

POLARIZATION EH?

MEASURING MASS POLARIZATION IN CANADA

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PROBLEM



- Large literature on mass polarization in the United States, much of this work, however, is not well situated in a comparative context
- We know there are many different dimensions of possible mass polarization (extremity, consistency, sorting, social, perceptual)
- How do other countries compare to the U.S. on these dimensions?

PROBLEM



Canada acts as a useful case:

1. Cultural similarity to the United States
2. Similarly high level of diversity, immigration
3. Liberal political culture
4. Polarizing political parties
5. **But:** minimal partisan media ecosystem, less racial tension, very different political institutions

PROBLEM



- Early research minimized the importance of partisanship in Canada
 - “the concept of party identification...may be almost inapplicable in Canada ... party identification seems to be as volatile in Canada as the vote itself” (Meisel 1973).
 - Flexible partisanship (Clarke et al. 1979)
- Main parties are “brokerage parties” that incorporate and deemphasize societal divisions and are devoid of ideological motivation

PROBLEM



- More recent work has drawn attention to the importance of partisanship in Canada
 - Measurement error generated instability (Green et al. 2002; Johnston 1992)
 - Party cues and opinion formation (Merolla et al. 2008, 2016)
 - Asymmetry in partisan strength (Belanger and Stephenson 2010)

PROBLEM



- Why might we expect mass polarization?
 - Polarizing party elites
 - Rising economic inequality
 - Rising levels of immigration and diversity
 - Social media

Cohen: Welcome to the Americanization of Canadian politics

The rise of physical threats, verbal insults, poisonous social media, ideological divisions and attacks on the media represent a coarsening of our political culture.

POLITICS OPINION

Donald Trump unleashed dark politics in America. Could it happen in Canada?



By [Susan Delacourt](#) National Columnist
Wed., Jan. 6, 2021 | 4 min. read

OPINION

Whatever happened to Canadians' famous pursuit of balance?

PRESTON MANNING
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL
PUBLISHED DECEMBER 29, 2020

Politics · Analysis

Things fall apart in the United States — and Canada takes a hard look in the mirror



We assume we're immune to the forces now threatening the American experiment. We shouldn't.

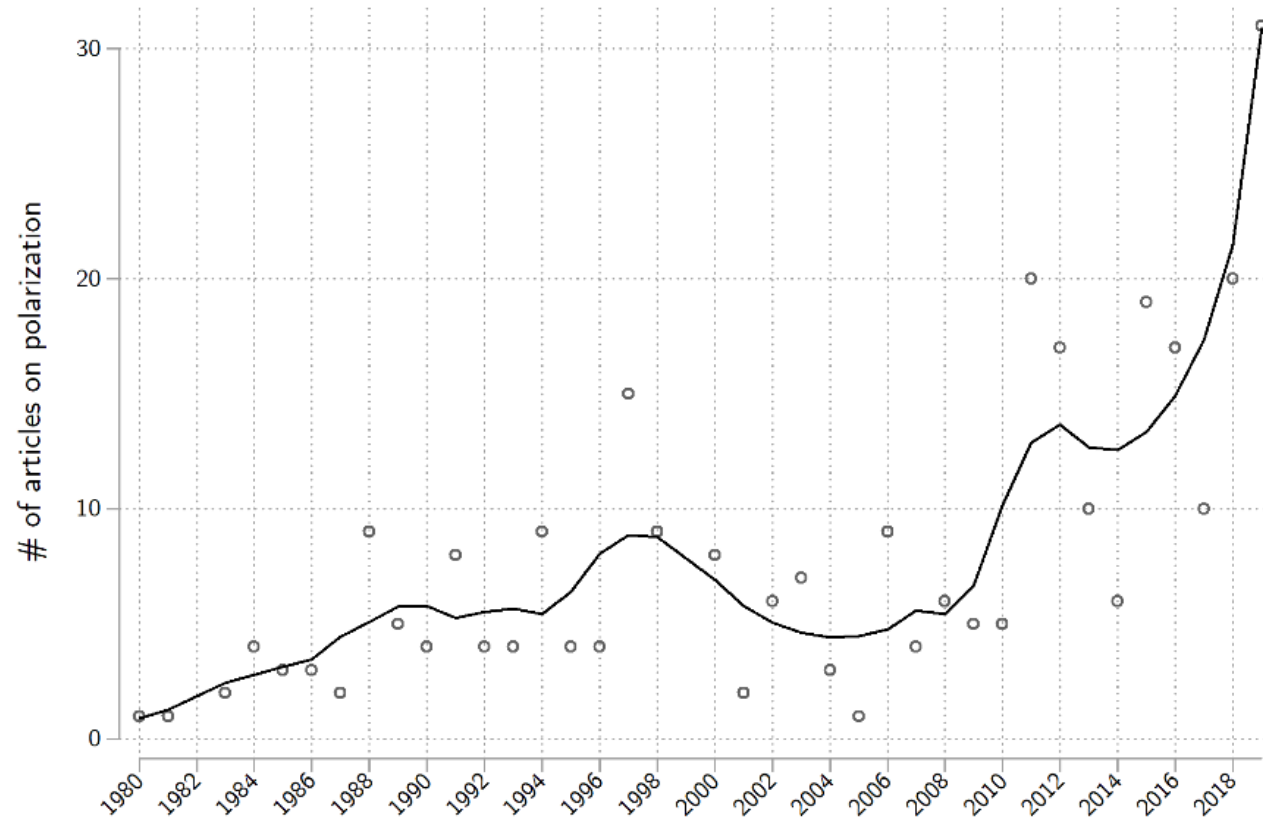


[Aaron Wherry](#) · CBC News · Posted: Oct 31, 2020 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated

Canadians' appetite for climate action growing, but beware of polarization

By [MONICA GATTINGER](#) JANUARY 7, 2021





OF ARTICLES ON POLARIZATION IN THE GLOBE AND MAIL,
TORONTO STAR, AND NATIONAL POST



PROBLEM



Have Canadians polarized? If so, on what dimensions?

- 1) Ideological extremity
- 2) Ideological consistency
- 3) Partisan sorting
- 4) Affective polarization
- 5) Social polarization
- 6) Perceptual polarization

DATA



- Cumulative file of the Canadian Election Study (1993-2019)
- 0-10 ideological self placement
- Eight continuously asked policy items
 - Ideological consistency constructed by coding items for left (1), right(-1), and neutral(0) direction creating a -8 to 8 index
 - Factor analysis used to identify social and economic policy dimensions from items

DATA



- Wave 9 of the Digital Democracy Project's study of the 2019 federal election, fielded from October 24-November 4, 2019 (N=2,068 adult Canadian citizens)
- Non-probability opt-in internet panel; quotas on age, gender, region, language to match population benchmarks
- Analyses restricted to supporters of the Conservative party, Liberal party, and NDP
- Use this to measure: affective, social, and perceptual polarization

KEY FINDINGS



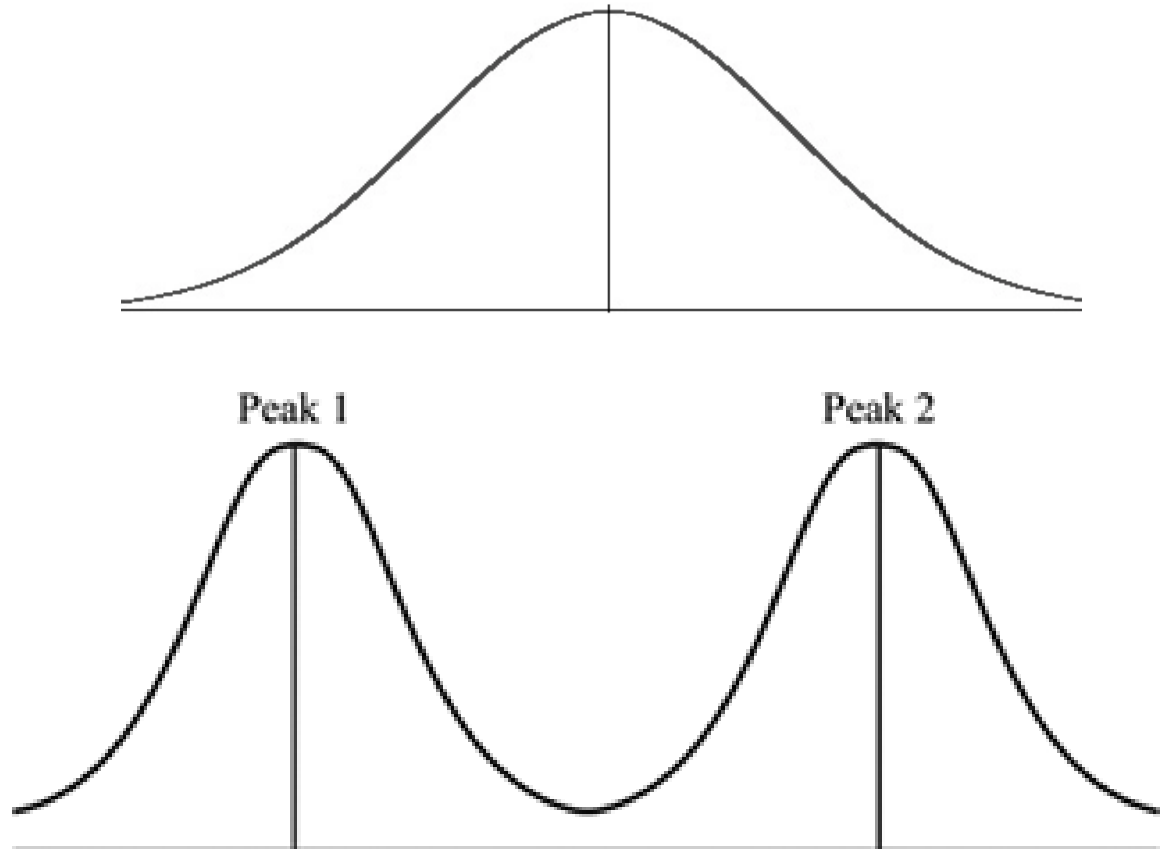
1. Ideological extremity – non-existent
2. Ideological consistency – weak to modest
3. Partisan sorting – strong
4. Affective polarization – strong, but not manifesting strongly in measures of social alienation
5. Social polarization – weak
6. Perceptual polarization – modest



IDEOLOGICAL EXTREMITY

Ideological Extremity: Gravitation to the ideological extremes

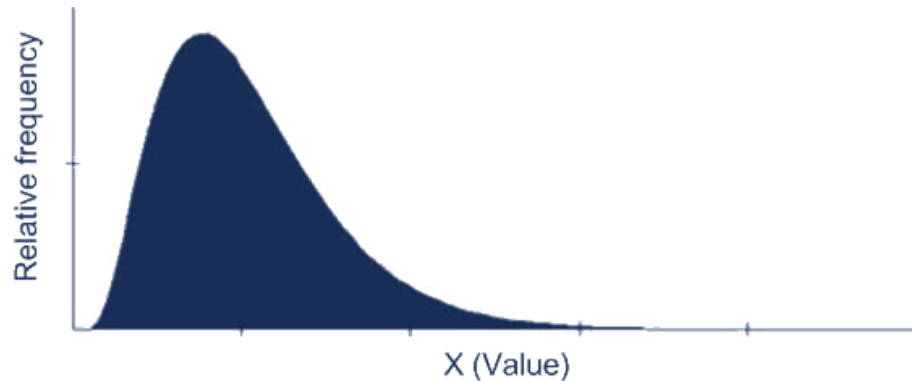
(Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Fiorina & Levendusky, 2006; Fiorina et al., 2005, 2008; Lelkes, 2016; Levendusky & Pope, 2011)





