

Polarization in US politics

Government and Politics of the USA,
Weeks 5&6

HT 2019

Prof. Andrew Eggers

Overview and plan

Briefly, elite polarization — polarized Congress.

Mass polarization:

- Ideological polarization?
- Affective polarization
 - Evidence
 - Causes

Briefly on electoral system

How democracies die (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018)

“The weakening of our democratic norms is rooted in extreme partisan polarization — one that extends beyond policy differences into an existential conflict over race and culture. America’s efforts to achieve racial equality as our society grows increasingly diverse have fueled an insidious reaction and intensifying polarization. And if one thing is clear from studying breakdowns throughout history, it’s that extreme polarization can kill democracies.” (p. 9)

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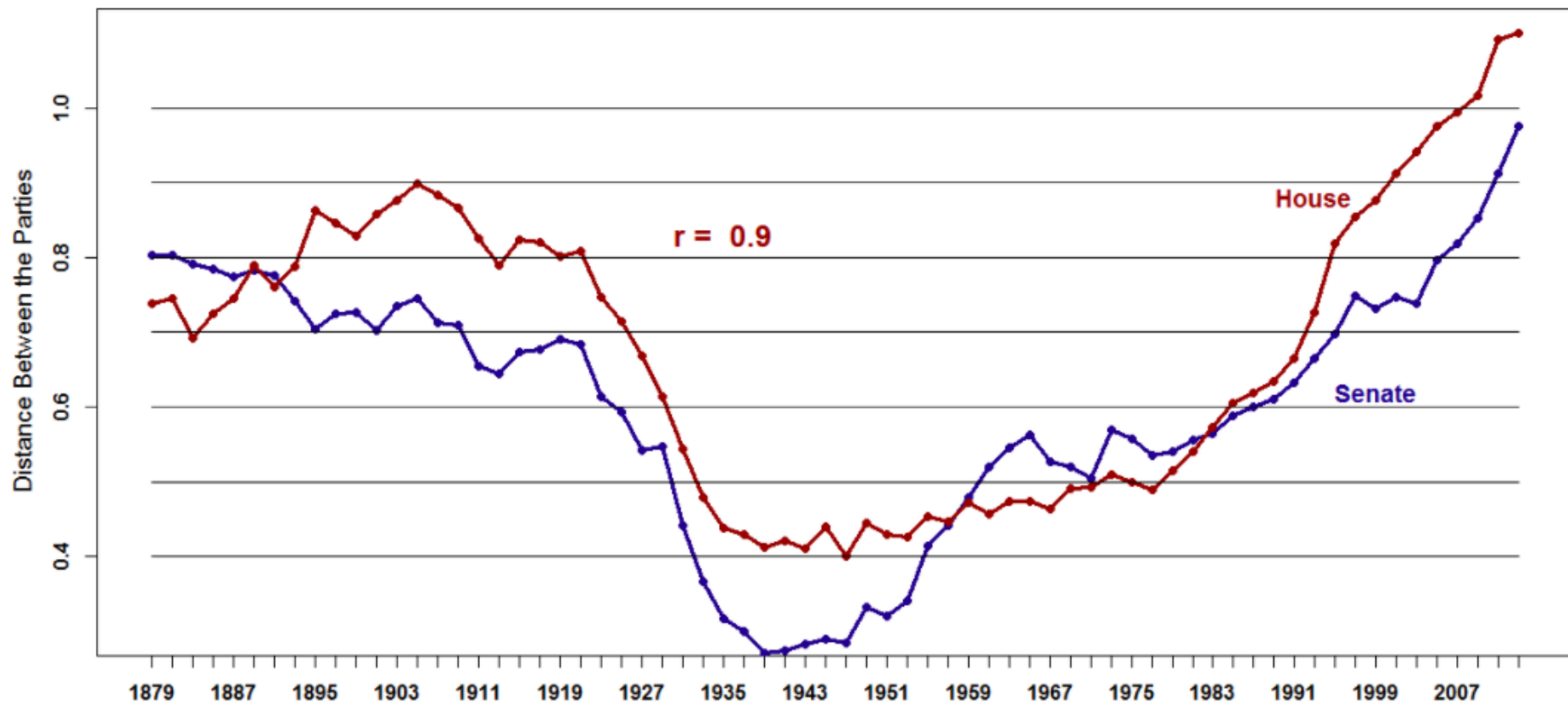
Political Man (Lipset, 1959)

“Inherent in all democratic systems is the constant threat that the group conflicts which are democracy’s lifeblood may solidify to the point where they threaten to disintegrate society.” (p. 83)

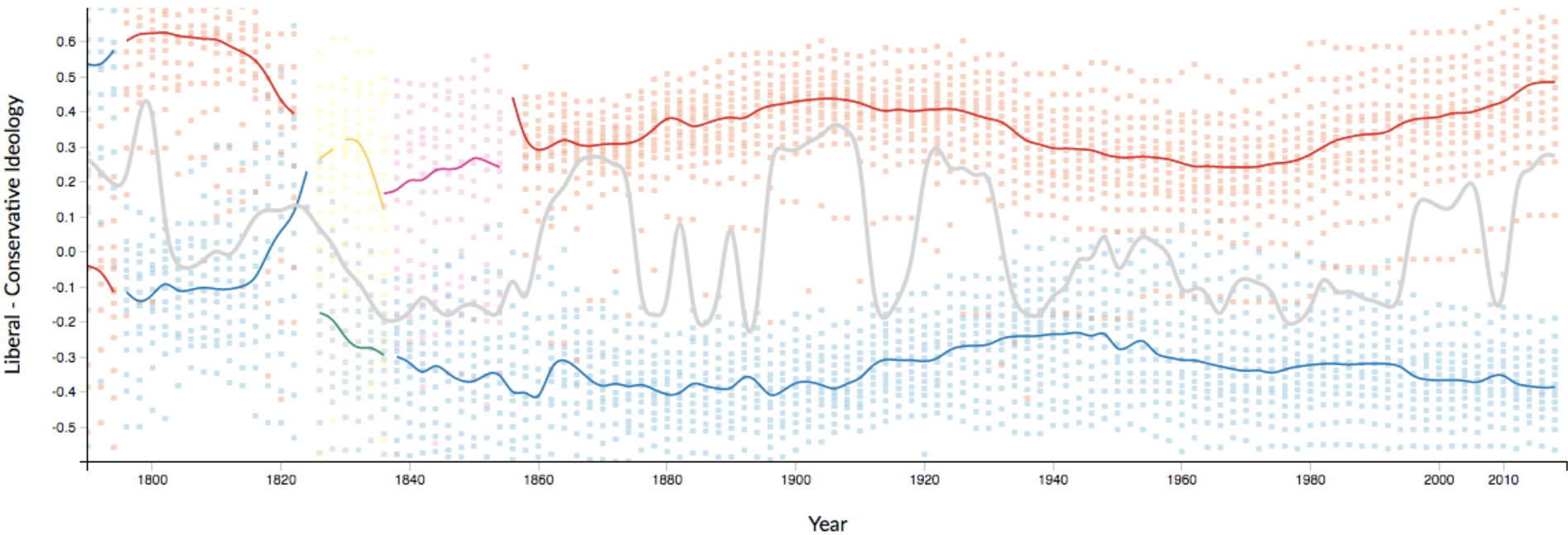
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Party Polarization 1879-2014
Distance Between the Parties on the First (Liberal-Conservative) Dimension



Polarized America / voteview.com



Parties Throughout History

Today's Parties



Democratic Party
Active from the 25th
Congress (1837) onwards



Republican Party
Active from the 34th
Congress (1856) onwards

Historical Major Parties

Democratic-Republican Party

Active from the 4th Congress (1796) until
the 18th Congress (1825).

Whig Party

Active from the 24th Congress (1836) until
the 33rd Congress (1855).

Jackson Party

Active from the 19th Congress (1826) until
the 24th Congress (1837).

Federalist Party

Active from the 4th Congress (1796) until
the 17th Congress (1823).

Anti-Jackson Party

Active from the 21st Congress (1829) until
the 24th Congress (1837).

Adams Party

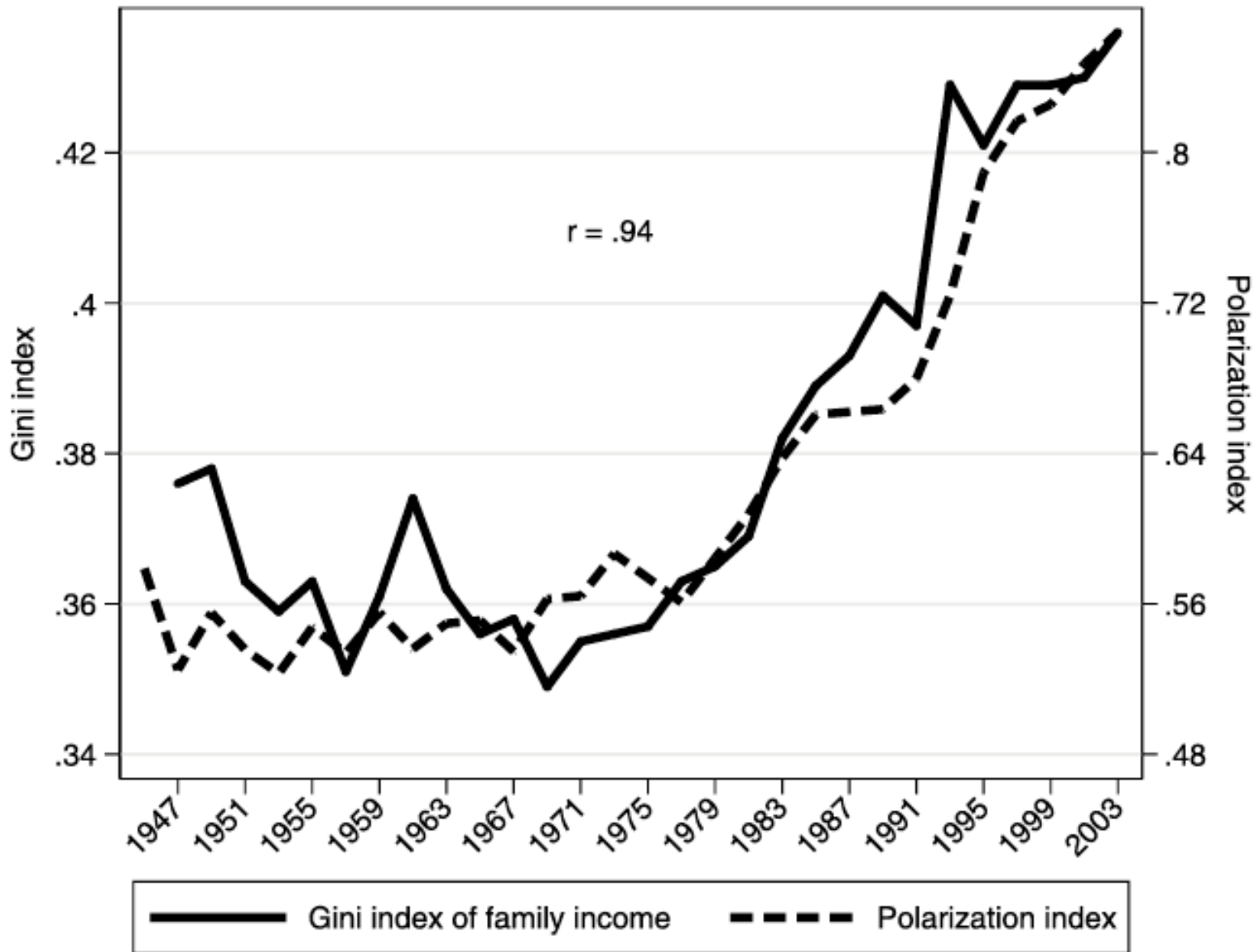
Active from the 19th Congress (1826) until
the 20th Congress (1829).

