Title

A Double-Edged Sword? How Appeals to Group Identity May Shape Affective Polarization & Political Mobilization

Author

Wilke, Carolyn Joy

Publication Date

2021

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Los Angeles

A Double-Edged Sword? How Appeals to Group Identity May Shape Affective Polarization & Political Mobilization

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

by

Carolyn Joy Wilke

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Double-Edged Sword? How Appeals to Group Identity May Shape Affective Polarization & Political Mobilization

by

Carolyn Joy Wilke
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science
University of California, Los Angeles, 2021
Professor John Zaller, Chair

Democrats and Republicans in the United States have become increasingly hostile toward and distrustful of one another over the past five decades. This dissertation documents the rise of this phenomenon, which is called affective polarization, and develops and tests a novel theory to explain it.

Affective polarization has its roots the changing demographic composition of the two parties. The Democratic Party is increasingly non-white, educated, urban, non-religious, while the Republican Party remains overwhelmingly white, religious, and conservative. Previous work has tied these shifts to the increase in inter-party hostility but has been unable to show how exactly the process works.

This dissertation attempts to fill this gap in understanding with the argument that elite communication is the essential intermediate step in the transformation of demographic social sorting and into affective polarization. Specifically, political elites' appeals make group identities salient considerations, activating stereotypes about who belongs in each party. Political actors make these appeals in speeches, campaign ads, and news reports because they more are effective tools for mobilizing and persuading voters than appeals based on policy or ideology. And as core social identities such as race, class, religiosity, urbanicity, and age increasingly align with partisanship, the incentive to political actors to play to them become stronger.

In making these appeals to Americans' social identities, partisans' understanding of what a typical Democrat and typical Republican look like solidifies, making it easier to demonize members of the opposite party. These increased stereotypes lead to affective polarization among the American public. In other words, social identity alignment does not engender affective polarization in and of itself; the later results only as political communication activates aspects of individuals' personas in the service of political goals. Increased inter-party hostility is an unfortunate by-product of this mobilizing rhetoric.

To test this theory, I examine the way that political elites have communicated shifts in the party composition since the 1970s. I use a multi-pronged methodological approach, combining longitudinal survey data, text analysis, and survey experiments to test each link in my chain of argument: 1) that the parties have grown increasingly distinct over time, 2) that political elites communicate these changes in their rhetoric, and 3) that exposure to appeals to group identity can increase affective polarization.

Overall, the results of this research are mixed. I find robust evidence that affective polarization has occurred among broad swaths of the American electorate, and confirm the findings of Mason (2018) that social group sorting has occurred during that same time period. Further, I demonstrate that the language that party elites used to describe their priorities and goals tracks these changing party coalitions, with appeals to group identities increasing most sharply within the Democratic Party. However my research on the effects of exposure to group appeals produced mixed results, supporting expectations in some experimental tests and disappointing them in others. My overall conclusion from this research is that the theoretical premise of this dissertation, which posits a central role for elite communication in causing affective polarization, remains promising but will require more refined tests to confirm or refute.

The dissertation of Carolyn Joy Wilke is approved.

Ted Brader

Tim Groeling

Matt Barreto

John Zaller, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

For my family.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgments

I truly would not have been able to complete this dissertation without the love and support of many people. To begin, I want to thank my incredible committee. John Zaller has been everything that I could ask for in a mentor, advisor, and chair. He is both wise and kind. Over the past six years, he has pushed me to ask questions that matter, thoughtfully considered my arguments and analysis, provided me with the resources to test my ideas, and supported my decision to pursue an alternate career path. Thank you, John, for getting me across the finish line.

Matt Barreto has also had a fundamental impact on my research agenda and career trajectory. Many of Matt's students have been beneficiaries of his tremendous generosity, and I am no exception. Thank you for believing in my research from the beginning, giving excellent advice, and for helping to open the door to Democratic politics.

I'm grateful to Ted Brader and Tim Groeling, both of whom have shaped my interest in communication and media effects research over the years, and have graciously served on my dissertation committee.

Finally, Mike Traugott has shaped my academic journey, career, and life in innumerable ways. He spent many hours pouring over pages of SPSS print outs with me when I was an undergraduate student, teaching me research fundamentals with patience and kindness. When I graduated, Mike suggested I apply to the Master's program in Survey Methodology, a program I would not have found without his help. He provided me with my first teaching opportunities, found me an internship at the Gallup Organization, and has written me countless letters of recommendation. My life would have been immeasurably different had I not taken Mike's Comm 211 class in 2008, and I am so grateful to have such a wonderful and caring advisor.

My intellectual community extends beyond my faculty advisors, and I've been fortunate to have an extraordinary cohort along the way. Angie Gutierrez has been my partner-in-

crime since our first visit to UCLA. All graduate students need someone like Angie: a friend with an incredible memory, an obsession for political science, and very sound judgment. Thanks for being whatever I need: a gut check, a place to vent, or my maid of honor.

Sarah Brierley introduced me to one of my favorite places in Los Angeles, and our hikes and runs in the Santa Monica mountains are some of my most treasured memories from life in LA. My office mates, Tyler Remy and Brian Hamel (and honorary E.C. member, Bryan Wilcox), were incredible resources for troubleshooting code, workshopping ideas, and good coffee. And thank you to Aaron Rudkin, Tracey Brown, Luke Sonnet, and Kye Barker for the all the hikes, board game nights, and friendship in LA.

Dissertation writing can be extremely isolating, especially after I left Los Angeles. But I have been lucky to have had a great community of fellow dissertators along the way; Tamy Guberek and Evangel Penumaka helped me establish a writing routine even once I was working outside of academia full time.

My parents, Rob and Ruste, are the most incredible role models. They are the hardest working people I know, and always push me to be the best version of myself. I'm lucky to have parents who have always been there to help me celebrate my successes, and work through the hard times.

Raphael Nishimura is the rock in my life. I am truly grateful for a partner who is kind and thoughtful, calm in any situation, up for adventure, and always interested in talking surveys and statistics with me. I aspire to your level of dedication and passion for your work. Your belief in me has made me believe in myself.

And a final thank you to Jacqueline Jane, whose arrival gave me the deadline I needed to finish this project.

Vita

2014 M.S. Survey Methodology, University of Michigan

2011 B.A. Political Science, University of Michigan

Publications

Lasala Blanco, Maria Narayani, Robert Y. Shapiro, Joy Wilke. 2020. "The Nature of Partisan Conflict in Public Opinion: Symmetric or Asymmetric?" In *American Politics Research*

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"We must not become a country at war with ourselves. A country that accepts the killing of fellow Americans who do not agree with you. A country that vows vengeance toward one another. But that is the America that President Trump wants us to be, the America he believes we are." *Joe Biden, August 30, 2020*

1.1 Motivation: Partisan Antipathy

As the United States prepared for a presidential election on November 3, 2020, the political media frequently lamented the hostility and polarization that divide the parties today. "Is America Headed for Another Civil War?" asked one headline, while another described the political landscape in more colloquial terms: "Pass the pie and shut your piehole: Almost a third of Minnesotans have stopped talking to someone due to politics." To many Americans, politics has grown more deeply personal than ever before.

Though it is tempting to lay the blame for this partisan hostility at the feet of President Trump, whose penchant for demonizing his opponents is unprecedented in the American presidency, the rise of this antipathy cannot be laid at his feet. As I show in the sections that follow, the rise of partisan hostility in American politics began before Donald Trump became a major player on the political scene. For instance, the Tea Party protests which began in 2010 as a response to Barack Obama's presidency were full of displays of out-party hostility. "I don't belong to the Party of No, I'm with the Party of Hell No" read one protester's sign, "Stop the march to socialism" read another (Good, 2010). Similar protests were common among liberal activists during President Bush's time in office, suggesting for

at least a segment of the population, antipathy toward the opposite party has been a part of American political opinion for at least 20 years.

And yet, American history is littered with stories of hostility between partisans. Federalists accused Republicans of being "monsters of sedition" and "filthy Jacobins", and referred to President John Adams as "being 'a mock Monarch' who was 'blind, bald, toothless, querulous' and 'a ruffian deserving of the curses of mankind"'(Wood, 2009, p 256). In fact, historians credit the hostile rhetoric of the early republic with numerous violent uprisings, including the Whiskey Rebellion and the unrest stemming from opposition to Jay's Treaty.

Political hostility has run high at other points in modern American history as well. American rage boiled over during the Vietnam War and the race riots of the 1970s. Yet the political tension today is different. The protests of the 1960s and '70s were focused on a particular issue, while today's affective polarization is widespread. Feelings of hostility toward members of the opposite party in the 2020s are not solely driven by partisan attitudes on foreign policy or race relations. Rather, the rampant hostility in today's political environment is party-based; in 2020, Democrats hate Republicans, and Republicans hate Democrats. The question I ask in this dissertation is: Why?

This question is worth asking because the rise in affective polarization is associated with normatively undesirable democratic outcomes, in both the mass public and political elites. Among political elites and elected officials, this rise in party hostility manifests itself in memorable inter-partisan interactions, such as Republican Representative Joe Wilson's shout of "You Lie" while President Obama gave a speech on the House Floor in 2009, for which he was later rebuked by the House (Hulse, 2009). Another example is the interaction between Republican Representative Ted Yoho and Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, in which Yoho swore at Ocasio-Cortez on the steps of the US Capitol Building (Sprunt, 2020). This type of hostility and lack of civility manifests itself at the state-level as well, as evidenced by a recent interaction in the Texas state legislature, where one State Representative threatened to "put a bullet in one of [his] colleague's heads" (Stevenson, 2017). Yet these examples of disdain for members of the opposite party are not limited to the Republicans. For instance, in the 2016 campaign, Democratic presidential nominee

Hillary Clinton argued, "You could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic — you name it" (Khalid, 2016b).

But this phenomenon is not limited to one-off events. There's strong evidence suggests that political elites – including members of Congress – increasingly dislike one another as well. A recent paper examining C-SPAN footage demonstrates that members of Congress are literally crossing the aisle less often, and that there are fewer cross-party interactions on the house floor today than there were in the late 1990s (Dietrich, ming). This decline in cross-party interactions has occurred while members of Congress show are less likely to cooperate and form relationships with members of the opposite party (Andris et al., 2015). This increase in Congressional polarization is accompanied by a rise in congressional gridlock and a drop in legislative productivity (Binder, 1999; Carmines and Fowler, 2017; McCarty, 2007).

The rise in affective polarization is also associated with normatively troubling outcomes among the American public. Kahan et al. (2017) demonstrate that polarized individuals are worse reasoners and make worse decisions when confronted with data which challenges their political outlook. Similarly, when told they had been assigned to act as team leaders and were tasked with selecting teammates, affectively polarized individuals discriminate against members of the opposite party, "even at the cost of having a less educated team member working on tasks that require education and verbal acumen" (Lelkes and Westwood, 2017).

Further, partisans discriminate against members of the opposite party, *even in non-political settings*. For instance, Iyengar and Westwood (2015) show that, in an experimental setting, partisans are less likely to give scholarships to members of the opposite party than their own, even when the member of the opposite party was objectively more qualified. They demonstrated, using the same behavior measure of trust that I use in Chapter 4, that partisans trust members of their own party significantly more than members of the opposite party.

Affective polarization may be shaping fundamental aspects of our lives as well, including

where we choose to live. Brown and Enos (2021) show that many American voters live in neighborhoods that are highly segregated along partisan lines, with "virtually no exposure to voters from the other party in their residential environment." These findings align with recent public opinion work showing that about 40% of partisans report they think it would be easier to get along with a new neighbor who was a member of their own party (Doherty, 2016b). Given the stereotypes about members of the opposite party that partisans hold, these findings may be less surprising. Pew has found that overwhelming majorities of Democrats (75%) and Republicans (64%) view the opposite party as closed minded, about half of Republicans (55%) and Democrats (47%) view the opposite party as immoral, and two-thirds of Republicans view Democrats as unpatriotic (63%) (Doherty, 2019a).

1.2 The Magnitude of the Problem

Though partisan hostility is not *unique* to this moment in American history, survey data establish that there is something different about partisans' attitudes today than even 30 years ago. Tension between members of opposite parties is a more prominent feature of American civic discourse today than it was in even during the turbulent 1970s. Data from the Pew Research Center show a dramatic shift in partisans' perceptions of the opposite party in the past two decades. When asked about how they feel about the opposite party in 1994, just 17% of Democrats replied that they held a very unfavorable opinion of Republicans; but by 2016, this had risen to 55%. The staggering level of change occurred among Republicans as well; from just 21% in 1994 to 58% by 2016 (Doherty, 2016a).

Similarly, data from the American National Election Studies show that, over the course of the last few decades, partisans' rating of the opposite party has dropped dramatically. Figure 1.1 shows the average feeling thermometer score that partisans give to members of their own party (top line) and the opposite party (bottom line), since 1964.[1] This figure

[1]Question wording has changed slightly over time. Since 1978, the ANES has asked about the Democratic and Republican Parties; before that time, they asked about "Democrats" and "Republicans." There is not a significant break in the trend line at that point. Question wording: We'd also like to get your feelings about some groups in American society. When I read the name of a group, we'd like you to rate it with what

demonstrates that partisans' rating of the opposite party on a 0 to 100 feeling thermometer scale has fallen by more than half half since 1964. In that year, partisans rated the opposite party at a neutral rating of about 50. Through the 1970s, partisans ratings of members of their own party fell, while their feelings toward members of the opposite party remained fairly stable and neutral.

Feelings about the opposite party ticked downward in the 1980s, but fell about 10 points in the 1990s, and began to fall off even more dramatically beginning in the year 2000, and again in 2008. By 2020, partisans' rating of the opposite party had fallen to just 19.

During that same time period, partisans' ratings of their own parties remained fairly stable. Beginning at an average of 81 in 1964, in-party ratings bounced around through the early 2000s, climbing again to 76 in 1988. Since 2008, partisans' ratings of their own party have ranged from a high of 73 in 2008 to a low of 67 in 2016. In 2020, partisans' aveage rating of their own party was 71.

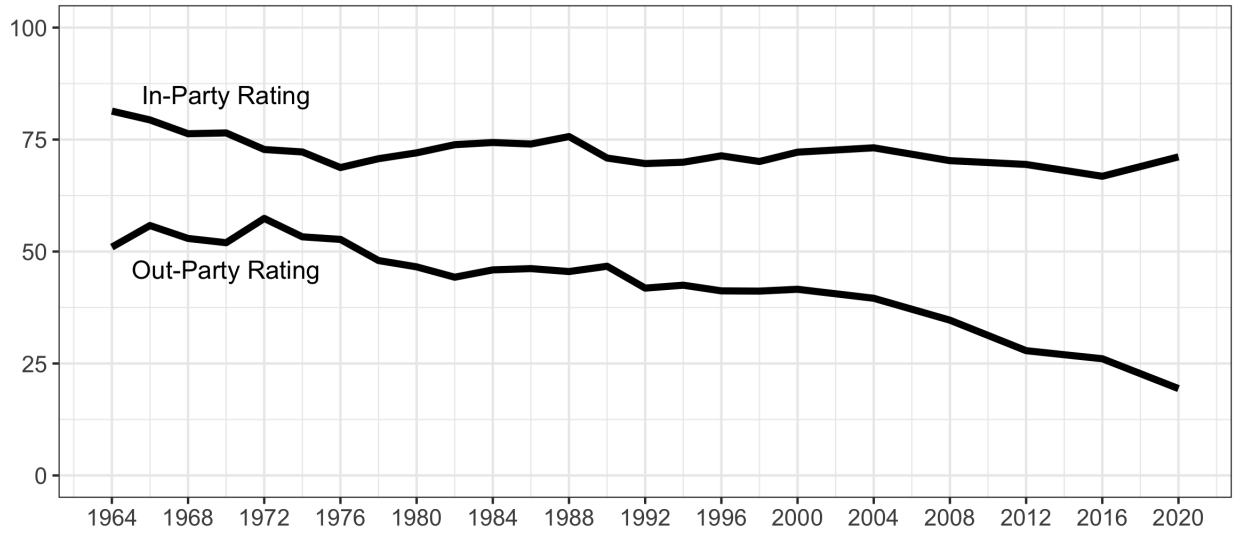
The gap between partisans' rating of their own party and their rating of the opposite party was identified and termed "affective polarization" by Iyengar et al. (2012). In this dissertation, I hope to improve our understanding of why this gap has grown so dramatically in recent years. Specifically, why have partisans' ratings of the opposite party dropped to such a great extent? My argument will be that elite appeals to the demographic groups which increasingly align with either party shape stereotypes about partisans and enhance inter-party hostility. Group-based appeals heighten partisans' perceptions that members of the opposite party are simply different from people like you, and lead to increased feelings of distrust and dislike among partisans.

Group-based appeals are especially prevalent and explicit in Trump's America – for instance, his racist tweet about four Democratic congresswomen: "Why don't they go back

---

we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees-100 degrees mean that you feel favorably and warm toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorably towards the group and that you don't care too much for that group. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward a group you would rate them at 50 degrees. If we come to a group you don't know much about, just tell me and we'll move on to the next one. And still using the thermometer, how would you rate the *Democratic Party/Republican Party*?

Figure 1.1: ANES Party Feeling Thermometer (1964-2020)



Note: Prior to 1978, the question asked about 'Democrats' and 'Republicans.'
After 1978, question asked about 'Democratic Party' and 'Republican Party.'

and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came" which led to chants of "Send her back!" at a 2019 Trump rally (Yglesias, 2019). Or, for example, his racist attack on former Democratic congressmen Elijah Cummings, in which he described Cummings' predominantly African American, Baltimore-based district as a "disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess" where "no human being would want to live" (Baker, 2019). Trump aids confirm that this type of racialized appeal is designed to play to his majority white, working-class base, to prime fears about an increasingly diverse country (Scott, 2019).

However, though partisan animosity in the United States is especially prominent during the Trump Era, Donald Trump is not the underlying driver of this phenomenon. As I show in Chapter 3, appeals to group identity have been on the rise since the 1970s. Appeals to group identities existed before Trump's presidency, and will likely continue to play a prominent role in American politics well after.

1.2.1 Who is Polarized?

Partisanship is an enduring and stable group-based identity with important consequences for political behavior (Bartels, 2000). But partisan attachments today encompass more than

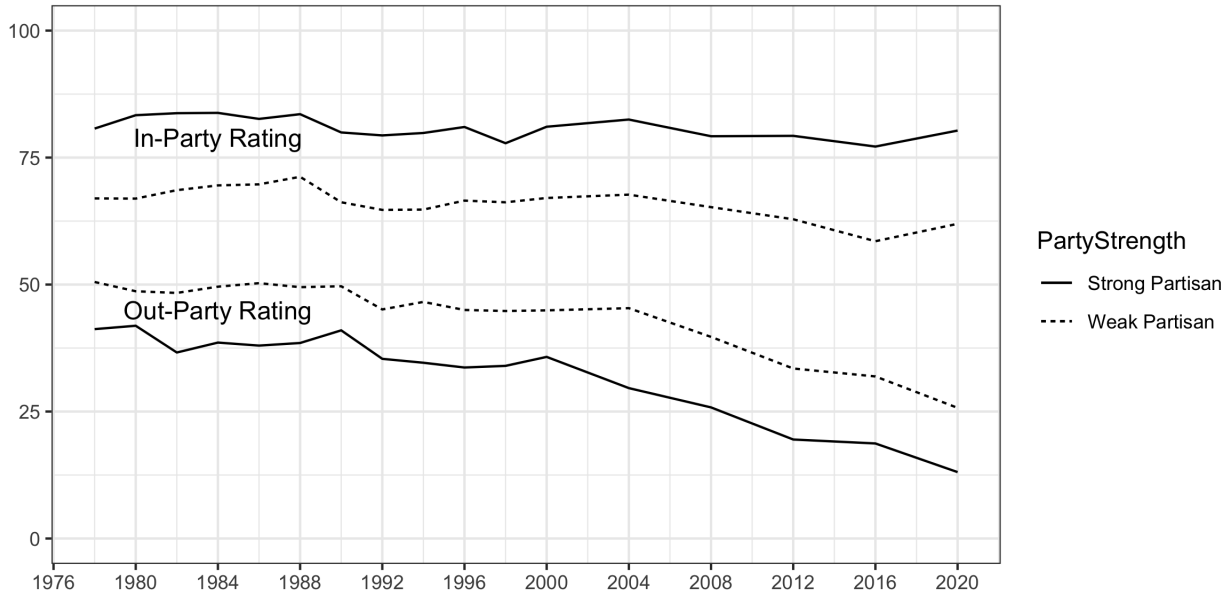
policy preferences. "It cannot simply be that partisans fear an untoward policy outcome should their opponents win office," write Green et al. (2002). "Partisans would not want the opposing team to win election to a purely honorary office" (220). Partisanship incorporates a team-like enthusiasm for one's party, and (increasingly) intense dislike toward those who support the other team. In fact, Theodoridis (2017) shows that partisan identity is an implicit, pre-cognition association between one's self and one's party.

This emotional attachment to a party must be a crucial component for any theory seeking to explain affective polarization. In an important paper, Huddy et al. (2015) show that social group affiliations can increase one's emotional attachment to the party group. They find that partisans who strongly identify with the parties exhibit stronger reactions when faced with electoral loss or victory compared to partisans who do not. Yet they find no difference in the emotional reactions between those who hold strong, ideologically consistent, positions on issues and those who do not when facing the same electoral prospects. These results indicate that a group-based, expressive partisan identity creates a stronger, more emotional, response than partisanship based in ideology.

We should not expect, therefore, this rise in affective polarization to be uniformly distributed in the American public. Partisanship is not an equally important identity for all Americans. We should expect affective polarization to be greatest among those for whom politics matter most, and whose partisan identities are most central to how they see themselves. Yet affective polarization is not limited to these individuals, as some have argued (Klar et al., 2018). Figure 1.2 shows that the same trend has occurred even among those for whom partisanship as an identity is only weakly held. The dotted lines represent the average views of the in- and out-party of weak partisans, while the solid lines show the average views of strong partisans.

Figure 1.2 shows that the overall trend is magnified among strong partisans. Though the party gap in feeling thermometer ratings has always been large among those who identify as strong partisans, it has grown even larger since the mid-1990s, and especially in the mid-2000s. In 1978, the party gap stood at 38 points, with strong partisans rating their own party at an 81, and the opposite party at a 42. By 2020, this gap had grown significantly, to

Figure 1.2: ANES Feeling Thermometer Trend, by Strength of Partisanship



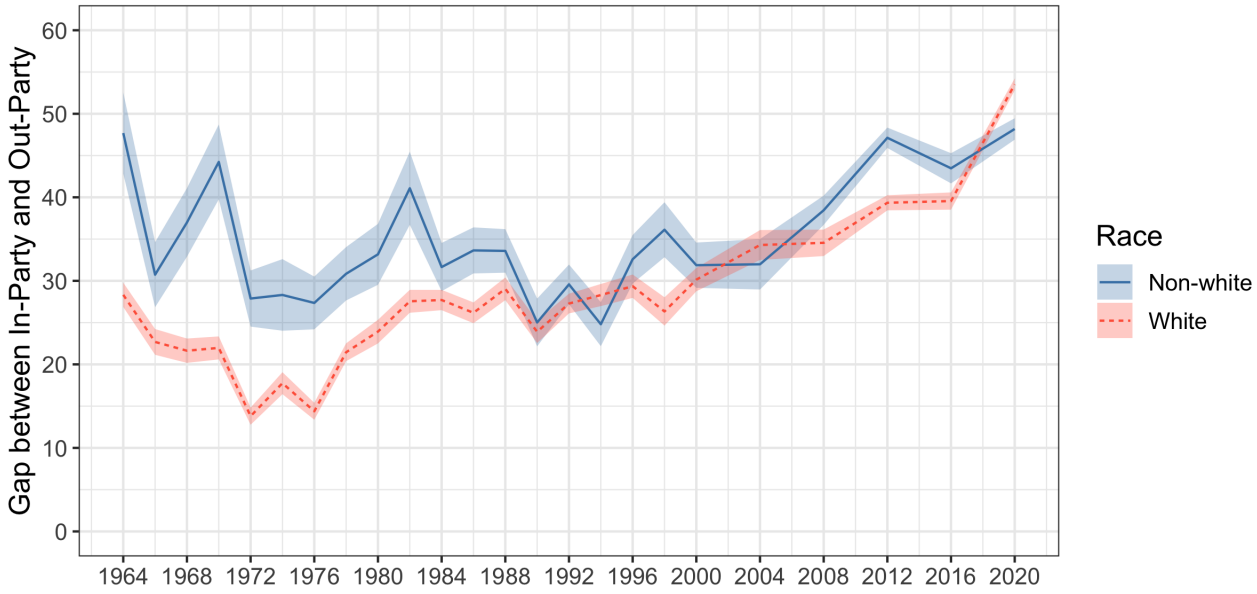
67 points; and this growth has been driven entirely by a decline in ratings of the out-party. In 2020, strong partisans rated their own party as a 80 on the feeling thermometer scale, about in line with their rating back in 1978. But strong partisans' rating of the out-party has fallen off precipitously, to just 13. Strong partisans today feel about as favorably toward their own party as they did in previous decades, but their opinions of the opposite party are *significantly* more negative today than in years past.

Importantly, Figure 1.2 also demonstrates that, though the overall gap between in-party and out-party ratings is significantly smaller among weak partisans than it is among strong partisans, the overall trend is the same. In fact, the party gap among weak partisans has about doubled in size during this time period. In 1978, this gap was about 16 points, meaning that on average, weak partisans rated the in-party about 16 points more favorably than the out-party. The gap grew slightly wider through the 1980s and early 1990s, and it has been greater than 20 points since 1996. By 2008, the gap had grown to 31 points, and in 2020, it stood at 36 points.

Further, as shown in Figure 1.3, the same pattern has occurred among both whites and non-whites over the past 50 years, though the trend is less noisy and more pronounced

among white Americans. The gap between how partisans rank their own party and the opposite party among whites is shown in the red dotted line, while non-whites are shown in the blue solid line. Since the 1960s, non-whites have generally expressed greater levels of affective polarization, compared to white Americans, most notable during the turbulent 1960s and '70s. Yet despite their higher baseline, the party gap that non-white partisans express has risen from its low in the 1980s and '90s.

Figure 1.3: ANES Feeling Thermometer Trend, by Race

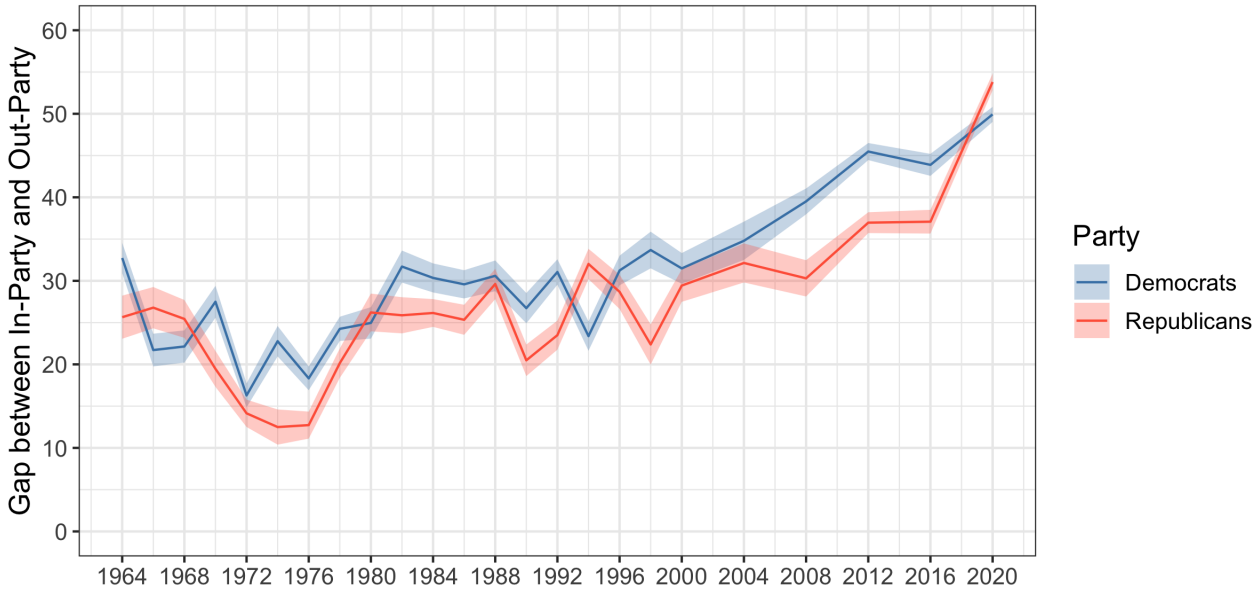


Similarly, the same trend emerges when broken down by partisanship, as shown in Figure 1.4. Democratic polarization has been growing steadily since its nadir in the mid-1970s. The trend among Republicans has been punctuated by period of decline, though the overall trend is one of increasing affective polarization over the past five decades.

Figure 1.5 shows this trend broken down by media use, including both TV use (1.5A) and Newspaper use (1.5B).[2] As the plots show, the rise in affective polarization has occurred among all groups, both frequent and non-frequent media consumers. But it is most pronounced among Americans who watch TV five or more days per week. Among that group, it

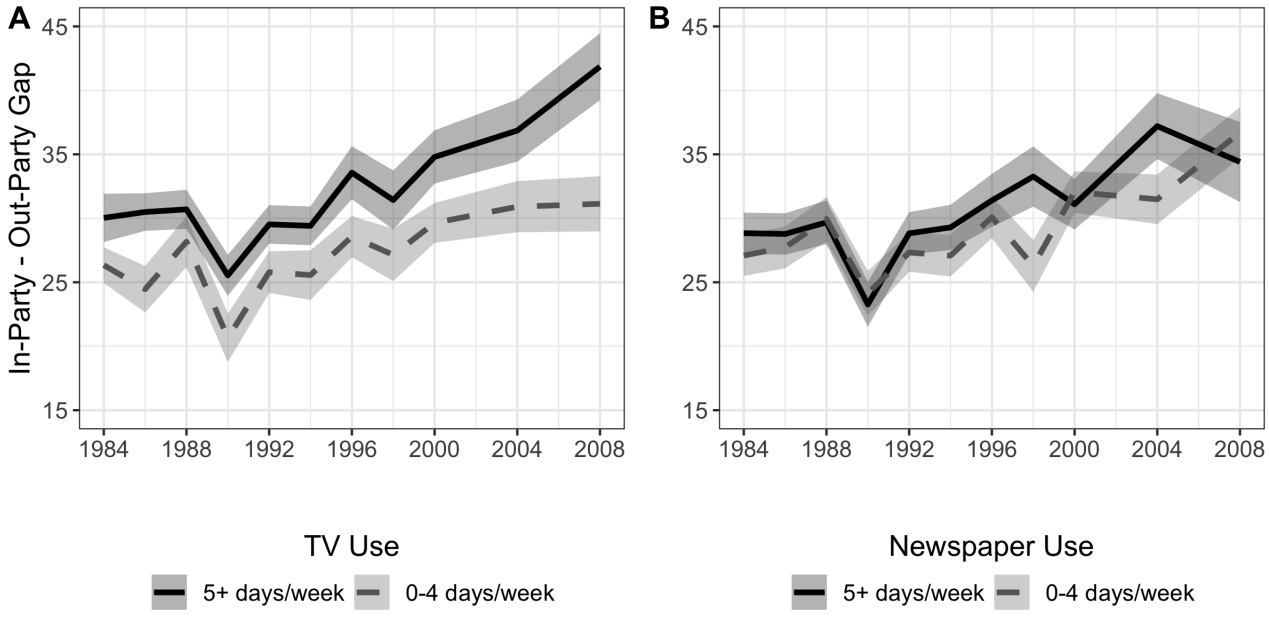
[2]Note: The ANES changed the way they ask media consumption after 2008, so the graphs are not updated after that time.