MEASURING IDEOLOGICAL EXTREMITY

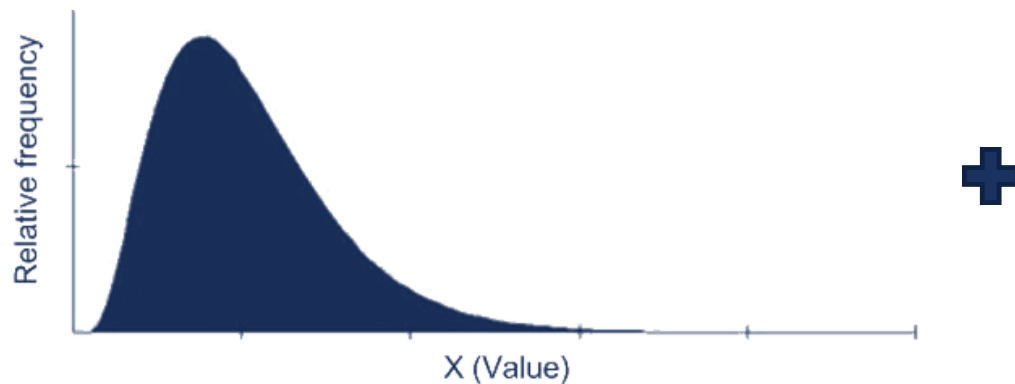
1. Average standard deviations
2. Bimodality coefficient of self-placement and ideological dimensions
 - 0-1 scale where higher values = more bimodality; 0.55 indicates two peaked distribution



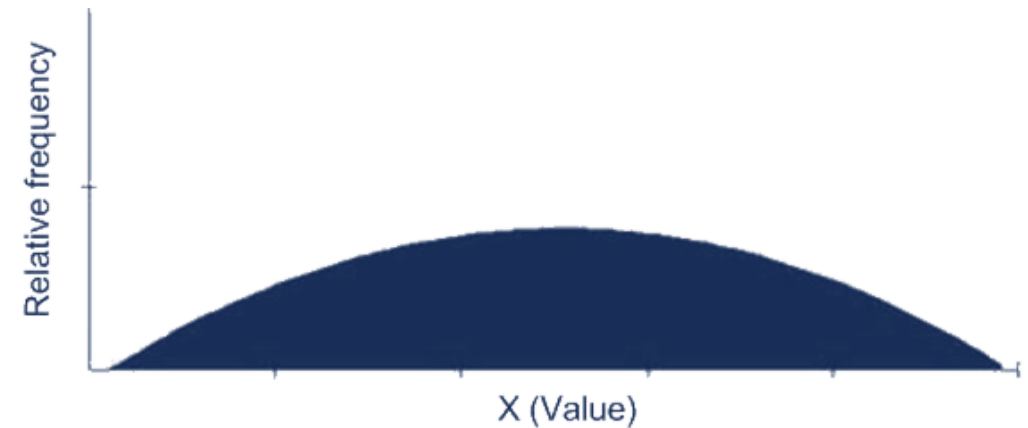


MEASURING IDEOLOGICAL EXTREMITY

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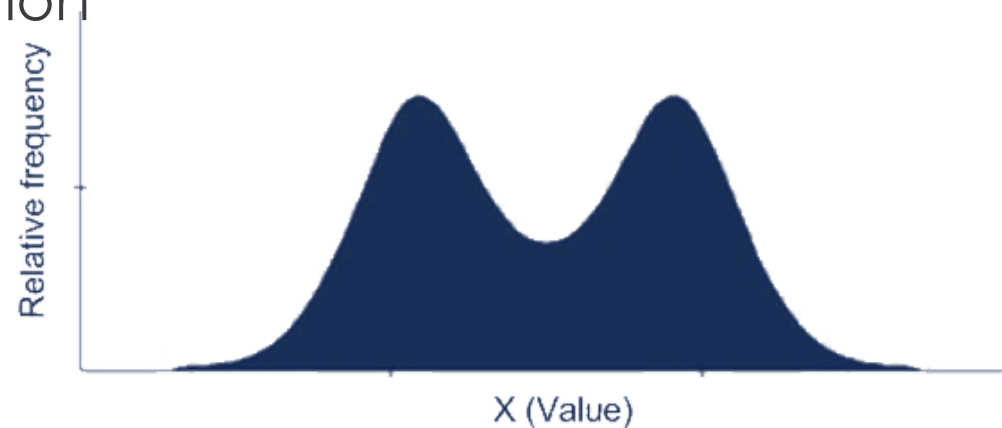
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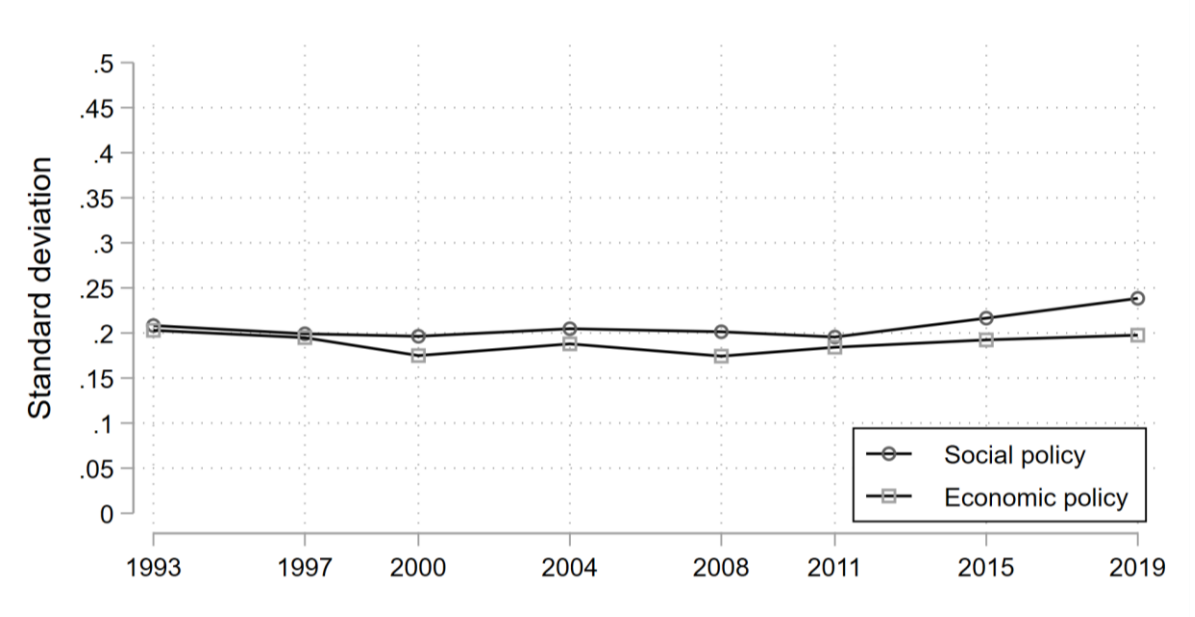
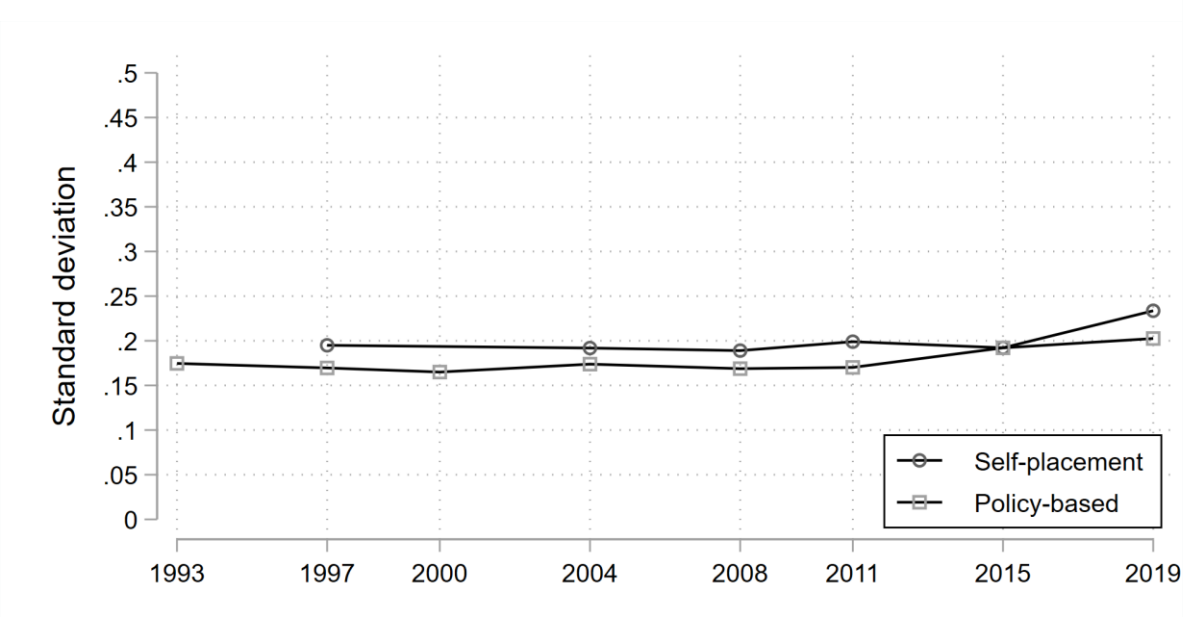




