krupnikov 2016).

Our new measures center around an often-use measure of affect for the opposing party: How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for [Opposing Party]? Although this is a simple measure, it is one that provides individuals with little information besides the partisanship of the individual their child will marry. In turn, this partisanship provides a critical cue about their child's future spouse: this person's partisanship is a pivotal component of their identity. As a result, a respondent may be unhappy because they do not

wish their child to marry someone of the opposing party, but a respondent may also be unhappy because they do not wish their child to marry someone for whom partisanship is a pivotal part of their identity.

Indeed, in a series of tests Klar and Krupnikov (2016) utilized a version of this question as a basis for measuring attitudes toward partisanship. In their study, participants (N=156) were told that they would get a new colleague at work, and this colleague would be a partisan who likes to talk about politics and who had *voted for the same presidential candidate* as the participant. Klar and Krupnikov (2016) find that when participants were reminded of the broader partisan climate in the US, almost forty percent expressed discontent at the thought of working with this new politically inclined colleague – even though the hypothetical colleague *agrees* with them.

These results lead us to our proposed measures: to distinguish between a dislike for parties and a dislike for the opposing party, we will provide respondents with a greater context to their future son or daughter-in-law. If the results are about the opposing party it should not matter that the future in-law is a Democrat or Republican as long as that person rarely discusses politics.

Specific Measures

The questions we propose for a survey experiment are modeled after the social distance questions asked as part of both the 2008 YouGov poll of U.S. and U.K. Voters as well as the 2010 YouGov eleven-nation study (Iyengar et al. 2012). The questions ask respondents how they would feel if they had a son or daughter who

married someone with a particular political affinity. Iyengar et al. (2012) use these questions to show that the percentage of people who would not want their child to marry someone from a different party than their own has increased in the United States—where the parties have moved apart ideologically—while decreasing in the United Kingdom—where the parties have moved closer ideologically.

We make two changes to this base question. First, we propose to randomize whether respondents are told that the future in-law discusses politics frequently or infrequently. This element is based on Klar and Krupnikov (2016). We also have a second innovation in our survey experiment. In recent years, a strong increase in the public's dislike for political parties has accompanied the increased partisan polarization in the United States (Smith 2015). In the last thirty years, the public's ratings of both political parties has declined while their ratings of liberals and conservatives has not (Iyengar et al. 2012). At the same, voters do not punish representatives for being too ideological, but do punish them for partisan loyalty on salient issues (Carson et al. 2010). Hence, it is possible that any question that asks about political *parties* may be met with even greater hostility than politicians for the individual parties. For this reason, we manipulate whether the respondent is asked about a potential in-law who votes for a particular party or one who voted for a particular candidate.

The survey experiment involves elements of both a within-subjects and between-subjects design. All respondents would receive two questions: (1) one that mentions the new son or daughter-in-law is a Democrat or an Obama voter; (2) one that mentions the new son or daughter-in-law is a Republican or a Romney voter. By

asking every subject about each party, we are able to use their own party as a baseline with which to compare their feelings about a potential in-law from the other party.

The between-subjects elements involve the Democrat/Republican vs. Obama/Romney manipulation as well as a question about the frequency with which the individual discusses politics. In this manipulation, respondents will be told that the potential in-law either talks about politics frequently or rarely. Based on the results in Klar and Krupnikov (2016), we expect that individuals, on average, will dislike having a son or daughter-in-law who spoke frequently about politics *even when that individual supports the same candidates as the respondent*.

The exact questions we are proposing are listed below. In total, there are four conditions: (1) in-law supports a particular party, but talks about politics rarely; (2) in-law supports a particular candidate, but talk about politics rarely; (3) in-law supports a particular party and talks about politics frequently; (2) in-law supports a particular candidate and talk about politics frequently. Again, all respondents would receive only two questions. We include these questions at the end of the proposal.

Conclusion

Certainly, some segments of the public may be more partisan than before, and certain segments of the public may dislike the opposing party more than they have in the past. Indeed, these segments of the public may even be quite politically consequential. A growing body of research, however, suggests that we must better distinguish between people's connection and affective links to the political party

(Huddy et al. 2015). Our goal with this proposal is to continue this critical task of understanding how Americans relate to parties. These measures will allow us to consider whether affective polarization is new American reality or whether the voices of the affectively polarized merely rise above the voices of those retreating from partisanship.

Proposed Questions

All respondents receive the same response options: <1> Very happy; <2> Somewhat happy; <3> Neither happy nor unhappy; <4> somewhat unhappy; <5> very unhappy.

Condition 1: (Randomize order of questions)

Q1. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Democratic Party but who RARELY talks about politics?

Q2. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Republican Party but who RARELY talks about politics?

Condition 2: (Randomize order of questions)

Q1. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Democratic Party and who FREQUENTLY talks about politics?

Q2. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Republican Party and who FREQUENTLY talks about politics?

Condition 3: (Randomize order of questions)

Q1. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who voted for Barack Obama but who RARELY talks about politics?

Q2. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who voted for Mitt Romney but who RARELY talks about politics?

Condition 4: (Randomize order of questions)

Q1. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who voted for Barack Obama and who FREQUENTLY talks about politics?

Q2. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who voted for Mitt Romney and who FREQUENTLY talks about politics?

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