Figure 1.4: ANES Feeling Thermometer Trend, by Partisanship



has risen from about 30 in 1984 to 42 in 2008. Interestingly, the same gap between frequent and infrequent newspaper consumers does not appear; affective polarization among these groups has trended together since the mid-1980s.

Figure 1.5: ANES Feeling Thermometer Trend, by Media Use



In summary, affective polarization is not a narrowly-occurring phenomenon. The rise in

inter-party hostility has occurred among whites and non-whites, Democrats and Republicans, the politically informed and the uninformed, the young and the old, TV news viewers and newspaper readers, both strong and weak partisans, the religious and non-religious, and liberals, conservatives, and moderates. The magnitude of the phenomenon does vary, but the trend is apparent among Americans of all sorts. The question I ask in this dissertation is: Why?

1.3 The Cause of Affective Polarization: Existing Theories

An appealing hypothesis is that the ideological sorting of the electorate has caused affective polarization. Though political scientists remain divided as to the extent to which Americans are polarized on the issues (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Fiorina et al., 2005), evidence suggests that, since the 1980s, liberals have sorted into the Democratic Party, and conservatives have sorted into the Republican Party (Hill and Tausanovitch, 2015). Though initially first measured among political elites (Poole and Rosenthal, 1984; Hare and Poole, 2014; Hetherington (2001), 2009), it has since also occurred within the public (Hill and Tausanovitch, 2015) – possibly as citizens receive cues about their ideological "home base" through elite cues (Nicholson, 2012) and the media (Davis and Dunaway, 2016).[3]

The coincidental rise of ideological sorting with affective polarization suggests that this trend may be a plausible explanation. In fact, the much of the work examining the factors driving affective polarization include ideological sorting as key component (Huddy et al., 2015; Mason (2015), 2016; 2018), and include ideology as one of the main social identities measured and becoming increasingly aligned with partisanship.

However, I argue that theories of affective polarization which emphasize the effects of ideological sorting place too much weight on the role of ideology among the American public. The earliest studies of public opinion demonstrated the lack of ideological constraint among

[3]Klar and Krupnikov (2016) have noted the rise in the share of political independents that has occurred over time. As individuals with weaker attachment to the parties become independents, perhaps the parties will have a higher concentration of partisans with strong attachment to the parties.

most Americans (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964), a finding that has recently been replicated and extended (Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017). Evidence in Chapter 2 shows there has been a widening gap divergence between the parties in their attitudes about issues. But, for most Americans, attitudes about issues are weakly held, and the gaps between the parties on policy issues – though wider than ever before – remain fairly small. Simply put, most Americans do not hold ideological positions strongly enough for that to be driving this trend.

Other theories of prejudice developed to explain racial discrimination might also be applied to affective polarization. Most similar to my theory of demographic divergence is work by Craig and Richeson (2014), who explicitly test whether theories of group threat shape white Americans' racial attitudes by showing that exposure to the changing demographics makes whites more racially conservative. Other, related, theories of prejudice, such as Power Theory (Giles and Hertz, 1994) or the Group Position Model (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996) explain how prejudice against Black Americans develops among whites.[4] But these existing theories of racial prejudice cannot explain the rise in affective polarization in the United States, because they offer an explanation for one only side of the story: why Republicans dislike Democrats. The increased hostility in American politics cuts across both racial and party lines; the one thing partisans can agree about today is they do not like the other guy. Thus, existing theories of the role of social sorting on affective polarization are unsatisfying, either because they do not adequately explain increased out-group hostility and flat in-group attachment (identity alignment theory), or they do not explain why both Democrats *and* Republicans display increased out-party animosity (theories of racial prejudice).

A third alternative theory aimed at explaining the rise in partisan hostility argues that affective polarization simply reflects increasing disgust with all politics in general Klar et al. (2018). These scholars argue that it is aversion to politics in general, not the opposite party in particular, which has created trends like those shown in Figure 1.1. There is strong evidence that partisan disdain is high – many Americans do not like discussing politics. Yet

[4]Power Theory predicts that, as low-status groups (Black Americans) become increasingly associated with one party (the Democratic Party), higher status groups (whites) tend to leave the party – especially those for whom perceived threat is high (low income/status whites).

the rise in affective polarization among the American public has been overwhelmingly driven by a drop in partisans' rating of the opposite party; in-party ratings have fallen slightly since 2008, but still remain quite high. If the increasing gap between in-party and out-party ratings were driven by partisan disdain, rather than affective polarization, we would expect American partisans' ratings of both their own party and the opposite party to fall.

A fourth possibility is the rise of a polarized media environment. This explanation is very common among members of the political elite. For instance, when asked about the level of acrimony in politics, the late Senator John McCain noted, "I also think that media, honestly – I mean, let's be frank. There are certain levels of media that are extreme right, extreme left, that you just have different versions of the currents of the day. And I think that that has had a polarizing effect" (Axelrod, 2017). Similarly, when asked in an interview with *The New Yorker* magazine what newspapers he subscribed to, Former Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia replied, "We just get *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Times*. We used to get *The Washington Post*, but it just ... went too far for me. I couldn't handle it anymore." When asked what tipped him over the edge, he replied, "It was the treatment of almost any conservative issue. It was slanted and often nasty. And, you know, why should I get upset every morning? I don't think I'm the only one. I think they lost subscriptions partly because they became so shrilly, *shrilly* liberal" (Senior, 2013).

It is true that, since the 1990s, the political media landscape has fragmented. Many Americans today consume news that comes from a distinctly ideological viewpoint – and one that, more and more, is less likely to challenge their own perspective on politics (Prior, 2013; Stroud, 2011). The goal, often, is to reduce conflict and cognitive dissonance. Increasingly, partisans in the United States experience political news media from a place of bias, and view even neutral media as biased against their own perspective, a phenomenon known as the hostile media effect.

Existing research suggests that the consumption of ideologically-slanted news increases affective polarization by heightening partisan group identity (Levendusky, 2013a; Levendusky, 2013b). There are a number of plausible explanations for this effect, including the strengthening of a "team" identity. Another possibility is that media discussion of political

polarization has increased over time, which heightens dislike toward members of the opposite party (Levendusky and Malhotra, 2016).

Evidence for the effect of polarized media consumption on affective polarization comes from multiple sources. Lau et al. (2017) argue that voters in a high-choice media environment express greater levels of affective polarization than those in a more mainstream news environment.[5] Similarly, Lelkes et al. (2015) find evidence that greater access to broadband internet enhances partisan hostility, as it increases individual consumption of partisan media.

Further evidence of this effect can be seen by looking at the relationship between viewership of ideologically-slanted news sources and the ideology of a district's member of Congress. Using a unique instrumental variable, the numeric position of the Fox News Channel and MSNBC in a given area, Martin and Yurukoglu (2017) found that viewership of these channels predicts more ideologically extreme members of Congress, and that this has increased over time.

Yet a confounding variable in this discussion of the role of partisan media in creating affective polarization among the public is selection bias. That is, the fact that Americans who are more likely to opt in to watching politically-slanted news such as FOX or MSNBC are more likely to be strong partisans, and therefore have high levels of affective polarization in the first place. Further, while there is a significat portion of the American public which does consume politically-biased news sources, most Americans still get their news from more neutral sources (Stroud, 2011). And as I showed in Figure 1.5, Americans who frequently watch cable news are not the only ones who express high levels of affective polarization.

A final line of research has attributed this heightened level of affective polarization to increasingly aligned social identities (Mason, 2015, 2016, 2018). Mason has shown that, over the past few decades, the parties have grown increasingly homogeneous along demographic lines. She demonstrates that core social identities such as ideology, race, religion, class, and geography increasingly predict party identification, creating partisans who are more

[5]It's also worth noting that they Lau et al. (2017) lay some blame at the feet of negative advertisements, as do Iyengar et al. (2012).

prejudiced and less tolerant of the opposite party.

Based on the above discussion, it's clear that the verdict is still out on the cause of affective polarization. Dozens of researchers have spent the past 10 years examining different potential explanations of this phenomenon. The headlines noted at the beginning of this chapter offer a glimpse into the reasoning: it's clear that affective polarization is one of the defining characteristics of modern American politics. And while many researchers have worked on this problem, the verdict as to the cause of affective polarization remains out.

1.4 What's Missing?

In this dissertation, I build on the work by Mason (2018). She demonstrated that the decline in cross-cutting identities is associated with the rise in affective polarization. As social sorting and party homogeneity have increased, there are fewer salient social groups that enable party members to reach across the aisle. Democrats, Mason demonstrates, are increasingly liberal, secular, urban, low-income, and people of color. Republicans, meanwhile, are white, conservative, middle-class or wealthy, rural, and churchgoing. The evidence for this growing intra-party homogeneity is strong; yet how have these shifts in party membership become salient to partisans who pay only a passing attention to politics? The trend data clearly show that ideological and demographic sorting have occurred in recent decades – and that affective polarization has increased at the same time. Further, Mason's work demonstrates that partisans with fewer cross-cutting identities express greater levels of affective polarization. But the causal link has not yet been established. In other words, how has the demographic sorting which increasingly separates the American political parties created a more affectively polarized public?

In this research, I propose one potential mechanism: elite communication. Foundational work in public opinion demonstrated the importance of elite cues in shaping individuals' attitudes about politics (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Zaller, 1992). This key finding – that political elites shape mass opinion – has been consistently replicated and extended across numerous contexts (Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Druckman et al., 2013; Robison and Mullinix,

2016; Broockman and Butler, 2017). The messages political elites send to Americans shape the way the public thinks about politics and policies. Might political elites also shape the way Americans view the political parties as well?

I propose that elite communication is the mechanism by which American partisans learn about who belongs in each party, creating and enhancing stereotypes about party membership and leading to heightened inter-party antipathy. In other words, social identity alignment does not by itself engender affective polarization; the later results only as political communication – which may include speeches, campaign ads, and news reports – activates aspects of individuals' personas in service of political goals. And as core social identities such as race, class, religiosity, urbanicity, and age increasingly align with partisanship, the incentive to political actors to play to them become stronger. The resulting identity-based appeals, I argue, prime and enhance stereotypes about party membership, and are more effective mobilizers than rhetoric based solely on ideology or issues. Increased inter-party hostility is an unfortunate by-product of this mobilizing rhetoric.

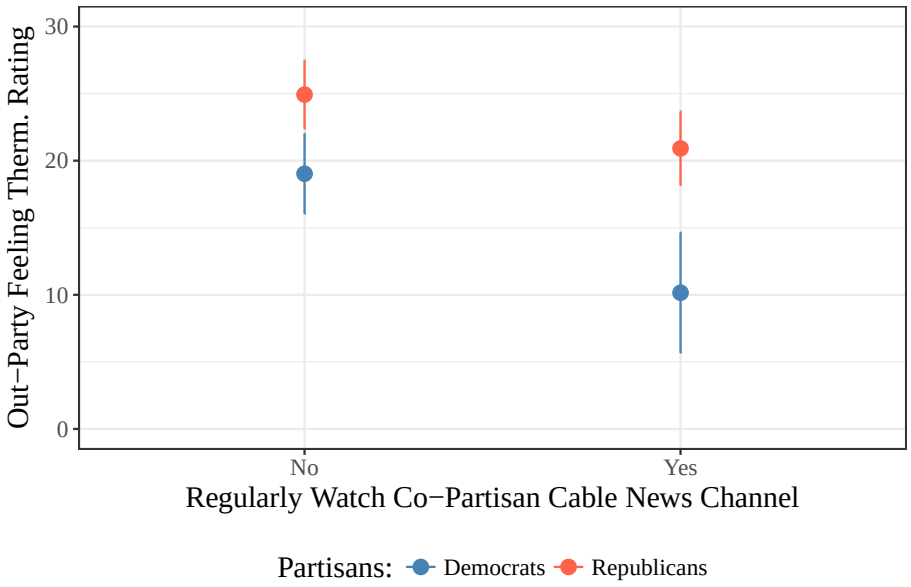
Elite communication occurs through multiple avenues – campaign advertisements, political speeches, the news media – and is driven by politicians and journalists. In this dissertation, I examine two specific communication media: party platforms and campaign advertisements.

I chose to examine campaign communication for two main reasons. First, though signals about party composition may appear in the news media, I believe they are most likely to occur in partisan news media sources like Fox News, MSNBC, and political talk radio. These news sources may send strong signals about changes in party composition, and highlight *who* belongs in either party. Indeed, Americans who regularly consume partisan cable news are more affectively polarized than those who do not, as shown in Figure 1.6. Using data from the 2012 ANES, the figure shows the predicted feeling thermometer score for partisans who regularly watch a co-partisan cable news channel, compared to those who do not, holding all other predictor variables at their modal or mean value.[6] The predicted feeling thermometer

[6]These variables include: education, ideology, political interest, marital status, ethnicity, race, income,

score for Republicans who do not watch Fox is 24.9 – signicantly higher than the 20.9 among those who do ($p < 0.05$). The relationship is even more extreme for Democrats and MSNBC; the predicted out-party feeling thermometer rating among Democrats who do not watch MSNBC is 19.0, compared to 10.2 among Democrats who do regularly watch MSNBC ($p < 0.01$).

Figure 1.6: Out-Party Feeling Thermometer, by Cable News Consumption (2012 ANES)



Thus, though it's possible that some Americans may learn about changes in party composition through partisan cable news, the share of Americans who regularly consume partisan media remains fairly small. And as Figure 1.5 demonstrates, affective polarization has risen across the board, not only among heavy TV viewers. So while cable news is one potential transmission mechanism, I chose not to explore it in this dissertation.

Instead, I explore campaign communication. The impact of this mode of elite communication is worth exploring not only because of its wider reach, but also because of the incentive structure at play. Specifically, I suggest that strategic political actors highlight social identities as a means to win votes and increase turnout in elections. As I discuss below, appeals to social group identities may do more than increase partisan hostility. This

and partisanship.

type of rhetoric may also enhance interest in politics, feelings of efficacy, and motivation to vote. Thus, strategic politicians may be incentivized to appeal to group identity as a way to win elections.

1.5 My Argument

My central argument is that political actors today appeal to increasingly demographically distinct party coalitions with language which highlights those partisan differences. In doing so, they create and prime stereotypes about who belongs in each party, and create partisans who prefer to stand on principle over compromise. In short, as the party coalitions diverge along demographic lines, strategic political actors appeal to aligned identity groups to win votes, and in the process enhance hostility between partisans.

Foundational work in political science identified social groups as drivers of partisanship in the United States. Berelson et al. (1954) argued that these social groups are not inherently political; they identified that factors such as the church you attend or the social club you belong to can drive party identification. Further, they argued that strength of association with the group translates to strength of association with a party.

But since this foundational work was written, the party coalitions have shifted dramatically along both demographic and attitudinal lines. The Democratic Party coalition is more ideologically liberal and diverse than the 1954 coalition, while the Republican Party has moved significantly to the right (Valentino and Sears, 2005; Levendusky, 2009; Hill and Tausanovitch, 2018). As these shifts in the party coalitions have occurred, researchers have worked to identify the important role that racial and ethnic identity play in shaping the political attitudes and voting behavior of Latinos (Barreto, 2010), Black Americans (Dawson, 1995; Tate, 1994), Asian Americans (Junn and Masuoka, 2008), and white Americans (Jardina, 2014).

But group identity is not limited to racial groups. For instance, Cramer (2016) writes about the development of "rural consciousness," a concept rooted in the perception held by many individuals who live in rural areas that they do not get their fair share. Cramer

identifies the importance of place and geography, especially as these factors increasingly correspond to political identification (Bishop, 2009). Other group identities, such as religion and religiosity (Margolis, 2018; Olson and Warber, 2008), income, wealth, and education also shape the way Americans think about politics.

Building on this work, Mason (2015) and Mason and Wronski (2018) describe how the alignment of Americans' identities has contributed to social polarization (an umbrella term that includes affective polarization). She argues the alignment of numerous identities – racial, religious, ideological, and partisan – increases the perceived difference between the ingroup and the outgroup. Based on psychological theories of identity complexity (Roccas and Brewer, 2002), Mason's identity alignment theory argues that "individuals cognitively conceptualize their ingroup members as matching with their fellow party members" which should "create a strong, overarching sense of party identity" (Mason and Wronski, 2018, 264).

In short, the Mason studies measure the extent to which certain politicized identities align, including identities based on ideology (liberal/conservative/Tea Party), religion (secular/Christian/Evangelical), and race (Black/Hispanic/white). She argues that increased affective polarization is the result of cross-cutting identities becoming less common.

In this dissertation, I build on Mason's work, and show that the alignment of these group-based identities creates incentives for strategic politicians to make demographic appeals in order to win votes. Mason offers a compelling description of the association between identity alignment, emotional attachment to the party, and affective polarization. But key elements are missing; I argue that affective polarization is not an automatic response to demographic divergence and identity alignment, but group-based appeals make these identities politically salient, and serve as a heuristic as to who belongs in what party. When these appeals are present, however, out-party prejudice and affective polarization are the expected result.

For instance, Ahler and Sood (2018) show that partisans wildly overestimate the proportion of each party belonging to aligned identity groups. Further, the error is larger

when individuals are characterizing the opposite party, rather than their own, demonstrating partisans have an easier time recognizing diversity within their own party, and paint the opposition with a broad brush.

This dissertation highlights the perverse incentives at play in American politics today. I ask whether identity-based appeals are effective mobilizing tools, and motivate potential voters to a greater extent than alternatives. If so, strategic political actors on both the left and the right would be incentivized to engage in this type of "identity politics." Yet if appeals to politically-aligned identity groups activate stereotypes about *who* belongs in each party, they may create feelings in partisans that the other team *just isn't like you.* The result would be greater hostility, less trust, and less willingness to compromise.

1.5.1 The Benefits & Drawbacks of Group-Based Appeals

A common accusation in American politics today is someone is "playing identity politics." The charge carries a negative connotation; the implication is that the other side is not playing fair. Instead of making their case on the basis of issues or high-minded policy, the opponent is simply appealing to people's *identities.* This accusation is more often made by members of the Republican Party about the Democrats. For instance, President Obama and other Democrats were often accused by Republicans of "playing the race card" (Blow, 2016), and Trump frequently accused Hillary Clinton of "playing the woman card" in her 2016 presidential campaign against him (Khalid, 2016a). The complaint suggests that Democrats are unfairly playing to individuals' race, gender, or other group identity to curry favor and win votes.

But in this dissertation, I argue that a great deal of politics is about identity. Berelson et al. (1954) long ago that social groups are foundational to the creation of our political affiliation, a finding which has been replicated and expanded upon since then (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016, Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017). Political actors accused of "playing identity politics" may just be playing *politics.* Though Republicans are often the party which bemoans the use of "identity politics," in doing so, they activate stereotypes about *who* belongs

in either party – a process which can heighten out-party animosity. In Chapter 3, I show that conservatives' deployment of this tactic is often more veiled and coded than liberals (see Mendelberg, 2001).

Further, despite my central argument that group-based appeals can prime stereotypes and create affective polarization, this type of rhetoric is not inherently negative. In fact, identity-based appeals can play a constructive role in our political conversation, with two important benefits: first, they can identify and raise the profile of the concerns of minority groups, challenging the conception of what an "American" looks like and ensuring that concerns unique to various identity groups are addressed. In doing so, group-based appeals can increase individuals' sense of efficacy and interest in politics.

White Americans have long been considered as the default category in the United States (Devos and Banaji, 2005; Jardina, 2019). And as the dominant group, whites have had no problem ensuring that their concerns guide the political agenda in the United States. The discussion of minority groups interests can challenge this perception that whites are the default "Americans." Group-based appeals raise the unique concerns of minority groups, and empower individual group members. In fact, arguing in favor of "color-blind" politics allows many white Americans to express a preference for the racial hierarchy status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Ignoring group differences in civic life gives white Americans permission to dismiss the concerns of minority groups; thus bringing identity groups into play in American civic discourse is essential for ensuring everyone's unique concerns are addressed.

Second, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, group-based appeals can increase turnout intent, efficacy, interest in politics. By tailoring a message for specific identity groups, politics becomes more relevant to individuals who might otherwise be disengaged with the political process, because it shows that political actors are paying attention to the concerns of specific groups in the public.

In sum, scholars have identified important positive consequences of explicitly addressing differences across identity groups, racial or otherwise. But another group of actors also stand to benefit from an explicit discussion of identity groups: candidates and their campaigns.

The experiments I present in Chapter 4 demonstrate how identity-based rhetoric serves as a more successful mobilizing tool than issue-based messaging.

As such, a number of reasons exist for politicians to continue to use identity-based language. I argue this should be done with care, because this language can also enhance stereotypes about party membership, partisan distrust, and inter-party hostility. That is, despite the many benefits of ensuring all group interests are represented in political rhetoric and language, I argue this language can also serve to remind partisans that members of the opposite party *just aren't like you.* To the extent that identity-based appeals increase the salience of the country's increasing diversity, and in particular the overwhelming one-sidedness of this increasing diversity, group-based appeals may activate stereotypes about party membership and enhance affective polarization.

As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, the parties are increasingly different from one another. In particular, the Democratic Party has grown significantly more racially diverse over the past 40 years, while the Republican Party remains overwhelmingly white. When these differences are made salient – both by strategic politicians and the news media – it can increase outgroup hostility. For instance, Craig and Richeson (2014) showed that making racial diversity salient increases anti-racial minority and pro-white sentiment among white Americans. When white participants read a short paragraph about the country's increasing diversity, they expressed significantly more hostility towards Blacks, Latinos, and Asians compared to those in the control condition.

In short, the use of identity-based language can prime and create stereotypes about the types of people that belong to each party.

1.6 Dissertation Outline

Why is partisan hostility greater today than at any other point in modern American history? My hope is that this dissertation partially answers this question. Specifically, I aim to identify the role that group-based political rhetoric plays in generating heightened levels of hostility between American partisans. Does it make partisans more polarized when politi-

cians emphasize *who* goes with *what*? I use a range of methodological approaches to help answer this question: longitudinal survey data, text analysis, and survey experiments.

In Chapter 2, I document trends in American partisanship, both ideological and demographic. I use survey data dating back to the 1960s to identify the ways that the American parties have diverged over time, along both demographic and ideological lines. I examine a variety of characteristics including race, urbanicity, religiosity, income, as well as a host of attitudinal items, to demonstrate that the parties are further apart than at any other point in modern American history, both in terms of demographics and attitudes.

In Chapter 3, I measure how party elites' description of their party priorities has grown to encompass significantly more group-based language over time. To do so, I use a bag-of-words style text analysis to code over 60 years of party platforms for group identity content. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the way the parties discuss their membership has changed dramatically over time, especially within the Democratic Party. In recent years, the rate at which the Democratic Party discusses party-aligned groups is almost twice as high as its rate of doing so in the 1950s and 60s. I argue that this dramatic shift in partisans' language when discussing party membership can activate stereotypes about *who* belongs in each party, and leading to greater levels of affective polarization.

Chapter 4 contain a series of experiments that test my theory. First, I demonstrate that perceptions of demographic, not ideological, difference drive affective polarization among partisans. I run a series of experiments which test the effects of messaging strategies containing policy information or group-based appeals on affective polarization. I expected to find that portraying the parties as demographically divergent creates higher levels of affective polarization than appeals based on ideology, while messaging strategies that portray the parties as demographically similar minimize affective polarization.

In Chapter 4 I also test the behavioral effects of affective polarization. I follow the experimental strategy of Iyengar and Westwood (2015), and attempt to manipulate respondents' partisan antipathy, as measured by standard economic games of cooperation and trust. Overall in Chapter 4, I find only modest evidence supporting my theory that appeals

to group identity create affective polarization. When voters see messaging strategies that emphasize the demographic difference between an individual and members of the opposite party, there is some evidence that they are less inclined to trust and cooperate with those individuals, but the evidence for this theory is overall mixed and not conclusive.

The experimental findings in Chapter 4 lead me to believe that the theory that I advance in this dissertation may hold, but that my method of testing needs further development. Group-based communication may be one cause of affective polarization, particularly among certain populations. More work should be done in this area, in which alternate messages are used to manipulate expressed levels of affective polarization.

I conclude by discussing my findings overall, and how the distance between the two parties today compares to other key moments in American history. I highlight the implications of my research for American norms and political discourse, as well as the level of partisan gridlock and refusal to compromise in the American political system in general, and in Congress in particular. In light of the fact that the parties are likely to continue to grow more demographically distinct in the coming decades, understanding how partisans react to these differences is a crucial first step in mitigating this trend. I discuss the implications of my findings for those who might wish to limit the level of affective polarization in the American electorate.

Partisan animosity in the electorate – though not unique to this political moment (Daniel, 2010; Wood, 2009) – is well above its historical average. I demonstrate that the consequence of an affectively polarized polity is less desire for compromise, and little pressure on legislators to stand their ground on extreme policy positions. Lowering the hostility between partisans in the electorate may therefore increase pressure on legislators to compromise, ending legislative gridlock.

Thus, understanding the causes of affective polarization is urgently necessary. And while a number of explanations have been proposed, no research has yet explored the role of political campaigns in creating affective polarization among the American public. My work shows mixed evidence for my theory that appeals to group-based identities may create

greater levels of partisan hostility than other types of campaign appeals. Yet it is clear that their use is increasingly common in American politics. Given the potential consequences, understanding the ways in which group-based appeals may or may not heighten affective polarization, and identifying potential alternative campaign strategies that do not have these negative consequences, is an important avenue for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Shifting Party Coalitions

In Chapter 1, I explored the rise of affective polarization, and demonstrated that it has occurred broadly, among many groups of the American public. I also laid out my theory for why this has occurred; namely, elite appeals to increasingly divergent group identities. In this chapter and the one that follows, I'll test whether the conditions for this theory to be true hold. To begin, I test whether demographic trends in American politics make conditions right for appeals to these demographic groups to be the cause of rising partisan hostility. Are partisans truly increasingly different from one another? I also test whether the conditions exist for a plausible alternative hypothesis to hold – rising ideological polarization.

Though there is broad consensus that affective polarization has clearly increased in the United States in recent decades, political science is much more divided on the question of whether or not American partisans are ideologically polarized. To the extent that a consensus has been reached, it's clear that the American political elite have long been divided along ideological lines, and the ideological gap between the party elite continues to grow (Poole and Rosenthal, 1984; Lewis, 2020). Is the American public equally ideologically divided? On the one hand, Americans are not particularly well-informed about politics, have very little substantive information about political debate (Converse, 1964; Achen and Bartels, 2017), and do not hold strong ideological beliefs (Zaller, 1992; Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017). Yet the party membership has tended to sort along ideological lines, perhaps driven in part by the elite-level polarization (Levendusky, 2009; Hill and Tausanovitch, 2018).

The polarization debate is often centered around ideology and issues, perhaps because they seem more legitimate and rational grounds of political debate than the alternative dimension upon which the parties have divided: demographic groups. While the ideological

polarization debate has raged in the forefront, a group-based theory of polarization has emerged on the margins. Since Berelson et al. (1954), political scientists have identified the role of groups in determining Americans' political preferences. Group membership often acts as an antecedent to partisanship (Green et al., 2002), perhaps especially among members of the Democratic Party (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016).

These two competing theories of what drives partisanship – ideology or group membership – have also been identified as potential drivers of the rise of affective polarization that I identified in Chapter 1. This trend is strongest among individuals who identify as strong partisans, but it has also occurred among weak partisans and independents who lean towards either party. The group-based theory of affective polarization lays the blame at the increasing alignment of group membership with party-membership (Mason, 2018). Yet evidence also suggests that ideological conflict can make partisans intolerant of members of the out-group, especially when those beliefs are tightly linked with individuals' self-concept (Brandt et al., 2016).

I build on this work in this dissertation, and aim to identify *why* affective polarization has risen so dramatically in the past few decades. Specifically, my goal is to identify the underlying drivers of partisan hostility. In this chapter, I build on previous work showing that between-party heterogeneity has increased over time – members of the two parties increasingly do not hold the same beliefs, look like each other, worship in the same buildings, or live in the same places. In other words, the conditions exist for both ideological sorting and group-based sorting to create inter-party hostility.

In the sections that follow, I aim to answer a three key questions about the composition in the Democratic and Republican party membership. Who belongs in each party? How have these party coalitions changed over time? Do these changes extend to both political attitudes and party demographics?

In Chapter 4, I will identify the causal impact of group-based appeals on affective polarization. But in this chapter, I begin to lay the groundwork for this analysis. Specifically, are the conditions present for affective polarization to be created by demographic divergence

between the parties? To answer these questions, I use longitudinal survey data to trace the extent to which the parties have grown apart along key dimensions during this time of rising hostility. First, I show that Democratic Party affiliation among the electorate is correlated with being a person of color, more educated, and non-religious, while Republican affiliation is now more correlated with being white, male, older, less educated, and religious. These associations have strengthened since the 1960s as the parties have diverged demographically, and social groups have continued to sort along party lines, and show no signs of stopping. This divergence extends beyond demographics: partisan attitudes have grown apart on a majority of political issues over the past 40 years.

2.1 Data

In this chapter, I analyze demographic and attitudinal data from the American National Election Study (ANES) cumulative data set, using survey responses from each presidential election year between 1956 and 2020 ane (2016). In the analyses that follow, I present the demographic and attitudinal breakdown of the Democratic and Republican parties, with independents who lean toward one party or another categorized as members of their respective parties (though true independents are dropped in this analysis). Survey weights from the ANES are applied where available to provide population-level estimates.

To begin, I examine changes in the demographic composition of the parties over that same time period. I use the Cumulative ANES file to examine how individual characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, religiosity, and educational attainment have grown increasingly predictive of an individual's partisanship. I also use data from the General Social Survey (GSS) to examine whether there has been a partisan divergence in urbanicity.

In the second half of this chapter, I examine Americans' attitudes on a range of issues over the past 5 decades to provide greater insight into the magnitude of Americans' ideological polarization. To do so, I build on work by Lasala Blanco et al. (2020), and gathered Democratic and Republican responses to 15 attitudinal questions asked consistently on the ANES over time. The subjects covered by these 15 items span many important issue areas

relevant to American political discourse, including military spending, the social safety net, social issues, immigration, and the role and scope of government. The earliest survey item included here was asked in 1956, and most items were asked in the majority of waves until the most recent iteration in 2020. The question wording and variable names can be found in the appendix.

2.2 Demographic Divergence

To begin, Figure 2.1 traces the emergence of a significant racial gap between the parties over the past four decades. These figures show the percentage of each party that identifies in the ANES as non-Hispanic white or Caucasian, Back or African American, Hispanic or Latino, or another race, from 1956 to 2020.[1]

In 1956, the two parties where fairly homogeneous and overwhelmingly white.The racial gap was about 6 percentage points; the Republican Party was 96% white, while the Democratic Party was about 90% white. About 9% of the Democratic Party self-identified as Black, compared to 4% of the Republican Party. Other racial groups made up less than 1% of the sample.

By 1992, the racial gap had increased to 19 percentage points, with the white percentage of the Democratic Party falling to 69%, with 19% self-identifying as Black, another 10% as Hispanic, and 2% as another racial group. In that same year, 87% of the Republican Party was white, 2% Black, 7% Hispanic, and 3% some other race.

In 2020, the gap stood at about 54 points. At this time, the Republican Party remained 82% white – about the same as the demographic breakdown more than 20 years previously, in 2000. The Republican Party in 2020 was about 2% Black, 8% Hispanic, and 5% other. But by 2020, the Democratic Party has continued to diversify. In this most recent time period,

[1]The response categories have not always been asked using this terminology, but I map out-dated terminology onto its modern equivalent. Any respondent who select "Hispanic/Latino" on the question of ethnicity is coded as Latino. White, Black, and the other race categories, therefore, refer to the non-Hispanic members of those groups.

the Democratic Party was about 57% white, 20% Black, 16% Hispanic, and 6% other.