MEASURING IDEOLOGICAL EXTREMITY

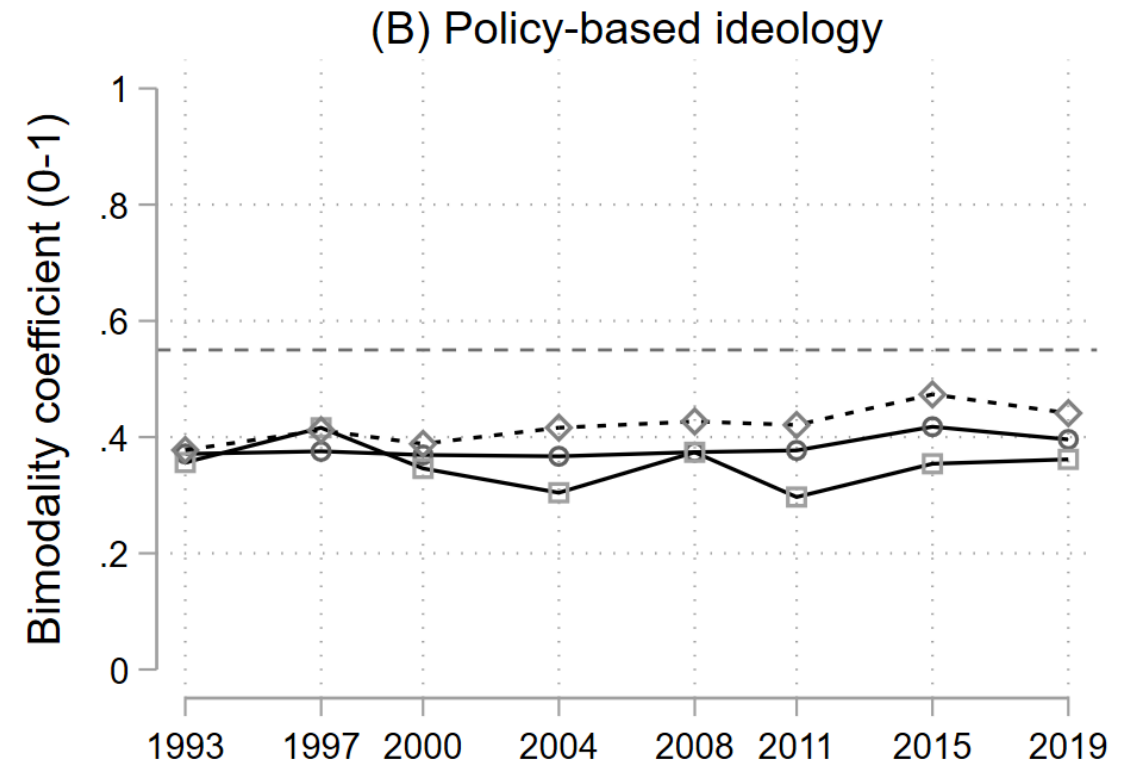
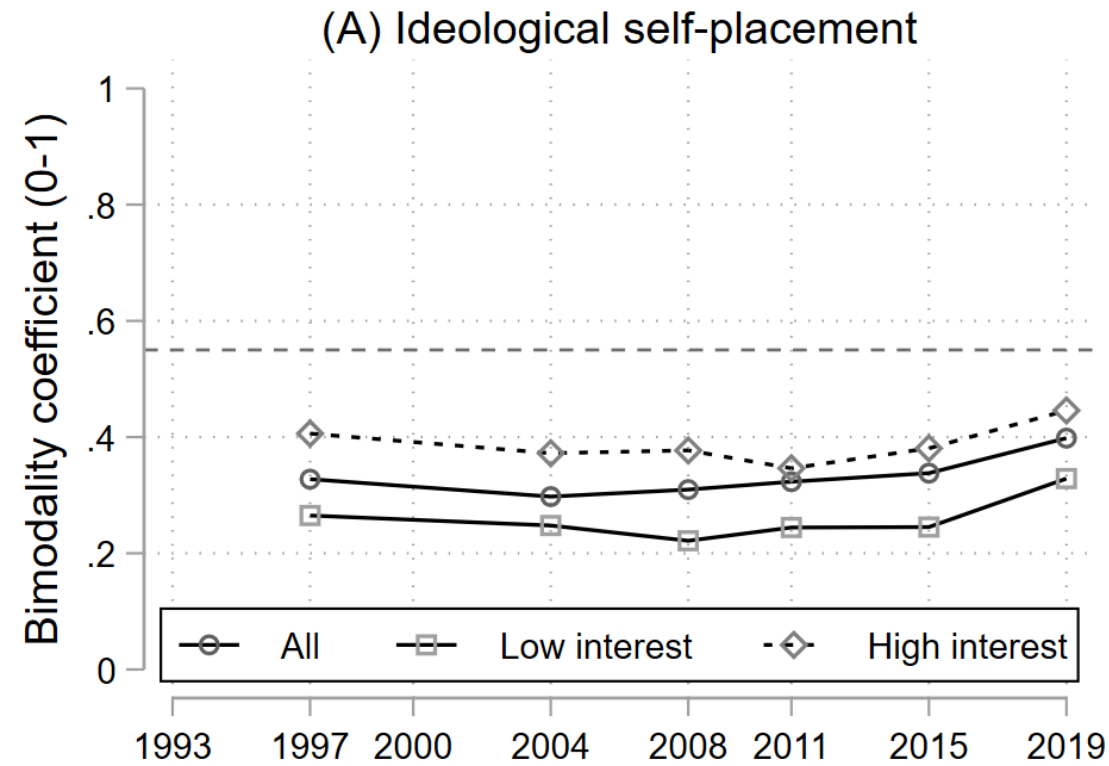
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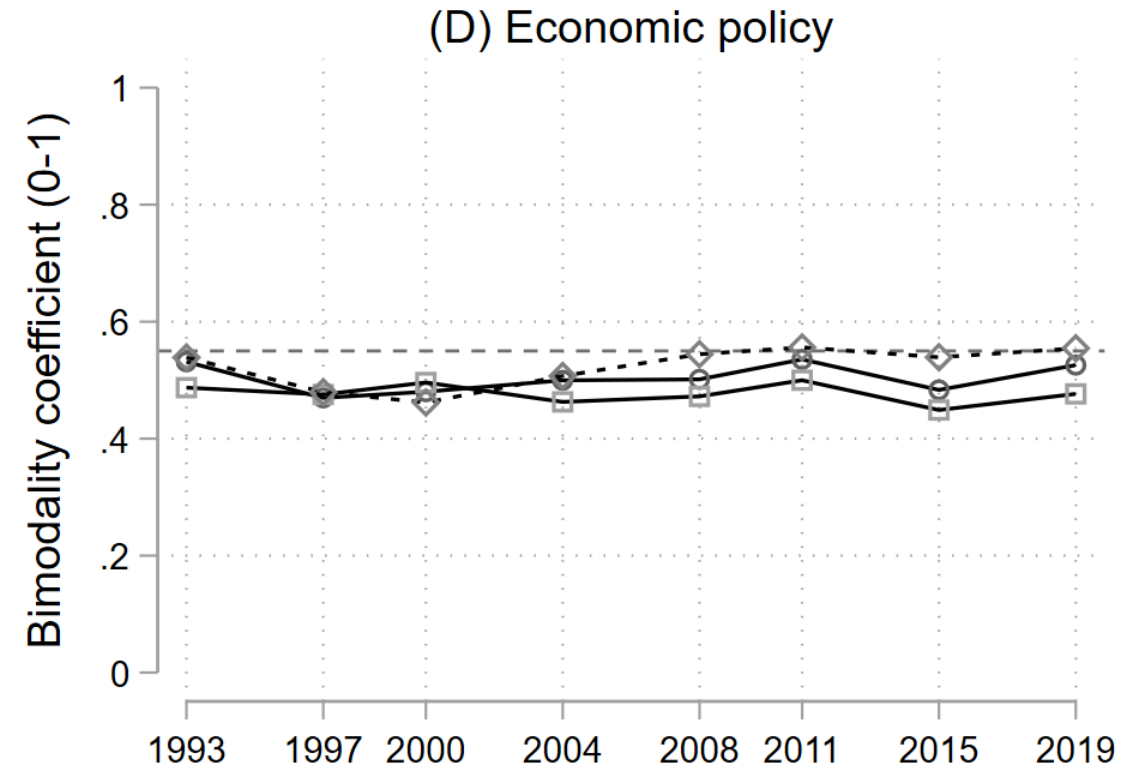
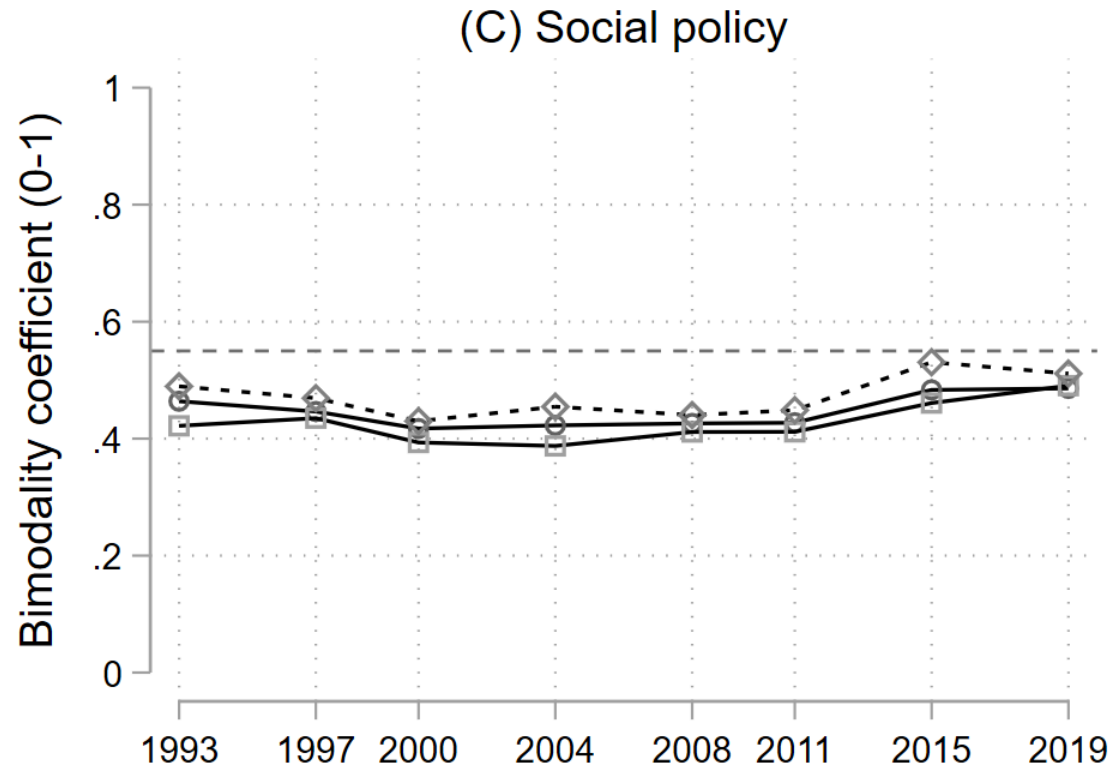
STANDARD DEVIATIONS





BIMODALITY COEFFICIENTS FOR SELF-PLACEMENT (LEFT) AND
POLICY-BASED IDEOLOGY (RIGHT)





BIMODALITY COEFFICIENTS FOR SOCIAL POLICY (LEFT) AND ECONOMIC POLICY (RIGHT)





IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY

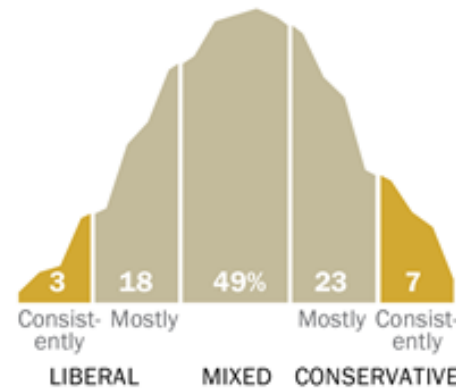
Ideological consistency:
inter-correlation between
policy beliefs

(Abramowitz & Saunders, 2005, 2008;
Abramowitz, 2010; Hare & Poole, 2014)

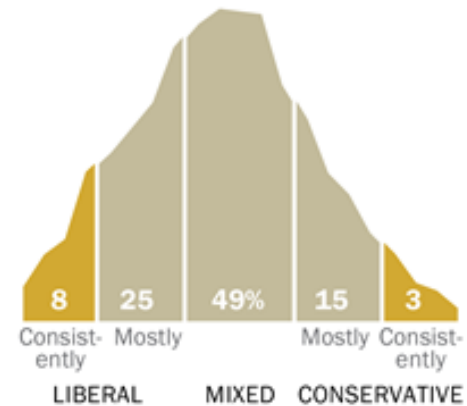
Growing Minority Holds Consistent Ideological Views

On a 10-item scale of political values, % who are...