Pro-Administration Party

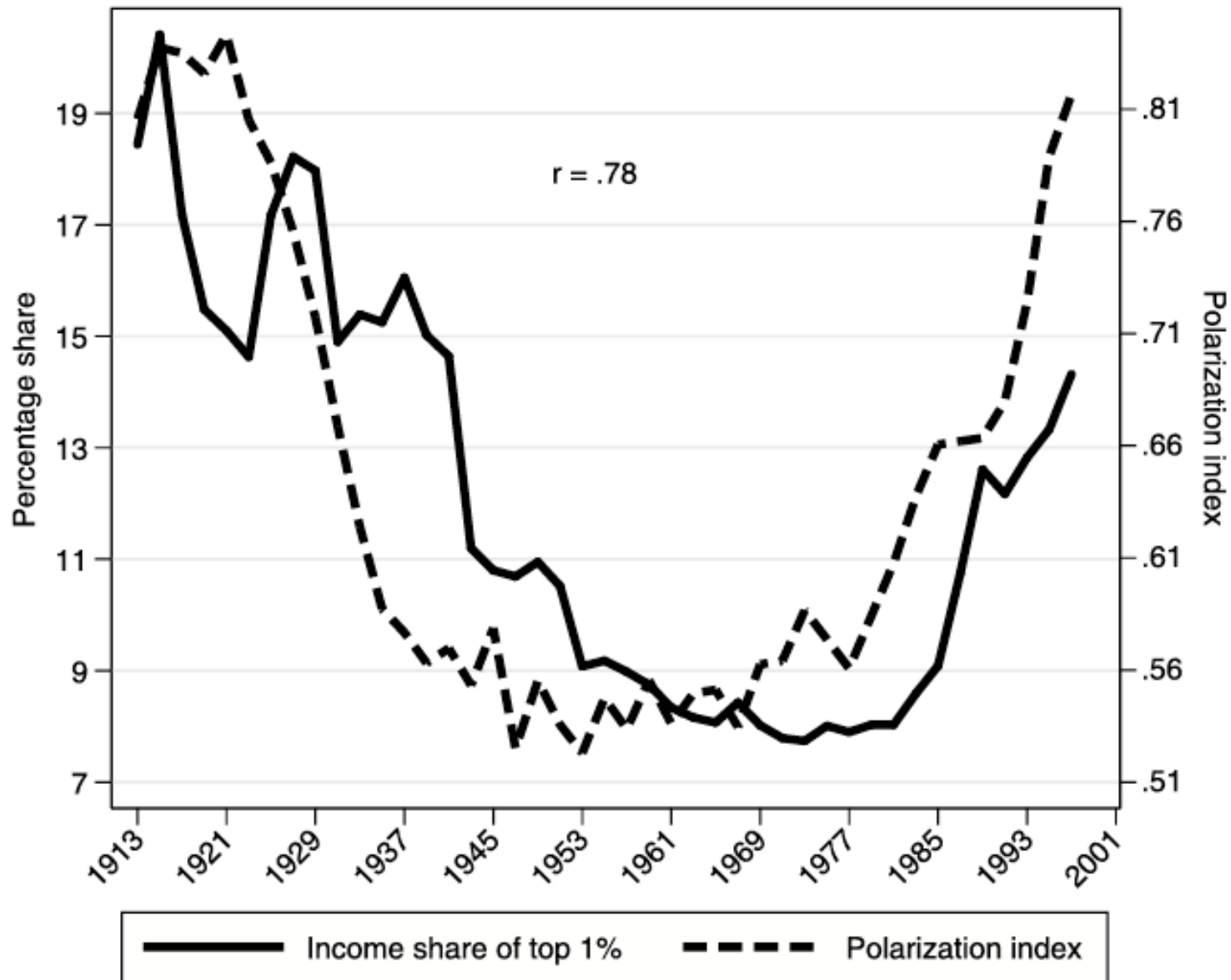
Active from the 1st Congress (1789) until
the 3rd Congress (1795).

Anti-Administration Party

Active from the 1st Congress (1789) until
the 3rd Congress (1795).

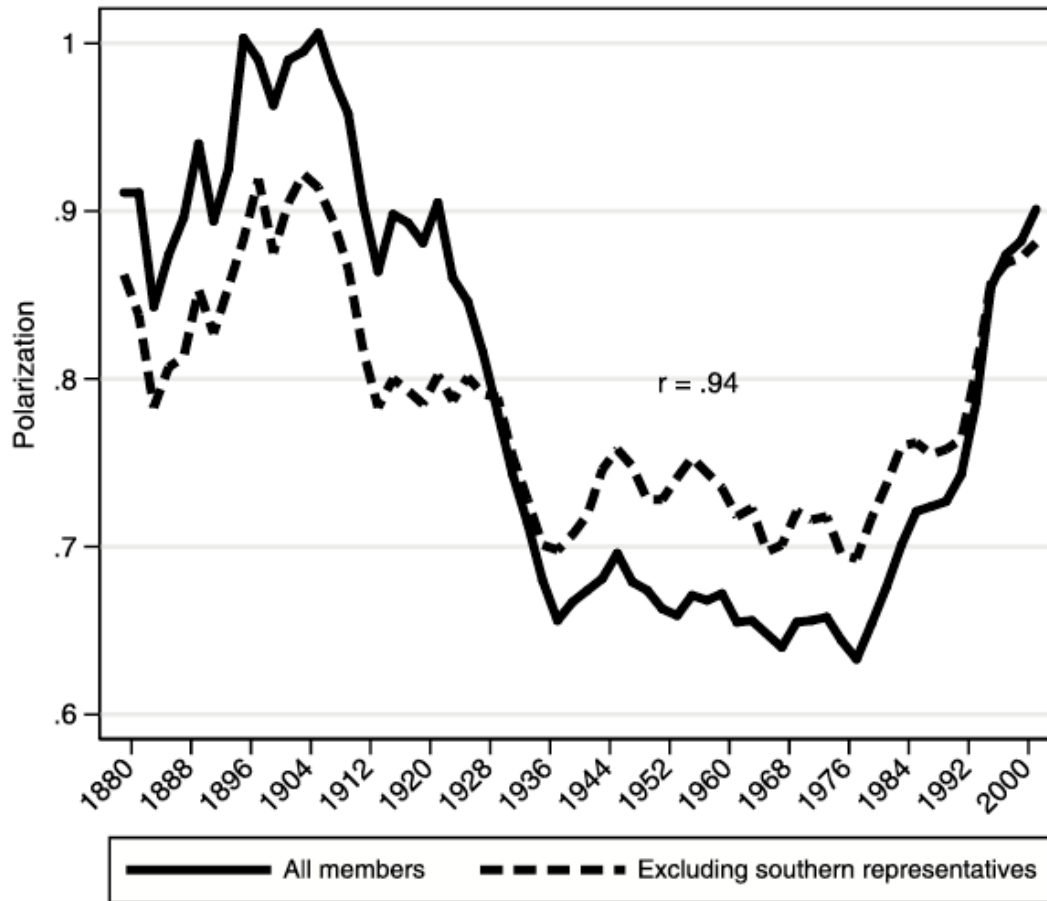


McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006), *Polarized America*, p. 6



McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006), *Polarized America*, p. 8 (Piketty & Saez income shares from top tax returns rather than Gini coefficients from full distribution)

Does Southern realignment explain polarization in Congress?



Partly.

The U shape is indeed less striking when we exclude the South.

Figure 2.18

Southern Effect on Polarization in U.S. House, 1879–2001

Note: Measures of distance between two parties with and without southern members.

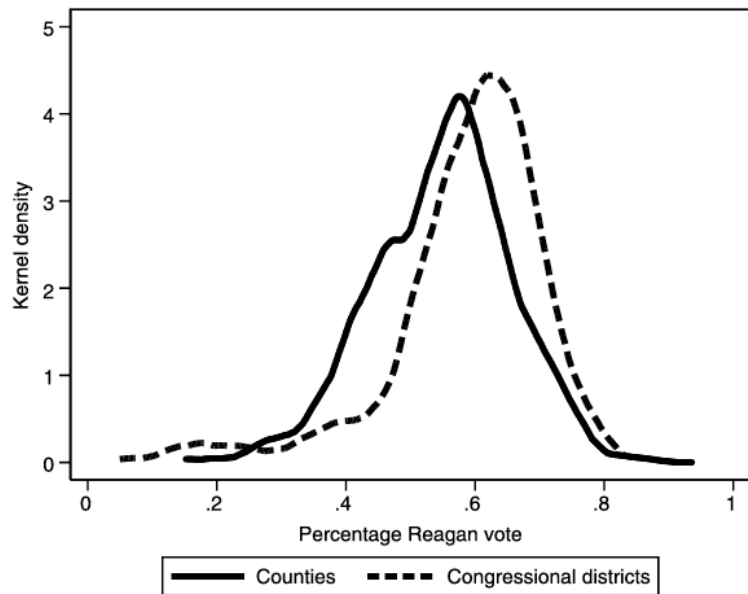


Figure 2.22c
 Distribution of the 1980 Reagan Two-Party Vote by Counties and Districts
 Note: Counties are weighted by population. Both densities estimated using bandwidth = .025.

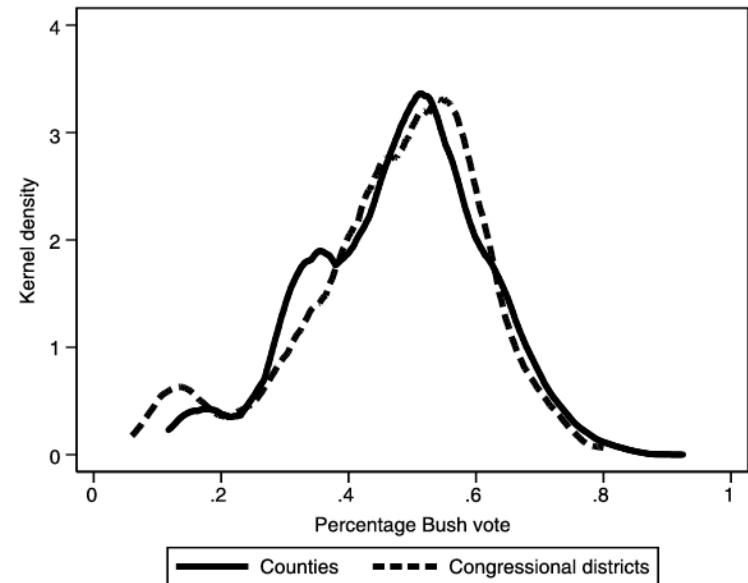


Figure 2.22a
 Distribution of the 2000 Bush Two-Party Vote by Counties and Districts
 Note: Counties are weighted by population. Both densities estimated using bandwidth = .025.

Does gerrymandering explain polarization in Congress?

Is there evidence that the distribution of partisanship in counties (fixed) vs districts (changing) diverged?

Not much 1980-2000.

But note *flattening* of both distributions. What does that indicate?

McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006), *Polarized America*, p. 63 and 65

Do primary elections explain polarization in Congress?

McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006):

- Existence or nature of primary elections causes it? *Timing problems:*
 - Primaries introduced mainly in Progressive era (around turn of 20th century)
 - Slightly more polarization in closed-primary states, but closed primaries not becoming more common
- Reduction in participation in primaries causes it? *No direct evidence:* polarization not lower following presidential elections (when participation is higher)

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Autor et al show that congressional districts that were more affected by import competition from China in the 2000s were more likely to elect MCs with polarized voting records in 2010 (especially more conservative Republicans), controlling for 2002 conditions.

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This is mainly through replacement rather than shifts in ideology of existing MC.