Figure 2.1: Racial Breakdown of the Parties

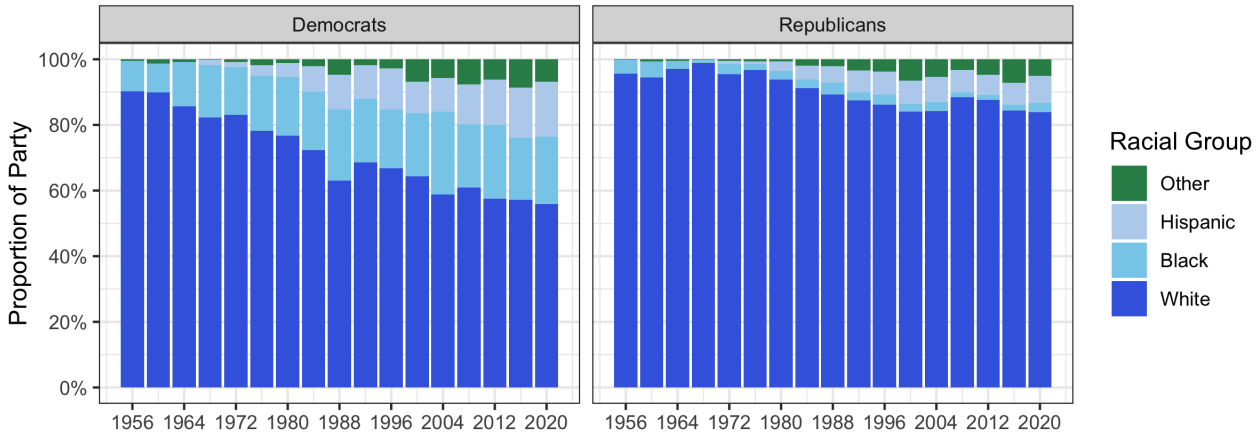


Figure 2.1 demonstrates a key point about demographic change within the two major political parties in the United States. In the middle of the 20th century, both parties were overwhelmingly dominated by white Americans. But, beginning with the implementation of voting rights laws which provided more equal access to the vote, the makeup of the parties began to shift. This shift has overwhelmingly occurred within the Democratic Party, and white Republicans still outnumber non-white Republicans by almost 9 to 1. Yet the racial and ethnic makeup of the Democratic Party has changed more dramatically. Over the past 60 years, the non-white percentage of the Democratic Party has ticked steadily upwards, and about 4 in 10 Democrats identified as non-white in 2016.[2]

Current population projections indicate the United States is going to continue to diversify over the course of the next few decades (Vespa, 2018). Given recent patterns and political rhetoric on both sides of the aisle (see Chapter 3 for more discussion of how the parties appeal to different demographic groups in their rhetoric), I expect the Democratic Party to continue its path of racial and ethnic diversification. The share of the Republican Party

[2]This trend is not a function of the ANES data collection. The same change in the composition of the parties is apparent in the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS) as well. A full graph is shown in the appendix.

that identifies as non-white is higher than ever, and the 2020 election saw a higher share of Latinos supporting the Republican Presidential candidate than many political observers had expected. Despite this recent shift in party composition, however, the GOP remains a racially homogeneous party.

Yet these changes in the racial and ethnic makeup of the parties are not the sole shifting factors in U.S. party membership. Just as the country as a whole is increasingly diverse, it is also increasingly non-religious, with fewer Americans today attending church weekly or identifying as religious, compared to previous decades. This decline in religiosity is not evenly distributed, as Figures 2.2 and 2.3 demonstrate.

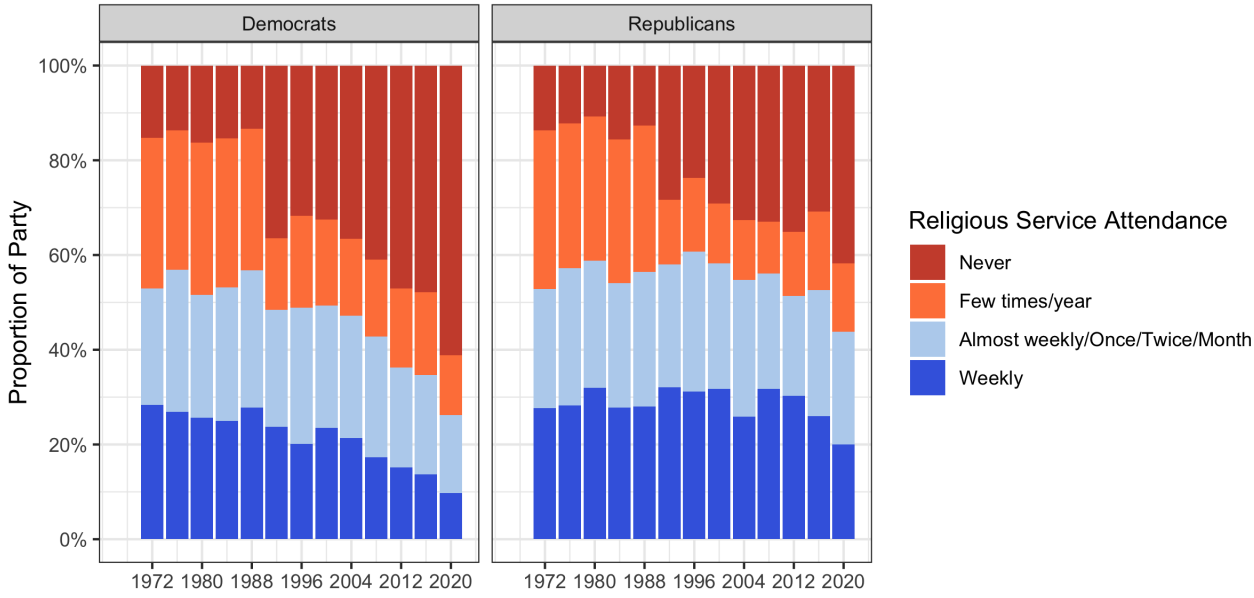
Figure 2.2 traces the frequency with which individuals within the Democratic (left side) and Republican (right side) parties attend religious services.[3] The figure begins in 1972, the first year that this question was asked on the ANES. In that year, 14% of Democrats said they never attend religious services, outside of the the occasional wedding, baptism, or funeral. Another 30% of Democrats reported attending religious services about once a year, 23% reported attending almost weekly to monthly, and 27% reported attending religious services every week.

Republican religious attendance was relatively similar in 1972. About 13% of Republicans said they never attend religious services, outside of the the occasional wedding, baptism, or funeral. Another 32% reported attending services a a few times per year, 24% reported between almost weekly and monthly attendance, and 27% reported weekly attendance on religious services.

In the early 1970s, about half of both Democrats and Republicans reported attending religious services at least once or twice per month. But over the course of the past five

[3]Exact question wording changed slightly over the years. Since 1990, the following has been asked: Lots of things come up that keep people from attending religious services even if they want to. Thinking about your life these days, do you ever attend religious services, apart from occasional weddings, baptisms or funerals? (IF YES:) Do you go to religious services every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never? This change in question wording is reflected in a change in the proportion of respondents who say they never attend religious services, likely an effect of reducing the social desirability bias on this question. The changes in the overall trend are not produced solely by this change in question wording, however, it is visible after the change in question wording as well.

Figure 2.2: Religious Attendance of Party Membership



decades, the share of both Democrats and Republicans who report they never attend religious services has grown. However, among Republicans that increase comes mainly at the expense of individuals who said they attend services a few times per year; the share of Republicans who attend church at least once or twice a month has stayed relatively constant. Meanwhile, among Democrats, the proportion saying they regularly attend religious services has shrunk dramatically. By 2020, 61% of Democrats reported they never attend services (41% of Republicans), while about 44% of Republicans report attending religious services at least once or twice a month.[4]

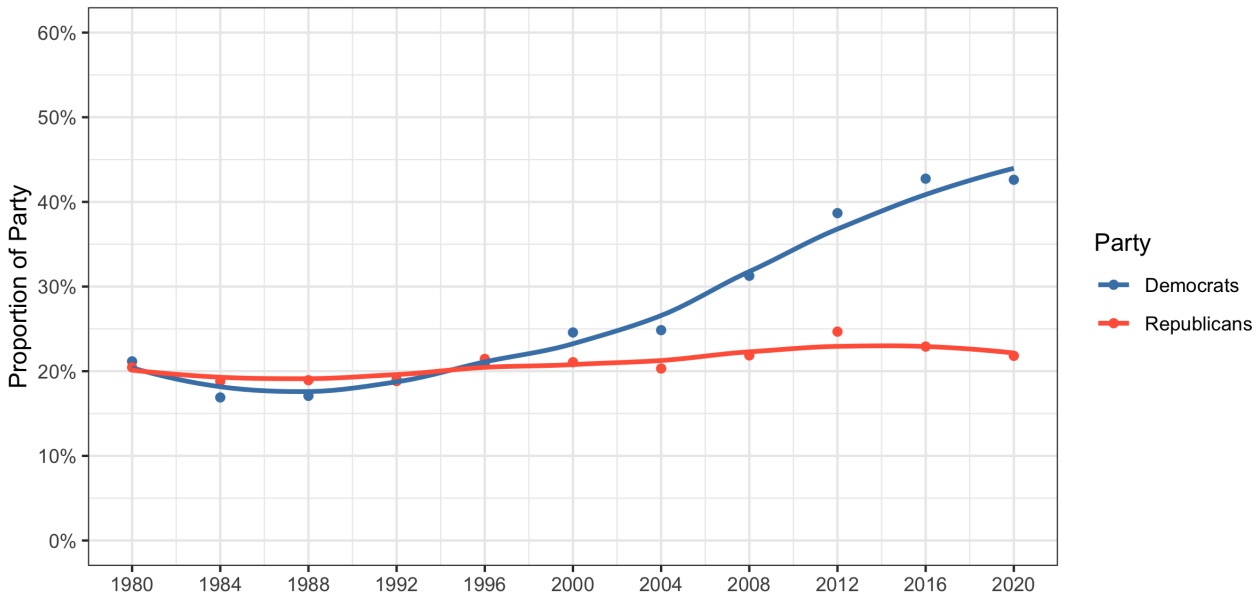
A similar trend emerges when looking at the proportion of the parties which identifies as not-religious. Since 1980, the ANES has asked "Do you consider religion to be an important part of your life, or not?" Figure 2.3 shows the proportion of each party who responds "No" to that question. In 1980, the parties were about aligned in their religiosity: 21% of Democrats and 20% of Republicans said religion is not an important part of their life.

[4]This trend also replicates on the GSS, see appendix for more details.

Among Republicans, this number has stayed fairly consistent, and ranged from about 19% to 25% between 1980 and 2020. In 2020, just 22% of Republicans identified as non-religious.

The proportion of the Democratic Party identifying as not religious has changed much more. Beginning in 2000, the upward trend is apparent; in that year, 25% of the Democratic Party reported that religion is not an important part of their life. In 2012, this grew to 39%, and again to 43% in 2020.

Figure 2.3: Non-Religious Proportion of Party Membership



Importantly, responses to this question in the importance of religion were quite similar regardless of partisanship between 1980 and 1996. But since then, attitudes have begun to diverge significantly; in the most recent time period, almost half of Democrats report that religion is not an important aspect of their lives, compared to just a quarter of Republicans. Regardless of how its measured – via self-reported church attendance or the importance of religion in their lives – the Democratic Party is experiencing a dramatic shift in the attitudes and demographics of its members. This change is detectable among Republicans in recent years, but it is significantly smaller than the change that is occurring in the Democratic Party. In terms of religiosity and religious attendance, the Republican Party of 2020 looks a

lot more like both parties of 1972 than it does the Democratic Party of 2020.

The final demographic factor worth exploring in detail is the average age of members of each party, shown in Figure 2.4. In this plot, red points again represent Republicans and blue points represent Democrats, but Figure 2.4 also shows pure independents (independents who report they tend not to lean toward either party; as always, independents who lean toward a party are grouped with that respective party). Most apparent from this figure is the aging of the US population; regardless of party, these the trend is for average age of each party to be increasing since the mid-1980s.

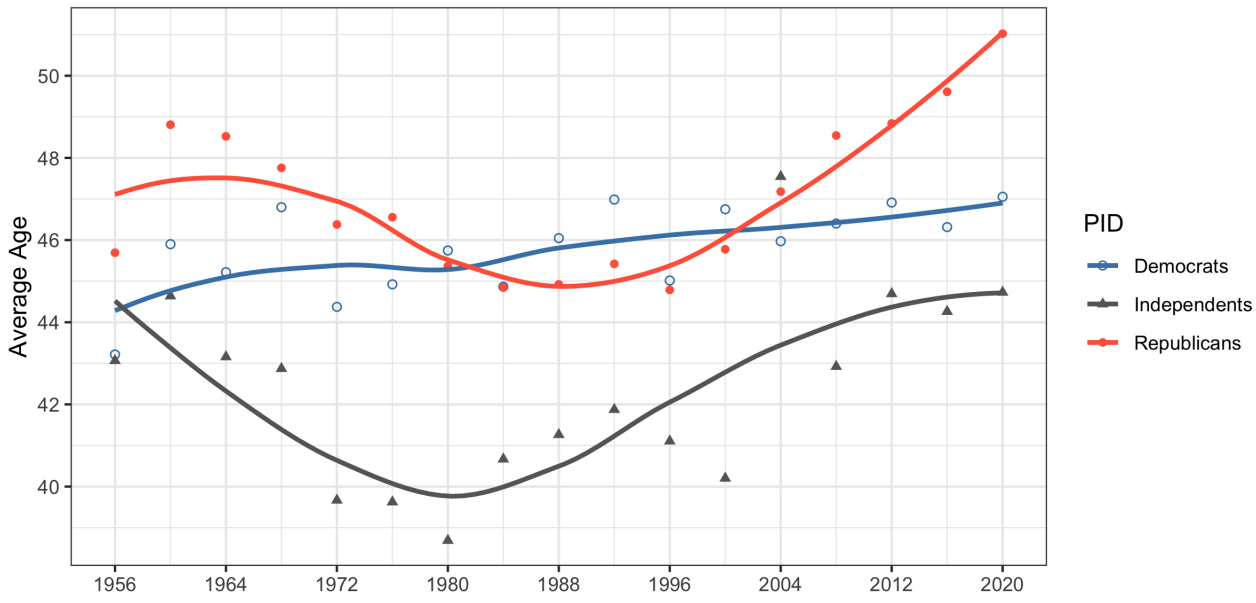
But more importantly for the question at hand, Figure 2.4 shows there has been *some* divergence in the average age of the parties in recent years, though this divergence is moderate, and about in line with the gap in earlier periods.[5] In 1956, the party age gap was about 2.5 years, with with the average Democrat 43 and the average Republican 46 years old (this difference is statistically significant with $p < 0.01$). This gap shrank substantially in the 1980s, as the average age among Democrats continued to steadily increase, and the average age among Republicans dropped somewhat. In 1984 for instance, the average age of both Democrats and Republicans was 45 years. Since about 2000 the party age gap has re-emerged. In 2020, the party age gap was about 3.5 years: the average Democrat was 47 years old, while the average Republican was 51 (p-value < 0.01).

The party differences by age do not exactly match the trend seen when examining previous demographic factors. Though the party age gap is wider today than it was in the mid-1980s, its emergence in recent years is not unique in the time period examined here. This gap existed at approximately the same magnitude in the 1960s, and it is not significantly different in 2020 than it was in 1956 (see Table 2.3 in the appendix for difference in differences test).

Finally, we turn to the question of whether Democrats and Republicans increasingly live in different places. To answer this question, we turn to the General Social Survey (GSS) longitudinal dataset. Figure 2.5 shows the percent of Democrats (blue) and Republicans

[5]The results are very similar when looking at alternative measures of centrality, such as the median.

Figure 2.4: Average Age by Party ID

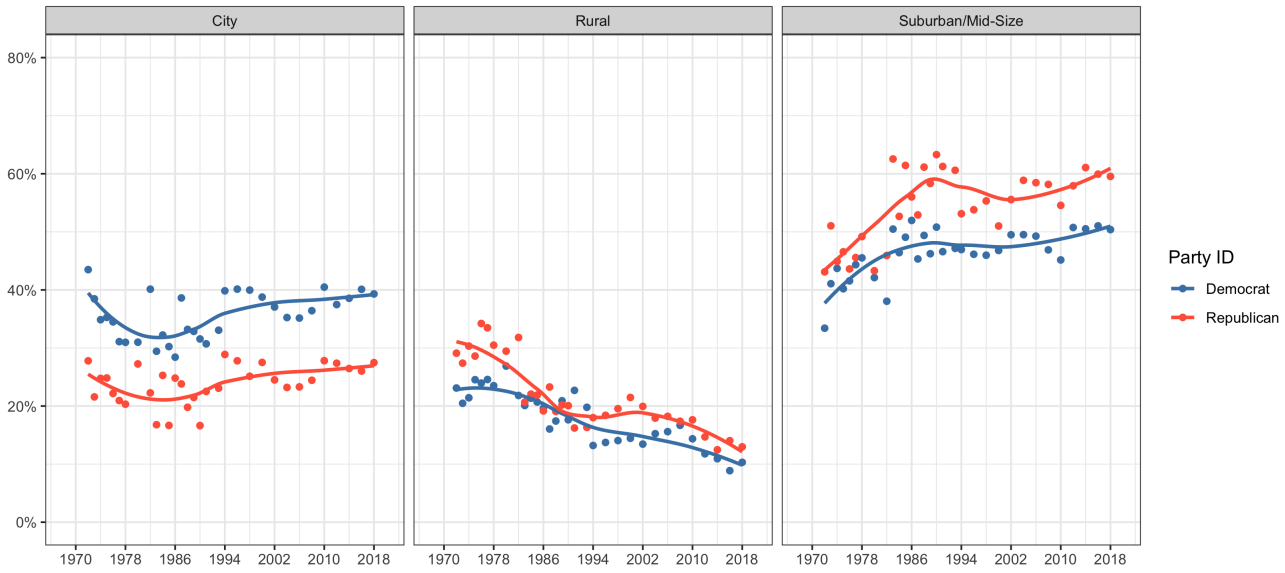


(red) living in cities (left), rural areas (center) and suburban areas or midsize cities (right). Though Democrats have always been more likely than Republicans to live in cities (about 40% of Democrats, compared to 27% of Republicans in 2018), the gap between the parties has not significantly increased over time. Similarly, when looking at the percentage of American partisans living in rural areas, that proportion has declined steadily over time, but at approximately the same rate among both Democrats and Republicans. That decline in the proportion of Americans living in rural areas is associated with a moderate rise in those living in suburban and mid-size places. Overall, however, there is not much evidence for the expectation that Democrats and Republicans increasingly live in different types of places.[6]

In the next section, I'll examine a wider range of demographic variables, and confirm that the differences over time and by party that I have identified above reflect true difference with formal statistical tests.

[6]This supports the conclusions of Mummolo and Nall (2017), who find that Americans have not moved to increasingly ideologically homogeneous areas.

Figure 2.5: Urbanicity by Party ID



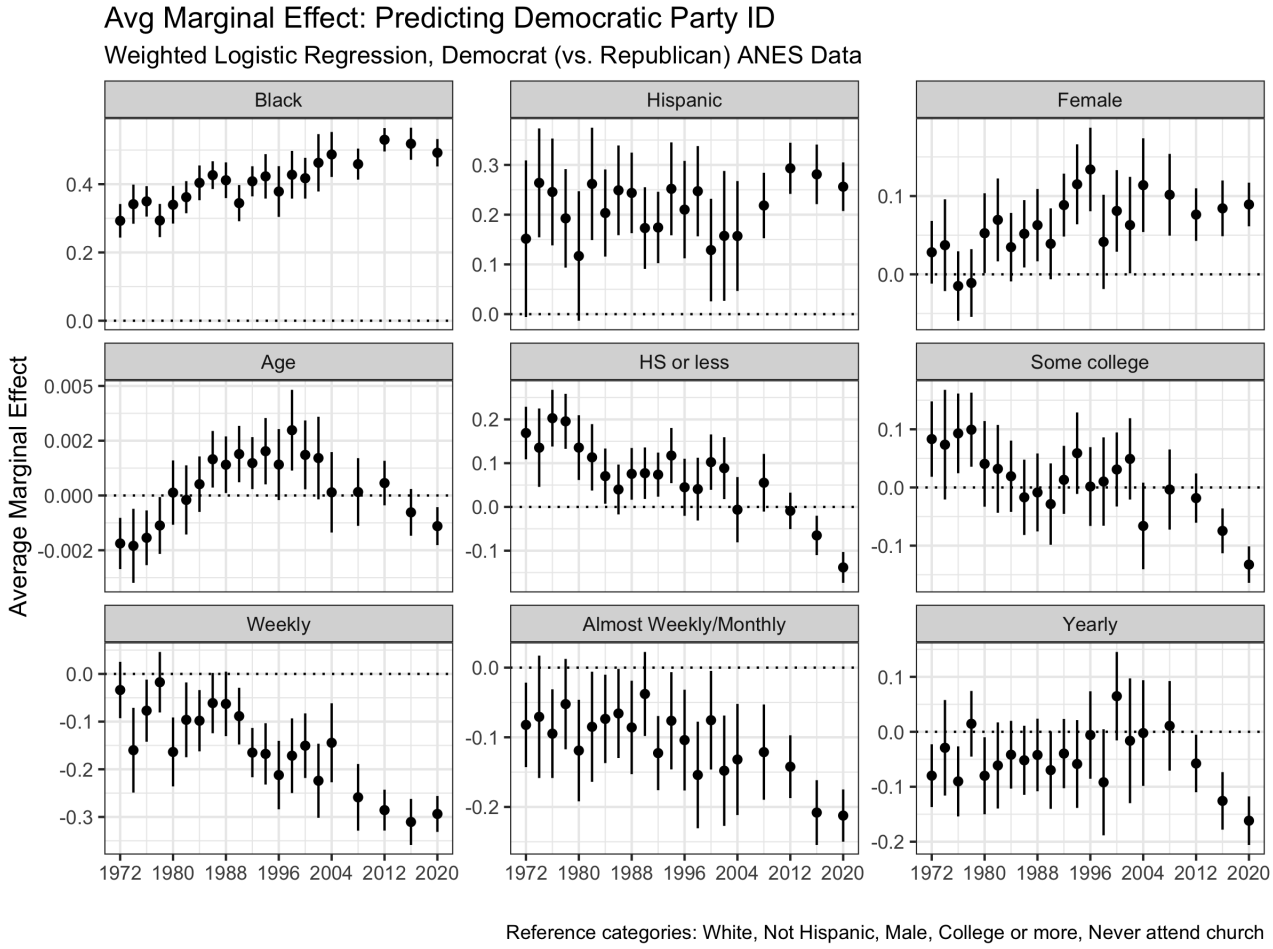
The Marginal Effect of Demographics

To test whether these changes outlined above (over time and by party) are statistically significant, I ran a series of 20 weighted logistic regression models within each year these questions were asked on the ANES between 1972 and 2020. Each model predicted whether, an individual identified as a Democrat (1) or a Republican (0) using their race (Black or non-Black), ethnicity (Hispanic or not), gender (female or male), age (18 to 99), and educational attainment (high school or less vs. college or more, some college vs. college or more). The models are weighted using the weights provided by the ANES, and independent leaners are grouped with their respective party.

Figure 2.6 shows the marginal effects of each demographic variable on likelihood of identifying as a Democrat. Beginning with the first subplot, we see the effect of being Black (vs. non-Black) on predicting Democratic identification. The figure shows that, in 1972, being Black was associated with a 29 percentage point increase in the predicted probability of being a Democrat. Importantly, the marginal effect of being a Black American on Democratic party affiliation has increased fairly steadily, though may be plateauing in recent years. By

2020, Black respondents were 49 points more likely to identify as Democratic than non-Black respondents, holding everything else equal. The effect of being Black is both statistically distinguishable from 0, and has also significantly changed over time; the effect is larger today than it was 40 years ago.

Figure 2.6: Marginal Effect of Demographic Variables on Democratic ID



The relationship between identifying as Hispanic or Latino and being a Democrat has bounced around slightly since the 1970s – though Latino respondents have, over time, consistently been more likely to identify as Democratic than their non-Latino counterparts. This relationship has strengthened since the mid-2000s, and Latinos in 2020 were about 26 points more likely to identify as Democratic than non-Latinos.

A similar trend exists for women, though the gender gap is smaller than the racial gap.

At the beginning of the time period examined here, women were no more likely to identify as Democrats than men. The gender gap emerged around 1980, band has generally hovered between 5 and 10 percentage points for the past few decades. In 2020, women were 9 points more likely to identify as Democrats than men.

The effect of age on Democratic identification has changed over time, though the relationship is much weaker than other variables examined here. Through the 1970s, being older was associated with a lower likelihood of being a Democrat (and a greater likelihood of being a Republican). This began to shift in the 1980s and 1990s, with older Americans becoming increasingly likely to identify as Democrats (at its height, in 2000, a 1-year increase in age was associated with a 0.3 percentage point increase in the likelihood of being a Democrat). But since then, the effect of age has reversed. In 2020, a 1-year increase in age was associated with a .1 point *decrease* in the likelihood that an individual is a Democrat.

The relationship between education and partisanship has received attention in political circles since the 2016 election, and the High School or Less and Some College subplots give a clue as to why. Previously, having less than a college degree was a strong, positive predictor of Democratic identification, and much of the Democratic Party was composed of individuals with a high school degree or less, or a technical or associate's degree, or some college (but not a 4-year degree). This relationship began to weaken through the '80s and '90s, and by 2016, the effect of having less education than a college degree had flipped in direction; by 2020, less educated groups were more likely to identify as *Republicans*, not Democrats.

Finally, the subplots on the third row of Figure 2.6 show the marginal effect of religious services attendance on an individual's predicted probability of identifying as a Democrat. For these variables, never attending religious services serves as the reference category. The takeaway from this set of graphs is that individuals who attend religious services weekly are increasingly less likely to identify as Democrats. In 1972, there was no statistically significant effect of weekly attendance of religious services on Democratic identification. But this has grown fairly steadily over time – particularly since the mid 1980s. By 2020, the effect of weekly services attendance had grown; individuals who attend weekly services are now 29 points less likely to identify as Democrats compared to those who never attend religious

services.

The past 45 years have seen a dramatic shift in *who* belongs in either party, as the relationship between partisanship and key demographics has changed since the 1970s. Many individual-level traits have consistently become more tightly correlated with Democratic Party identification: being Black or (to a lesser extent) Hispanic, a woman, college-educated, or never attending religious services. At the same time, other characteristics are becoming more strongly correlated with Republican identification: being older, having less education, and regular (or semi-regular) attendance of religious services. Today,the average Democrat and average Republican no longer look alike, spend their weekends at the same religious services, or have the same educational experiences.

2.3 Attitudinal Divergence

A plausible alternative explanation for the rise of affective polarization is the sorting of partisan *attitudes*. Perhaps partisans dislike and mistrust members of the opposite party because they just don't *think* like one another. To a certain extent, ideological sorting has occurred in the United States (Levendusky, 2009; Hill and Tausanovitch, 2018). In this section I present broad tends demonstrating that, across many salient issues, Democratic and Republican attitudes have diverged over the past 50 years.

Let's begin by examining the extent to which the parties have diverged along ideological lines over the past four decades. Figure 2.7 graphs the ideological composition of the Democratic (left) and Republican (right) parties between 1972 and 2020[7]. The figure demonstrates that the parties did diverge along ideological lines during this time, though the magnitude of the change is tamped down by the fact that the partisans were already somewhat sorted by ideology in the early 1970s; at that time, Republicans were already inclined towards identifying as conservative, while Democrats identified as slightly more liberal. In

[7]Question wording: We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold have been arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about it? Note: 1972 is the first year in which ideology was asked by the ANES.

1972, 23% of Democrats identified as either extremely conservative, conservative, or slightly conservative, compared to 53% of Republicans. In the same year, 36% of Democrats identified as either extremely liberal, liberal, or slightly liberal, compared to 13% of Republicans. At that time, 39% of Democrats and 33% of Republicans identified as moderate.

Since that time, the proportion of Republicans identifying as conservative has continued to grow, to 77% of the party in 2020. At the same time, the proportion of Republicans who identify as moderate or liberal has shrunk accordingly (18% of Republicans identified as moderate, and 4% identified as liberal in 2020). While the Republican Party has grown increasingly conservative, the Democratic Party has grown more liberal (albeit to a lesser extent). By 2020, the proportion of Democrats identifying as some form of liberal had grown to 65%, while just 7% identified as conservative and 28% as moderate.

Figure 2.7: Ideological Makeup of the Parties

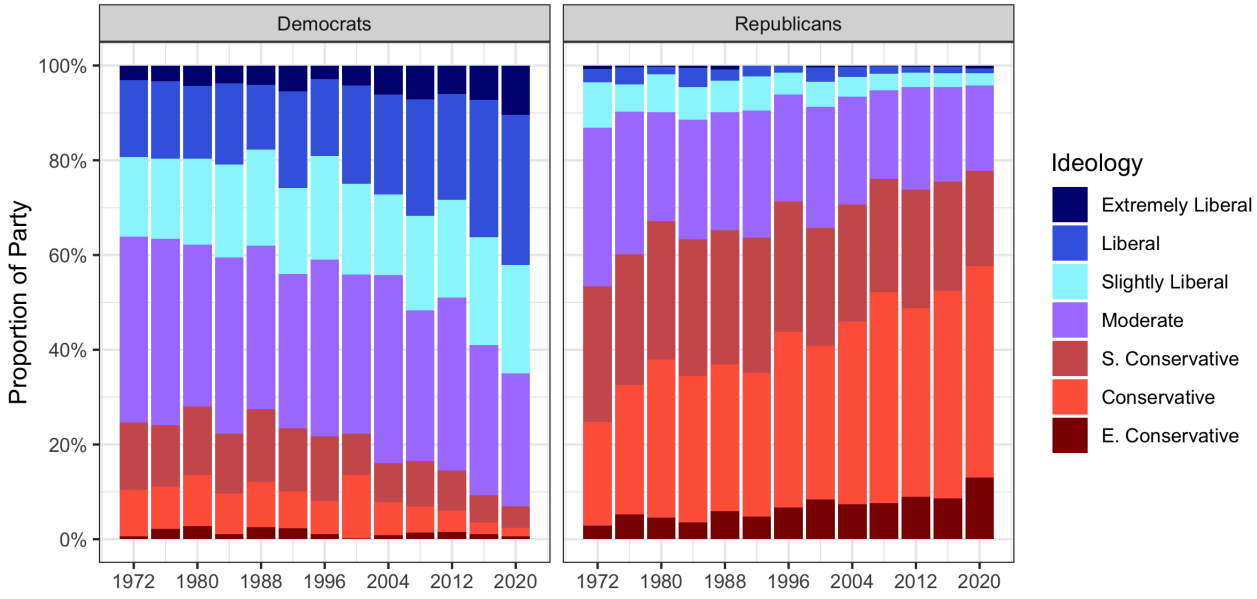
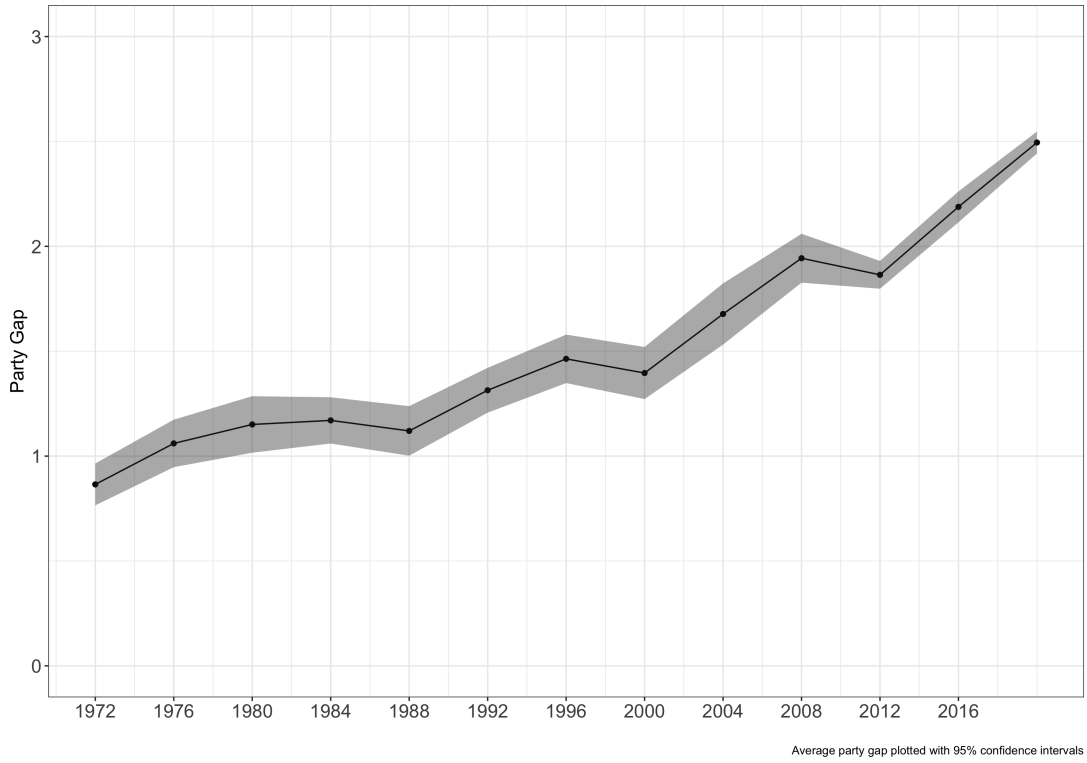


Figure 2.8 displays a variation of this trend. It shows the gap in average ideology (on a 7-point scale) between Democrats and Republicans, from 1972 to 2020. In 1972, the average Democrat a little less than 1 point more liberal than the average Republican; the average Republican was a 4.6 on this scale. In other words, in 1972, the average Republican

Figure 2.8: Party Difference in Average Ideology, over Time



categorized themselves as somewhere between "Moderate, middle of the road" and "Slightly conservative." At that same time, the Democratic average was a 3.8, or between "Moderate, middle of the road" and "Slightly liberal."