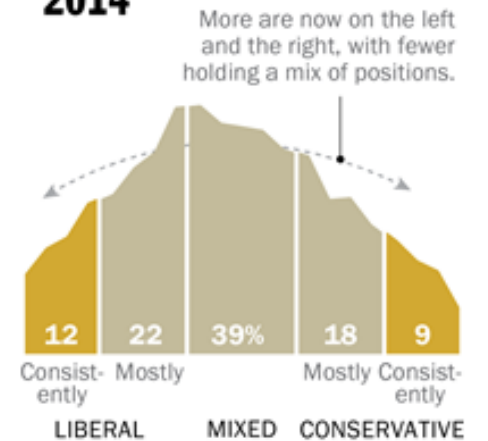
1994



2004



2014



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

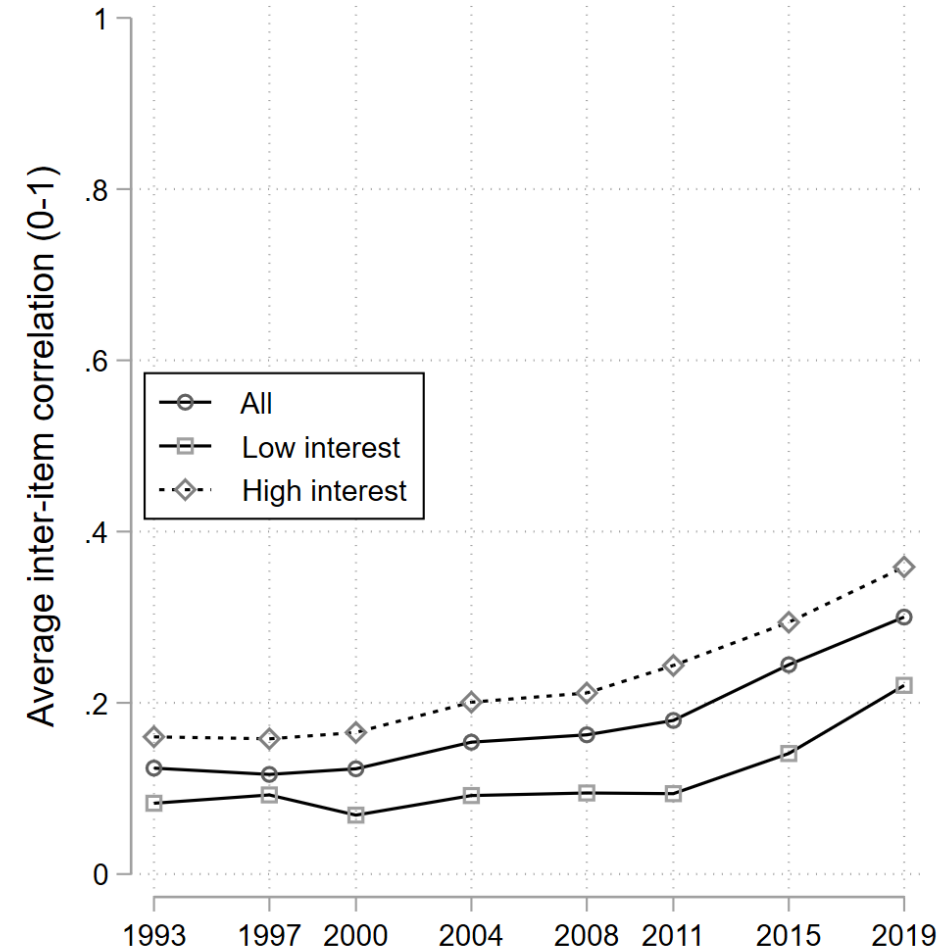
Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions. (See Appendix A for details on how the scale is constructed and how scores are grouped.)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



MEASURING IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY

- Average inter-item pairwise correlation between policy items



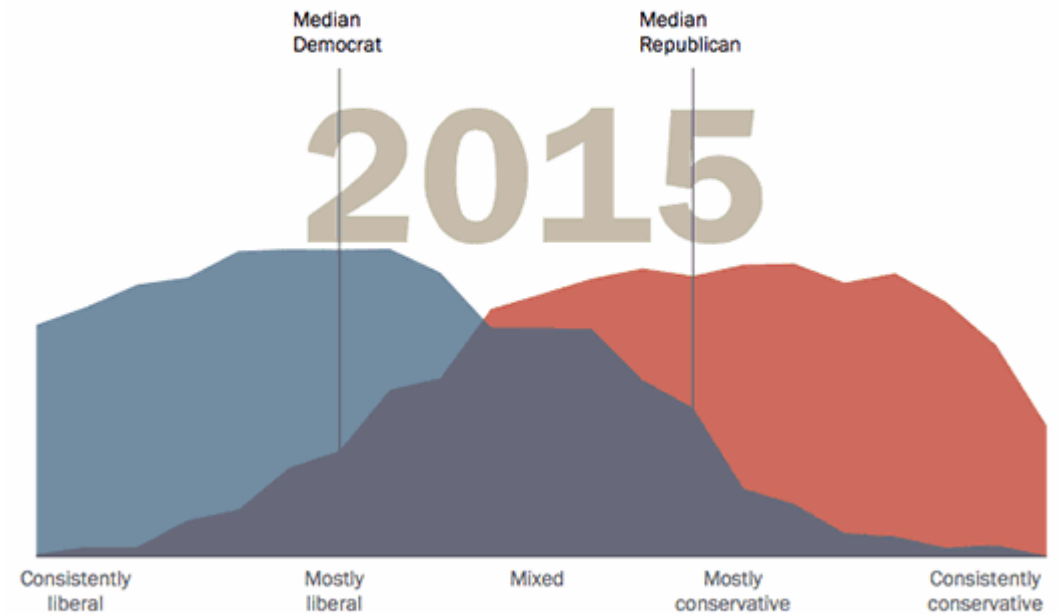
DEFINITIONS OF POLARIZATION



Partisan sorting: Increasing association between partisanship and ideological identification or policy beliefs

(Abramowitz, 2010; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008; Fiorina & Levendusky, 2006; Levendusky, 2009)

Political polarization in the American public, 1994 - 2015



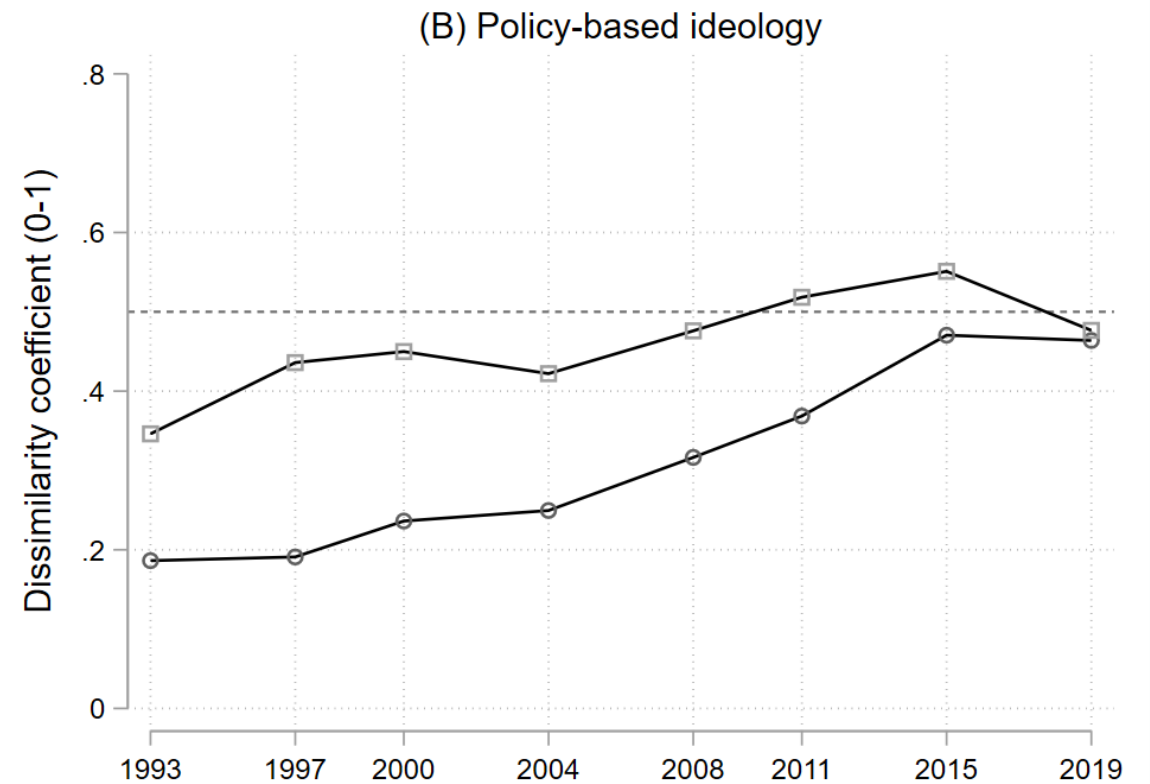
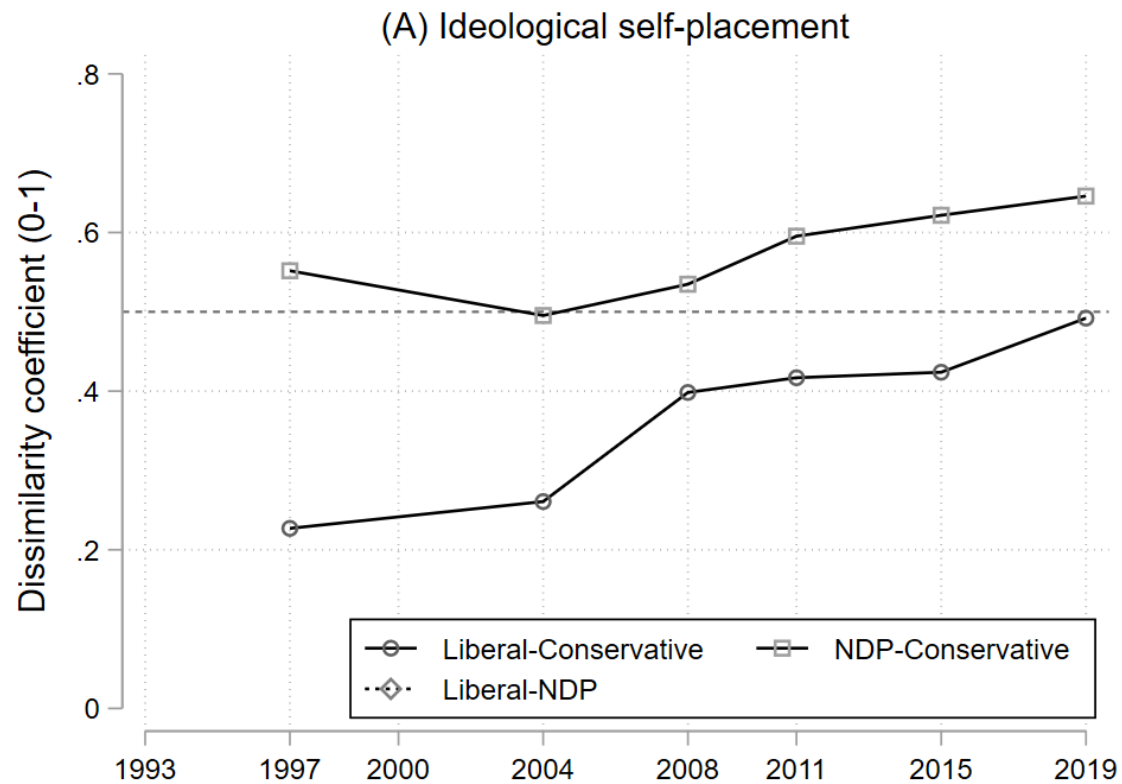
Surveys conducted 1994, 1999, 2004, 2011, 2014, and 2015