Elite and mass polarization: are elites more or less polarized than citizens?

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Widespread view that elites (e.g. members of Congress) are more polarized than citizens, and that this is bad (Fiorina & Abrams 2009, Abramowitz 2010, Bafumi and Herron 2010, Mann and Ornstein 2013; cf Levendusky 2009: distribution of preferences hasn't changed, but party identities have).

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Basic idea: few members of Congress have the mix of positions held by “centrist” voters, but most hold the positions endorsed by the majority of their constituents.

Ahler and Broockman (2018): example

Table 1. The Delegate Paradox: An Example of Why “Best Issue Delegates” May Appear Ideologically Extreme

	Liberal Survey Response?					Liberal Roll Call Vote?		
	Voter 1	Voter 2	Voter 3	Voter 4	Voter 5	Adam Schiff (D-CA)	Best Issue Delegate	Hypothetical Moderate
Ledbetter Act	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
Children’s Health Insurance	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Stimulus	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0
Clean Energy Act	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Obamacare	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Measured ideology (share of responses liberal)	.8	.8	.8	.6	.6	1	1	.8
Mean issue agreement with constituents						.72	.72	.64
Mean ideological distance from constituents						.28	.28	.08

Note. 0 = conservative survey response or position; 1 = liberal survey response or position. Data are taken from the 2009 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Mean issue agreement and ideological distance are computed using eqq. (1) and (3).

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My focus: *affective polarization* (how people feel about other side), where there is consensus about phenomenon (but not its causes).

Some perspectives on mass polarization: partisanship & social identification

Conventional view of voters as dispassionately choosing the party they prefer, and partisanship as a “running tally” (Fiorina 1981) of performance evaluations.

Green, Palmquist, Schickler (2002) *Partisan Hearts and Minds* argue party identification is a kind of social identification.



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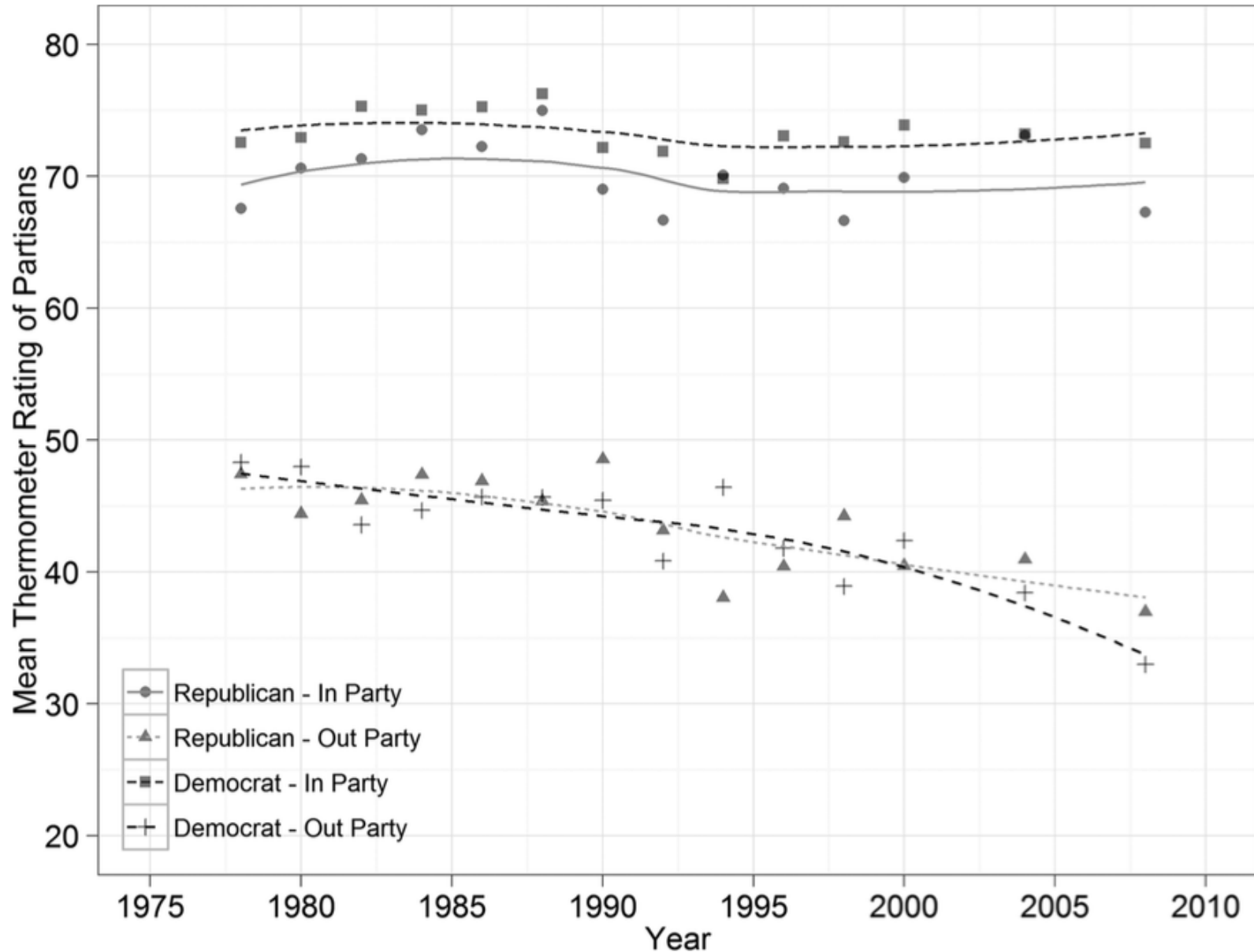
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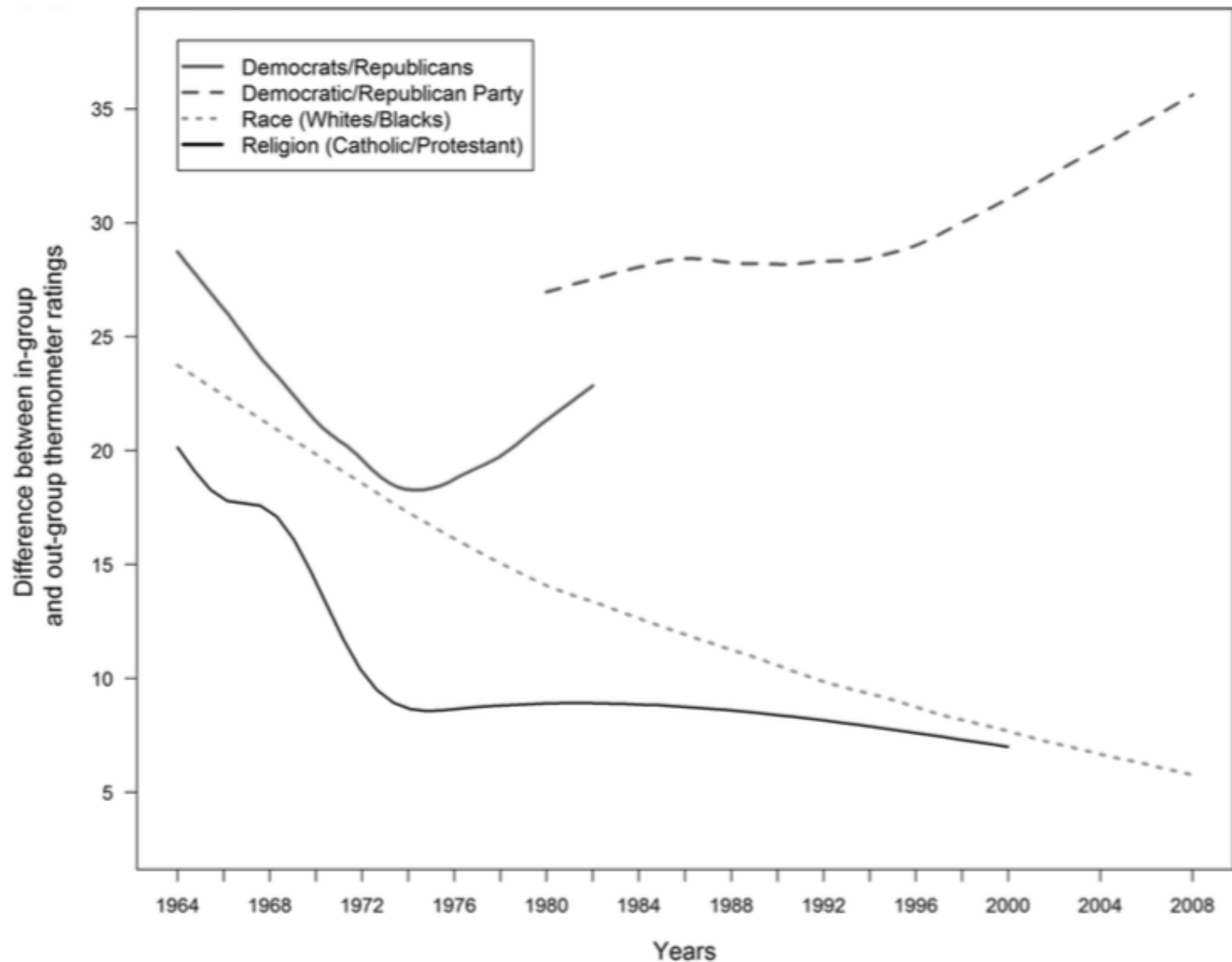
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And partisan animus has gotten worse over time: “we demonstrate that both Republicans and Democrats increasingly dislike, even loathe, their opponents”

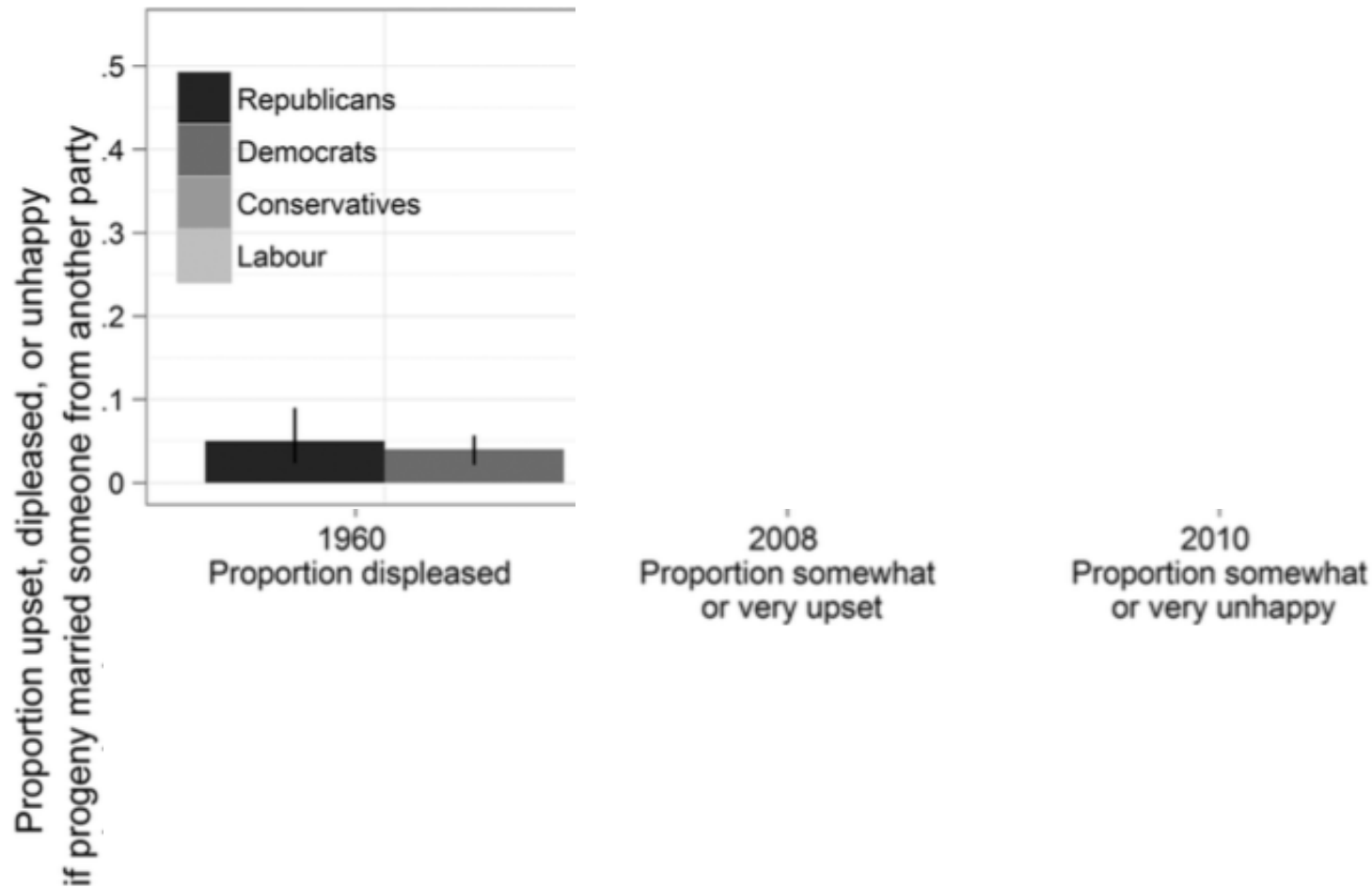
Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus



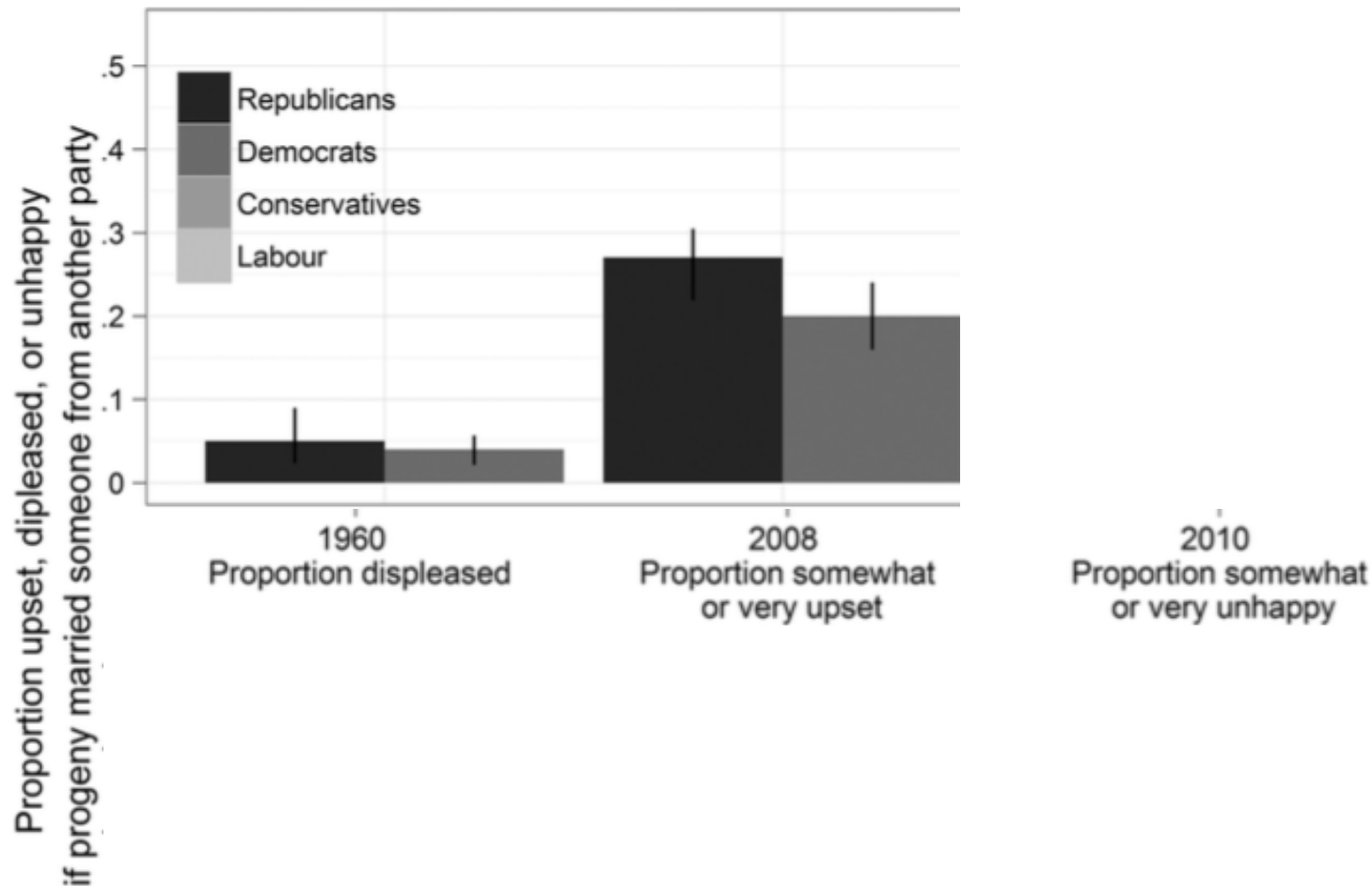
Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus (2)



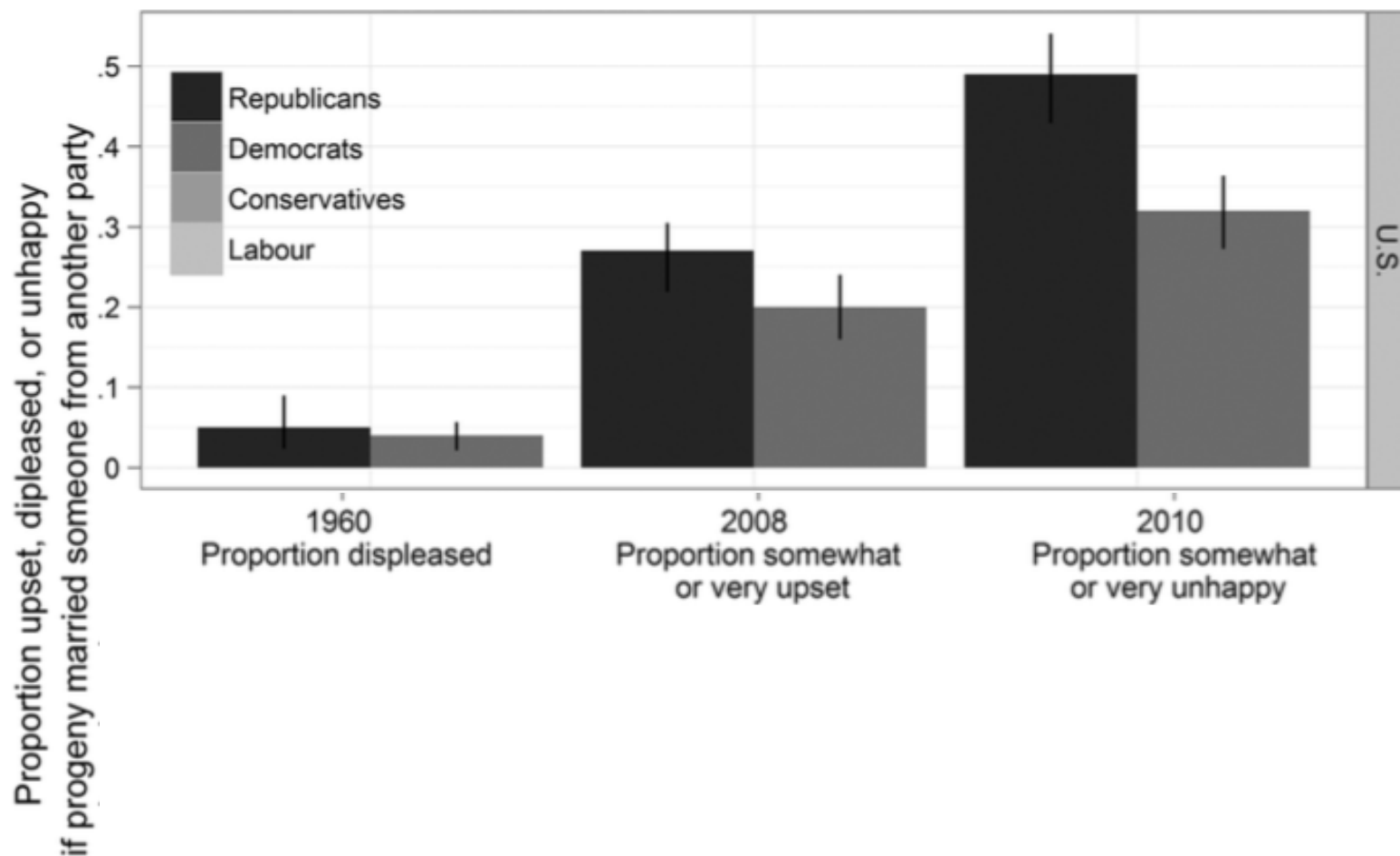
Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus (3)



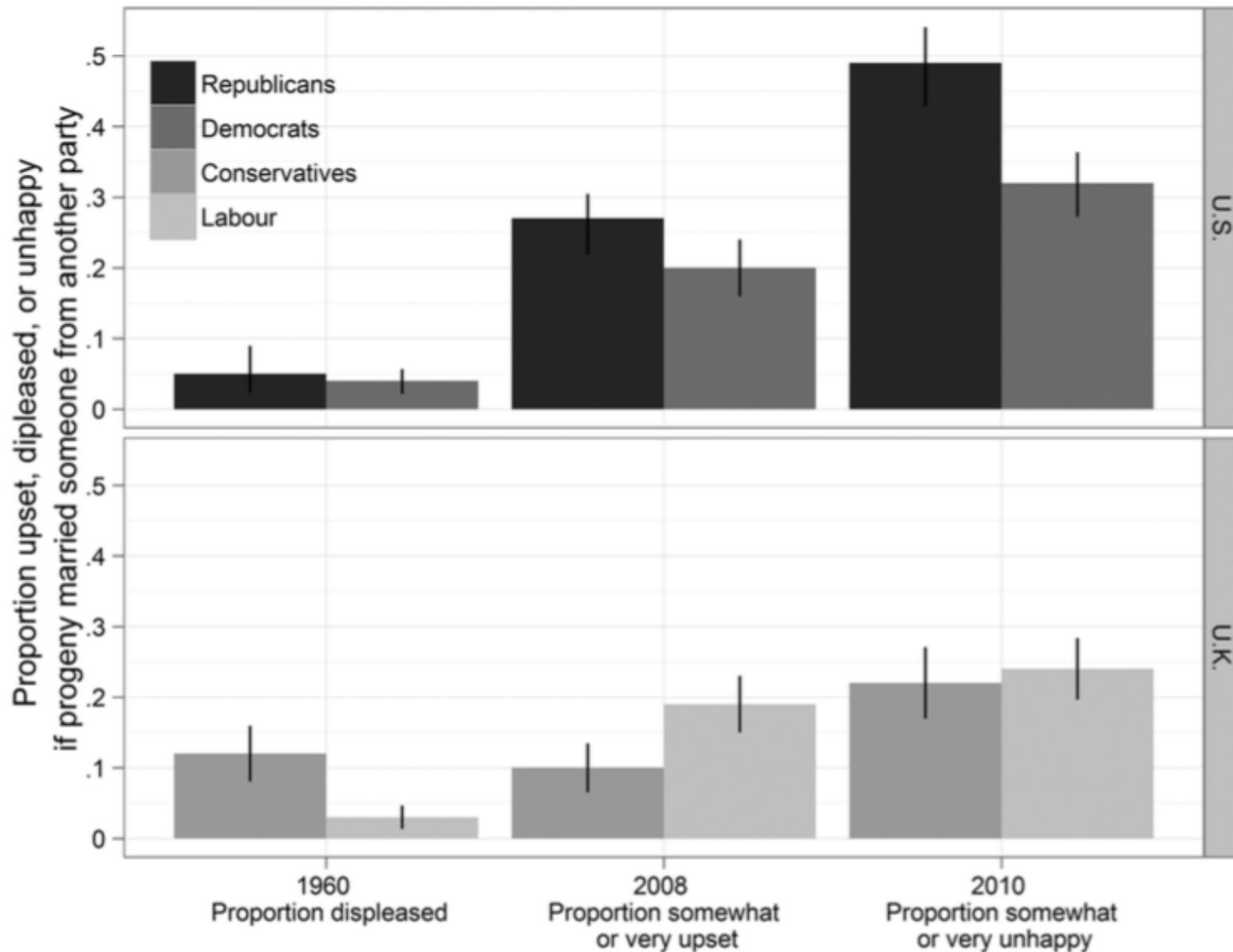
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Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus (4)