Since the 1970s, however, the gap between Democratic and Republican ideology has more than doubled; in 2020 the gap between Democrats and Republicans stood at 2.5. At that time, the Republican average was 5.4 (or somewhere between "Slightly conservative" and "Conservative"), while the Democratic average was about 2.9 (just to the left of "Slightly liberal"). The changes in the ideological composition of the parties are statistically significant (see Table 2.2 in the appendix for significance tests).

Clearly, Democrats and Republicans have changed the way they see themselves ideologically. Fewer and fewer partisans see themselves as moderates, and more partisans – particularly Republicans – now identify as ideological.

However, political science has shown for decades that many Americans do not have a strong grasp of ideologically-based words like "liberal" and "conservative" (Campbell et al.,

1960, Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017), so perhaps the trends in Figure 2.7 do not reflect true ideological polarization, but reflect a greater understanding of "what goes with what" when it comes to ideology and partisanship. To that end, we can examine attitudes about specific issues, rather than self-reported ideology as a whole, to see how Americans' attitudes have changed on political issues over time. Figure 2.9 shows the percentage of partisans who support the liberal position on each issue, with Democrats (and independents who lean Democratic) shown in blue, and Republicans (and leaners) in red. The party gap in percentage points (Democratic percent - Republican percent) at the first and final time period is noted on each graph.

The gap between Democrats and Republicans grew by more than 10 points over the time periods shown here on 11 of the 15 issues, and for each of the issues, the interaction between party and year is statistically significant (see appendix for models). The largest increase in the party gap is on the issue of abortion. When the abortion item was first asked on the ANES in 1980, Democrats were actually slightly less likely than Republicans to say that abortion should be permitted as a matter of personal choice or when the need for the abortion had been clearly established (the two most liberal responses to the question)[8]. But by the end of the 1980s, attitudes on abortion had begun to sort, and by 2016 the gap between Democrats and Republicans had grown to 35 percentage points, with 74% of Democrats and 39% of Republicans holding the liberal position on the abortion question.[9]

After abortion, the next largest increase in the partisan gap is on federal spending for improving and protecting the environment.[10] When this question was first asked in 1984,

[8] "There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? You can just tell me the number of the opinion you choose. 1. By law, abortion should never be permitted. 2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger. 3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established. 4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice."

[9] This pattern of polarization – from unpolarized opinion to polarized opinion – matches the description of abortion activists in the 1960s and 1970s described by Luker (1984). The key difference is that clearly the sorting of abortion attitudes in the electorate lagged the sorting of activist opinion on the issue.

[10] Should federal spending on Improving and Protecting the Environment be increased, decreased or kept about the same?

Figure 2.9: Democratic & Republican Support for Liberal Position on 15 Issues (ANES)

the gap between Democrats and Republicans was about 13 percentage points, with 42% of Democrats and 29% of Republicans supporting an increase in spending on the environment. Despite an initial increase in Republican support for environmental spending in the late 1980s, since the early 1990s Republican support for increased environmental spending has tended to remain in between 30% and 40%. Democratic support for increased environmental spending, on the other hand, has doubled since the question was initially asked; in 2016,

fully 80% of Democrats supported increasing federal spending on the environment.

While attitudes on abortion and the environment have polarized fairly steadily over the course of 35 years, American partisans' attitudes on immigration shifted dramatically in a small amount of time. The ANES first asked Americans whether immigration into the US should be increased, decreased, or kept the same in 1992.[11] In that year, there was a 3 point gap in the proportion of Democrats and Republicans who said immigration should be increased or left the same as it is now, with 47% of Democrats selecting those options, and 44% of Republicans. Until 2012, the gap between Democrats and Republicans on this issue was essentially non-existent – it was fewer than 5 percentage points each year the question was asked (in 1994, 1996, 1998, 2004, and 2008). Only in 2012 did the gap between the parties begin to open up; by then, the gap was 9 points, and the gap grew enormously in 2016 to 30 points. Americans' attitudes on immigration have changed since the 1990s, but the story is very different on this issue than the steady sorting seen on the abortion issue. Rather, the story on immigration is one of sudden liberalization in Democratic attitudes which began in the early-2010s.

Across most of the issues examined here, partisan attitudes to have grown more distinct over time, particularly when it comes to abortion, immigration, and environmental spending. But on some issues, the gap in partisan attitudes is not significantly larger today than it was when the question was first asked. For instance, on foreign aid spending, the overwhelming majority of Democrats and Republicans do not support increasing federal spending on foreign aid[12], – support for this proposal has remained fairly low since the early 1990s. On the other hand, partisans have remained divided on the issue of federal spending to the poor since 1992 [13], but neither party has changed their position on the issue since that time, and the gap between Democrats and Republicans on the issue of federal spending to the poor remains

[11]Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?

[12]Should federal spending on Foreign Aid be increased, decreased or kept about the same?

[13]Should federal spending on the poor/poor people be increased, decreased or kept about the same?

about the same in 2016 as it was in 1992.

Finally, Americans' attitudes on the issue of equality between the sexes have changed dramatically since the question was first asked in 1972, though partisan attitudes have moved in tandem during that time. In the 1970s, just under half of both Democrats and Republicans supported equality between men and women[14] – but support for equality has grown dramatically, to about 85% among both Democrats and Republicans in 2008.

Though the pattern does not universally apply to all issues relevant to American politics today, the overwhelming trend of partisan attitudes over the past 50 years is one of partisan divergence. The attitudes of Democrats and Republicans are, on the majority of issues, more different from one another today than they were in the 1960s. This section demonstrates that the conditions exist for ideological polarization to be driving affective polarization.

2.4 Discussion

In this chapter, I examined over 50 years of survey data to identify whether the conditions exist for either of two competing theories as to the drivers in affective polarization in America: issue divergence and demographic divergence. The theory behind issue-based affective polarization suggests that partisans in America have grown increasingly hostile toward one another over the past 50 years because their deeply held beliefs about issues have diverged over time. This argument suggests that Democrats and Republicans hold increasingly different world views and policy attitudes on issues which are fundamental to American civic life. Because partisans can no longer agree on these fundamental issues they distrust and dislike one another more. The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that partisans' attitudes *have* grown further apart in the last few decades, on issues which span the political spectrum – including social issues, the military, and the role of government.

[14]Recently there has been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. Others feel that a women's place is in the home. And of course, some people have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about this?

But attitudinal divergence is not the only potential rationale for the rise in affective polarization. The evidence demonstrates that not only have partisans' *attitudes* grown increasingly distinct over time, but so has the composition of each party itself. While the parties of the 1950s and 1960s were fairly homogeneous in terms of race, religiosity, gender, age, and educational attainment this had changed by 2016. While the Republican Party remains overwhelmingly white, religious, and suburban/rural, while the Democratic Party has grown more racially diverse and non-religious.

The survey data examined here suggests that the conditions exist for either of these hypotheses to hold. American partisans have diverged along both issue-based and demographic lines over the past few decades. The differences between the parties today are greater than they were in 1960, both in terms of who belongs to each party and the beliefs of those partisans, providing some evidence for my theory that appeals to these increasingly divergent group identities may be a driver of affective polarization. At least one piece of the puzzle holds; but changes in trends are not sufficient to establish causality; in the chapter that follows, I examine how political elites discuss party membership, a potentially creating heuristics about who belongs in each party – a test of the second step in my theory. And in Chapter 4, I experimentally test whether appeals to demography or appeals to attitudes create greater levels of affective polarization among partisans.

2.5 Appendix

Variable	Question Wording	Response Categories	Interpretation
VCF9047	Should federal spending on Improving and Protecting the Environment be increased, decreased or kept about the same?	1. Increased 2. Same 3. Decreased 7. Cut out entirely 8. DK	Federal spending on the environment should be increased.
VCF9133	ONE, the main reason government has become bigger over the years is because it has gotten involved in things that people should do for themselves; or TWO, government has become bigger because the problems we face have become bigger	1. Gotten involved in things 2. Problems we face are bigger 8. DK; both, depends	Govt has gotten bigger bc the problems we face are bigger.
VCF0606	Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?	1. A lot 2. Some 3. Not very much 9. DK	Govt does not waste a lot of money.
VCF9132	ONE, we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; or TWO, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved	1. Strong government 2. Free market 8. DK/Depends	We need a strong government to handle today's complex problems

VCF0879	Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a little, increased a lot, decreased a little, decreased a lot, or left the same as it is now?)	1. Increased a lot 2. Increased a little 3. Same as now 4. Decreased a little 5. Decreased a lot 8. DK	Immigration should be increased or kept the same.
VCF0843	Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense. Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about this? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R)	1. Greatly decrease defense spending . . . 2 - 6 7. Greatly increase defense spending 9. DK; haven't thought much about it	Defense spending should be lowered.
VCF0892	If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which of the following programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased: Should federal spending on Foreign Aid be increased, decreased or kept about the same?	1. Increased 2. Same 3. Decreased or cut out entirely 8. DK	Foreign aid spending should be increased

VCF0876	Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?	1. Favor 2. Oppose 8. DK/Depends	Support laws protecting homosexuals against job discrimination.
VCF0838	There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? You can just tell me the number of the opinion you choose.	1. By law, abortion should never be permitted. 2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger. 3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established. 4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice. 9. DK; other	Abortion should be permitted.

VCF0834	Recently there has been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. Others feel that a women's place is in the home. Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about this? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R)	1. Women and men should have an equal role 2-6... 7. Women's place is in the home 9. DK, haven't thought much about it	Men and women should have an equal role in business, industry, and government
VCF0886	If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which (1986 AND LATER: of the following) programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased: Should federal spending on the poor/poor people be increased, decreased or kept about the same?	1. Increased 2. Same 3. Decreased (before 2012: or cut out entirely) 8. DK 9. NA	Federal spending to the poor should be increased

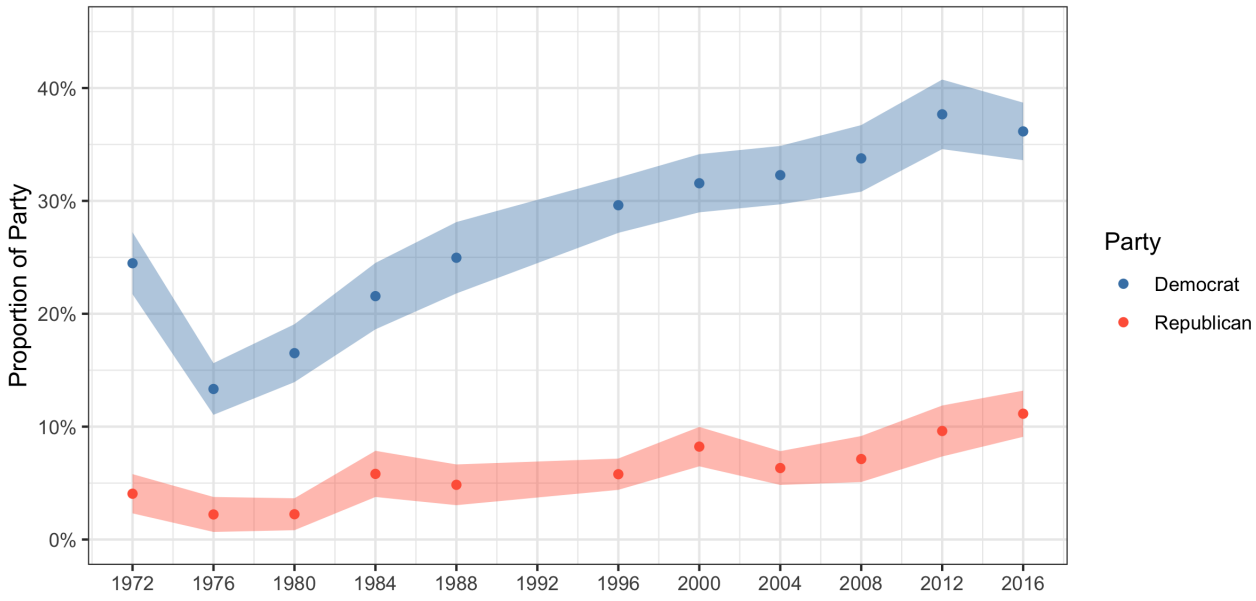
VCF0806	There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some people feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone. Others feel that medical expenses should be paid by individuals, and through private insurance plans like Blue Cross. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R)	1. Govt insurance plan 2 - 6 ... 7. Private insurance plan 9. DK; haven't thought much about it 0. NA	Support a government health insurance plan.

VCF0809	Some people feel that the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1). Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on his/their own. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R)	1. Govt see to job and good standard of living 2 - 6 . . . 7. Govt let each person get ahead on his own 9. DK; haven't thought much about it 0. NA	Govt should guarantee jobs and income.
VCF9013	Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.	1. Agree strongly 2. Agree somewhat 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Disagree somewhat 5. Disagree strongly 8. DK 9. NA	Society should do whatever it takes to make sure everyone has equal opportunity.

VCF0894	If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which of the following programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased: Welfare programs	1. Increased 2. Same 3. Decreased 8. DK 9. NA	Welfare program spending should be increased.

Figure 2.10 shows that the pattern in Figure 2.1 appears in other gold-standard longitudinal surveys as well. Figure 2.10 plots the percent of either party who identify as a race other than white, since 1972.

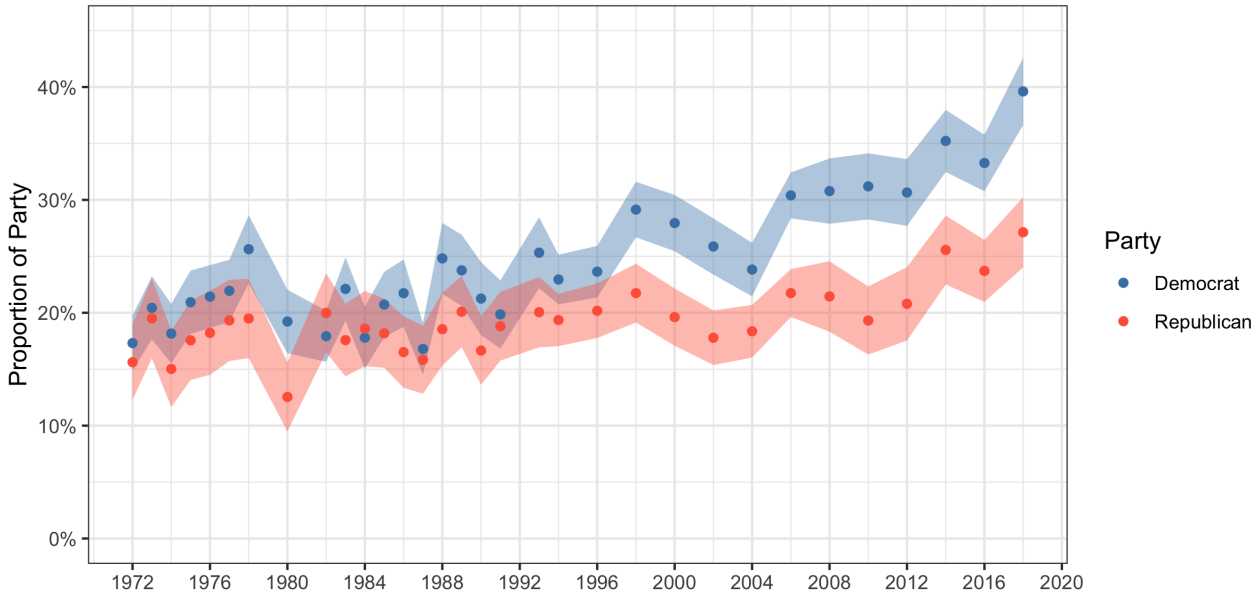
Figure 2.10: Percent of Party Identifying as Non-White, GSS



Note: Error bands represent 95% confidence intervals

Similarly, the rise in the gap between Democrats and Republicans in church attendance is not a function of the source of the data. The trend of Figure 2.11 shows that the pattern in Figure 2.2 is replicated in the GSS; this graph plots the percent of either party who report they never attend church, since 1972.

Figure 2.11: Percent of Each Party Who Never Attend Church, GSS



Note: Error bands represent 95% confidence intervals

Table 2.2 shows that this pattern shown in Figure 2.8 is statistically significant. It shows the results of a linear regression model predicting individual ideology, by the interaction between being a Democrat (vs. a Republican) and year, for each presidential election year between 1972 and 2016. On average, Democrats have become significantly more liberal over time, while Republicans have grown to be significantly more conservative.

Table 2.3 shows there is no significant increase in the age gap between Democrats and Republicans, when comparing 1956 and 2020.

Table 2.2: Partisan Ideology, 1972-2016

	Dependent variable:
	Ideology (0 Very Liberal to 9 Very Conservative)
Democrat	66.690^{***}
	(1.917)
Year	0.015^{***}
	(0.001)
Democrat x Year	-0.034^{***}
	(0.001)
Intercept	-23.942^{***}
	(1.409)
Observations	25,697
R^2	0.379
Adjusted R^2	0.379
Residual Std. Error	1.214 (df = 25693)
F Statistic	$5{,}237.906^{***}$ (df = 3; 25693)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
	Dataset includes Democrats and Republicans in Presidential election years between 1972 and 2016. Ideology is a 10 point variable, with lower numbers indicating more liberal ideology.

Table 2.3: Difference in Differences Test: Partisan Age Gap in 1956 vs. 2016

	Dependent variable:
	age
Democrat	-2.327^{***}
	(0.822)
Year (1956 v 2016)	7.967^{***}
	(0.668)
Dem x Year	-0.701
	(0.907)
Intercept	45.542^{***}
	(0.607)
Observations	8,919
R^2	0.038
Adjusted R^2	0.038
Residual Std. Error	16.398 (df = 8915)
F Statistic	118.959^{***} (df = 3; 8915)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

CHAPTER 3

Partisan Appeals to Group Identities

In this dissertation, I argue that the changing demographic characteristics of the Democratic and Republican Parties are made salient by strategic campaign communication and media coverage, intensifying partisan animosity. In Chapter 2, I outlined key ways in which the party coalitions have shifted in recent decades. Yet the shifting demographic and ideological characteristics of the party coalitions are not sufficient conditions to heighten affective polarization; partisans need to be made aware of the demographic differences between the parties. In this chapter, I test whether party communication has served as a mechanism for making partisan demographic divergence salient. In other words, Chapter 2 makes it clear that the parties look much more different from one another today than they did in the 1950s and '60s. Is this demographic divergence being communicated to American partisans? And how?

Understanding whether or not this elite communication about demographic divergence is important because elite cues play a pivotal role in shaping the way Americans think about politics (Druckman et al., 2013; Zaller, 1992, 1994). These cues can come from opposition leaders, which tend to polarize attitudes and send partisans to their respective corners (Nicholson, 2012), ones' own party leadership, or even neutral media coverage. For instance, when media highlight political polarization and differences between the parties, partisans moderate their views but dislike the out-party more (Levendusky and Malhotra, 2016). I argue that elite signalling which indicates "what goes with what" enhances perceptions of difference between the parties, leading to heightened stereotypes about the out-group and increased levels of affective polarization.

Appeals to group identity are common in American politics, in ways that are both

legitimate and illegitimate. For instance, politicians have a history of use racial framing and appeals in their campaign communications (Abrajano, 2010; McIlwain and Caliendo, 2011), sometimes playing on existing racial stereotypes to mobilize voters (Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Hutchings and Jardina, 2009; Mendelberg, 2001). These implicit racial cues prime racial attitudes and increase the accessibility of group-based stereotypes when thinking about politics (Valentino et al., 2002), in turn shaping the way we think about the parties and policies (Gilens, 1999; Tesler, 2012; Winter, 2006).[1] But not all appeals to group-based identity formed on illegitimate grounds, based on stereotypes or racial prejudice. Political actors may appeal to group identity in ways that enhance group consciousness and increase political efficacy and participation (Barreto, 2007).

Whether the group appeal is positive and empowering or based in steotypes and racial prejudice, there's reason to believe that political communication which appeals to group-based identities may heighten an us-vs.-them mentality among partisans. Huddy et al. (2015) demonstrated that appeals to identities are more likely to create an emotional response and heighten affective attachment to the parties. And because political appeals which create an emotional response in the viewer are often more persuasive (Brader, 2006), political actors have a strong incentive to use this type of appeal to identity.

In this chapter, I build the foundation for my test of the causal relationship between appeals to aligned group identities and affective polarization. This chapter demonstrates how party elites have increasingly included appeals to group identities in their rhetoric. To do so, I gathered the text of party platforms over the past several decades, and used text analysis to answer three main questions. Most importantly, have political elites increased their use of appeals to group-based identities over time? Second, how do the parties differ

[1]Beyond implicit racial appeals in campaign communications, the parties have become associated with certain racial policies as their stands on racial issues have shifted over time. Specifically, Democratic elites' embrace of racial liberalism began in the late 1950s and early '60s. At the same time, Republicans began to adopt a more racially conservative platform, leading to Goldwater's success in 1964 (Schickler, 2016). Thus, along with a history of implicit racial appeals in campaign communication, the increasing racial liberalism of the Democratic Party (and racial conservatism of the Republican Party), has led elites in both political parties to tightly link race and partisanship. Existing research shows that partisans have internalized these stereotypes, and often overestimate the percentage of each party belonging to party-stereotypical group (Ahler and Sood, 2018).

in their use of group identity appeals? And finally, are party elites more likely to appeal to identity groups which are already aligned with their party?

3.0.1 Expected Differences in Party Strategy

Much of modern political science is built upon the idea that groups are fundamental in shaping party identification, political attitudes, and behavior (Berelson et al., 1954; Converse, 1964). Group-based identities such as race, class, gender, urbanicity, education, and religiosity shape the way Americans think about politics and interact in the political sphere. And as social group sorting has become more extreme in the United States in recent decades, the influence of these social groups on partisanship has only grown (see Chapter 2 and Mason, 2018). I expect political rhetoric to reflect this increasing alignment of group identities with one party or another. This leads to Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1: Political appeals to group-based identities have increased over time.

That is, I expect to find that key, politically-relevant identities are more commonly referenced today than in the 1950s and '60s.

Further, we should expect each party to focus on groups which are aligned with their party. That is, I expect that Democrats use rhetoric about their key constituencies (e.g., women, people of color, low-income individuals, younger people, LGBTQ, and urban groups) to a greater extent than Republicans. On the other hand, I expect the Republican Party platforms to focus on their key identity groups (e.g.,religious individuals, people who live in rural areas, older people, and white Americans). This leads to Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2: Political appeals to party-aligned groups have increased more than appeals to non-aligned groups.

However, Grossmann and Hopkins (2016) show that there are differences in the extent to which group-based identities play a role in the two parties. The find that ideology is a larger factor in the Republican Party, while social groups are more relevant in the Democratic Party. This asymmetry in the parties' priorities suggests we should expect to find differences

in the use of ideological language between the two parties. Because the Republican Party prioritizes ideology to a greater extent than Democrats, we should expect strategic politicians to use this language more often, as it is more effective with their voters. On the other hand, the Democratic Party is more demographically heterogeneous, a big tent party which is better described as a coalition of groups. Because of this, we should expect the rhetoric used by Democratic politicians to increasingly discuss the differing interests of these groups. This leads to Hypothesis 3:

> *Hypothesis 3: Republican platforms contains more appeals to ideology than Democratic platforms.*

Finally, Levendusky (2018) demonstrates that priming Americans' common identity can ameliorate affective polarization (though there is preliminary evidence that this effect may be diminishing (Levendusky, 2021)). Yet Kalmoe and Gross (2016) show that appeals to patriotism (specifically, imagery of the American flag) benefit Republicans more than Democrats. These somewhat contradictory findings suggest it is worth investigating how the parties' use of appeals to a common national identity have changed over time. Hypothesis 4:

> *Hypothesis 4: The Republican Party's platforms contain appeals to Americans' national identity more often than the Democratic platforms.*

3.1 Methodology: Analysis of Party Platforms

There are a number of methods which might potentially be used to measure the frequency of group appeals in political rhetoric, all with their own benefits and drawbacks. Campaign ads transcripts are perhaps the most commonly studied, but convention speeches, the congressional record, and candidate websites are all potential sources of data as well. For the purposes of this study, I needed a text corpus that met three requirements. First, the data must be longitudinal in nature. I needed a source for which data are available since at least the 1980s, to establish a baseline rate of appeals to group identity.[2] Second, the text needed

[2]This rules out candidate websites, which only came into widespread use in the 2000s.

to be readily accessible.[3] And third, the text needed to represent the views, language, and priorities of party elites.

Party platforms meet all three of these criteria. They are available going back to 1840 from pre (2016), and are easily pulled from that website. Generally, there is variation in the party platforms every four years, allowing us to observe how the party priorities have changed over time.[4] Importantly, a party platform represents a party in conversation with itself: party elites explicitly laying out their priorities for their membership.[5]

3.1.1 Text-as-Data Approach

To test my hypotheses, I used a dictionary-based approach to perform a text analysis of the Democratic and Republican Party platforms, since 1952. This means I treated each platform as a "bag of words," in which the frequency of the use of certain terms over time and across parties was the main outcome of interest. This approach ignores the context and order in which words appear.

To begin, I scraped the text of the platforms from an online resource: pre (2016). Before analysis, I performed standard text-as-data cleaning procedures. These included: removing capitalization, punctuation, and stop words.[6]

---

[3]This eliminated the possibility of using campaign ads. Digitized presidential ads are only available through the Weslyan Media Project, which extends only to the mid-1990s. The other source of presidential campaign ads, the University of Oklahoma Political Communication Center, would require visiting the center and watching and transcribing each ad manually.

[4]The exception is the 2020 Republican Party's platform, which replicated the 2016 platform with an additional section explaining they were doing so because of the ongoing pandemic and their continued "enthusiastic" support for then-President Trump.

[5]We should expect to see the patterns of group-based appeals laid out in the previous section in this type of document – where the audience is party membership – and not in documents where the audience is the country as a whole, such as State of the Union addresses.

[6]Stop words are commonly removed before natural language text processing; they tend to be prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, and some verbs. For example, this includes words such as "the," "and," "or," "be" and "him." I used a dictionary of these stop words (the Snowball Dictionary, provided by the `tidytext` package in `R`) to identify and remove these words from the corpus of text.

I also passed the text of each platform through a word-stemming algorithm.[7] This removes commonly-used endings of words so that all variations of a word are identified as the same root word. For instance, the "s" at the end of "Americans" is removed, so that mentions of"American" and "Americans" are counted as two instances of the same word. Other commonly-removed endings include "-ing," "-ly," "-ies," "-ed," "-er," etc.

Finally, I "tokenized" each document, which converts the corpus from a long string of words into ngrams (individual words and collections of every two words, or bigrams), and then summarized the frequency of each ngram in each platform. For instance, the ngrams "latino" and "african american" appeared in the 2016 Democratic platform 5 and 6 times, respectively.

I also created a dictionary of identity-based words. To create this list of relevant identity groups, I drew on research about social identities and their alignment with party identification (see Cramer, 2016; Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016; Green et al., 2002; Jardina, 2019; Mason, 2018). In the end, my list included nine relevant group identity categories, including: race, gender, sexual orientation, age, urbanicity, education, class, industry, religion. I also created lists of ngrams which indicate an appeal to ideology (liberal and conservative) and for words which fall into a "Common American identity" category. Each category is also broken into relevant groups. For instance, the race category contains the groups: Blacks, Whites, Latinos, Other, and generic minority language. The full dictionary is shown in Table 3.1.

Throughout the analysis, the key measurement strategy is based on the frequency with which each ngram appears in a given platform, relative to the total number of words in that platform (excluding stopwords), expressed as a percentage. The resulting number represents how much of each platform is composed of group-identity appeals. These percentages may seem quite small, as most of these identity group ngrams represent less than half of a percent of the total number of words in a given platform ($< 0.5\%$). A critical reader may look with skepticism at the y-axes of the graphs that follow, and leave with the impression that effects

[7] I used Porter's stemming algorithm, using the `tm` package's `stemDocument` function in `R`.