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



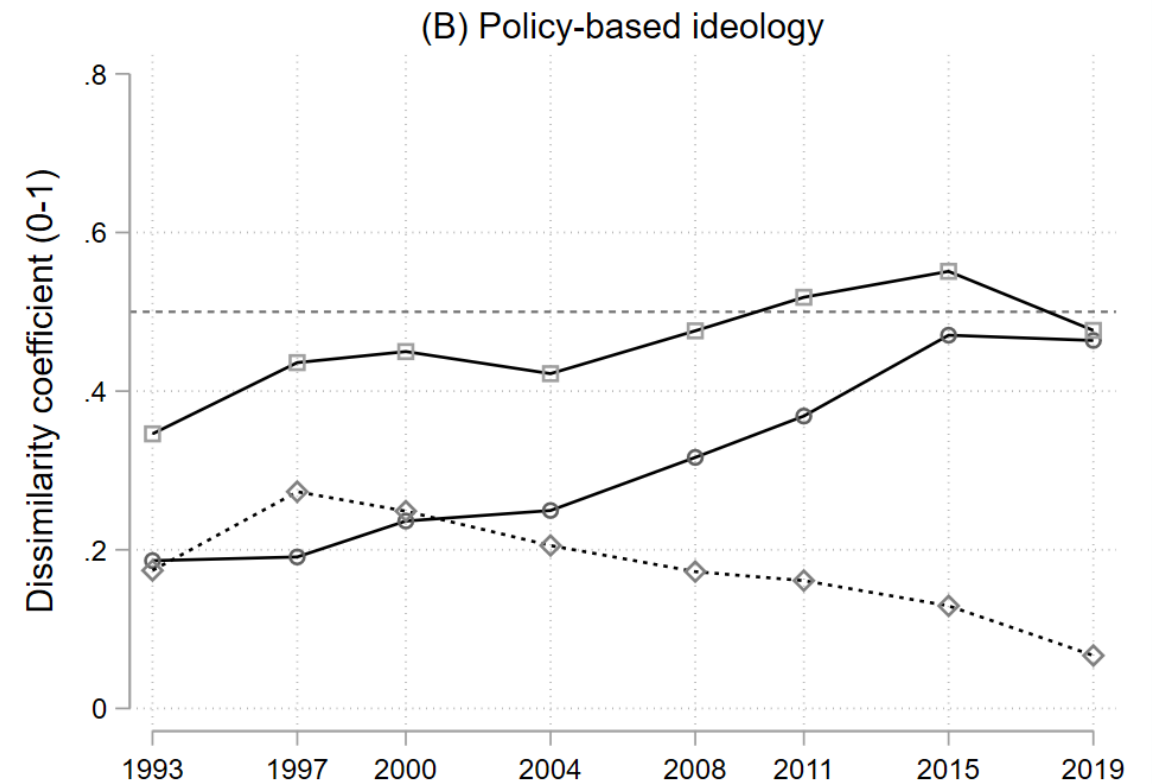
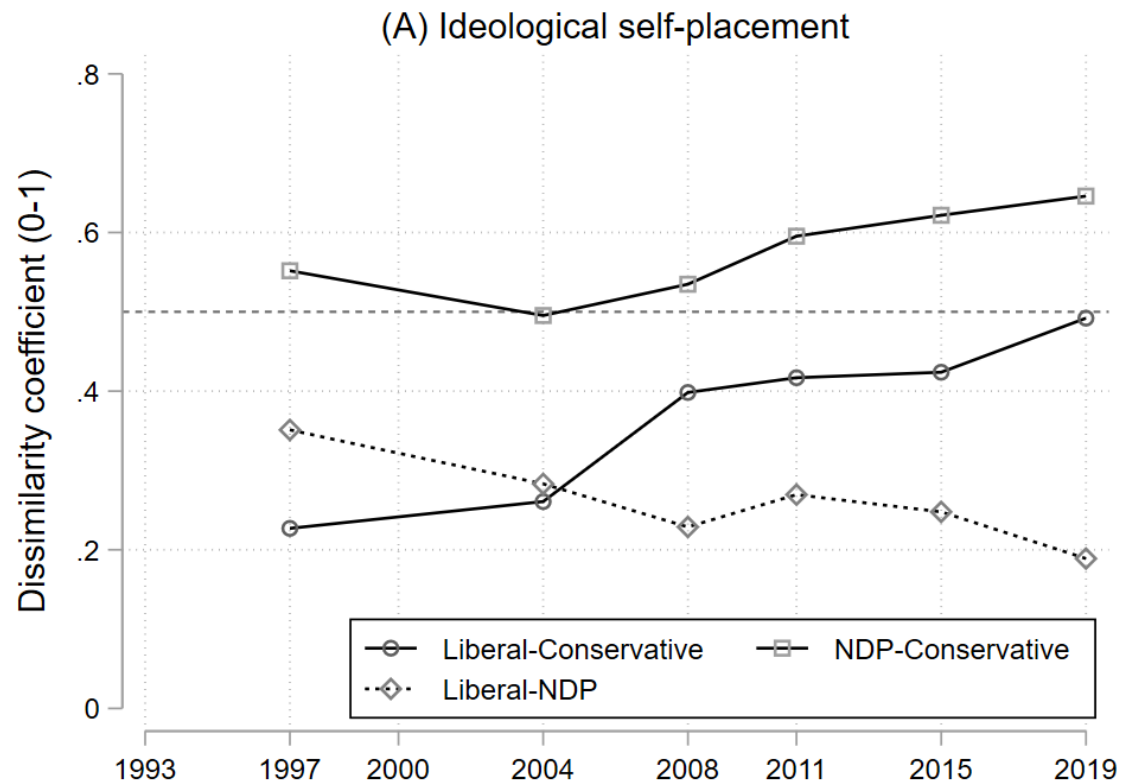
MEASURING PARTISAN SORTING

- Aggregate-level: **dissimilarity coefficient**
 - calculated for LPC/CPC, NDP/CPC, and LPC/NDP using ideological self-placement, policy-based ideology, and the social and economic policy dimensions
 - 0-1 scale with higher values meaning more dissimilarity



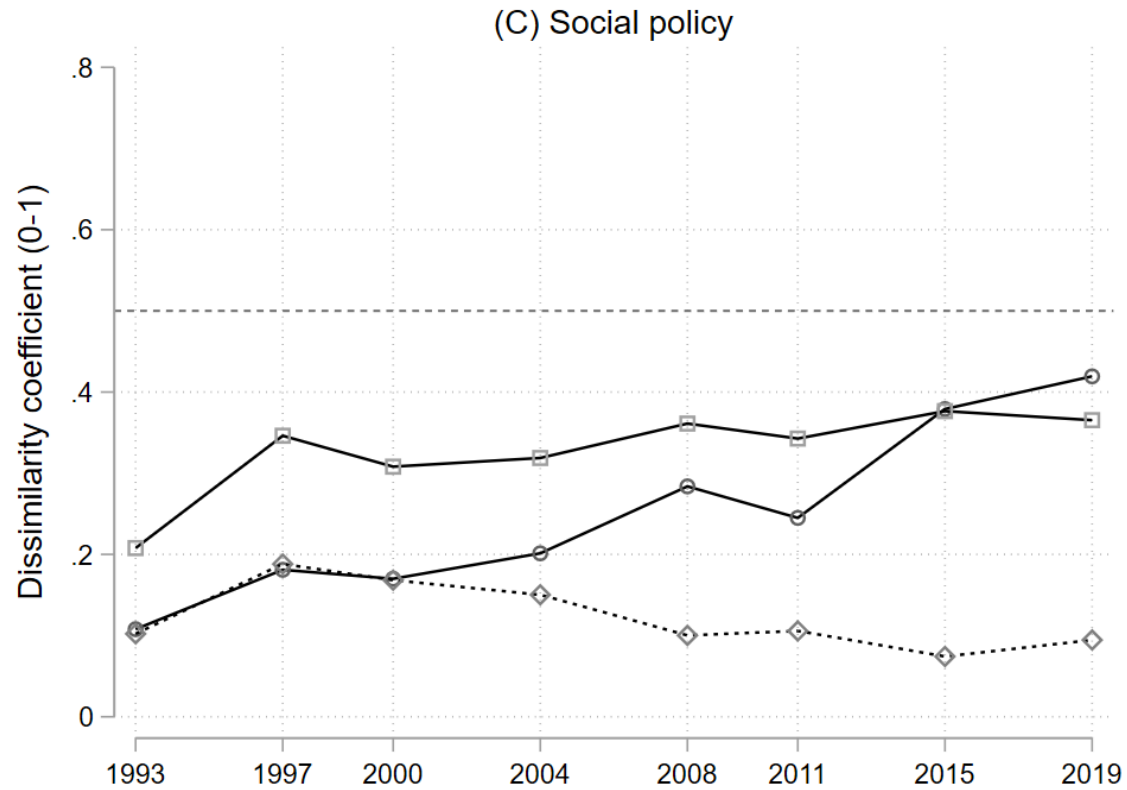
DISSIMILARITY COEFFICIENT FOR IDEOLOGICAL SELF-PLACEMENT
(LEFT) AND POLICY-BASED IDEOLOGY (RIGHT)