Year	Items	United States		
		In-party	Out-party	In – Out
1960	Selected traits ^a			
	Intelligent			
	Selfish			
	Average number			
	Positive traits			
	Negative traits			
	Positive – Negative			
<i>N</i>				
2008	Selected Traits ^a			
	Intelligent			
	Selfish			
	Closed-minded			
	Average number			
	Positive traits			
	Negative traits			
Positive – Negative				
<i>N</i>				

Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus (4)

Year	Items	United States		
		In-party	Out-party	In – Out
1960	Selected traits ^a			
	Intelligent	.33	.27	.06*
	Selfish	.04	.21	-.17***
	Average number			
	Positive traits	.47	.35	.12***
	Negative traits	.01	.08	-.07***
	Positive – Negative	.46	.27	.19***
	<i>N</i>		669	
2008	Selected Traits ^a			
	Intelligent			
	Selfish			
	Closed-minded			
	Average number			
	Positive traits			
	Negative traits			
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<i>N</i>				

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	<i>N</i>		669	
2008	Selected Traits ^a			
	Intelligent	.62	.14	.48***
	Selfish	.04	.47	-.43***
	Closed-minded	.08	.62	-.53***
	Average number			
	Positive traits	2.86	.62	2.24***
	Negative traits	.22	1.93	-1.70***
	Positive – Negative	-1.31	2.63	3.94***
<i>N</i>		656		

Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus (4)

Year	Items	United States			United Kingdom		
		In-party	Out-party	In – Out	In-party	Out-party	In – Out
1960	Selected traits ^a						
	Intelligent	.33	.27	.06*	.26	.09	.17***
	Selfish	.04	.21	-.17***	.02	.29	-.27***
	Average number						
	Positive traits	.47	.35	.12***	.34	.12	.22***
	Negative traits	.01	.08	-.07***	.01	.13	-.12***
	Positive – Negative	.46	.27	.19***	.33	-.01	.34***
	<i>N</i>		669		759		
2008	Selected Traits ^a						
	Intelligent	.62	.14	.48***	.38	.10	.29***
	Selfish	.04	.47	-.43***	.03	.28	-.25***
	Closed-minded	.08	.62	-.53***	.05	.47	-.42***
	Average number						
	Positive traits	2.86	.62	2.24***	1.93	.42	1.52***
	Negative traits	.22	1.93	-1.70***	.13	1.29	-1.15***
Positive – Negative	-1.31	2.63	3.94***	-.87	1.80	2.67***	
	<i>N</i>		656		817		

Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): the role of exposure to campaigns

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- Slightly higher partisan animus in battleground states

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- Slightly higher partisan animus in battleground states
- During 2008 election campaign, animus rose over time but especially in battleground states

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Main goal: benchmark partisan animus against racial hostility, accounting for social desirability bias.

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They find partisan animus is larger than racial animus.

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One technique: **brief implicit association test.**

How does response time differ when asked to link Democrats/blacks with positive word vs. when asked to link with negative word?

Iyengar & Westwood (2015): Brief implicit association test, briefly


Republicans
or
Good



Press the **I** key for **Republicans** or **Good**
Press the **E** key for anything else

Go as fast as you can

Republicans
or
Good



Press the **I** key for **Republicans** or **Good**
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Go as fast as you can

Democrats
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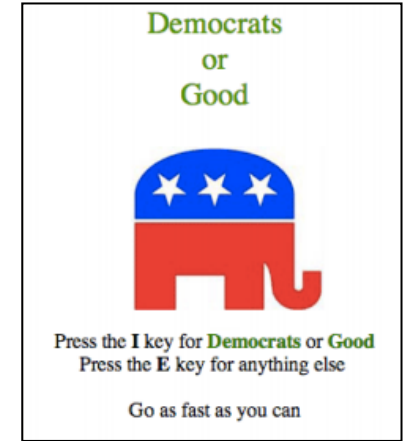
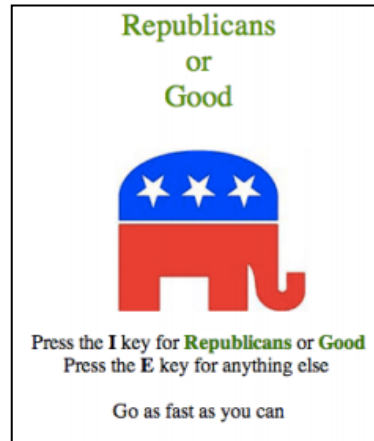
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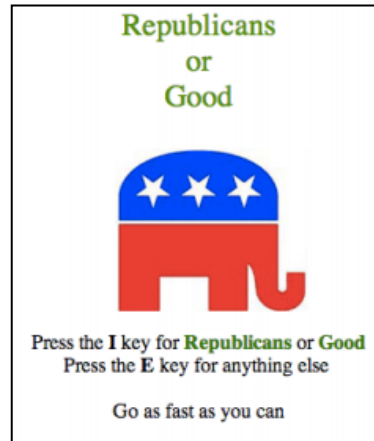
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Iyengar & Westwood (2015): Brief implicit association test, briefly



Basic task is linking symbol to party.

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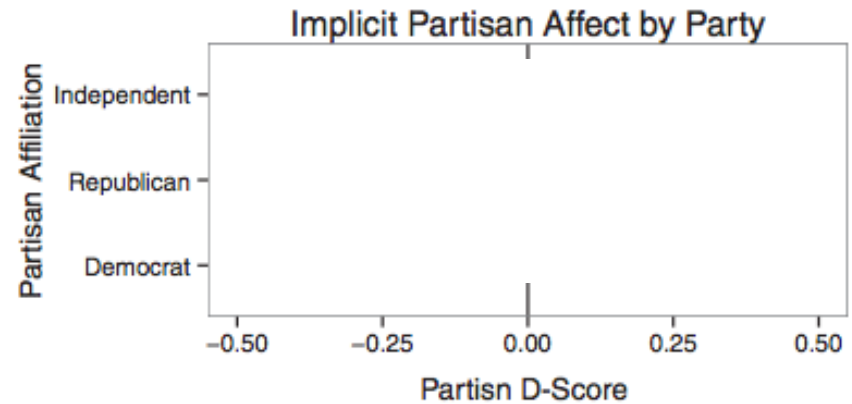


Basic task is linking symbol to party.

But “or good” makes it easier if you think that party is good,
harder if you think that party is bad.

Iyengar & Westwood (2015): “Fear and loathing across party lines”

FIGURE 4 D-Scores for the Partisan and African American/European American BIATs

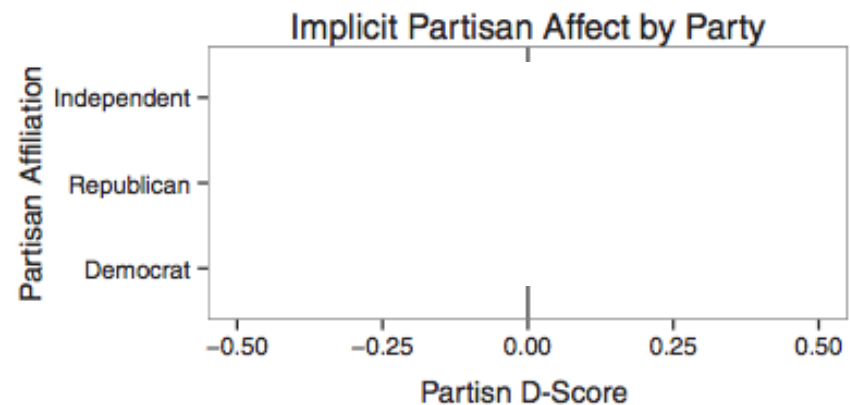


Note: This figure shows the distributions of implicit partisan affect (top) and implicit racial affect (bottom) with 95% confidence intervals.

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Partisan D-score: how much longer do you take when asked to identify **Democrat symbol/“good”** than when asked to identify **Republican symbol/“good”**?

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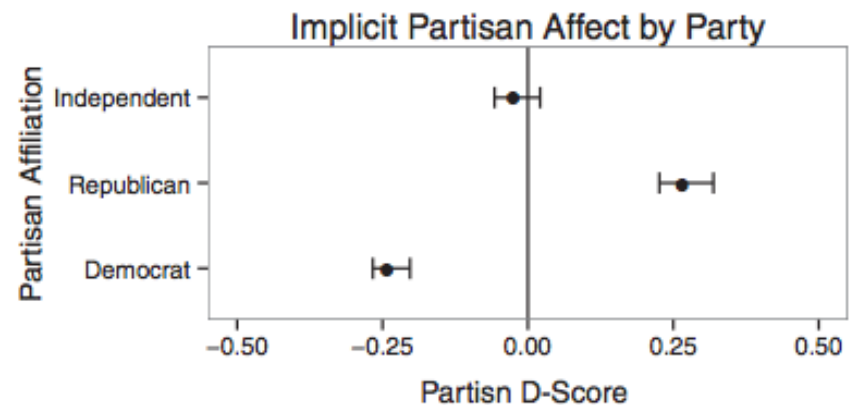


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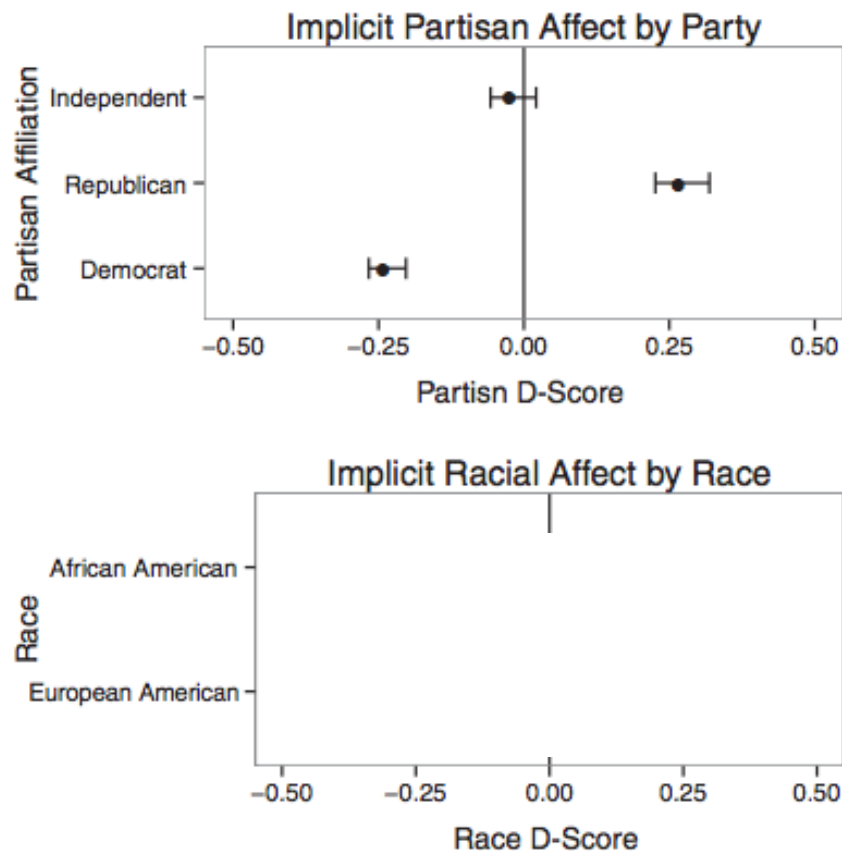