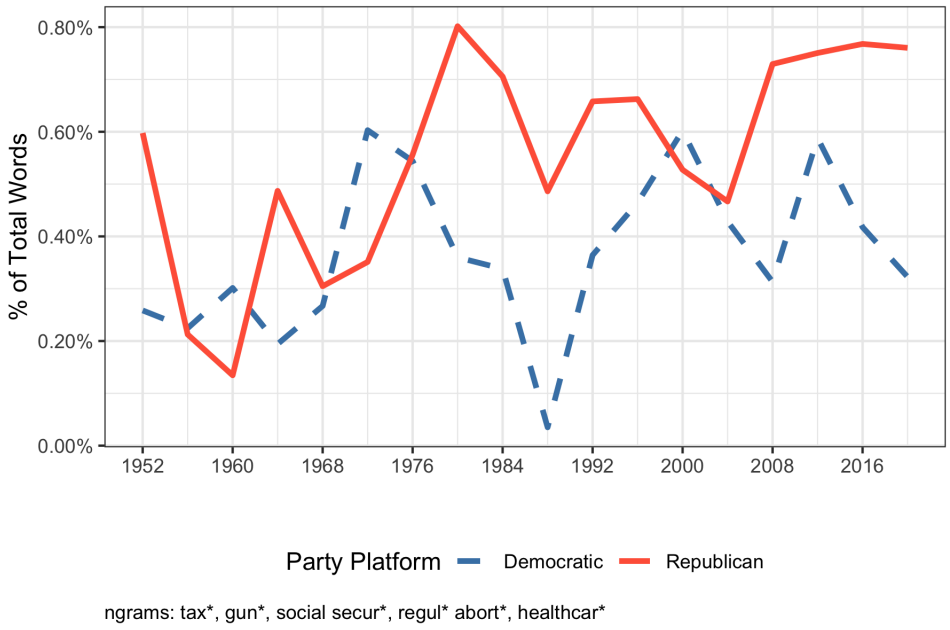
Table 3.1: Identity Group Dictionary

Category	Group	Ngrams	Party Alignment
Race	Black	african american, afro american, negro, black	D
	Latino	mexican american, latino, latina, hispanic	D
	White	white, all lives, caucasian	R
	Other	asian american, native american, american indian	D
	Generic Minority	of color, minority, ethnicity, immigrant	D
Gender	Men	men	
	Women	women	D
Sexual Orientation	Gay	lgbt, lgbtq, gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual	D
	Straight	traditional marriage, heterosexual	R
Age	Young	young	D
	Elderly	old age, aarp, elderly, seniors	R
	Middle aged	middle aged	R
Urbanicity	Rural	small town, rural	R
	Suburban	suburb, suburban	R
	Urban	urban, inner-city	D
Industry	Blue collar	construction worker, farmer, rancher, miner, factory worker, logger, coal miner, blue collar	R
	White collar	white collar	
	Unions	labor union, union member	D
Class	Low	low income, american poverty, poor people, poor american, working class	D
	Middle	middle class, moderate income	
	High	high income, wall street, wall st, businessmen, billionaire, millionaire, wealthy	*
Education	Students	students	D
Religion	Religious	judeo christia, judeo-christian, church, faith, worship, prayer, religious heritage, religious group, religious school, religious institution	R
	Non-Religious	secular	D
Americanism	American identity	we american, all american, our, united, together, all of us	
	Documents	constitution, declaration of independence, bill of rights	
	Heritage	lincoln, washington, founder, pioneer, forefather	
	Ideals	liberty, freedom, equality, independence	
	Symbols	flag, fourth of july, july 4th, eagle, patriot	

of this magnitude are unimportant.

Before examining the results, therefore, I'd like to provide some context for the numbers that will appear in this in the sections that follow. Figure 3.1 provides a point of comparison, and plots the rate at which the party platforms mention six key issues over time: taxes, guns, social security, regulations, abortion, and healthcare. Mentions of these issues, which have defined American politics for decades, *combined* never exceed 0.8% of a party platform. In fact, mentions of these six issues make up, on average, just 0.4% of Democratic platforms, and 0.6% of Republican platforms.

Figure 3.1: Discussion of Key Issues in Party Platforms



3.1.2 Enhancing Signal, Minimizing Noise: Analysis of Key Words in Context

Dictionary-based approaches to text analysis are inherently noisy. To enhance my confidence that this newly-created dictionary was high quality and accurately capturing signal in the noise, I performed a keyword-in-context (K.W.I.C.) analysis, and developed the dictionary iteratively. A K.W.I.C. analysis identifies the 20 words before and after each word of interest in a set of documents. I ran the K.W.I.C identifier for each of the 102 words in my identity-

rhetoric dictionary.[8]

This process produced a set of over 3,000 short phrases which I read and hand-coded. I coded each set of 41 words as either relevant to group identities or not. For instance, references to the "White House" are not references to white Americans, and therefore I removed all such mentions from the text before tokenizing the document. Similarly, references to blacks in South Africa during apartheid are not relevant to American political coalitions, and should not be counted as group-identity rhetoric either. For a word to be included in my final dictionary of group-identity words, over 80% of the references to that word must be relevant to a social identity context in the United States. Where possible, I removed non-relevant phrases which contained words that would otherwise be counted as group identity phrases. This process resulted in the removal of six ngrams from the dictionary, including:

- Homosexual: the only times it was used in the party platforms referred to discrimination in other parts of the world.
- Jewish, Jew: references were mainly about Israel and Jews in other parts of the world
- Retiree: most references were about social security, not individuals
- Religious minorities: mainly about discrimination against in other parts of world
- Rich: predominantly used in contexts unrelated to identity (for example, "rich heritage", "rich natural resources")
- Progressive: noisy measure with many alternative uses that were unrelated to identity and ideology. There was no simple rule I could apply to the corpus to capture the instances where use was related to ideology.

Further, I improved the rate at which true identity words were captured by changing the ngrams included in the dictionary, rather than removing them entirely. These changes included:

[8]To do so, I used the `kwic()` function from the `quanteda` package in `R`.

- Christian: to enhance the signal-to-noise ratio, I changed the dictionary entry to "Judeo-Christian"
- City: changed to "inner-city" to more accurately capture references to individuals living in urban areas
- Old: changed to "old age" to enhance the signal-to-noise ratio

Finally, the K.W.I.C. analysis also suggested some changes to the *corpus* could increase the rate at which ngrams in the dictionary accurately capture appeals to identity. The changes I made to the corpus included:

- Church and state: removing this ngram increased the rate at which references to "church" were capturing appeals to a religious identity
- Ethnic and religious groups, Repressed religious groups, Independent religious groups: these references tended to emphasize religious groups outside the United States. By removing them, I could confirm that all references to "religious" were actually appeals to religious identity.
- Worship according: removing this ngram removed references to international religious groups
- Liberal trade, Liberal democracy, Liberal arts: these phrases make it difficult to detect the rate at which appeals to a liberal ideology occurred
- South Africa: I removed the 20 words following the phrase "South Africa" from the corpus, so references to apartheid were not counted as appeals to racial identity in the United States
- White House: Mentions of this ngram would be counted as appeals to white racial identity, so it was removed from the corpus

This process resulted in a refined identity-rhetoric dictionary and corpus of cleaned party platforms.

3.2 Results

In the section that follows, I present the results of the analysis of the text of party platforms between 1952 and 2020. First, I examine the use of all identity language in that time, and demonstrate that while the Democratic Party's use of identity-based language has increased, the Republican Party's use has fallen slightly over time. Next, I examine the use of ngrams in key identity categories, and document the differences in the ways the parties talk about aligned constituencies. Importantly, the ways in which the parties talk about racial and ethnic groups, women, religious groups, students, class, and sexual orientation has changed significantly over time. Overall these results show that the Democratic Party's discussion of party-aligned groups has risen since the 1950s, while the Republican Party's discussion of their party-aligned groups has declined somewhat during that time (with the exception of appeals to religious identity, which have increased).

Next, because ideological polarization remains a plausible alternative hypothesis when it comes to the driver of affective polarization, I also examine the parties' use of explicitly ideological language over time. This shows that the Republican Party has consistently used more ideological language in their platforms than the Democratic Party – particularly in the mid-1990s – and the rate at which Republicans use this type of language has grown significantly over time.

Finally, I test the parties' use of appeals to a common national identity. The results show that a curvilinear pattern in the use of this type of language has emerged over time; both parties' use of appeals to American identity dropped in the 1980s, and has since recovered to approximate 1950 levels. Further, Republicans have consistently made use of this type of appeal to a greater extent than Democrats.

3.2.1 Party Differences in Identity Rhetoric over Time

Figure 3.2 displays the total use of identity-based language in each party platform, between 1952 and 2020. In this figure and throughout the chapter, Democratic Platforms are represented by open blue points and a blue dashed line, while Republican Platforms are rep-

resented by the solid red line and filled red circles. The figure shows the Democratic Party's use of identity-based language more than doubled between 1952 and 2020, though the trend has not been linear. In 1952, appeals to group-identities represented about about 0.7% of the Democratic Platform, and 0.6% of the Republican Platform. The use of these appeals rose steadily to its initial peak in the early 1980s, where these appeals represented 1.4% of the Democratic Platform (in 1980) and 1% of the Republican Rather (in 1984), Since then, the Democratic appeals to group identities dropped somewhat, hovering below 1% for the next 15-20 years. Republican use of these appeals dropped even further, to around 0.06%, where it remains today. Since 2012, Democratic discussion of group identities has grown dramatically, to a rate in 2020 that is more than twice as high as its 1952 level; in 2020, 1.9% of all of the words in the Democratic Party's platform referred to identity groups. Meanwhile, in terms of the overall rate of appeals to various group identities, the Republican Party platform of 2020 is not much different from the Republican Party platform of 1952.

Figure 3.2: Use of Group Identity Words in Party Platforms, 1952 - 2020

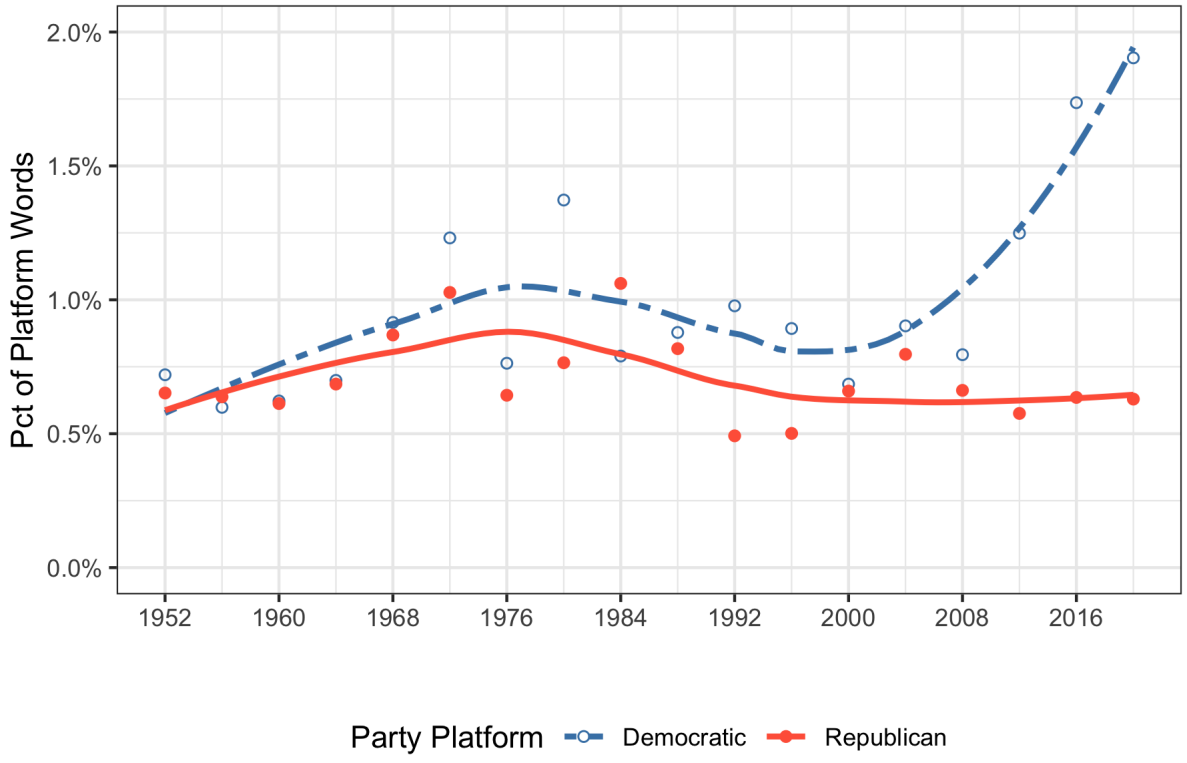


Table 3.2 confirms that the party trends shown in Figure 3.2 significantly differ from

one another. It shows the percentages of each party's platform composed of group identity ngrams over time.[9] In the first time period (1950-1975), there is no significant difference between the two parties' platforms use of identity-based words; the gap in their identity words usage is just 0.04 percentage points ($p = 0.52$). But since then, the parties have grown more demographically distinct. Chapter 2 demonstrates how, especially since the 1970s, the Democratic Party has become increasingly non-white, urban, younger, more female, and less religious. At the same time, the demographics of the Republican Party have not changed dramatically, and it remains over 90% white. And Table 3.2 demonstrates that this change in party membership is reflected in the parties' use of identity-based language. Between 1976 and 2000, the gap in the parties' use of the language of identity grew to about 0.23 percentage points (p-value < 0.001). And by the 2001-2020 time period, the gap in use of identity language grew again, to about 0.7 points (p-value < 0.001). By the 2001-2020 time period, Democratic use of identity-based language was more than twice Republican use of this rhetoric.

Table 3.2: Use of Identity Words in Party Platforms

Time Period	Party Platform	Pct. Identity Words
1950 - 1975	Democratic	0.846%
	Republican	0.808%
1976 - 2000	Democratic	0.944%
	Republican	0.713%
2001 - 2020	Democratic	1.425%
	Republican	0.663%

Overall, the Democratic Party's platforms average use of identity-based language increased by about 170% between the '50-'75 time period, and the '01-'20 period ($p < 0.001$). On the other hand, the Republican Party's platforms use of this language fell by about 15%

[9]These time periods represent points in time when the composition of the Democratic Party shifted. According to ANES data, between 1952 - 1972, over 80% of the Democratic Party in the electorate was white; that dropped to between 60% and 80% between 1976 and 2000. And finally, since 2004, less than 60% of the Democratic Party has been non-white. Though the breaks shown in Table 3.2 are arbitrary, the same trend is confirmed using a linear model. The findings are robust to alternative time period specifications.

between the 1952-1972 and 2001-2020 time periods. ($p < 0.05$.)[10]

The results presented thus far partially confirm my first hypothesis; Democratic use of identity-based language has increased over time, while Republican use of this type of language has remained fairly flat. But do these changes in language reflect the shifting priorities and demographics of the parties? In the next section, I test my second hypothesis, and show that the parties' appeals to identity reflect their divergent coalitions.

3.2.2 Appeals to Party-Aligned Identity Groups

In the previous section, I examined the use of identity language as a whole. But in *Hypothesis 2*, I explained that we should expect the parties to display important differences in the types of identity language they utilize in their platforms; that is, the parties are more likely to reference identity groups that are aligned with their party. The language the parties use will likely reflect their changing (or not, in the case of the GOP) party membership coalitions. To begin, I have categorized each identity ngram as aligned with either the Democratic or Republican Party, as shown in Table 3.3. Identity groups with no clear party affiliation are excluded from this analysis.

Table 3.3: Group-Party Alignment

Democratic Groups	Republican Groups
Blacks, Latinos, Other race, Generic minority, Women, Gays, Young, Urban, Unions, Low income, students, Non-Religious	Whites, Straights, Elderly, Middle Aged, Rural, Suburban, Blue collar, Business, Religious

Figure 3.3 shows the dramatic differences by party. The left panel shows the increasing prominence of Democratically-aligned identity groups in Democratic platforms since 1952. On the right, the data show that Republican Party's discussion of Republican-leaning groups has steadily declined over the past six decades, and its use of appeals to aligned-identity

[10]See Table 3.5 in the appendix, a regression model which shows that this trend holds up looking at the entire 1952 - 2020 time period as a whole, and is not an artifact of the years selected in each time period.

groups is lower today than it was 60 years ago.

In the Democratic platforms, two peaks emerge in their use of appeals to Democratically-aligned groups: 1980, and post-2012.[11] The Democratic party's use of appeals to aligned-group identities in 2016 reflected a new high in the party's use of this type of language, and a huge change from the previous election in 2012. Yet the rate at which this type of language is used grew even more in 2020, and more than 1.5% of all words in the platform reflected appeals to groups aligned with the Democratic Party.

Figure 3.3: References to Party-Aligned Groups in Each Parties' Platforms

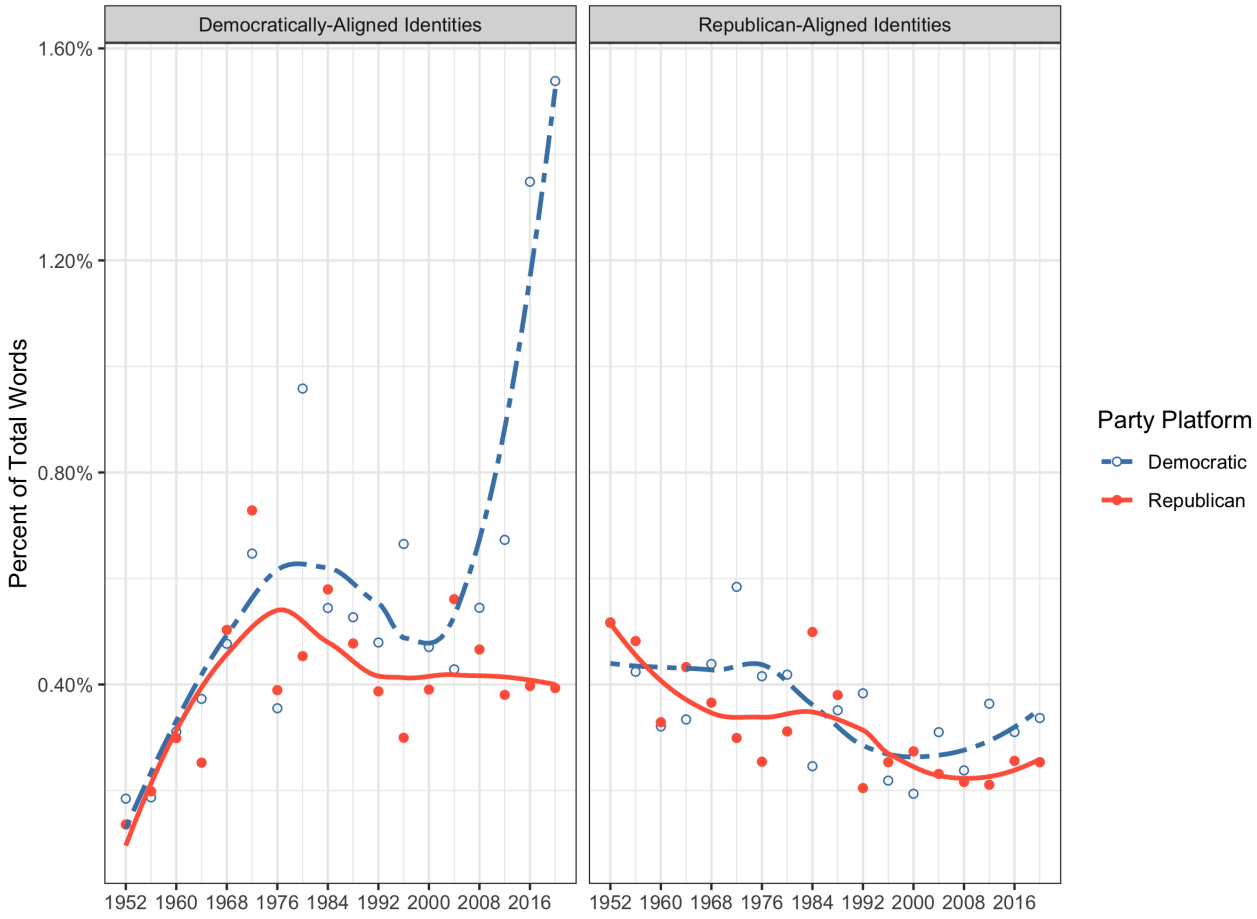


Figure 3.3 demonstrates Democrats' increasing prioritization of the diverse demo-

[11]The extensive discussion of identity group politics in the 1980 Democratic platform may reflect the bitter divide that ravaged the Democratic Party that year, culminating in a convention fight between Ted Kennedy and Jimmy Carter (Ward, 2019).

graphic groups aligned with their party. Mentions of Democratically-aligned groups in Democratic platforms occur more than five times as often in the 2020 platform than they did in the 1952 platform. Over the same time, the GOP's references to traditionally Republican groups has waned slightly. These trends largely confirm my expectations; as the Democratic Party's membership has diversified, the language party elites use to describe the party's governing principles reflects that diversification. On the other side of the aisle, the Republican Party's relative demographic stasis is reflected by their deemphasis of Republican-aligned identity groups.[12]

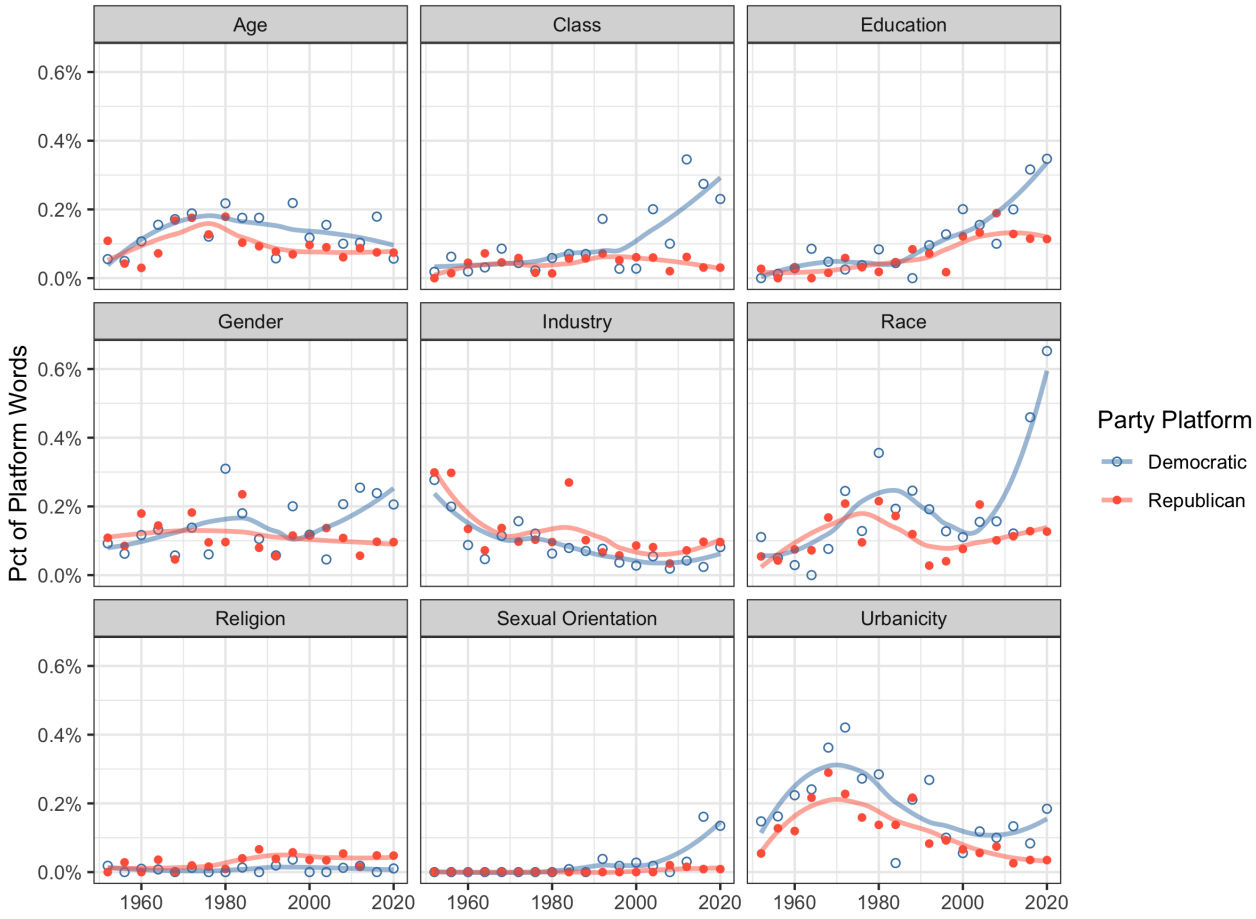
3.2.3 Changes in Appeals to Identity Types

While these summaries of the use of identity rhetoric overall are helpful in providing a broad understanding of partisan language, they mask important shifts in how the parties prioritize specific groups. To begin unmasking these differences, therefore, Figure 3.4 shows the rate at which the Democratic (in blue, open circles) and Republican (in red, filled circles) platforms use identity-based language in each of 9 identity categories: age, class, education, gender, industry, race, religion, sexual orientation, and urbanicity. Key differences emerge across identity categories, and much of the increase in the Democratic Party's use of rhetoric around aligned-identity groups identified in Figure 3.3 is driven by appeals to four specific types of identities: those related to class, education, gender, and race. Further, both parties' use of language around industry and urbanicity has fallen over time (though use of the latter shows signs of rebounding among Democrats).

Later sections in this chapter will dive deeper into the trends in each category, but this overall comparison is helpful framing up front to give a sense of the rate at which these groups are discussed, in relation to one another. For instance, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, urbanicity and industry were much more frequently discussed in both party platforms than other categories of identity. Moving into the 1980s, however, the rate at which these

[12]The different slopes and intercepts by party are confirmed by a linear regression model, shown in Table 3.6 in the appendix. The effect of year is positive among Democratic platforms and negative among Republican platforms.

Figure 3.4: Party Platforms' Use of Identity Categories, 1952-2020



groups were discussed dropped, and identities based on race became more prominent.[13]

Figure 3.5 tests whether these previously identified trends reflect statistically significant changes over time. It plots the correlation between a party's use of ngrams in each identity category and year. Each point represents the correlation between the percentage of the total document composed of words in the specified identity category and the platform's year, along with its 95% confidence interval. Thus, each point shows the correlation between these variables – year and percent of platform – across 16 data points. This small sample size means that only differences that are quite large reach conventional levels of statistical

[13]More work should be done looking into this, but this shift may reflect party elites shifting to use coded language to describe racial identities. For instance, references to "urban" environments may have been coded references to mean "Black Americans."

significance. Coefficients below 0 indicate that the party's use of language in that identity category has fallen over time, whereas coefficients above 0 indicate the use of language in that category has increased over time. The results of tests of significant difference in the parties' correlation coefficients are shown on the left side of the plot.

Figure 3.5: Correlation between Use of Identity Categories and Year, by Party

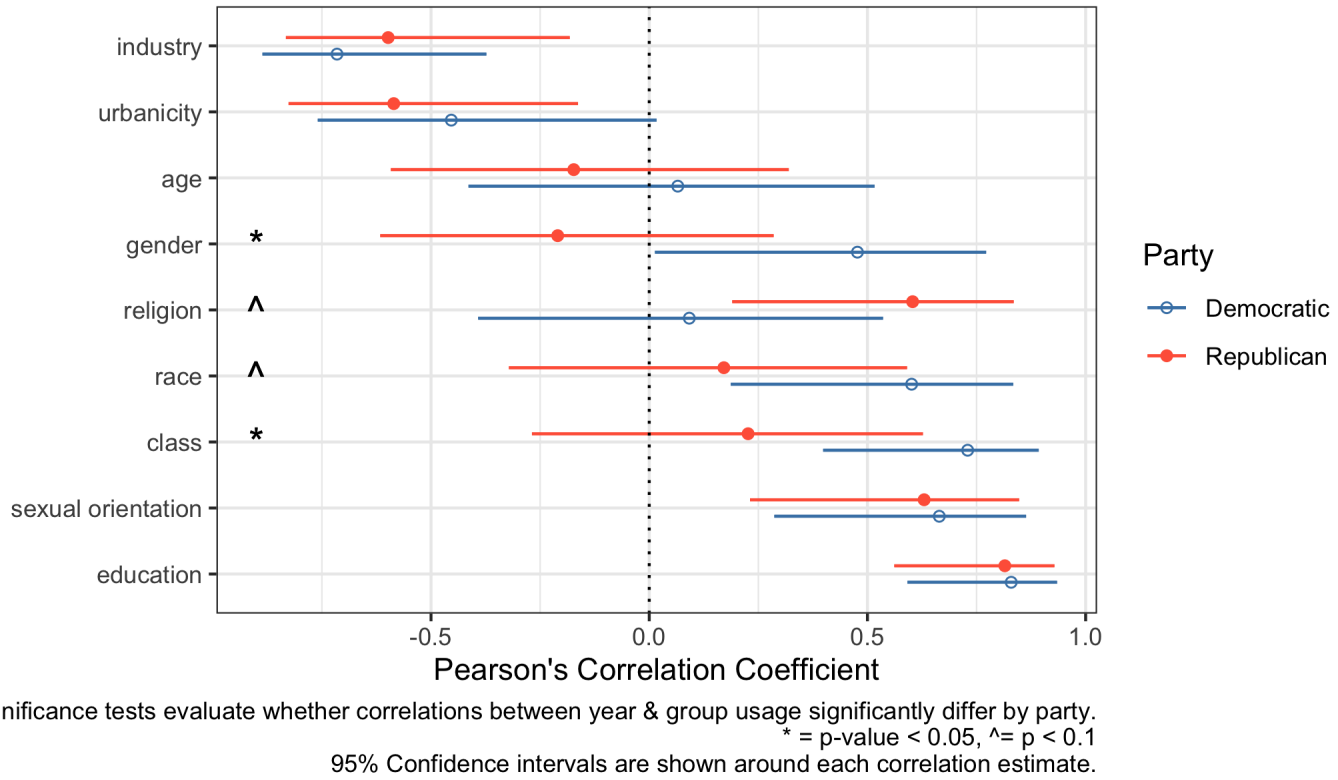


Figure 3.5 shows that the parties have changed in the way they discuss many – but not all – identity groups over time, with four important takeaways. First, Democrats have grown more likely to discuss gender and class, while Republicans discussion of these groups has stayed about the same or declined. Second, the rate at which both parties discuss sexual orientation, education, and race has grown over time, though the rate at which Democrats have increased their use of racial language has out-paced that of Republicans. Third, Republican's use of appeals to religious identities has risen dramatically, while Democrats' use has remained fairly flat over time. And finally, both parties' use of language around urbanicity and industry has fallen. Because of the important changes in the language of gender, race, class, and religion, the next few sections will examine these groups more deeply.

3.2.4 Language of Gender

Let's first turn to an examination of the parties' discussion of gender in their party platforms. As shown in the previous section, the parties differ dramatically in their use of gender-based language: Democratic platforms use appeals to gender significantly more than in previous decades, while Republican use of these types of words has, overall, fallen.

This analysis that follows is focused mainly on the use of two words used to describe gender groups – "women" and "men" – in the party platforms since 1952. This is because, when used together in the tri-gram "men and women," the appearance of either word does not signal an appeal to either gender identity. In that context, the words imply a discussion of the whole. In fact, a simple count of the words "women" and "men" over time shows that usage is fairly flat over time, with a small uptick in recent years. This is because, much of the time, "men" and "women" are used together, signalling a reference to all Americans.