DISSIMILARITY COEFFICIENT FOR IDEOLOGICAL SELF-PLACEMENT
(LEFT) AND POLICY-BASED IDEOLOGY (RIGHT)





DISSIMILARITY COEFFICIENT FOR SOCIAL (LEFT) AND ECONOMIC POLICY (RIGHT)





AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

Affective polarizayion:
Increasing animus towards out-party elites and their supporters

(Iyengar et al., 2012)

Affective Polarization

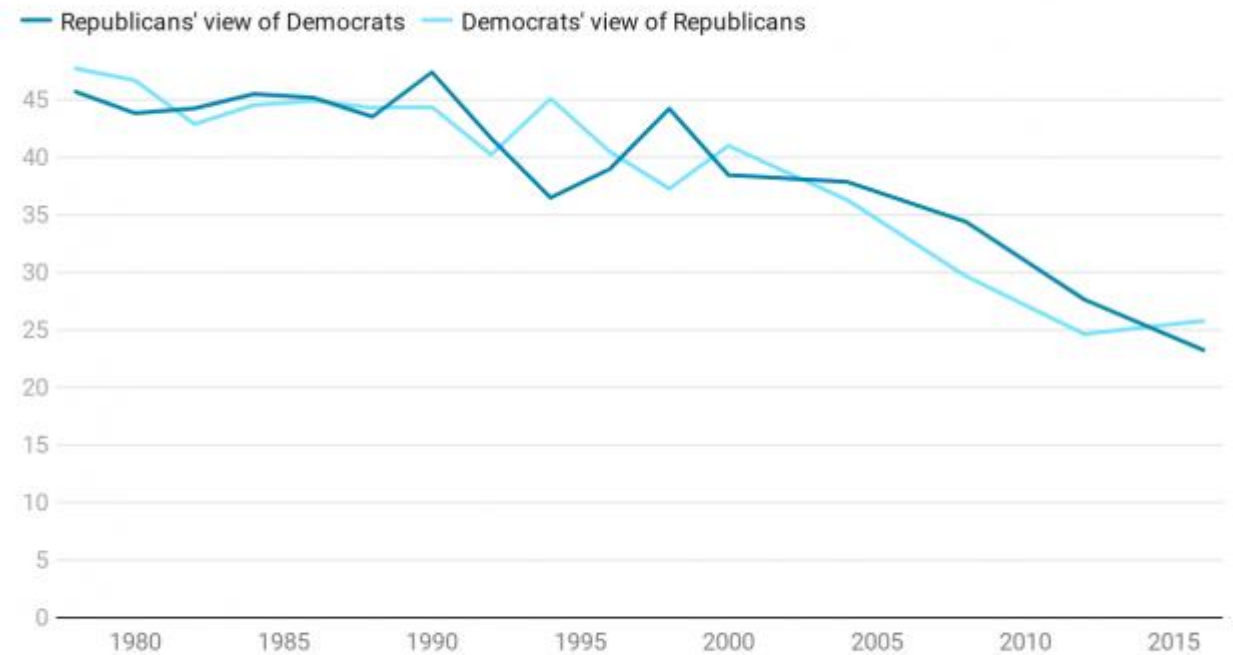
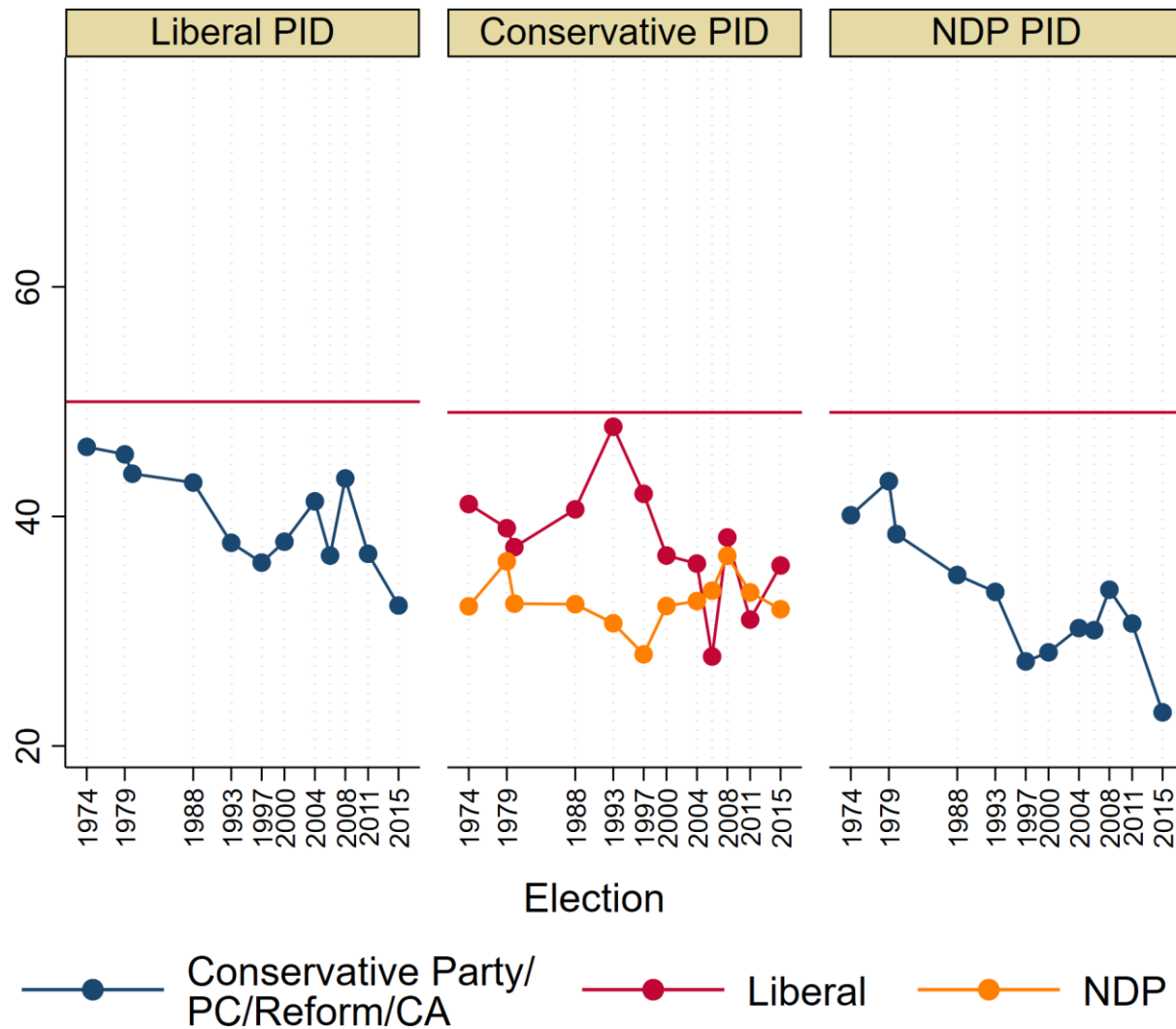


Chart: Peter Levine • Source: American National Election Studies



- Canada one of only a few countries experiencing affective polarization (Boxell et al. 2020)
- Catching up to levels of affective polarization in other countries? (Wagner 2021)

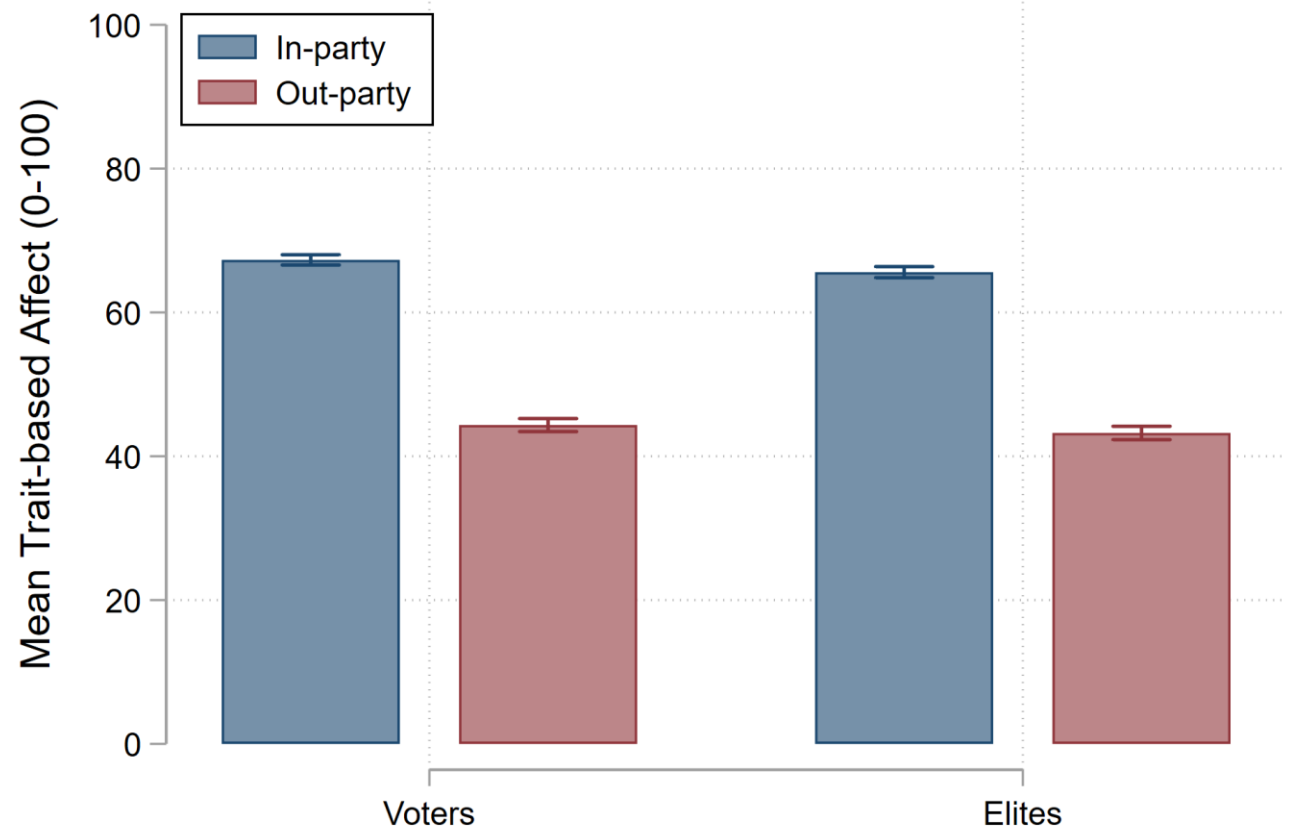
AVERAGE 0-100 OUT-PARTY
FEELING THERMOMETER
SCORE BY PARTISAN GROUP



Respondents rate applicability of positive and negative words to voters or elected officials of each party (randomly assigned)