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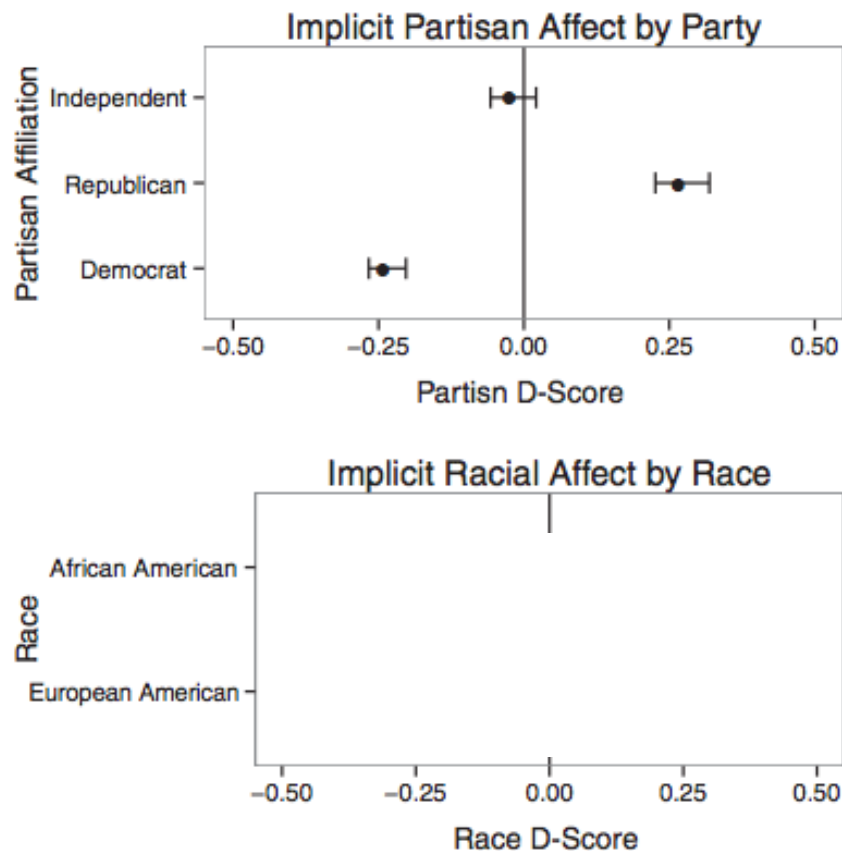
Note: This figure shows the distributions of implicit partisan affect (top) and implicit racial affect (bottom) with 95% confidence intervals.

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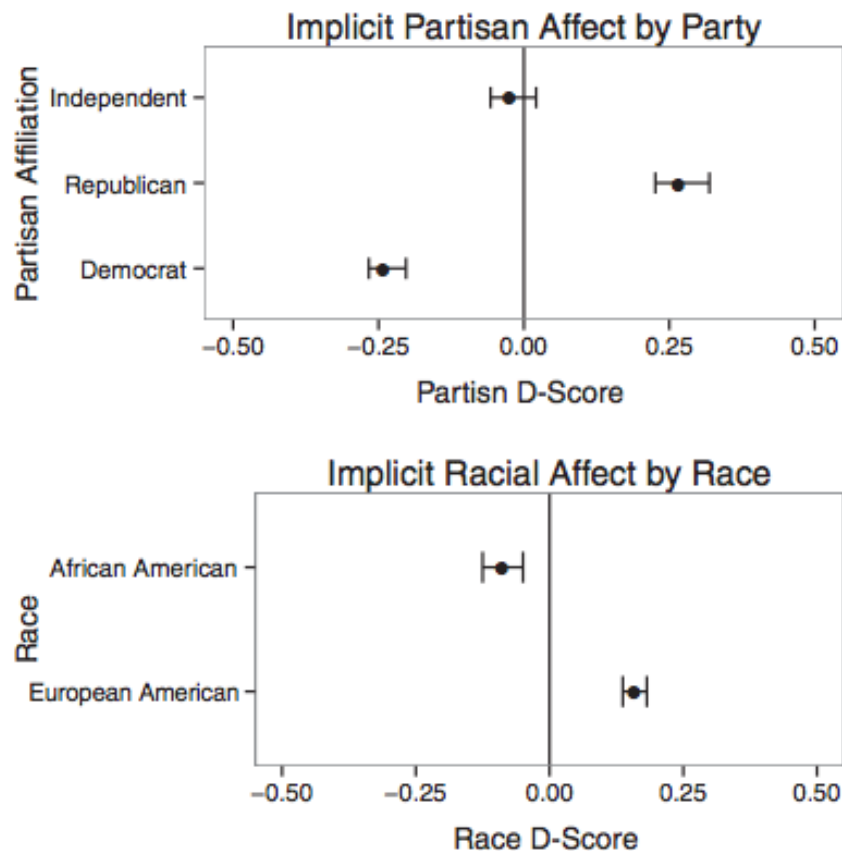
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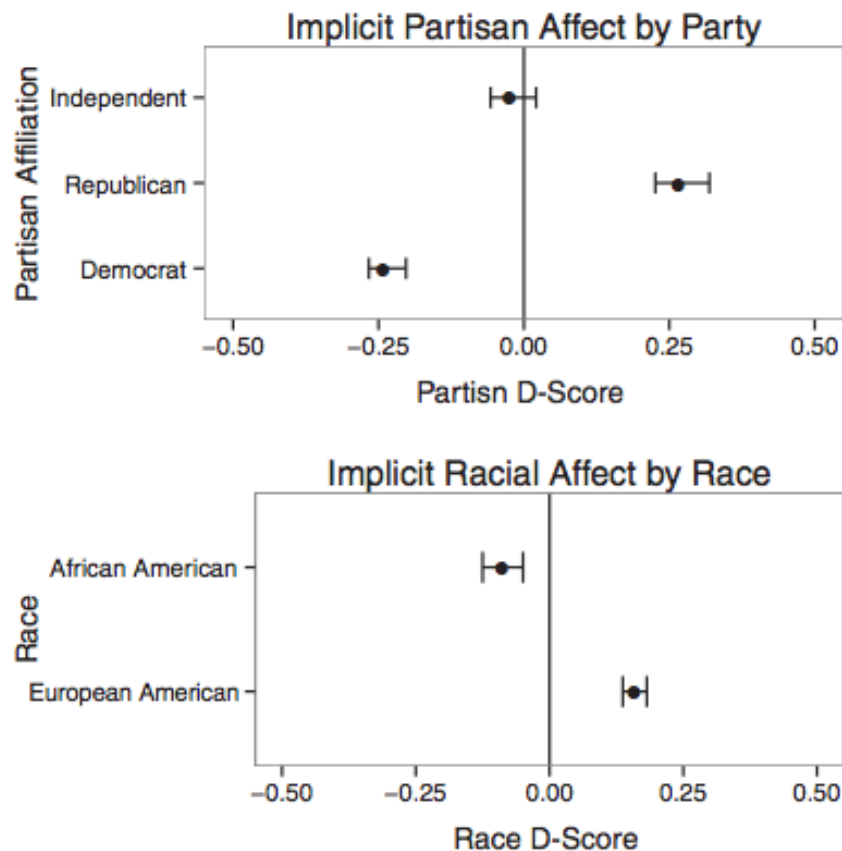
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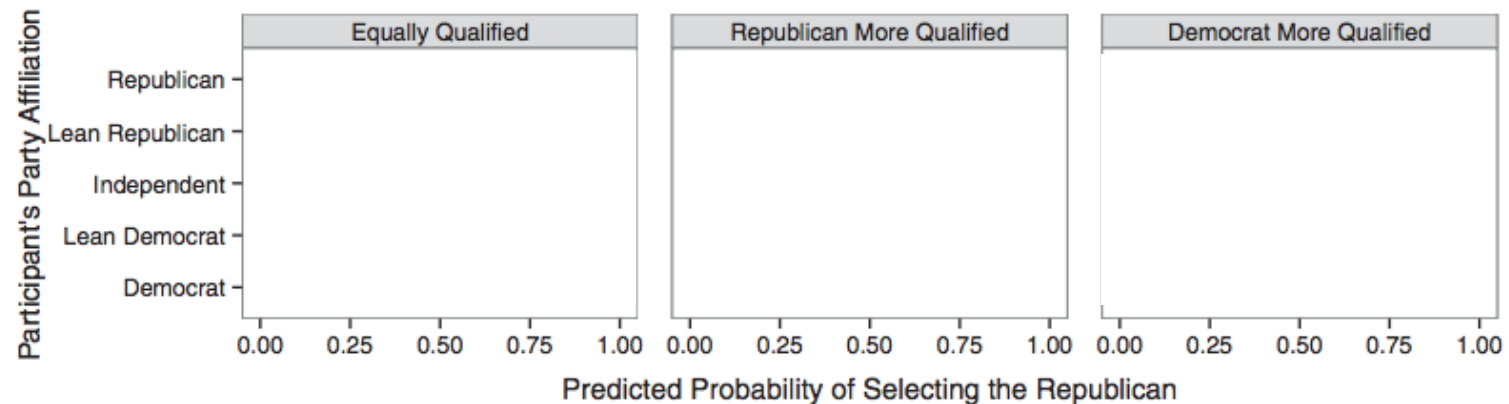
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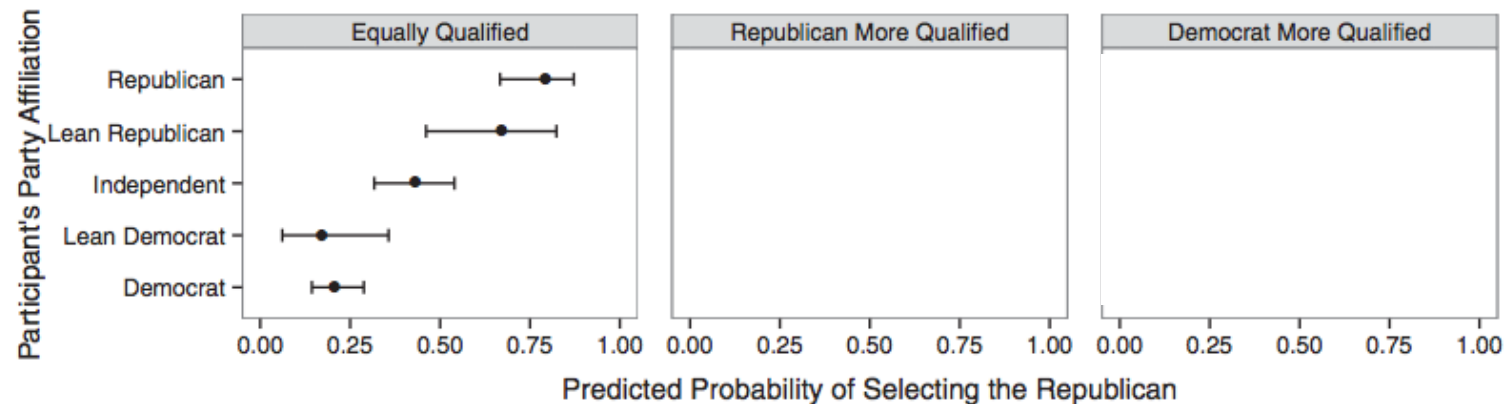
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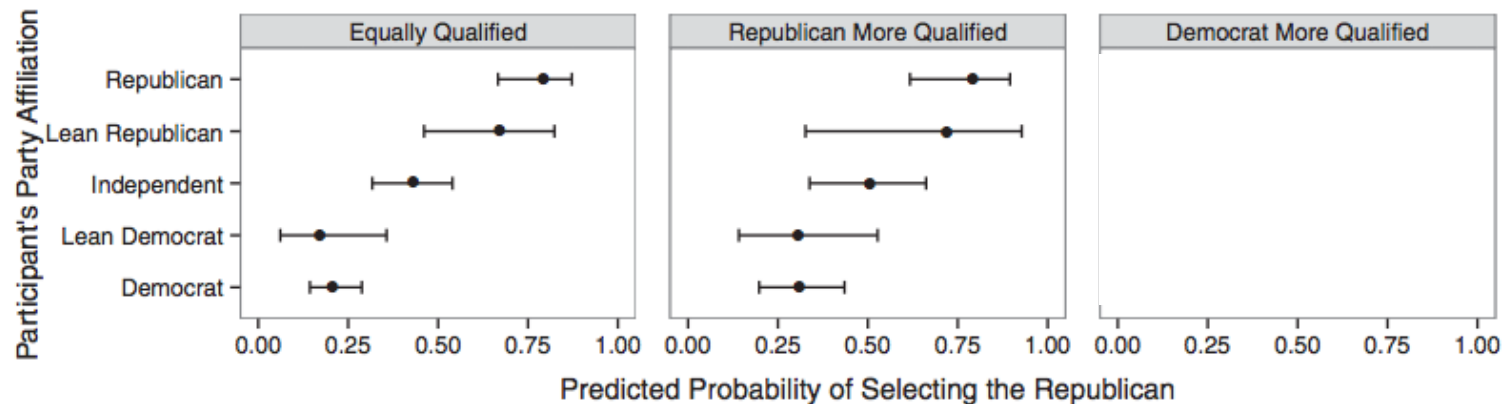
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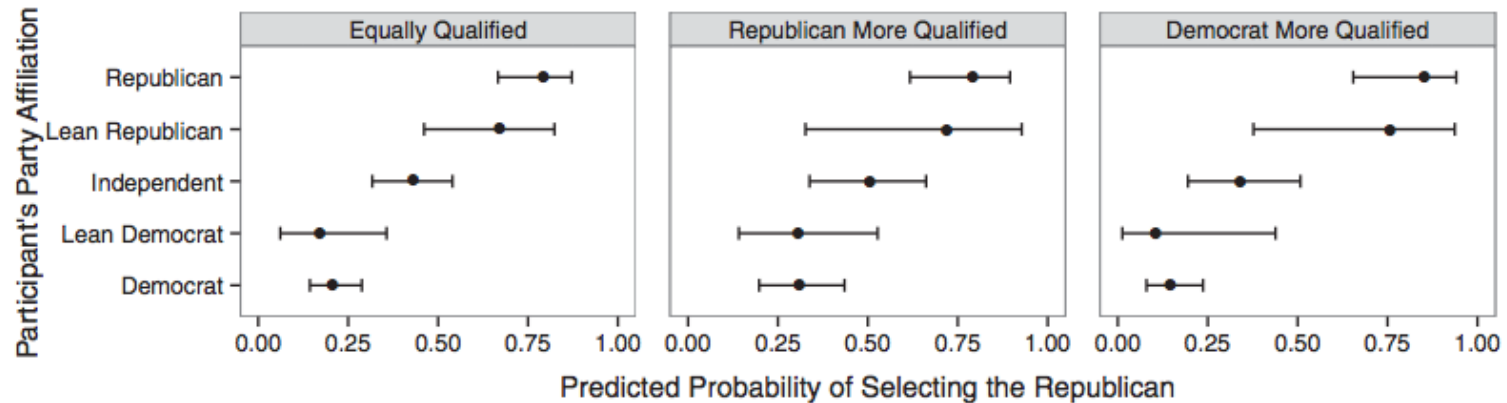
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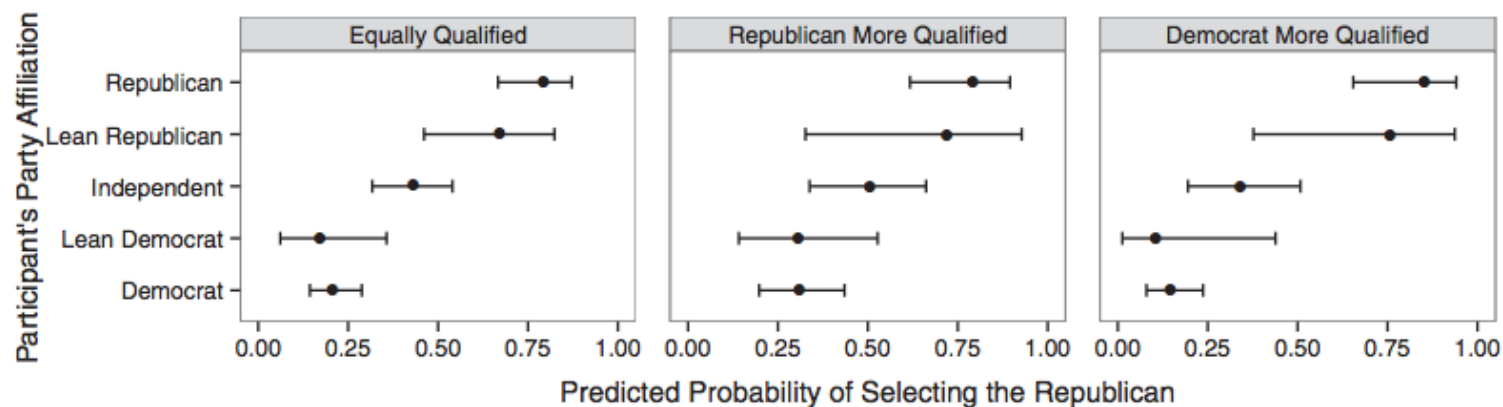
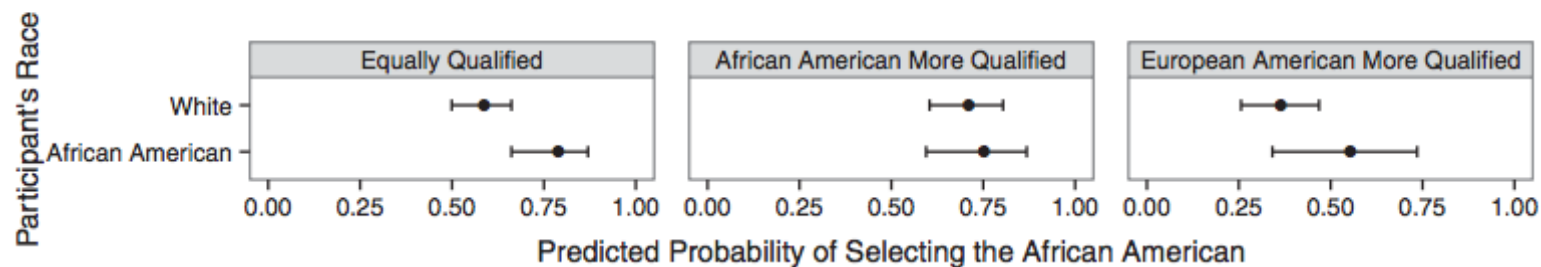