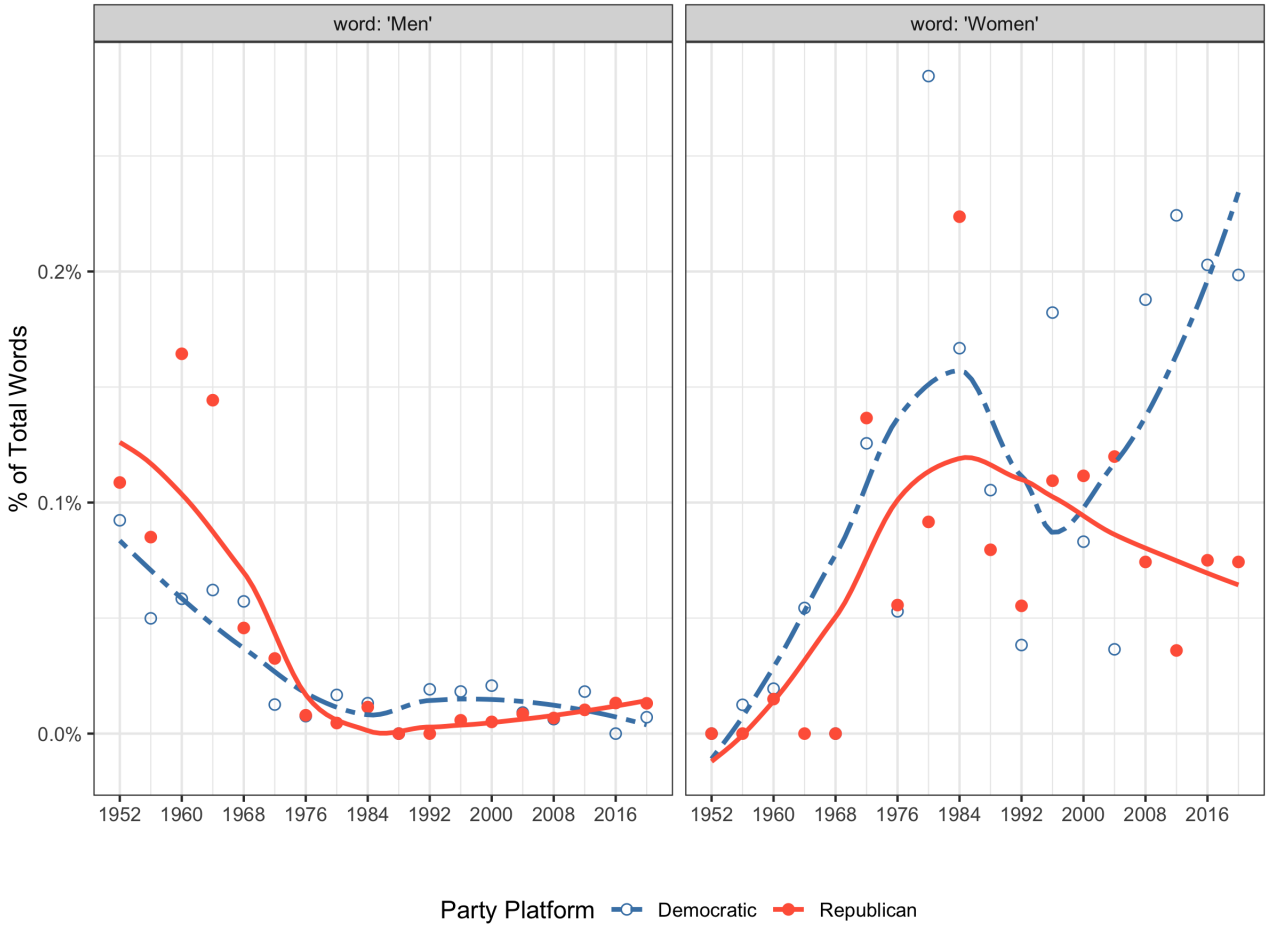
To account for this, I've identified the use of each word individually, outside of the context of the phrase "men and women" or "women and men." Figure 3.6 shows the rates at which the parties use both words over time. In this figure, references to men are shown on the left, and references to women are shown on the right. As always, empty blue points and dashed lines represent Democratic platforms, while red points and solid lines represent Republicans.

The data show that, in the 1950s, the word "men" was regularly used outside of the context of "men and women;" in fact, the word "men" or "man" frequently represented between 0.1% and 0.2% of all words in the Republican Party platforms throughout the 1950s and 60s. However, in 1952, neither party used the word "women" outside of references to both genders. Up until the early 1960s, neither party spent much of their platform referencing women. But this has changed dramatically over time. By 1980, the word "men" was very rarely used outside the context of "men and women", while the use of "women" on its own has skyrocketed.

The increase in the use of the word "women" is especially pronounced in the Democratic platforms. Looking at the Republican platforms, though its current usage of the word

"woman" dramatically exceeds its usage in 1952 (when the word was not used at all), it rate of use has remained relatively flat since the mid-1970s, and has fallen since its peak in 1984. The use of the word "women" in Democratic Platforms, however, has frequently hovered around 0.2% of the platform since the 1990s.

Figure 3.6: Use of Gender Words in Party Platforms: References to "Men" or "Women"



The parties' explicit inclusion of women in the platforms shown in Figure 3.6 reflects the changing role of women in U.S. society, and the Democratic Party, over time. Though largely excluded from the political sphere at the beginning of this time period, women have increasingly become an important constituency – especially within the Democratic Party, where women (and in particular women of color) are an increasingly important and relied upon segment of the party coalition.

3.2.5 Racial Differences between the Parties

Given the dramatic differences in the demographic composition of the parties highlighted in Chapter 2, we should expect the language they use in the party platforms to reflect those priorities. Table 3.4 confirms this, showing the average rate of racial identity words in the parties' platforms across three time periods, along with a test of whether the parties' use of race-based appeals in a given time period significantly differ from one another. In the 1950-1975 period, the parties used racial identity language at about the same rate, though Republicans used racial identity words at a marginally higher rate (p-value < 0.15). But since then, the Democratic Party's platforms have, on average, contained at least twice as much racial identity rhetoric as the Republican platforms. Democratic use of racial identity words significantly increased between the '50 - '75 and the '76-'00 time periods, and rose again between '76-'00 and '01-'20. The Republican Party's use of racial identity language has not significantly changed over time.

Table 3.4: Use of Racial Words in Party Platforms

Time Period	Party Platform	Pct. Racial Identity Words	Difference
1950 - 1975	Democratic	0.095%	
	Republican	0.127%	
1976 - 2000	Democratic	0.207%	***
	Republican	0.11%	***
2001 - 2020	Democratic	0.365%	***
	Republican	0.139%	***

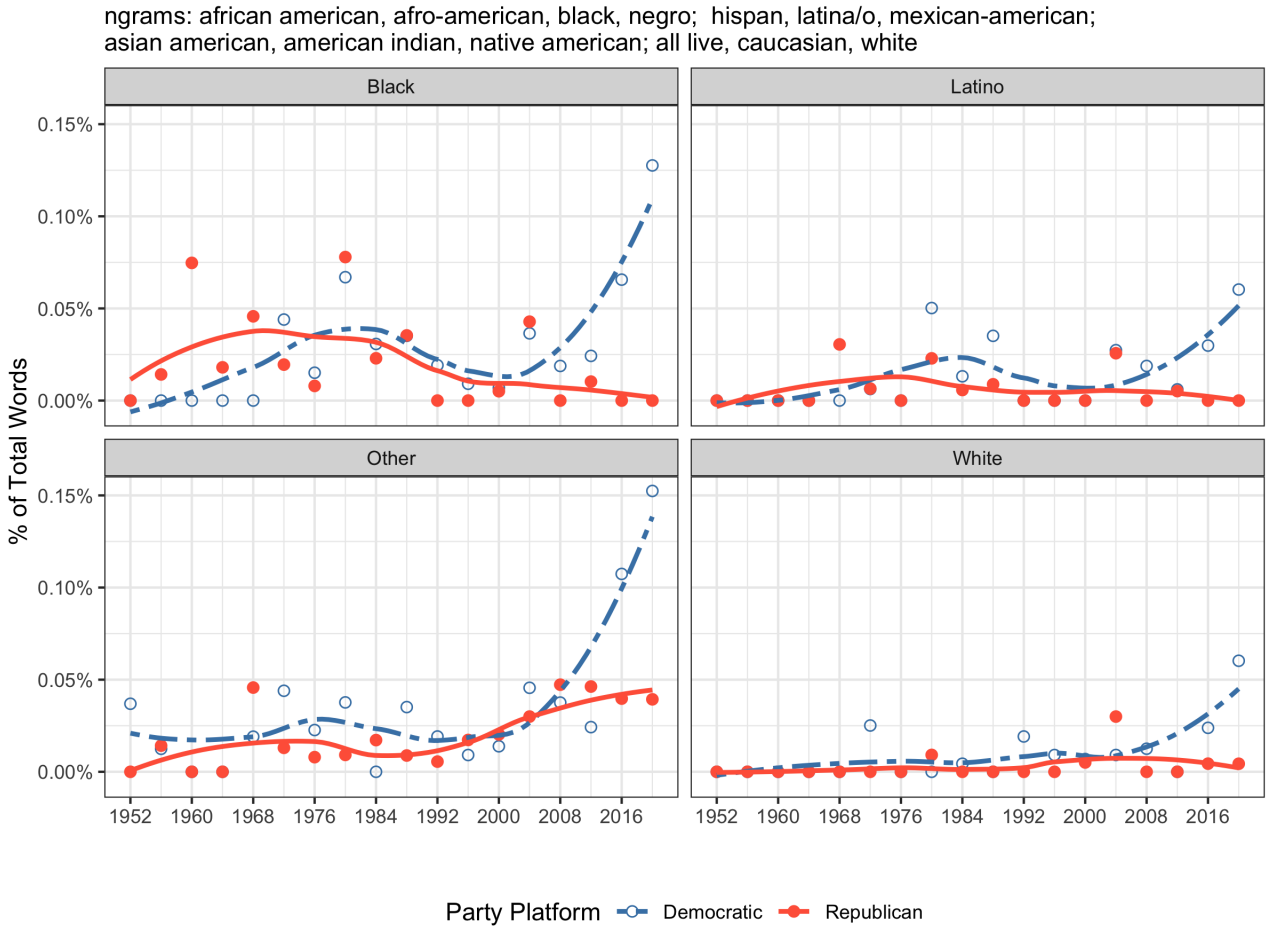
Note:
Significance test indicates if parties significantly differ in a time period. *** = p-value $< .001$

Further, Figure 3.7 breaks out the parties' use of key terms over time, by racial group.[14]

[14]References to black Americans are measured by the frequency of the the stemmed ngrams: "african american", "black", "afro-american" and "negro." References to Latinos are identified with: "hispan," "latino," "latina," and "mexican-american". References to "Other" include the ngrams "asian american," "native american," and "american indian." References to whites are identified with the stemmed ngrams: "white," "caucasian," and "all lives." Based on the K.W.I.C. analysis, I excluded references to the White House or "white collar" work, as well as sentences which discussed South Africa (its history of apartheid was often discussed in the party platforms). As these references are not related to black and white *Americans*, they are irrelevant to the question at hand.

The ngrams related to Black Americans are shown in the upper left graph, those related to Latinos are shown in the upper right, whites are shown on the lower right, and appeals to other racial groups are shown on the lower left. Figure 3.7 demonstrates the Democratic Party's complicated history with race: from its initial position as the party of racial conservatism, to its shift to become the champion of racial minorities in America. Indeed, the Democratic platforms did not even mention Black Americans until 1972. Yet since the 1980s, the Democratic platforms have consistently included an explicit discussion of Black Americans to a greater extent than Republican platforms, reflecting a greater prioritization of the concerns of Black Americans.

Figure 3.7: Use of Racial Words in Party Platforms

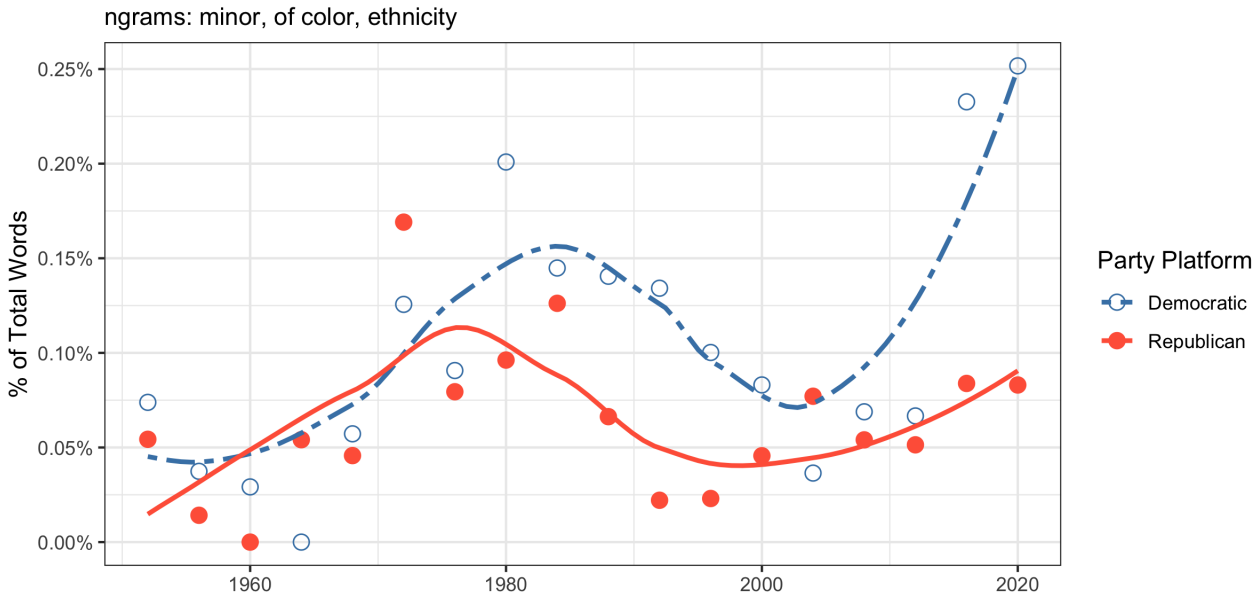


Over time, both parties have begun including references to Latinos and whites in their platforms as well, though the rate of discussion of these two groups does not match the

magnitude of the discussion of Black Americans. The Democratic Party's platform has been much more likely to likely than the Republican Party's platform to contain references to these two groups. Appeals to Asian Americans and American Indians are shown in the bottom left graph, labelled "Other." Historically, the Democratic Party has dedicated a larger portion of its platform to the discussion of these groups. That trend has become even more apparent in recent cycles: in 2016 and 2020, more than 0.1% of the Democratic platform contained references to these groups.

Finally, I also included a generic category for references to racial minorities includes the stemmed ngrams "minor" (to capture the use of words such as "minorities" and "minority") "of color," and "ethnicity." The use of these words in both party platforms over time is shown in Figure 3.8. In recent years the Democratic Party has used these ngrams significantly more than the Republican Party. In 2016 and 2020, for instance, more than 0.2% of the words in the Democratic platform fell into this category, while about 0.08% of the Republican platform included these references in the same years.

Figure 3.8: Racial Minority-Related Ngrams in Party Platforms



Overall, this section has demonstrated that the Democratic Party's use of racial identities in their platforms has increased dramatically over time, while the Republican Party's

use of this type of language has remained about the same over the past few decades. These different patterns reflect the changing composition of the two parties shown in Chapter 2; the Democratic Party has grown significantly more racially diverse since the 1960s, and the language they use in their party platform reflects that shift.

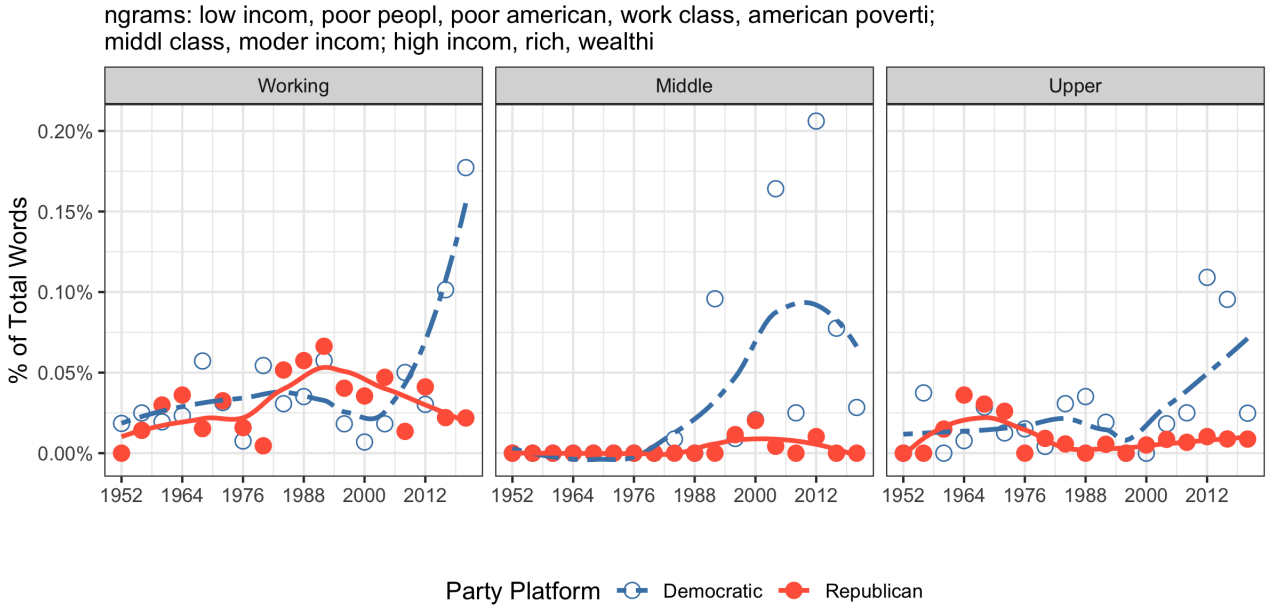
3.2.6 Class Identity in Party Platforms

Another area where Republicans and Democrats differ dramatically is their use of language related to class. Earlier, we saw that Democratic use of appeals to class identity have significantly grown over time, while Republican use has not shifted. Figure 3.9 dives into that trend more deeply. It shows the rate at which the parties have referred to lower (left), middle (center), and upper (right) class groups since 1952. To capture appeals to the working class, I included the ngrams: "low incom*," "american* povert*," "poor peopl*," "poor american*," "work* class." Republicans made much more frequent use of appeals to the working class in the 1980s and early 1990s, but have since backed away from explicit discussion of the group. Democrats, on the other hand, only sporadically highlighted the working class for much of the time period examined here. Since 2016, however, the Democratic platform has referenced the working class at a significantly higher rate.

The center plot shows the rate at which the parties have appealed to middle class Americans (operationalized by the ngrams "middl* class" and "moder* incom*"). The Republican Party has generally refrained from using this type of language in its platform. Democrats consistently refrained from mentioning the middle class in its platform through the 1980s. But beginning in the 1990s, the Democratic platform has frequently contained significant references to this group. Unlike their discussion of working class Americans, however, references to middle class Americans peaked in 2012, and has dropped off somewhat since then.

Finally, the plot on the right shows the rate of appeals to upper income Americans (operationalized with the ngrams "high incom*," "rich," and "wealth*"). Again, we see that the Republican Party platforms have not referenced this group with any regularity, except

Figure 3.9: Appeals to Class Identity in Party Platforms



in the 1960s and 1970s. Democrats, on the other hand, have generally been somewhat more likely to explicitly discuss higher income Americans; have begun referring to upper-class Americans at a much more regular cadence, particularly since 2000.

3.2.7 Religion & Religious Groups

The party platforms tend to refer to religious identities somewhat differently than other group identities; when examining the discussion of other group identities (such as race, gender, and class), the key word list was composed of an enumeration of the various demographic groups. That approach isn't feasible when it comes to religious identities – the party platforms almost never discuss specific religious groups or sects.[15] Instead, they refer to religiosity overall. Therefore, the ngrams in the dictionary do so as well; words such as "judeo-christian," "church," "prayer," "religi* group," "religi* institut*," "religi* school," and "worship."[16]

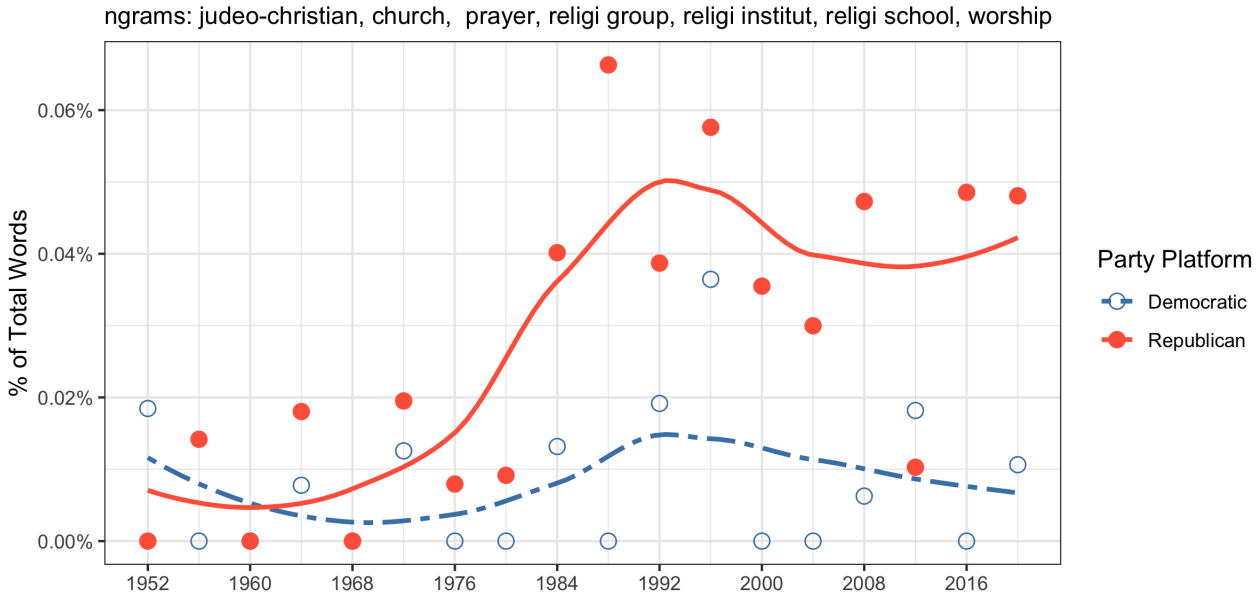
[15]The exception is when it comes to foreign policy; many platforms mention the words "Jew" or "Jewish" for example, when discussing policy related to Israel. These references, however, are generally irrelevant to the question at hand.

[16]This list was generated by reading numerous party platforms, and was refined using the KWIC analysis described in the Methodology section.

Previous work has shown that religiosity and religious identities play an important role in American political life – especially within the Republican Party in the last few decades (Layman and Carmines, 1997; Olson and Green, 2006; Olson and Warber, 2008). Given that, we should expect that references to religiosity will occur at a higher rate in the Republican Party than in the Democratic Party.

Figure 3.10 confirms this hypothesis. Both parties utilized religious language at about the same rate in their 1952 platforms, and the use of this type of language was intermittent among both parties in the 1950s through 1970s. Yet in 1984, the Republican Party's use of this language about doubled its previous rate, and has hovered at or above 0.04% since the mid-1980s.[17]

Figure 3.10: Use of Religious Words in Party Platforms



During this time, the Democratic use of religious language has consistently fallen below that of the Republican Party, and has not changed significantly over time. In 2020, the Democratic platform's rate of religious language was less than a fifth of the Republican Party's level. In fact, within each time period (1952-75, 1976-2000, and 2001-20), on average,

[17]The exception is the 2012 Republican Platform, when the Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, was Mormon.

Democrats' included religious ngrams at about half the rate of Republicans.

These dramatic differences in the way Democrats and Republicans discuss religion (or don't, as is the case of the Democratic Party). While both Democrat and Republican platforms use the word "faith" fairly frequently both in the early years and since the mid-1980s, Republican platforms use a much wider range of ngrams as well. References to church, prayer, religious groups and institutions, and the phrase "judeo-christian" all appear from time to time in the Republican platforms. Overall, the Republican platform has engaged with religious identity to a greater extent than the Democratic platform.

Importantly, though perhaps not surprisingly, no similar pattern emerges when looking at appeals to secular identities. When looking at the rate at which the party platforms contain references to non-religious groups (ngrams: secular, atheist), the overwhelming trend is that neither party mentions these identities at all.

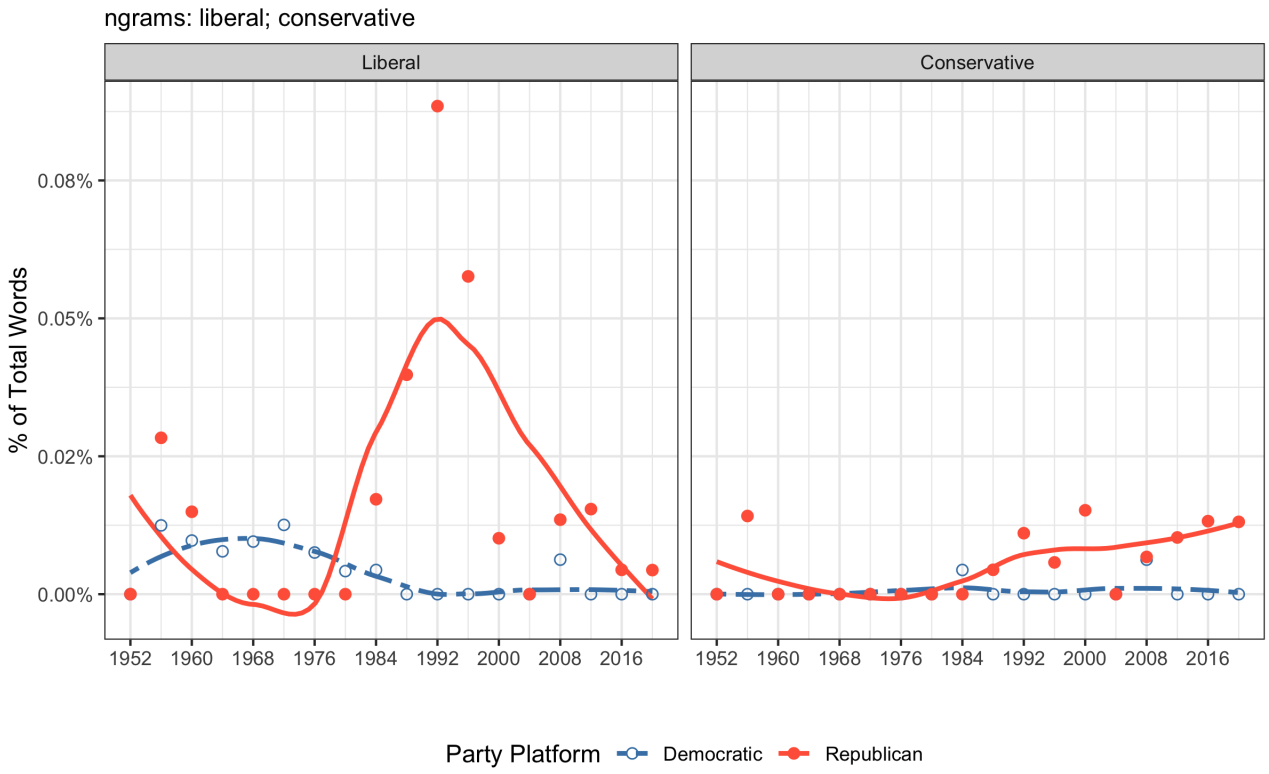
3.2.8 Ideology

As the sections above have shown, the Republican Party platform generally contains many fewer references to group-based identities than the Democratic Party platform, except when it comes to appeals to religious identities. Figure 3.11 highlights one other area where the Republicans place significantly more emphasis on group identities than the Democrats: ideology. Looking only at the ngrams "liberal" and "conservative," we see that, especially since the 1980s, Republican platforms have consistently used the ngram "liberal" more often than the Democratic platform.[18] Presumably, this use has been as an attack on their their Democratic opponents, as the GOP is unlikely to be describing their own policies as liberal. Republican use of the word "liberal" peaked in 1992, and has fallen off since then. In fact, the 2016/2020 platforms contained just two occurrences of the word. At the same time, the rate at which Republicans use the word "conservative" in a positive sense to describe their

[18]Note that the word "progressive" is excluded from this analysis. Though progressive is commonly used by Democrats to describe their ideology today, the same has not always been true. The K.W.I.C. analysis showed that about 50% of all references to the word "progressive" were not related to ideology. Instead, they were references to the tax code, or descriptions of on-going projects and improvements.

own party has grown. Since 2016, the Republican platform referenced conservativism at a slightly higher rate than it referenced libreralism.

Figure 3.11: Ideology in Party Platforms

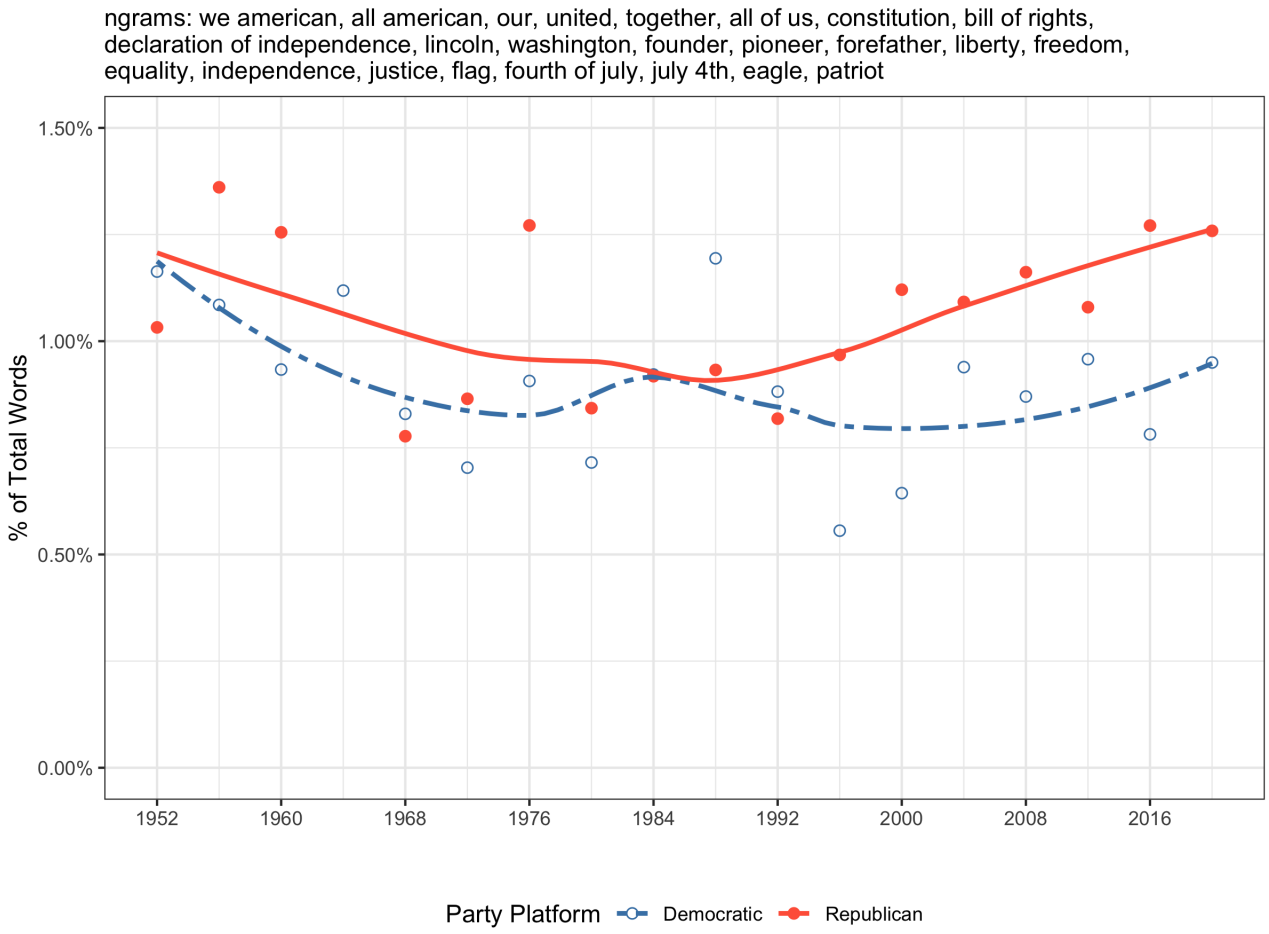


Ideological language has largely been absent from the Democratic platform in the last few decades. Though Democrats used the word "liberal" to a certain extent through the early 1970s, the party stopped using "liberal" as a descriptor for their policies around the same time the Republican Party began picking up its use of the word, suggesting Republicans were successful at making "liberal" a dirty word in politics. Democratic references to "conservatives" exist only in two platforms: 1984 and 2008. Democrats are clearly not comfortable using the word "conservative" as a slur, in the same way that Republicans use "liberal."