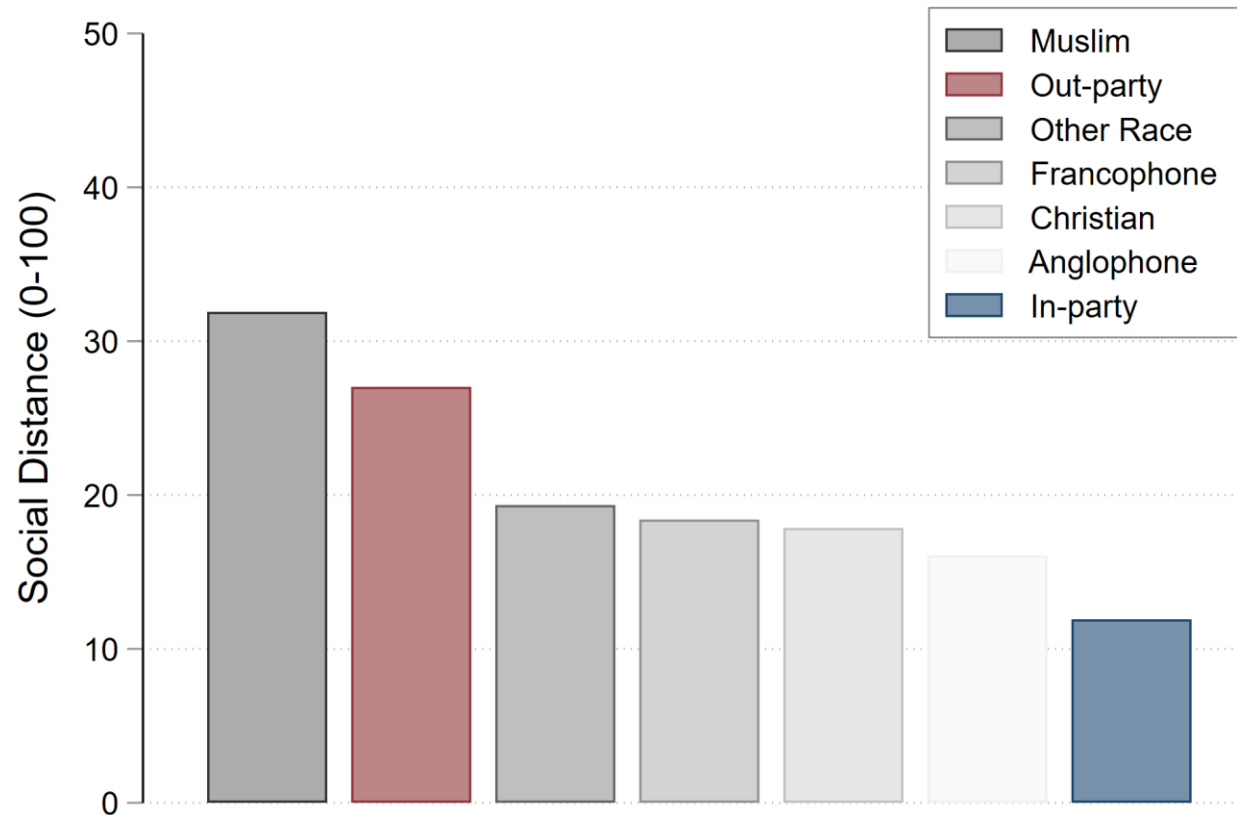
i.e., honest, intelligent, mean, selfish

(Almond & Verba, 1963; Garrett et al., 2014; Iyengar et al., 2012)



TRAIT-BASED AFFECT, VOTERS VS. ELITES (0-100)





Social alienation from out-party members: **social distance**

For instance, one's comfort with out-party members as friends, neighbours, in-laws, etc.

(Bogardus, 1925; Druckman & Levendusky, 2019; Iyengar et al., 2012)

SOCIAL DISTANCE (0-100)

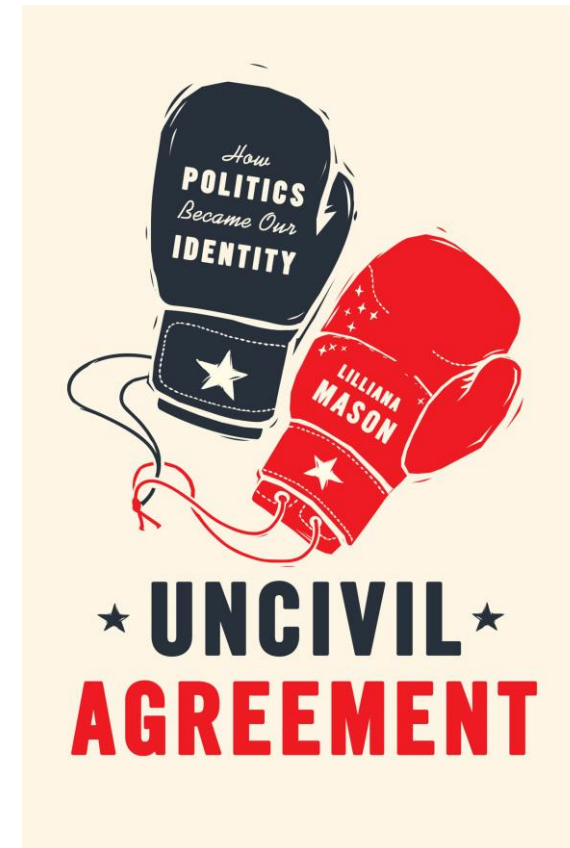


SOCIAL POLARIZATION



Social polarization: Increasing alignment between social identities and partisanship

(Mason, 2015, 2018)





MEASURING SOCIAL POLARIZATION

- Ask respondents whether they identify with a social group from a list of 25 (e.g., evangelical Christian, working class)
- Follow-ups:
 - Importance of identity to themselves (extremely, somewhat, not very, not at all)
 - How often use the word 'we' rather than 'they' when talking about group (always, most of the time, sometimes, rarely, never)
- Treat identity as held if R scored above 0.5 on 0-1 index of these items

CORRELATIONS



- Average rank biserial correlation between identities and strength of partisanship (strong left to strong right) and ideology is a relatively weak 0.13
- Strongest Conservative correlated identity is Westerner (0.39)
- Strongest left-partisan correlated identity is LGBTQ (-0.30)

Top-10 Correlations		Bottom-10 Correlations	
Westerner	0.39	British Columbian	0.07
Albertan	0.36	Newfoundlander	0.07
LGBTQ	0.30	Catholic	0.05
Evangelical	0.29	Immigrant	0.05
Acadian	0.24	Middle class	0.04
Saskatchewanian	0.24	Francophone	0.04
Ethnic/racial minority	0.19	Manitoban	0.02
Secular	0.18	Ontarian	0.01
New Brunswicker	0.14	Quebecois	0.01
Lower class	0.12	Maritimer	0.01
Average			0.13

Note: absolute values



MEASURE OF SOCIAL POLARIZATION

- Index increments upward by one for every PID- or ideology-correlated identity aligned with one's PID and downward by one for an identity aligned with the out-party (-7 to 7 range)
- Mean = 0.25
- 63% unsorted; 37% with some degree of social sorting
- Low level of social polarization

PERCEPTUAL POLARIZATION



Perceptual polarization: Perceptions of social or ideological polarization between partisan groups

Contaminated with error – often spoken of as **false polarization**

(Lelkes, 2016; Ahler and Sood, 2017)



MEASURING PERCEPTUAL SOCIAL POLARIZATION



Estimate the share of Conservative, Liberal and NDP supporters that are:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) evangelical Christian; | 6) over the age of 65; and who |
| 2) Westerners; | 7) earn under \$30,000; |
| 3) LGBTQ; | 8) earn over \$150,000; |
| 4) ethnic or racial minorities; | 9) live in rural areas; and |
| 5) under the age of 35; | 10) live in large cities |