FIGURE 7 Predicted Probabilities for Racial Winner Selection



Iyengar & Westwood (2015): the role of social norms

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“Unlike race, gender, and other social divides where group-related attitudes and behaviors are constrained by social norms, there are no corresponding pressures to temper disapproval of political opponents. If anything, the rhetoric and actions of political leaders demonstrate that hostility directed at the opposition is acceptable, even appropriate. Partisans therefore feel free to express animus and engage in discriminatory behavior toward opposing partisans.”

The role of nationalism

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Levendusky (2017): Can we reduce partisan animus by emphasizing national identity?

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Natural experiment: Annenberg Nat’l Election Study interviewed subjects in 2008 April-August (with random interview date); do those interviewed closer to July 4 show less partisan animus?

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Polling (e.g. Gallup) indicates declining proportion saying “extremely proud” to be American since 2000; rate lower in younger generation.

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“Norm erosion” at the elite level contributes too.

Comparison to UK and Brexit

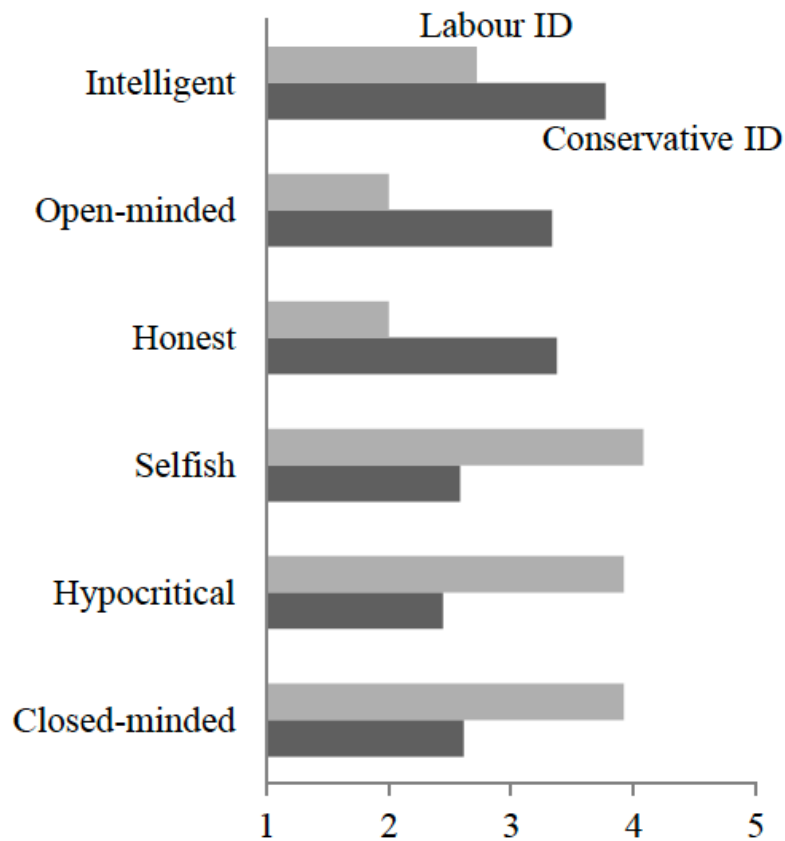
Hobolt, Leeper, Tilley (2018 wp): “Divided by the Vote: Affective Polarization in the Wake of Brexit