3.2.9 Appeals to the Collective: An American Identity

Finally, I also examined the rate at which both parties make appeals to a common American identity. The ngrams included in this category are related to the country as a whole, key American historical documents and individuals, references to the American heritage and ideals, and Americana symbology (see Table 3.1 for the full list). The resulting trend is shown in Figure 3.12; two key patterns emerge. First, among both parties, appeals to the American identity declined somewhat in the middle of the time period examined here (1970s through 1990s). Since 2000, Republican use of this type of rhetoric has been trending upwards, while Democratic use has remained at this lower level.

Figure 3.12: Appeals to a Common American Identity



Second, on average, Democratic use of these types of appeals has been consistently

lower than Republican usage. This finding is compatible with with previous research, which shows that Republican politicians benefit more from appeals to patriotism than Democratic politicians (Kalmoe and Gross, 2016).

Further, the types of references to a collective American identity that the parties use have changed over time. Figure 3.13 shows the overall trend broken up into its component categories: references to a united whole, documents, heritage, and ideals.

The panel on the upper left shows that the Democrats have begun placing a greater emphasis on the common American identity, and increasingly uses ngrams such as "we American*," "all American*," "our," "united," "together," and "all of us." Democratic appeals to a united country fell during the 1960s and '70s, but have been rising since 2000. Since 2008, Democratic platforms have used this rhetoric of unity to a greater extent than Republican platforms. This is seen clearly in the 2020 Democratic Platform: a function of the emphasis that President Biden's campaign placed on unity and coming together after the divisive Trump years.

At the same time, however, the panel on the upper right shows that the rate at which the Republican Party in particular makes reference to foundational American documents like the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence has risen significantly, especially beginning in 2008; a similar rise has *not* occurred among the Democratic Platform.

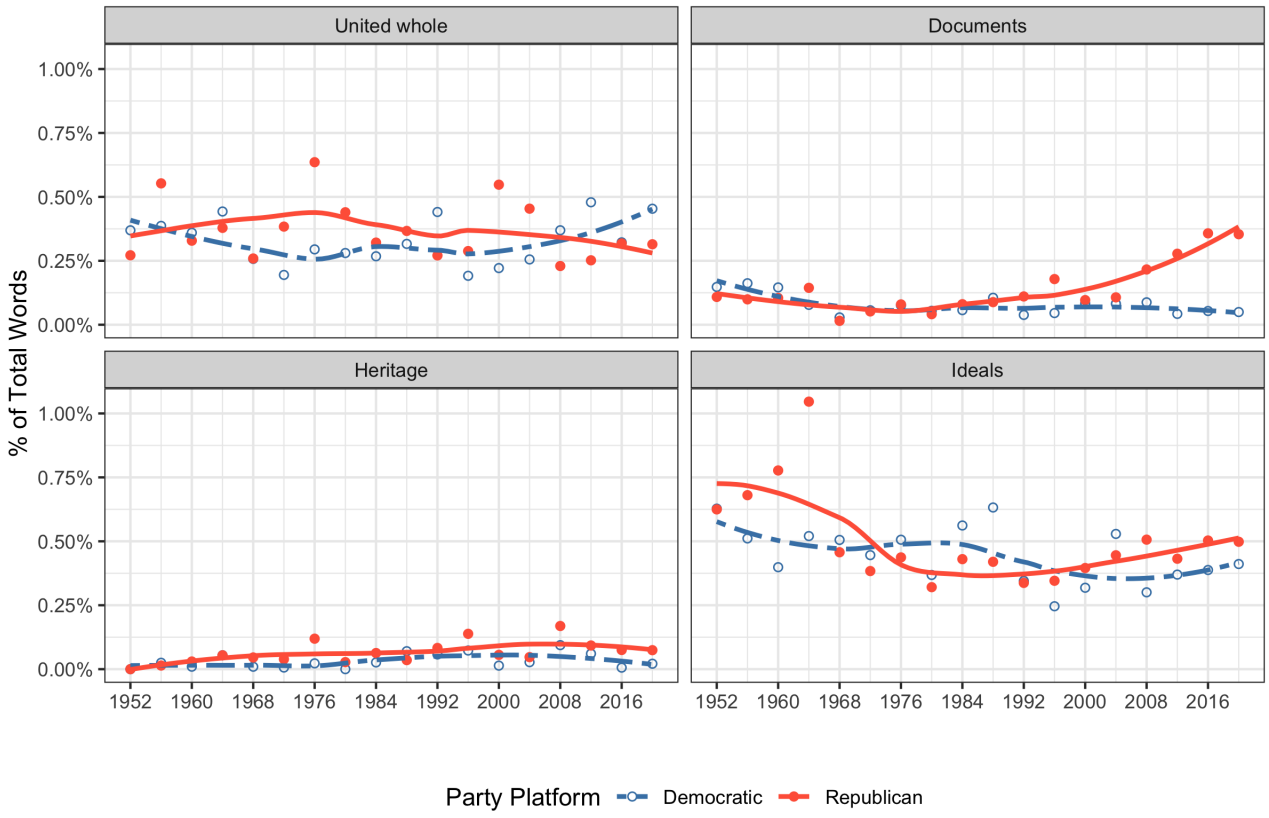
The panel on the bottom left of Figure 3.13 shows that neither party has made use of appeals to American heritage (bottom left), which have remained consistently low over time. This category was operationalized by counting ngrams such as "lincoln," "washington," "founder*," "pioneer*," and "forefather*." This type of rhetoric only occasionally appears in party platforms.[19]

Finally, the bottom right panel (ideals) shows the rate at which both parties refer to common American ideals such as liberty, freedom, equality, and justice has fallen over time,

[19]I also measured the rate at which the platforms contained laungauge related to iconic American symbols, such as the flag, the Fourth of July, eagles, and patriotism, though the data are not shown in Figure 3.13. The overall use of this type of language was quite low, and did not significantly change over time.

though this type of language remains quite common in the party platforms.

Figure 3.13: Types of Appeals to Americanism



United whole: we americans, all americans, our, united, together, all of us
Documents: constitution, declaration of independence, bill of rights
Ideals: liberty, freedom, equality, justice
Heritage: Lincoln, Washington, founders, pioneers, forefathers,
Symbols (not shown):flag, Fourth of July, July 4th, eagle, patriot

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter uses automated text analysis to demonstrate that the types of group identities highlighted by the Democratic and Republican parties has changed over time – particularly within the Democratic Party. In fact, the rate at which Democrats used identity-based language in their 2020 platform was over 200% greater than the rate at which they did so in 1952. During that same time, the Republican Party's platforms have remained about the same in terms of appeals to group identity, though here has been change in the types of groups and identities the Republican Party makes reference to. Further, in the last few

decades, both parties' platforms mention aligned demographic identities at a rate which exceeds their discussion of key political issues.

3.3.1 Text Analysis as a Methodology

Applying an automatic text analysis to a textual corpus is a convenient method for assessing the descriptive characteristics of a large body of words. As with any method, however, it has its own benefits and drawbacks. In particular, a limiting characteristic of the "bag of words" approach that I used here is that, in only counting the frequency with which words appear, the audience loses the context in which the word appears. Without that context, all appearances of a word or phrase are treated equally. There are certainly important differences as to the meaning of a group-identity word when it appears alone, compared to when it appears alongside other group-identities of the same category. For example, a sentence related to the unique concerns of Black Americans conveys a very different meaning than one which refers to "Black and white Americans." A bag of words text analysis treats these references equally, however.

Similarly, the bag of words approach precludes the use of certain types of words that are used in multiple contexts. Because I conducted a keyword in context (K.W.I.C.) analysis, I identified and removed ngrams from my original dictionary which were frequently used on contexts outside of one related to a social group identity. This improves the accuracy of the method, ensuring that changes in the frequency with which certain ngrams appear truly reflect changes in references to the group identity, rather than an increase in references to a word's alternate meaning. However, the trade off in doing so is that it limits the breadth of the dictionary. For example, when looking at appeals to ideology, it appears that Democrats do not often refer to their own ideology with any frequency. However, part of that may be because a key word that Democrats use to refer to their positions on issues, "progressive," is very frequently used in contexts outside of ideology (i.e., progressive taxes, progressive development, etc.).

Stemming from this point, the success of the bag of words approach to text analysis

depends on the quality and breadth of the dictionary. In particular, when using text analysis to examine how the use of certain types of language have changed over time the user must give great care to ensure that the dictionary fairly includes ngrams used consistently throughout the time period being studied. If the words used to refer to certain groups has changed over time, the dictionary should be sure to include all of those words. For instance, party platforms used the word "Negro" to refer to Black Americans into the 1960s; excluding that word from the dictionary, despite the fact that it is no longer used, would not accurately reflect the rate at which references to that group identity had changed over time.

Despite these drawbacks, the bag of words can be a useful approach for descriptive analysis of textual documents. Users should be sure to give careful considerate when creating the dictionary, and perform K.W.I.C. analysis to ensure the ngrams included in the dictionary are most often being used in the intended context. In doing so, users can quickly put together a descriptive analysis of a large body of documents without coding them manually. Overall, this approach is not appropriate in all contexts, but it performed well on the party platforms examined here.

3.3.2 Implications for My Theory

The results presented in this chapter largely confirm the hypotheses I laid out in the initial section. Overall, the party platforms contained appeals to group identities at similar rates for much of the time period examined here. In recent years, however, the Democratic Party has begun appealing to group identities at a much higher rate, while the Republican Party's use of these types of appeals has remained flat. This overall trend, however, masks key changes in the different *types* of identities the parties have appealed to over time.

Though the data presented here shows that their overall rate of appeals to identity has remained fairly constant over time, the Republican Party has increasingly emphasized two key identities in their platforms: religiosity and ideology. Republican use of appeals to religious identity spiked in the 1980s, and has remained high since then; meanwhile, Democratic appeals to religious identities have remained fairly low over time. Further, when

looking at appeals to ideology, since the 1990s, Republicans have increasingly made explicit appeals to conservatives.

The fact that the use of appeals to group identities has not risen over time within the Republican Party platforms should not be taken as definitive proof that Republicans do not engage in this type of appeal in politics more broadly. Both the analysis method and the type of document examined here make it difficult to detect implicit appeals to identity. Appeals to identity which are based on dog-whistle politics are unlikely to be measured with this approach.

On the other side of the aisle, the Democratic Party's platforms – especially since the 1990s – have increasingly highlighted key constituencies. In recent decades, the Democratic platform contains significantly more appeals to race, gender, and class than in prior time periods. Women, people of color, and the working and middle class are increasingly discussed in Democratic Platforms, while the modern Republican Platform largely ignores these groups. This difference in the priorities of the parties along these lines reflects the increasing demographic differences between the parties, as discussed in Chapter 2. For instance, as the Democratic Party becomes increasingly non-white, and the Republican Party stays overwhelmingly white, the language the parties use to describe their priorities will continue to shift accordingly.

This chapter has shown that the platforms increasingly focus on the concerns of the distinct Democratic and Republican coalitions. Further, it demonstrates that appeals to a common American identity may not serve as an effective mechanism for mitigating affective polarization as previous research has shown (Levendusky, 2018), because appeals to an American identity and patriotism have been largely one-sided. Since 2000, the Republican Party has been overall significantly more likely to appeal to patriotism than the Democratic Party. This tactic may be less effective at weakening inter-party hostility if these appeals are seen as sole strategy of a single party.

This chapter provides evidence for my theory that group-based appeals may heighten affective polarization by testing whether appeals to group-based identities have increased

over time. Thus far, I've shown that these two trends are moving together; as inter-party hostility has increased in recent decades, so too have appeals to group identities. In Chapter 4, I test whether the correlation between the trends shown thus far (a rise in affective polarization, demographic sorting, and politicized appeals to group identities) reflects a causal relationship. Specifically, do appeals to group identities heighten affective polarization?

Appendix

Table 3.5: OLS: Pct of Platform Composed of Identity-Words

	Model 1
Intercept	0.0000827***
	(0.0000158)
Year (since 1950)	0.0000015***
	(0.0000004)
Party (R)	0.0000235
	(0.0000223)
Year * Party	−0.0000017***
	(0.0000005)
R^2	0.4670252
Adj. R^2	0.4170588
Num. obs.	36
RMSE	0.0000335

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table 3.6: OLS: Pct of Platform Composed of Party-Aligned Identity Words

	Model 1
Intercept	0.0000481^{*}
	(0.0000270)
Year (since 1950)	0.0000035^{***}
	(0.0000007)
Party (R)	0.0000796^{**}
	(0.0000382)
Year * Party	-0.0000045^{***}
	(0.0000009)
R^2	0.6127399
Adj. R^2	0.5764343
Num. obs.	36
RMSE	0.0000573

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$

CHAPTER 4

Priming Aligned Identities May Create Inter-Party Hostility

4.1 Introduction

In the 2012 Republican presidential primary, former Texas governor Rick Perry ran an iconic ad appealing directly to the politicized identities of his audience. In the ad, Perry stands in a field near a river in a Carhardt jacket and speaks directly to the camera. He says, "I'm not ashamed to admit that I'm a Christian. But you don't need to be in the pew every Sunday to know that there's something wrong in this country when gays can openly serve in the military but our kids can't openly celebrate Christmas or pray in school. As President, I'll end Obama's war on religion, and I'll fight against liberal attacks on our religious heritage. Faith made America strong; it can make her strong again. I'm Rick Perry and I approve this message."

In this 30-second ad, Perry appeals directly to rural, conservative Christian values. The candidate stands in a rural setting in an outfit which signals *working class*, and appeals directly to a Christian religious identity. In doing so, Perry primes a number of Republican-aligned group identities: Evangelicals and religious individuals, the working class, and rural consciousness. In this ad, Perry explicitly ties those identities to conservatism and the Republican Party. The ad contains only vague ideological or policy content, and instead works to cement the connection between a certain type of people and the Republican Party. Both implicitly and explicitly, the ad suggests that Rick Perry – and, by extension, the Republican Party – is for Christian, working class, rural, conservative Americans. At the same time, he paints liberals in general, and Obama in particular, as an attack on Christian

values and heritage.

Campaign ads like this are designed to prime group identities in viewers. Every factor of the ad – from the candidate's wardrobe, the setting, the soundtrack, and the message – is designed to signal to voters *I'm one of you.* My theory suggests that when politicians make politicized appeals to group identity like these, they prime group identities among the viewers, enhancing stereotypes about who belongs in each party. In doing so, they enhance antipathy toward members of the opposite party, by making partisans believe that the opposite party is *just different.*

I hypothesize that the heightened level of animosity between American partisans described in Chapter 1 is caused not only by the shifting demographics of the parties shown in Chapter 2, but also the rise of appeals to group identity in political rhetoric, as described in Chapter 3. Thus far, I have shown that these three trends have moved in tandem over the past several decades; as partisan sorting and identity appeals have increased, so too has affective polarization. I build on the findings of the previous chapters here, and explicitly test this hypothesis. In particular, I test whether campaign communication which highlights social identities heightens partisan animosity.

My theory builds on Mason (2018), who argues that affective polarization is an artifact of increased partisan sorting shown in Chapter 2. I suggest that social identity alignment does not engender affective polarization in and of itself; the later results only as political communication – which may include speeches, campaign ads, and news reports – activates aspects of individuals' personas in service of political goals. And as core social identities such as race, class, religiosity, urbanicity, and age increasingly align with partisanship, the incentives for political actors to play to them become stronger. The resulting identity-based appeals, I argue, prime and enhance stereotypes about party membership, and are more effective mobilizers than rhetoric based solely on ideology or issues. Increased inter-party hostility is an unfortunate by-product of this mobilizing rhetoric.

If trends toward greater alignment between social and partisan identities continue, the tension between democratic norms and voter mobilization is likely to become increasingly

fraught. It is therefore urgently necessary to understand the precise mechanisms for this relationship, and investigate alternate campaign strategies that mobilize and persuade voters without the same harmful side effects.

They key questions of this chapter surround how group-based appeals (specifically campaign advertisements which highlight race and ethnicity through words and images) affect the political attitudes and behavior of partisans. Specifically, to what extent do appeals to aligned group identities heighten affective polarization? Are group-based appeals more effective mobilizing tools than issue-based appeals? And can alternative advertising strategies mobilize as effectively without creating partisan hostility?

The results of chapter identify some circumstances under which group-based appeals heighten affective polarization in an environment in which group identities increasingly align with partisanship. However, the results of the three studies that I conducted are inconsistent and taken together do not support the hypotheses that follow. In the discussion section, I discuss the implications of these findings, potential limitations with the work, and explore the discrepancies across experiments.

4.1.1 Hypotheses

Leading scholarship has shown that affective polarization is strongest among individuals whose identities align with their partisanship (Mason, 2015,2016, 2018), and may be weakened by appeals to patriotism (Levendusky, 2018; though there is evidence this may be changing, see Levendusky, 2021). Framing political issues in terms of aligned-group identities, therefore, may heighten the salience of these identities and their relation to politics and political issues. This leads me to:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Affective polarization will be *highest* when participants see ads which frame the candidates in terms of groups they support, and portray the parties as distinct along demographic lines. Affective polarization will be *lowest* when political issues are framed in terms of their effect on the collective, or America as a whole.

This will manifest itself through larger gaps in party ratings on the feeling thermome-

ters (higher ratings for the in-party, lower ratings for the out-party), sending more points to in-partisans and fewer points to out-partisans in the trust game, enhanced preference for gridlock over compromise, and stronger stereotypes about the type of people who are members of each party.

I expect that these effects will not be homogeneous across subgroups; for instance, I expect that participants who are more politically engaged and knowledgeable will be more likely to respond to issue-based appeals (though this is a group that generally has a higher baseline level of affective polarization). This leads to:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Effects will be stronger among strong partisans, and those who say that their party is an important part of their identity.

Finally, I expect these appeals to aligned-group identities will not only heighten affective polarization, they will also increase perceived importance of the outcome of elections. I expect this is driven by the fact that heightened antipathy toward the opposite party effectively raises the stakes of an election, and increases interest in the electoral contest. Therefore:

> *Hypothesis 3:* Individuals in conditions containing stronger group-based appeals will express a higher likelihood to vote than individuals in the control.

4.2 Methodology

To test these hypotheses, I ran a series of three experiments. The first two experiments used samples of UCLA undergraduate students, and in the third I used respondents from national non-probability web panels. In all three experiments, I exposed participants to a campaign ad attacking a fictional congressional candidate. After viewing the ad (or ads, in the case of Experiments 2 and 3), participants answered a few questions assessing their attitudes toward the opposite party and, in Experiments 1 and 2, played a brief economics-style trust game to assess partisan trust. The experiments are explained in more detail below.

4.2.1 The Trust Game: A Behavioral Measure of Partisan Trust

Iyengar and Westwood (2015) showed that affective polarization has important behavioral consequences, and that individuals who are express greater levels of affective polarization in their attitudes also demonstrate this in their behavior. I hypothesized that this is a manipulable feature. Specifically, that partisan trust can be increased or decreased based on the type of appeal an individual sees. I expected that participants exposed to ads which contain group-based appeals and emphasize the differences between the parties will exhibit the lowest trust of members of the out-party.

To test this, participants in Experiments 1 and 2 played a series of trust games after being exposed to a stimulus (campaign ads for fictional candidate(s)). The game follows the design of Carlin and Love (2013). Briefly, the rules are thus: Player 1 and Player 2 both start with 10 points, and each would like to maximize her points at the end of the game. Player 1 decides how many of her points to send to Player 2; those points are tripled. Player 2 decides how many points to return to Player 1. The game ends. If Player 1 trusts that Player 2 will be fair, it is in her best interest to send all of her points to Player 2. But if Player 1 does not trust Player 2, she would be wise not to send any points to Player 2.

In my experiments, participants always act as Player 1 (though they are told this is randomly assigned) and play four rounds with four hypothetical opponents. Before each round begins, Player 1 reads a short blurb about their teammate that round; they will play one round with a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, and an anonymous player. I expect that participants will always send more points to co-partisans than out-partisans, and that this effect will be magnified after having seen treatments which highlight the demographic differences between the parties.

4.3 Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, I recruited 371 undergraduate students enrolled in two introductory political science class at UCLA between June and October, 2018. This experiment utilizes a 2x2,

design testing two kinds of campaign appeals in the context of a political advertisement attacking a fictional Republican candidate. A control condition made appeals to the American collective as a whole, while a second condition explicitly mentioned the interests of minority groups; a third augmented this appeal with visual images of minority group members who would purportedly be affected by the policy; and a fourth condition augmented the issue-appeal with both verbal and visual references to minority groups. Table 4.1 lays out these four conditions.

Table 4.1: Experiment 1 Design

	Narrative Emphasizes the Collective	Narrative Emphasizes Aligned Groups
Images: Few People	Ad 1	Ad 3
Images: People of color	Ad 2	Ad 4

The narrative in Ads 1 and 2 discusses the effects of Republican policies on Americans as a whole. Key phrases include "American interests," "Americans," and "our children." The script in Ads 3 and 4 emphasizes the effects certain policies will have on particular Democratically-aligned groups, and used key phrases such as "black and Hispanic Americans," "people of color," "children in underserved urban areas." At the same time, Ads 1 and 3 used the same images throughout: the ads did not contain many images of people at all. In Ads 2 and 4 I replaced some images of buildings or outdoor scenes with images of people of color.

This design also provides some nuance in our understanding of what is a more effective prime of group-based identities: an ads' words or images. The comparison of respondent behavior across treatment conditions can help us determine whether narrative or images have a greater impact on the level of affective polarization expressed. The text of the narration is shown in Table 4.2, and was read by the same professional voice actor across all treatment conditions.

After viewing the ads, participants are asked key dependent variables. These includes attitudinal measures of affective polarization (party feeling thermometers, willingness to compromise), behavioral measures of trust (described above), and questions which gauge

Table 4.2: Experiment 1 – Republican Attack Scripts

Same Text:	**Effects on Groups (1 & 2)**	**Effects on Collective (3 & 4)**
Mike Johnson and the Republicans aren't looking out for	people like you.	American interests.
Johnson voted with Republicans to defund Planned Parenthood, cutting healthcare services for 2.4 million Americans every year	– a move which would disproportionately hurt people of color.	
Johnson voted to repeal Obamacare, which has lowered the uninsured rate of _____ by almost 40%.	black and Hispanic Americans	Americans
Johnson and the Republicans voted to cut funding to public education to give taxpayer money to private schools. The result? Fewer resources for	children in underserved urban areas.	our children.
Mike Johnson and the Republicans: leaving _____ behind.	us	Americans

participants' interest in politics and enthusiasm to vote. These questions include:

- On a scale of 0 (coldest) to 100 (warmest), how do you feel about the following people and groups? Donald Trump, Barack Obama, The Democratic Party, The Republican Party, Congress
- Generally speaking, is it more important for government officials in Washington to compromise to find solutions, or to stand on principle even if it means gridlock?
- If these candidates were running for Congress in your district, who would you vote for? [Democrat, Republican, I don't know]
- If these candidates were running for Congress in your district, how likely would you be to vote in that election? [Very likely, Somewhat likely, Somewhat unlikely, Very unlikely]

Participants in this experiment received extra course credit for doing so. They were told they would receive 1.5 points for their participation, and would have the opportunity to earn an additional 1.5 points, to incentivize thoughtful and strategic behavior in the trust games (described below). In the end, each participant received 3 total points of extra credit. In the grading scheme used in the class, the 3 points available for study participation translated into a roughly 1/3rd letter grade difference in final course grade, e.g., from B to B+. We took this amount of credit to be a strong incentive to participate in the study and to try hard on the trust game.

All deceptions were disclosed to the class at the end of the experimental period, as required by the UCLA IRB.[1] And because the trust game was rigged, all participants received 3 total points of credit, the maximum possible.

4.3.1 Experiment 1 Results

We begin by examining how the treatments impacted participants' overall level of affective polarization. Figure 4.1 shows the average difference in participants' feeling thermometer ratings of co-partisans and out-partisans across treatment conditions, with the 95% confidence intervals around each estimate. This gap is about 5 points larger among participants in Condition 4 than Condition 1 (t-stat: 1.3, p-value < 0.2).

Importantly, the results in Figure 4.1 are not driven by higher levels of out-party hostility. Rather, the increased partisan feeling thermometer gap is driven by higher levels of in-party favorability, as shown in Figure 4.2. The blue circles indicate participants' average rating of their own party (Democrats rating the Democratic Party, Republicans rating the Republican Party), while the green squares indicate partisans' rating of the opposite party. Average ratings are plotted with their 95% confidence intervals. Participants in Condition 4 (Group-based appeals in the images and script) express significantly warmer feelings toward the in-party compared to the control condition (67 vs. 60, p-value < 0.05). The difference in out-party ratings is not statistically significant (23 vs. 21, p-value $= 0.5$).

[1] UCLA IRB number 18-000893

Figure 4.1: Feeling Thermometer Party Gap, by Treatment Condition

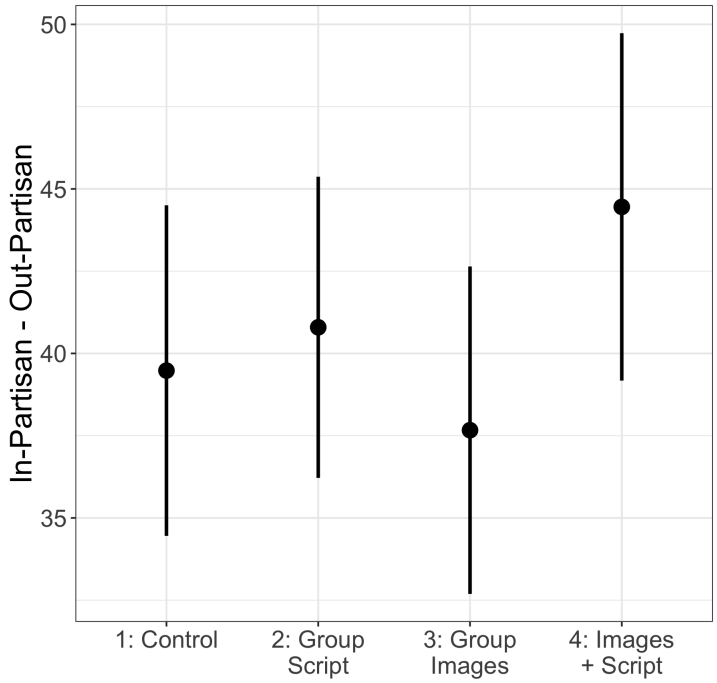
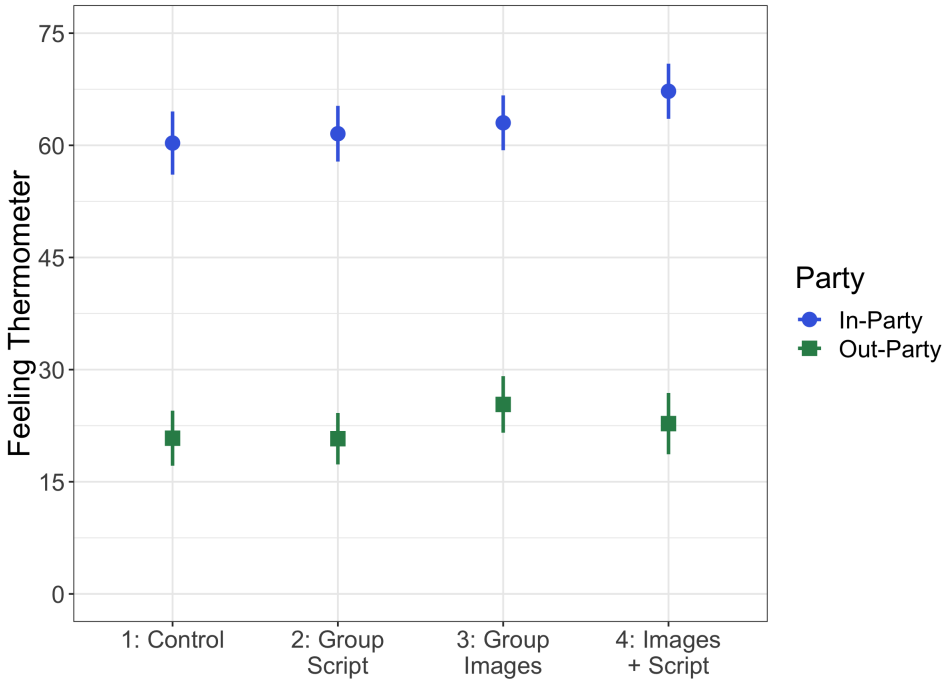


Figure 4.2: Feeling Thermometer, by Treatment Condition



Next, we examine how the treatments impacted preference for compromise and gridlock. Participants were asked, "Generally speaking, is it more important for government officials in Washington to compromise to find solutions, or to stand on principle even if it means gridlock?" Participants who watched ads which emphasized the effects of Republican policies on Democratically-aligned groups were significantly more likely to answer that government officials in Washington should stand on principle, even if it means gridlock (rather than compromise to find solutions), as shown in Table 4.3. In the control condition, just 7% of participants preferred gridlock over compromise; this rose to 20% among those in Conditions 2 and 4, who saw ads with group-based appeals in the script (t-stat = -2.52, p-value $<$ 0.05). Participants in Condition 3 were also significantly more likely to prefer gridlock over compromise (17%).

Table 4.3: Preference for Gridlock over Compromise, by Treatment Condition

Treatment	Compromise	Gridlock	Sig. Test
1: Control	92.6%	7.4%	
2: Group Script	79.8%	20.2%	*
3: Group Images	83%	17%	*
4: Images + Script	79.8%	20.2%	*

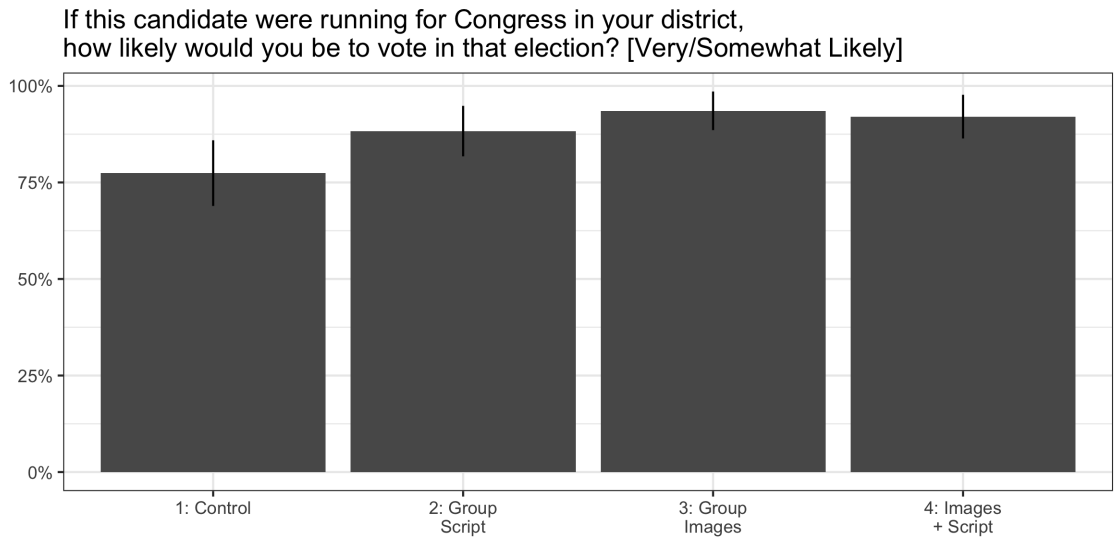
Note:
Generally speaking, is it more important for government officials in Washington to compromise to find solutions, or to stand on principle even if it means gridlock?
* Comparison to control, p-value $<$ 0.05

Figure 4.3 shows that group-based appeals also increased participants' stated turnout intention.[2] About 77% of participants in the control condition reported they would be "very" or "somewhat" likely to vote in the election if this candidate were running for office in their district. This rose to 88% among participants in Condition 2 (t-stat = 1.98, p-value $<$ 0.05), 94% among participants in Condition 3 (t-stat = 3.19, p-value $<$ 0.01), and 92% among participants exposed to group-based appeals in Condition 4 (t-stat = 2.79, p-value $<$0.01).