MEASURING PERCEPTUAL SOCIAL POLARIZATION

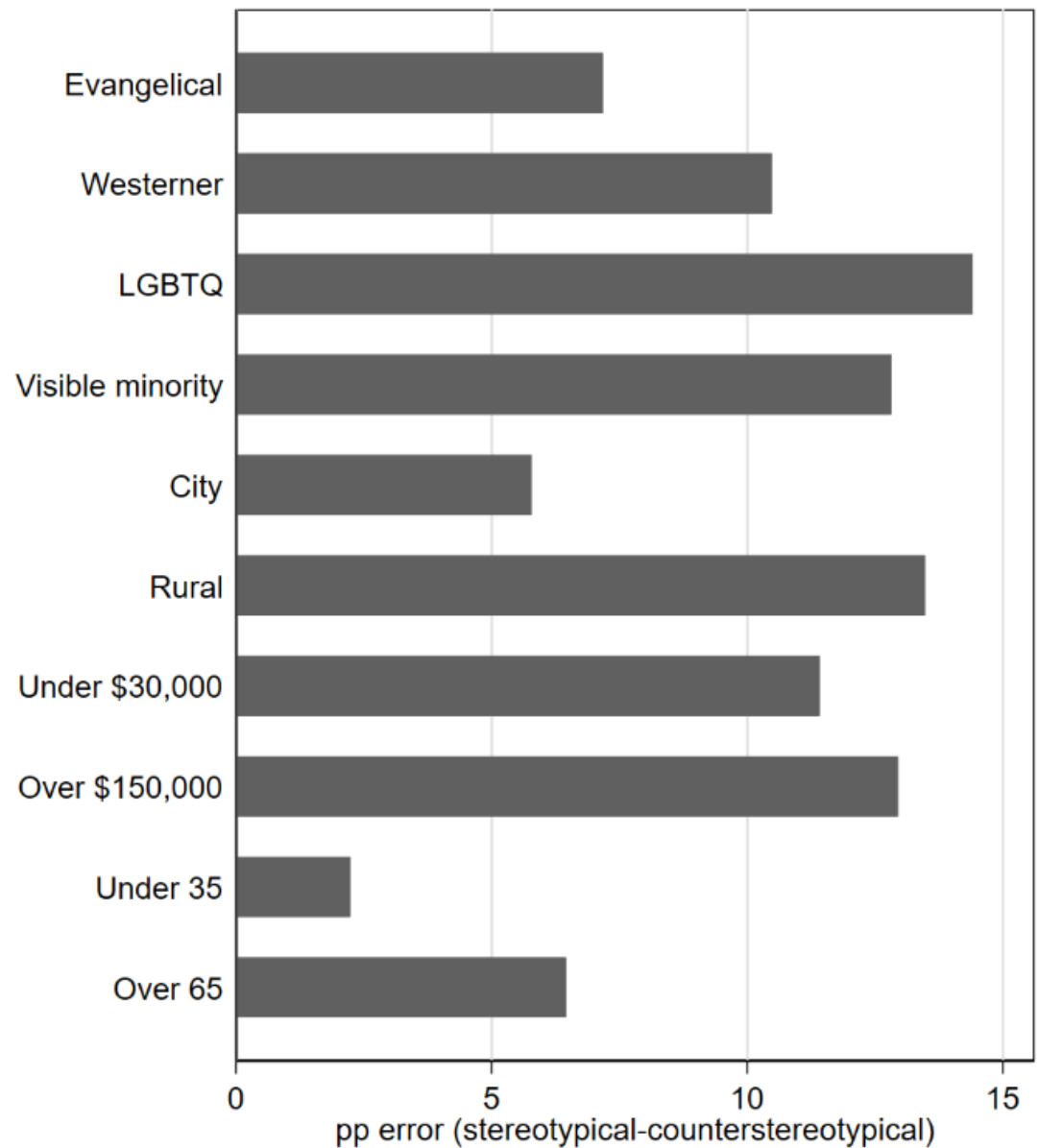
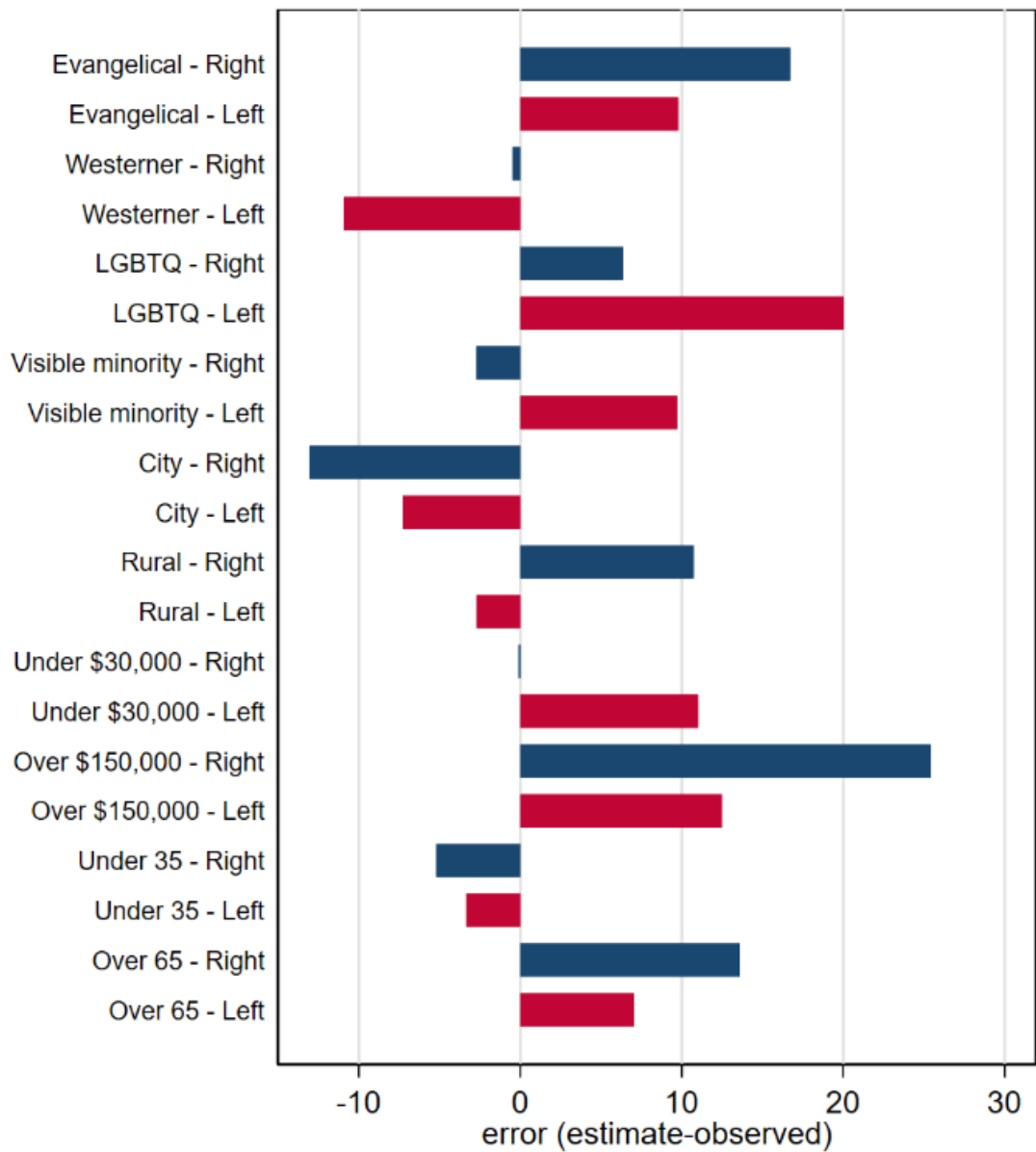


- Ahler and Sood (2017) focus only on stereotypical groups and divide error by observed value (i.e., % bias)
- Using their approach, Americans exaggerate social differences 4x the rate of Canadians (342% vs. 87%)
- But, their method heavily weights groups with low base rates, and fails to account for overestimates of groups with low base rates (e.g., % Republican AND % Democratic who are high income earners)

MEASURING PERCEPTUAL SOCIAL POLARIZATION



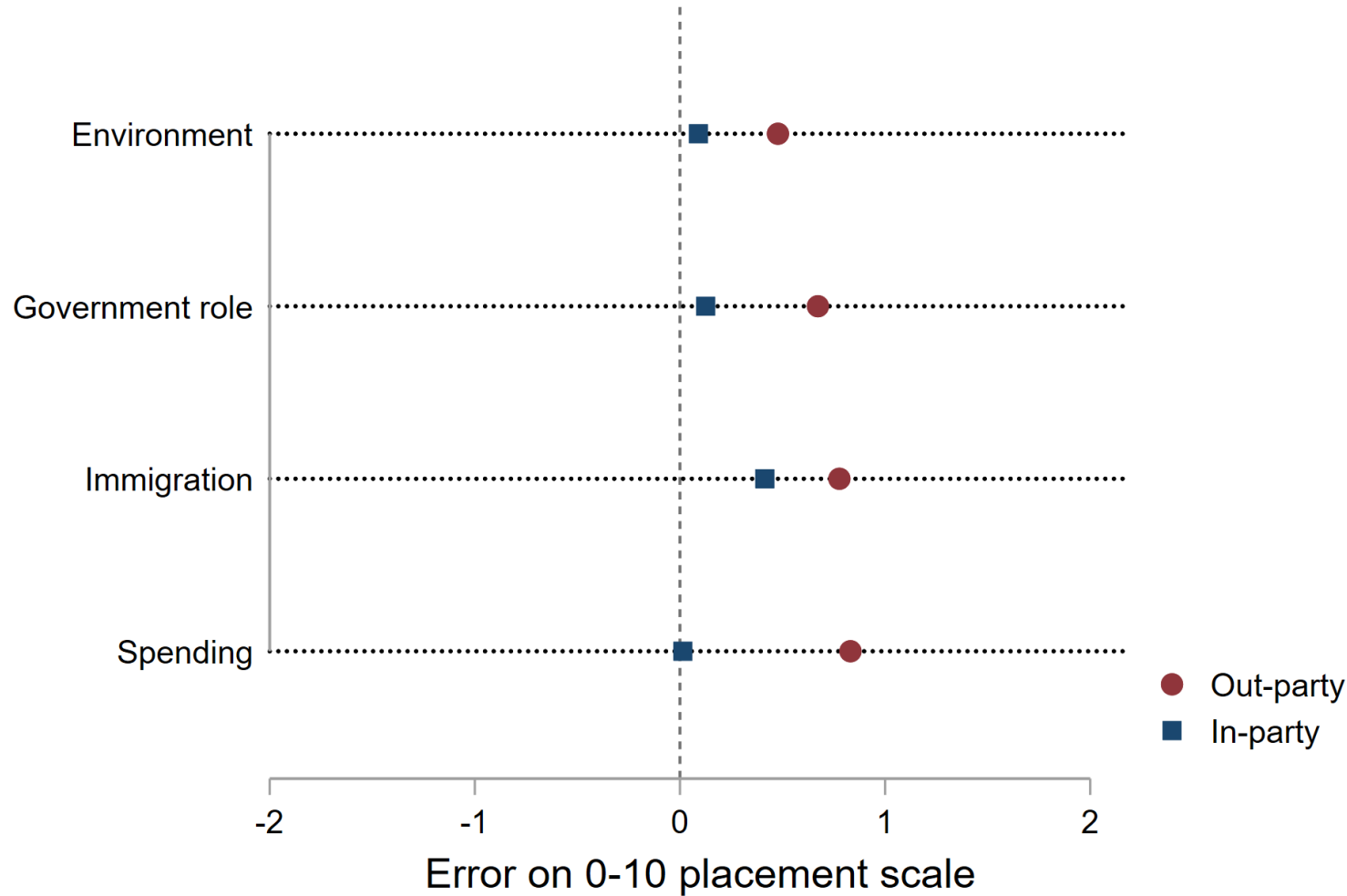
- I take the difference between the estimated and observed % as a measure of error for a particular group (estimate % - observed %)
- I then take the difference between the error for stereotypical and matched counter-stereotypical groups as a measure of *bias* (e.g. error Conservative evangelicals – error left partisan evangelicals)
- Average across group pairs for a composite measure of false social polarization





MEASURING PERCEPTUAL IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION

- Ask respondents to place the opinion of party supporters on 0-10 scales on four different issues
- Based on ANES questions: environment, immigration, spending, and government role in the economy
- Respondents also placed themselves on these scales as well



Error in 0-10 placement of ideological beliefs of in-party and out-party voters



KEY FINDINGS



1. Ideological extremity – non-existent
2. Ideological consistency – weak to modest
3. Partisan sorting – strong
4. Affective polarization – strong, but not manifesting strongly in measures of social alienation
5. Social polarization – weak
6. Perceptual polarization – modest

LARGER PROJECT



- Affective polarization in Canada the result of the following process: elite polarization → partisan sorting → affective polarization
- Also an role for perceptual polarization, but hard to evaluate this over time with available data
- Minimal role of social polarization – polarization in Canada is driven by ideological differences between the parties

DISCUSSION



- Canada exhibits some elements of polarization like the U.S., but a much weaker social identity component
- Maybe this accounts for why social alienation from outgroup supporters is markedly lower?
- What are the implications for these differences for the consequences of polarization? Is it less concerning?
- More effort needed at measuring polarization across all of these dimensions in other countries



Thank You!

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SUPPLEMENTARY SLIDES



POLICY ITEMS



1. We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country
2. Too many immigrants just don't want to fit into Canadian society
3. The government should do more to reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor
4. Protecting the environment is more important than creating jobs
5. Homosexual couples should be allowed to legally marry
6. People who don't get ahead should blame themselves, not the system
7. The government should: see to it that everyone has a decent standard of living; leave people to get ahead on their own
8. Do you think Canada should admit more immigrants, fewer immigrants, or about the same as now?

BIMODALITY COEFFICIENT



$$BC = \frac{s^2 + 1}{k + 3 * \frac{(n - 1)^2}{(n - 2)(n - 3)}}$$

DISSIMILARITY COEFFICIENT



- Where $f(x)$ represents the distribution of ideology for one group of partisans, and $d(x)$ represents the distribution for the other group.

$$DC = 1/2 \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} |f(x) - d(x)| dx,$$