Table 2. Comparison of the strength of party and Brexit identities

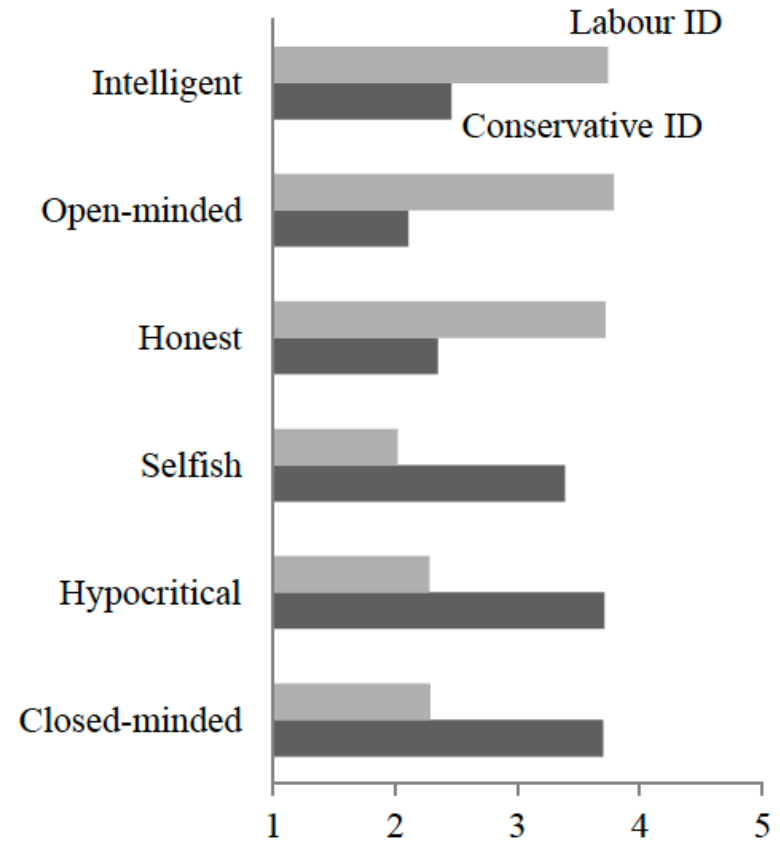
	Party identity		Brexit identity	
	Conservative	Labour	Leaver	Remainer
<i>Proportion of people with identity</i>				
BES - June 2017	26%	30%	43% ^a	44% ^a
YouGov - Sep 2017	27%	31%	37%	38%
Sky – Oct/Nov 2017	32%	35%	35%	35%
<i>Brexit identity scale (1-5 scale of 5-question battery)</i>				
BES - June 2017	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.1
Sky – Oct/Nov 2017	2.9	3.0	3.4	3.4

Comparison to UK and Brexit: Hobolt, Leeper, & Tilley (2018)

Perceptions of Conservative supporters

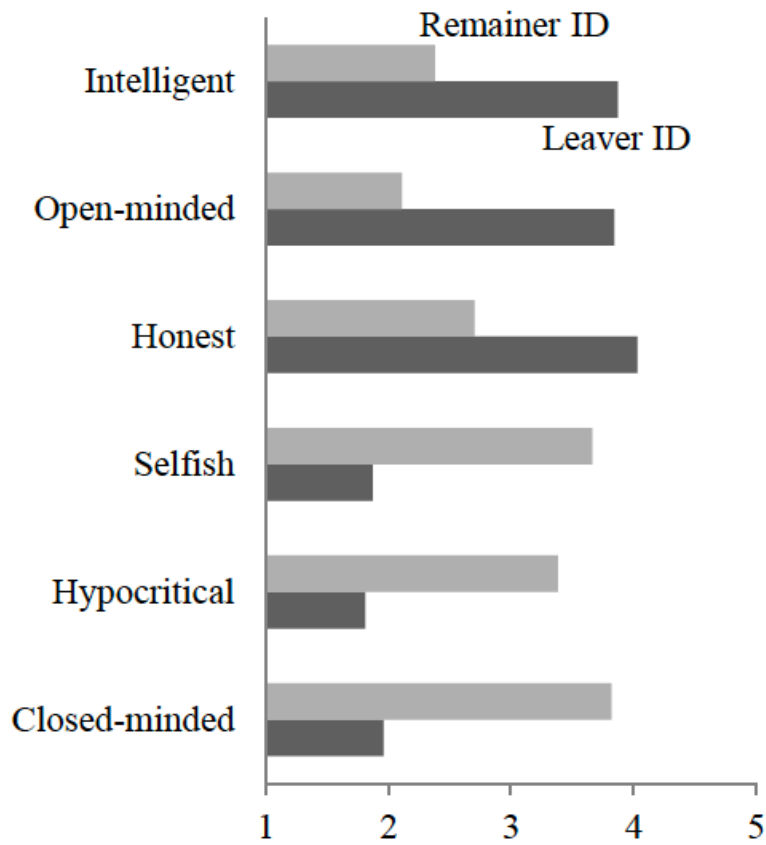


Perceptions of Labour supporters

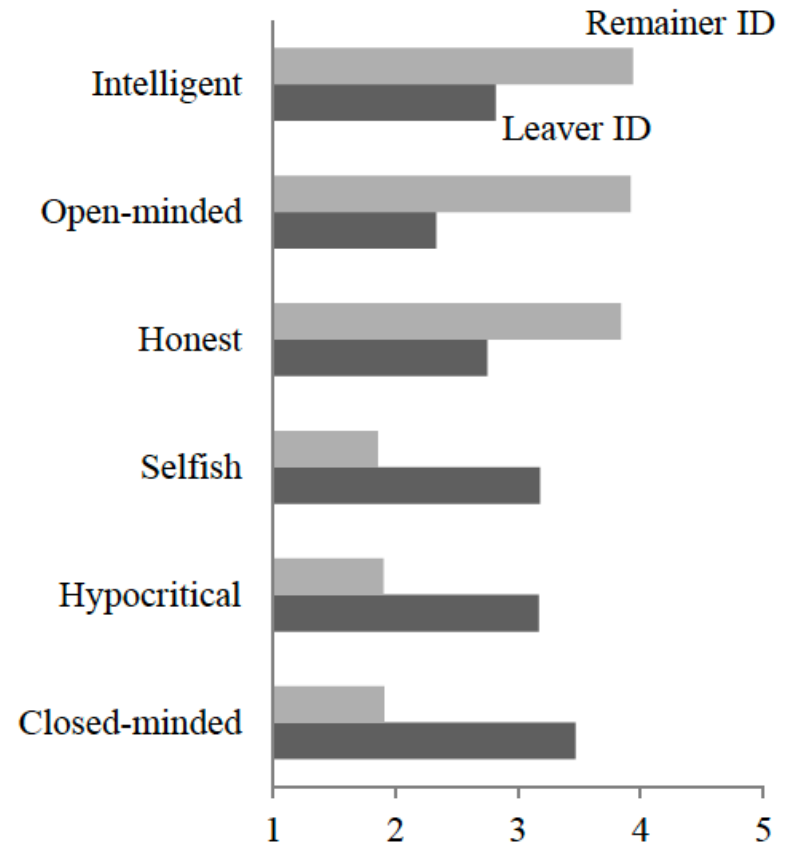


Comparison to UK and Brexit: Hobolt, Leeper, & Tilley (2018)

Perceptions of Leavers



Perceptions of Remainers



Comparison to UK and Brexit: Hobolt, Leeper, & Tilley (2018)

Table 3. Prejudice against the other side

	Party identity		Brexit identity	
	Conservative	Labour	Leaver	Remainer
<i>Happy with child marrying other side</i>				
YouGov - Sep 2017	24%	19%	45%	30%
Sky – Oct/Nov 2017	25%	16%	36%	23%
<i>Happy to talk politics with other side</i>				
YouGov - Sep 2017	43%	46%	56%	58%
Sky – Oct/Nov 2017	53%	41%	51%	47%

Note: The YouGov data have a total unweighted N of 3,326. The Sky data have a total unweighted N of 1,692 for party identity and 1,702 for Brexit identity

Some key aspects of federal elections in the United States

- Frequency:
 - Members of House of Representatives (# proportion to state pop) elected every two years
 - Senators (two per state) elected every six years (previously by state leg; now directly)
 - President elected every four years, with max two terms (indirectly, by Electoral College: # of electors per state = $2 + \# \text{ Reps}$)
- States determine how MCs are elected; 20th century court decisions restrict this to universal suffrage in equal-sized SMDs (gerrymandering)
- Almost all offices: partisan FPTP with primaries of various kinds. Exceptions: president; majority run-off (top two primary); ranked-choice voting in Maine

Ranked-choice voting movement

- System also known as alternative vote (UK), preferential voting (Australia), single-winner STV (Ireland), instant-runoff voting, Hare system, etc
- Variants used in many US cities (e.g. San Francisco), first time for Congress in Maine 2018
- Essentially an iterative runoff
- Advocates RCV as solution to spoiler effect, tactical voting, limited expression in FPTP

Electoral college background

- Original constitutional debate: popular election of President, vs. election by Congress?
- Electoral College as compromise through indirect election
“A small number of persons, selected by their fellow-citizens from the general mass, will be most likely to possess the information and discernment requisite to such complicated investigations.” (Federalist No. 68)
- Initial format (II.1.3): Each Elector votes for two candidates, one of whom must not be from own state; majority winner is President (second place is VP); if no majority winner Congress chooses among top 5.
- Twelfth Amendment (1803): Each elector casts separate ballots for Pres and VP
- Early 19C: Electors are partisan actors, thus *pledged* for a ticket; now electors usually no longer listed on the ballot

OFFICIAL BALLOT, GENERAL ELECTION
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
NOVEMBER 7, 2000

<p>ELECTORS FOR PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT</p> <p>(A vote for the candidates will actually be a vote for their electors.)</p> <p>(Vote for Group)</p>	<p>(REPUBLICAN)</p> <p>GEORGE W. BUSH - PRESIDENT 3➔</p> <p>DICK CHENEY - VICE PRESIDENT</p>
	<p>(DEMOCRATIC)</p> <p>AL GORE - PRESIDENT 5➔</p> <p>JOE LIEBERMAN - VICE PRESIDENT</p>
	<p>(LIBERTARIAN)</p> <p>HARRY BROWNE - PRESIDENT 7➔</p> <p>ART OLIVIER - VICE PRESIDENT</p>
	<p>(GREEN)</p> <p>RALPH NADER - PRESIDENT 9➔</p> <p>WINONA LaDUKE - VICE PRESIDENT</p>
	<p>(SOCIALIST WORKER)</p> <p>JAMES HARRIS - PRESIDENT 11➔</p> <p>MARGARET TROWE - VICE PRESIDENT</p>
	<p>(NATURAL LAW)</p> <p>JOHN HAGELIN - PRESIDENT 13➔</p> <p>NAT GOLDHABER - VICE PRESIDENT</p>

OFFICIAL BALLOT, GENERAL ELECTION
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
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<p>4➔</p> <p>(REFORM)</p> <p>PAT BUCHANAN - PRESIDENT</p> <p>EZOLA FOSTER - VICE PRESIDENT</p>	
<p>6➔</p> <p>(SOCIALIST)</p> <p>DAVID McREYNOLDS - PRESIDENT</p> <p>MARY CAL HOLLIS - VICE PRESIDENT</p>	
<p>8➔</p> <p>(CONSTITUTION)</p> <p>HOWARD PHILLIPS - PRESIDENT</p> <p>J. CURTIS FRAZIER - VICE PRESIDENT</p>	
<p>10➔</p> <p>(WORKERS WORLD)</p> <p>MONICA MOOREHEAD - PRESIDENT</p> <p>GLORIA La RIVA - VICE PRESIDENT</p>	
<p>WRITE-IN CANDIDATE</p> <p>To vote for a write-in candidate, follow the directions on the long stub of your ballot card.</p>	

TURN PAGE TO CONTINUE VOTING



Electoral college reform?

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How does this happen?

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1968 election results

	Pop. vote	Elec. vote
Richard Nixon	43.5%	56%
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NYT Sept 30 1970

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By WARREN WEAVER Jr.
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Why so hard to change?

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National Popular Vote Interstate Compact

"Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress..." (US Constitution, II.1.2)

Currently: All states use winner-take-all except Maine & Nebraska, which use the "district system".

NPVIC: Signatory states agree to give all electors to national popular vote winner, once sufficient number of states have signed.