But while group-based appeals mobilized participants, they were not successful tools

[2]Question: [If this candidate were running for Congress in your district] How likely would you be to vote in that election? (Very likely/Somewhat likely)

Figure 4.3: Self-Reported Likely Voters, by Treatment Condition



Errors bars representing 95% confidence intervals surround the point estimates.

of persuasion. When asked: "If this candidate were running for Congress in your district, how likely would you be to support him?"[3] respondents in Condition 4 were no more likely to say they would not support the candidate attacked in the ad. Table 4.4 shows that, on a 6-point scale, the average support for the Republican candidate being attacked was 2.3 in the control condition. This represents a fairly negative view of the Republican candidate, as a score of 2 represents the response: "I would probably not support him", and a score of 3 represents: "I might not support him." None of the treatments significantly affected this perception; the average support score was 2.5 in Condition 2, 2.4 in Condition 3, and 2.6 in Condition. Overall, group-based appeals did *not* change viewers' minds about whether they supported the Republican candidate.

The results I've presented thus far show that group-based appeals cause participants to report colder feelings toward the opposite party, enhance preference for gridlock over compromise, and increase self-reported likelihood to vote, but do not actually persuade

[3]Response categories: 1: I would definitely not support him, 2: I would probably not support him, 3: I might not support him, 4: I might support him, 5: I would probably support him, 6: I would definitely support him

Table 4.4: Support for Republican Candidate, by Condition

Condition	Avg. Candidate Support	95% CI
1: Control	2.31	2.03 - 2.59
2: Group Script	2.54	2.25 - 2.83
3: Group Images	2.37	2.08 - 2.67
4: Images + Script	2.55	2.21 - 2.89

individuals to support a given candidate. I next demonstrate that group-based appeals also cause participants to exhibit significantly less trust toward out-partisans.

Figure 4.4 plots the overall results of the trust game that participants played. Each point represents the difference between the number of points a participant sent to a co-partisan to the number of points she sent to an out-partisan, along with the 95% confidence intervals of these point estimates. It shows that, on average, participants in the control condition sent about 0.9 more points to the co-partisan than they did to the out-partisan. The same is also true for participants in Condition 2 (1.0 more point to co-partisan).

But participants' behavior changed when exposed to Ads 3 and 4, which emphasize Democratically-aligned groups in the ads' images (Ad 3) and images and script (Ad 4). When shown Ad 3, the partisan send-gap doubled, to 2 points – a statically significant increase (compared to control: p-value < 0.05). When participants viewed Ad 4, the partisan send-gap increased to 1.5 points (p-value $= 0.15$).

4.3.2 Results by Strength of Partisanship

As discussed in Hypothesis 2, I expected these effects to be strongest among individuals who identify most closely with their party. To test this, I examine the effect of the treatments among strong and weak partisans. Figure 4.5 shows directional evidence that, in fact, the opposite is actually true, and that the effects of the group-based appeals actually make weak partisans act more like strong partisans. Weak partisans express a lower baseline level of affective polarization, and on average send just half a point more when playing with a co-partisan compared to playing with an out-partisan. On the other hand, strong partisans send 1.5 more points to co-partisans than out-partisans.

Figure 4.4: Trust Game Point Gap, by Condition

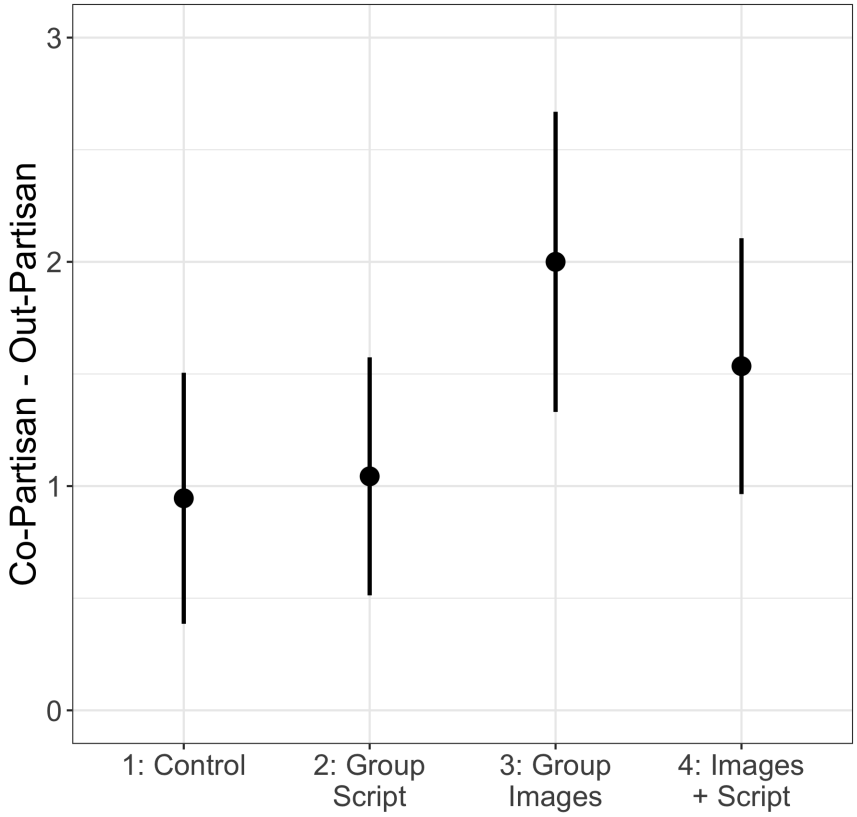


Figure 4.5: Trust Game Point Gap, by Condition & Strength of Partisanship

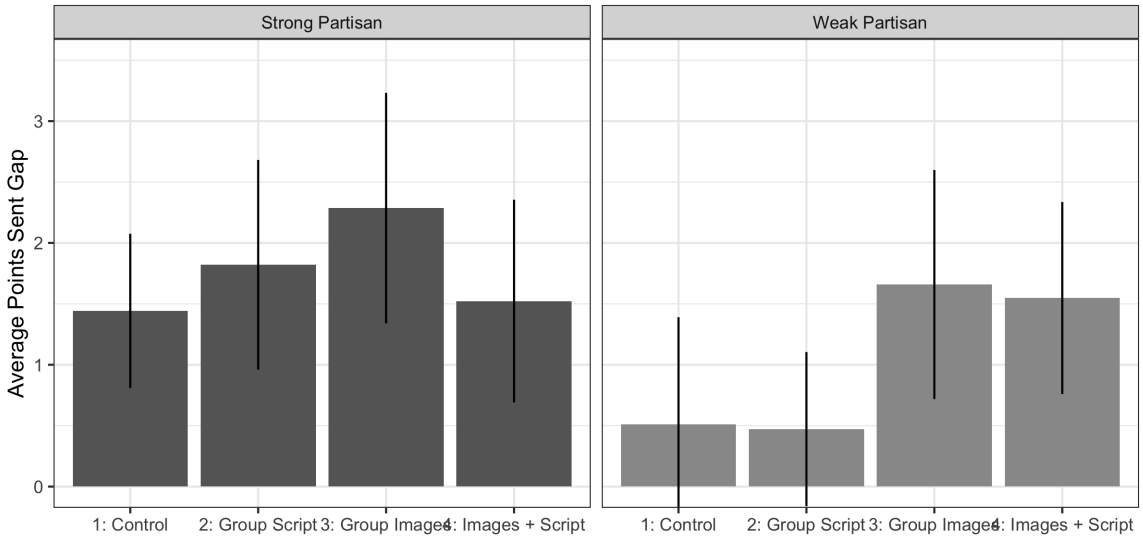


Table 4.5: Mobilization among Weak Partisans: How likely would you be to vote [if this candidate were running for Congress in your district]?

	T1: Control	T2: Group Script	T3: Group Images	T4: Images + Script
Very unlikely	0.12	0.04	0.02	0.07
Somewhat unlikely	0.24	0.09	0.04	0.07
Somewhat likely	0.29	0.44	0.47	0.36
Very likely	0.35	0.44	0.47	0.51

After showing weak partisans an ad with group-based images (either alone or in combination with group appeals in the script), however, they behave much more like strong partisans. Weak partisans in Conditions 3 and 4 sent 1.7 and 1.6 more points to co-partisans than they did to out-partisans, respectively (both significant increases from from the control condition, at $p < 0.1$). In sum, group-based appeals can make individuals with only weak ties to their political party behave just like strong partisans.

Further, as shown in Table 4.5, weak partisans were significantly more likely to report being likely to vote when viewing ads with strong group-based appeals. Among weak partisans, 87% of those in Condition 4 said they were "very" or "somewhat" likely to vote, compared to just 64% of those in the control condition (p-value < 0.05). Participants in Treatments 2 and 3 also reported significantly higher levels of mobilization (88% and 94%, respectively).

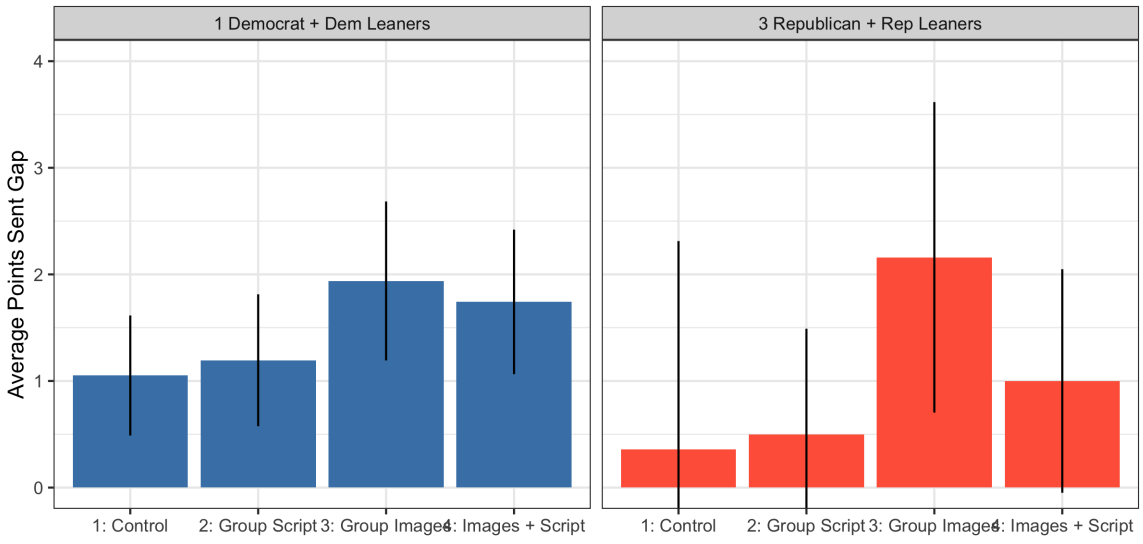
4.3.3 Results by Partisanship

The ads shown to participants were designed to prime Democratically-aligned identities; the groups highlighted in Conditions 2 - 4 were selected because of their close link with the Democratic Party. Therefore, I expected the results to be strongest among Democrats. In Figure 4.6, we see some directional support for that hypothesis; however, the number of conditions, fairly small sample, and noisy effects mean that these differences are not statistically significant. The figure shows the average gap in the number of points Democrats (on the left, in blue) and Republicans (on the right, in red) sent to members of their own party, compared to the opposite party. Two main points are immediately apparent. First, Democratic behavior displayed greater levels of affective polarization than Republicans' behavior,

in general. Democrats tended to trust members of the opposite party less, and members of their own party more, than Republicans.

This leads to the second main point: the increase in affective polarization was larger among Republicans, potentially in part because their baseline was lower and therefore had more room to grow. This result is largest when looking at Condition 3 (group-based images). Democrats in Condition 3 sent 1.9 points more to fellow Democrats than to Republicans (about 1 point more than they did in the control condition), while Republican participants in Condition 3 sent 2.2 points more to fellow Republicans than to Democrats (about 1.8 points more than they did in the control condition). The results are slightly different in Condition 4, in which participants were exposed to the strongest group-based appeals. Here, Democrats sent 1.7 more points to fellow Democrats than they sent to Republicans, while Republicans sent 1 more point to fellow Republicans than to Democrats.

Figure 4.6: Trust Game Point Gap, by Condition & Party ID



The large confidence intervals around these estimates highlight the fact that these data are noisy and the sample sizes small. A linear regression model predicting the Send Gap with the interaction between treatment condition and party identification tests whether or not Democrats and Republicans exhibit significantly different behavior when exposed to the different ads (see Table 4.15 in the appendix). It confirms that there is potentially some

difference in the way Democrats and Republicans respond to the group-based appeals – perhaps Republicans had a stronger response – but the small samples and effect sizes make this difficult to conclude with any confidence.

The effect of group appeals appears to be larger among Republicans, though the test is under-powered. Table 4.6 shows the average number of points Republicans sent to fellow Republican players, compared to the number of points they sent to Democratic players. In the Control Condition, Republicans sent only 0.4 more points when playing with fellow Republicans, compared to when playing with Democrats, on average. In Condition 3 (group-based images), this send-gap rose to 2.2 points, and to 1.0 points in Condition 4 (group images and script).

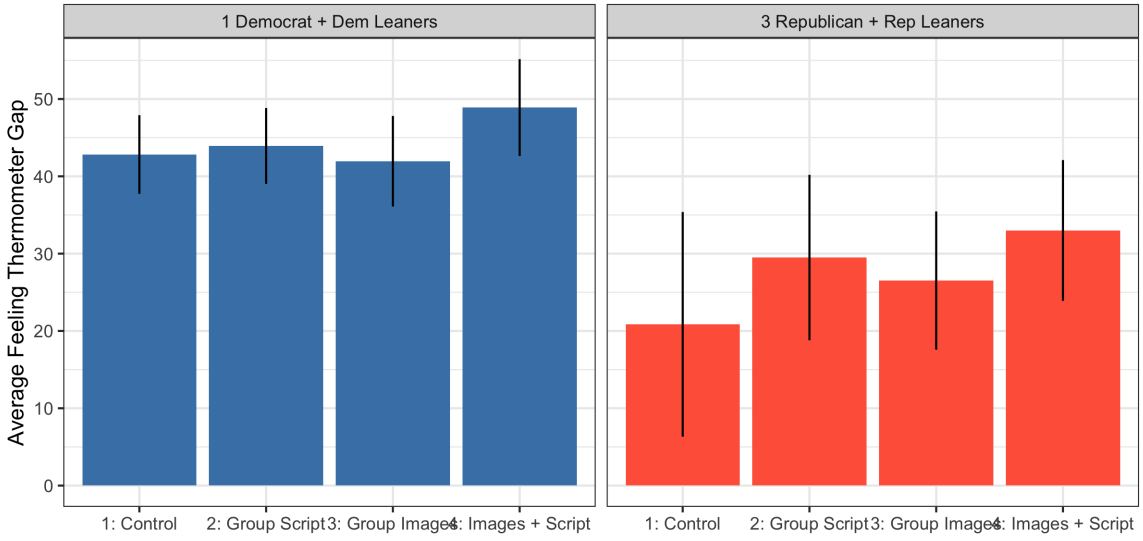
Table 4.6: Average Co-Partisan to Out-Partisan Send Gap, by Condition (Republicans Only)

Condition	Avg Send Gap	95% CI	n
1: Control	0.36	-1.6 - 2.3	14
2: Group Script	0.50	-0.5 - 1.5	20
3: Group Images	2.16	0.7 - 3.6	25
4: Images + Script	1.00	0 - 2	24

A similar trend emerges when looking at respondent attitudes on the feeling thermometer scale. Figure 4.7 shows the feeling thermometer gap by partisanship and treatment condition. A similar pattern emerges. The effect of the group-based appeals appears to be larger among Republicans than among Democrats; the average treatment effect of Condition 4 (the difference between the FT Gap in Condition 4 and Condition 1) is about twice the size among Republicans (12.1) than it is among Democrats (6.1). Again, because the study contains only 83 Republicans split across four treatment conditions, we cannot conclude that these differences are significant. But they suggest that the effect might be stronger among Republicans. Experiments 2 and 3 are designed to test this more thoroughly.

The results of Experiment 1 provide support for two of the three hypotheses laid out above. Evidence for Hypothesis 1 is fairly robust: participants who saw ads containing the most explicit group-based appeals exhibited the highest levels of partisan hostility, including less trust of members of the opposite party, greater preference for their in-group on the feeling

Figure 4.7: Feeling Thermometer Gap, by Condition & Party ID



thermometer, and less willingness to compromise on political issues. Further, there is strong evidence for Hypothesis 3: the group-based appeals appear to be successful motivators to vote (self-reported likely turnout was highest when participants saw a group-based appeal), though there is little evidence that group appeals persuaded participants in the treatment conditions to support the Democratic candidate at a higher rate. However, there is no evidence supporting Hypothesis 2 (that the effect of group appeals would be stronger among strong partisans). In fact, the opposite appears to hold; the impact of group appeals was strongest among weak partisans.

Overall, the results of Experiment 1 support my theory that appeals to group-based identities serve as effective mobilizing tools, yet can create greater levels of affective polarization among partisans. But Experiment 1 had a number of limitations. The sample size was fairly small in scope and contained only UCLA Political Science undergraduate students – a group that is significantly different from the US population as a whole. Experiment 1 also lacked a true control condition, and contained only a single ad attacking a Republican candidate. In the following two experiments, I made some changes to the design of the experiment to overcome some of these challenges.

4.4 Experiment 2

Experiments 2 and 3 were designed to build upon the results of the first experiment. My primary goals were: first, to improve the external validity of the experiment by showing participants multiple ads (therefore priming a wider range of group-based identities), second) to identify the impact of negative group-based appeals (vs. generic attacks), and third, to to create a true control condition. By showing ads attacking *both* candidates in the election, rather than just the Republican, I expected the results of the experiment would be stronger and more clearly defined. As the analysis section shows, however, the results are much less clear.

4.4.1 Methodology

The results of Experiment 1 lay a strong foundation of support for my theory that group-based appeals enhance affective polarization. But I decided to run a second experiment building on the findings of the first. There are three fundamental differences between the two experiments. First, Experiment 1 divides participants into 4 treatment conditions, but lacks a true control. Experiment 2 remedies that; participants in the control condition read an introductory paragraph about each candidate, but saw no ads.

Second, in Experiment 1, participants only saw one ad: an attack on a fictional Republican candidate. The decision was motivated by my expectations that the sample (college students in Los Angeles) would be significantly more Democratic than the country as a whole, and an attack on Republican which highlighted Democratically-aligned identity groups would have a larger impact than one which emphasized Republican-aligned identities. But as the results of Experiment 1 show, greater out-party hostility in Experiment 1 was created among Republicans than among Democrats. Therefore, in Experiment 2, participants saw a pair of ads, one attacking a fictional Democrat, and another attacking a fictional Republican.

Finally, in Experiment 1, I tested whether the *images* or *script* had a larger impact on participant attitudes and behavior. In Experiment 2, I focused exclusively on whether appeals to the *collective* or appeals to *groups* had a larger impact on affective polarization.

My expectation was that appeals to the collective might lower affective polarization, and appeals to the party-aligned groups would heighten it.

I recruited 243 UCLA undergraduate students in the fall of 2019, 224 of whom identified with either the Democratic (n = 174) or Republican (n = 50) parties to participate in this experiment. Each participant responded to two surveys: a baseline survey in which I gathered their demographic information and baseline feeling thermometer measures, and the treatment survey which was administered 7 days later. In the treatment survey, I randomly assigned each subject to one of three treatment conditions. In each condition, participants read a brief introductory paragraph, which describes two fictional candidates running for an open congressional seat in their district (see below). Participants then watched two campaign ads, which attack each candidate in turn, before completing the rest of the questionnaire. Professional voice actors narrated the ads, and the images and script used in the ads were similar across treatment conditions, with key differences, as shown in Table 4.7.

Introductory Information:

> Dan Baker is a Democrat running for Congress. His background is in law, and he has over 20 years experience as an attorney. He is married with 2 children, and grew up in this area.
>
> Mike Johnson is the Republican incumbent. He worked in business for most of his career, and ran a medical supply company he founded before running for Congress. He lives with his family in a town nearby.

Participants in the collective-interest condition (Condition 1) first read the introductory information, above, and then watched two short ads – one attacking the Democratic candidate, the other attacking the Republican. The scripts used language emphasizing the policy consequences on the nation as a whole, using words such as "Americans," "patriots," and"collective interest." The images used in these ads include the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, the Capitol Building, and other American icons.

Participants in the group-based condition (Condition 2) read the same introduction, but

viewed ads which emphasized the specific groups that would be harmed by the candidates' policies.[4] The images used in these ads tend to be individuals or groups staring directly to camera, to provide both visual and audio cues about the types of people who belong in each party.

The attack on the Republican candidate used in Experiment 2 is the same as Conditions 1 (script and images emphasize the collective) and 4 (script and images emphasize groups) in Experiment 1, and is shown in Table 4.2. The additional scripts used in Experiment 2 to attack the Democratic candidate are shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Experiment 2 – Democratic Attack Ad

Same Text:	**T1 - Effects on Collective**	**T2 - Effects on Groups**
Dan Baker and the Democrats want to pass a radical agenda that will take money out of	Americans' pockets.	the pockets of farmers, factory workers, and working class families.
The Democrats will cut funding for _____ putting _____ at risk.	the national defense and law enforcement... all Americans	soldiers and police officers...your family
Republican Mike Johnson's roots are in the heartland – he knows that _____ is at the heart of who we are as _____.	hard work... Americans	the farming ethic... Republicans
Mike will protect your 2nd Amendment rights and	our American values.	our Christian values.
Mike Johnson:	Bringing Americans together.	Sportsman. Veteran. Christian.

Participants were asked the same set of dependent variables and played the same trust game as in Experiment 1.

[4]In the ad attacking the Democratic candidate, the script mentions "Christians," "rural folks," "factory workers," and "soldiers." In the ad attacking the Republican, the script includes "people of color," "urban folks," "women," "black Americans," and "immigrants." The groups mentioned in each ad were selected based on the social groups aligned with, or perceived to be aligned with, each of the two political parties. See, for example, Ahler and Sood (2018), Goggin et al. (2018), and Mason (2018).

4.4.2 Experiment 2: Results

The results of Experiment 2 are lackluster. Table 4.8 shows the effect of each treatment condition on key dependent variables from Experiment 1. As seen below, there are no significant differences across conditions on the key dependent variables.

Let's begin with the measures of affective polarization. Hypothesis 1 suggests that affective polarization should be highest among respondents exposed to group based appeals, and columns 1-3 of Table 4.8 test this hypothesis. Column one shows the average feeling thermometer gap across treatment conditions (the difference in the feeling thermometer score of participants' own party compared to the opposite party). Neither the condition in which participants saw ads based on appeals to the collective, nor the ads that made group-based appeals, increased the feeling thermometer gap. Similarly, neither treatment significantly changed the difference in the number of points participants sent to their own party compared to members of the opposite party; the ads did not affect partisans' trust of out-partisans. The test of the third measure of affective polarization, participants' reported preference for congressional gridlock or compromise, show a similar result. Participants exposed to group-based appeals were no more likely to support gridlock than those in the control condition.

Table 4.8: Effect of Condition on Key Dependent Variables

Treatment	Feeling Thermometer Gap	Points Sent Gap	% Support Gridlock	Turnout (1-4)
Control	42.3 (2.6)	1.2 (0.3)	0.09 (0.03)	3.4 (0.1)
T1 - All	42.8 (2.7)	1.5 (0.3)	0.17 (0.04)	3.4 (0.1)
T2 - Group	41.6 (3.3)	0.7 (0.2)	0.11 (0.04)	3.2 (0.1)

Note: Standard errors of the estimates are shown in parentheses.

Overall, therefore, the results of Experiment 2 do not support hypothesis 1: group-based appeals did not increase affective polarization. Importantly, neither did collective-based appeals impact affective polarization. Across all three dependent variables measuring affective polarization – the feeling thermometer gap, the trust gap, and the support for gridlock – participants in the treatment conditions were no more likely to display heightened levels of out-party animosity compared to those in the control condition.

Did the ads in Experiment 2 heighten mobilization among respondents who saw them, as suggested by Hypothesis 3? The final column in Table 4.8 tests, and finds a similar null result. Looking at respondents' turnout likelihood, participants who saw the ads were no more likely to say they would turnout to vote in an election compared to those in the control condition.

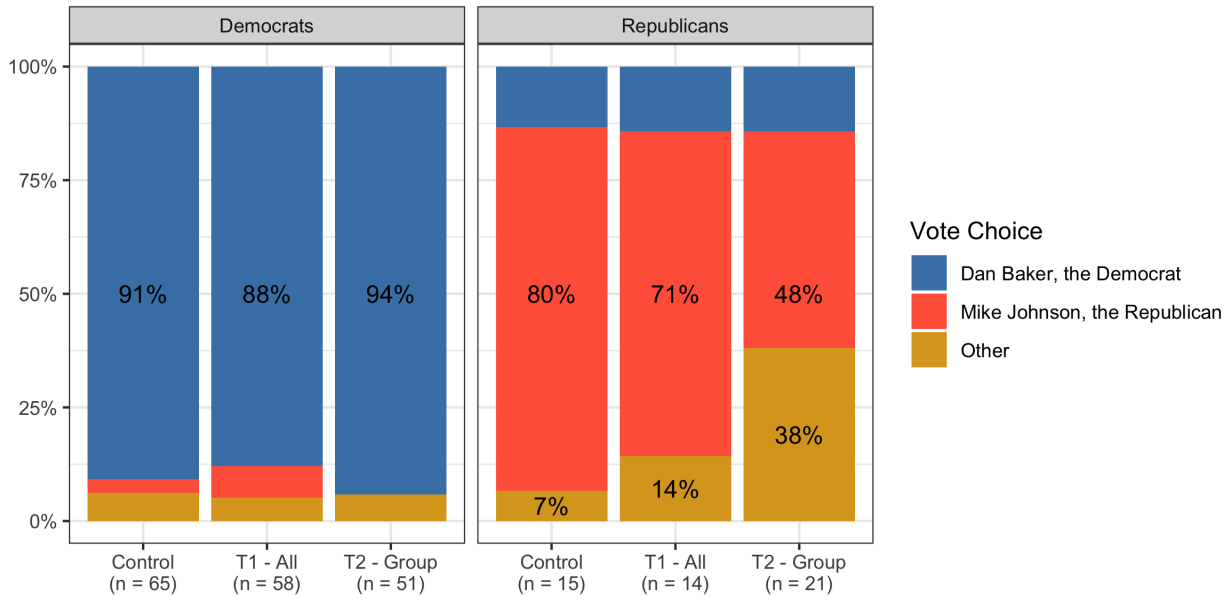
Because Experiment 2 includes a pre-post design, in which respondents answered an initial questionnaire a week before exposure to the ads, I tested whether the ads changed participants' attitudes from the initial survey. However, these results were similarly lackluster; accounting for attitudes at the baseline does not change these overall patterns.

Finally, Experiment 1 showed that the results were stronger among Republicans. Therefore, in Experiment 2 I examined the effect of each treatment condition among both Democrats and Republicans. However, neither ad significantly impacted the dependent variables when filtering the results to just Democrats or Republicans. Therefore, we can conclude from Experiment 2 that neither ad significantly impacted affective polarization or mobilization, and I found no support for either Hypothesis 1 or 3.

Looking at partisans' support for the candidates lends one potential explanation for these null results. Figure 4.8 plots vote intention for the two candidates by participants' partisanship and condition. Democrats are shown on the left, while Republican participants are shown on the right. Support for the Democratic candidate Dan Baker is displayed in blue, and support for Republican candidate Mike Johnson is shown in red. The proportion of respondents who reported they either would not vote or would vote for someone else are displayed in yellow. While about 90% of Democrats across all three conditions reported that they support the Democratic condition, the results among Republicans are very different. About 80% of Republicans in the Control Condition said they would support the Republican candidate, but this fell to 71% among participants in Condition 1, and just 48% among participants in Condition 2. The small sample size (shown along the x-axis) makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions from these data, but the large increase in the proportion reporting they would vote for another candidate or would not vote in the election among Republicans in Condition 2 is notable. The ads shown in both conditions, but especially the ad shown in

Condition 2, appear to have dissuaded the Republicans in this experiment from supporting their party's candidate.

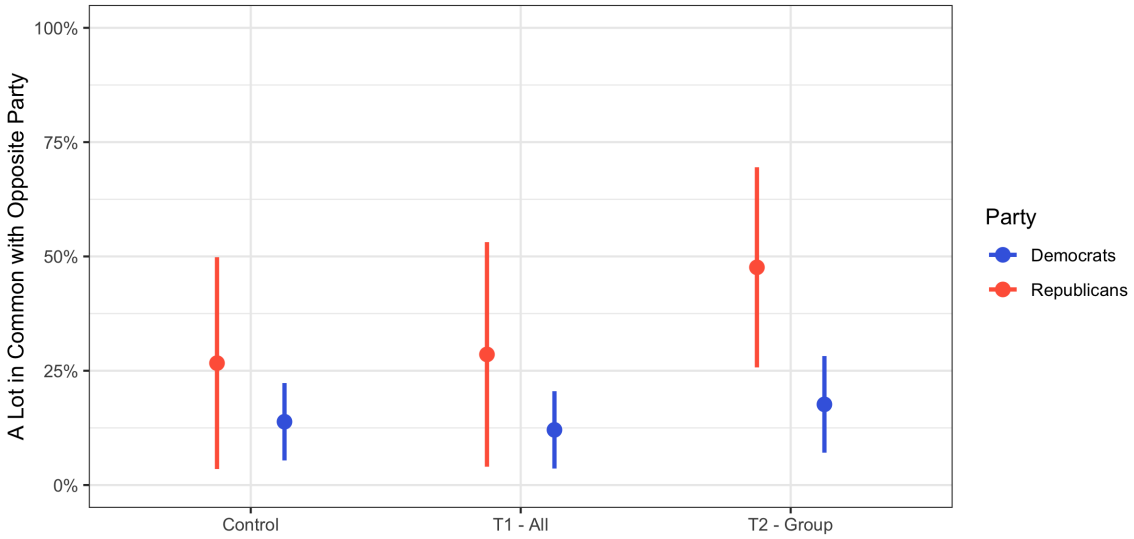
Figure 4.8: Vote Choice, by Condition & Party ID



Similarly, after viewing the ads, participants were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statement "Generally speaking, I have a lot in common with members of the [Democratic/Republican] Party." The results, by partisanship and treatment condition, are shown in Figure 4.9. Each point represents the proportion of partisans who reported that they strongly or somewhat agreed with that statement. The figure suggests that while the ads did not change Democratic perceptions of how much they have in common with Republicans, the ads *did change* how Republicans viewed Democrats. In the Control Condition, 27% of Republicans reported that they have a lot in common with Democrats; a similar proportion of Republicans agreed in Condition 1, 29%. But after having been exposed to the group-based appeals in Condition 2, this proportion rose to 48%. Again, the small sample size means determining whether or not this difference is statistically significant is a challenge (the p-value of the comparison of Republicans in the Control Condition and Condition 2 is 0.2), yet the direction of the effect is potentially illustrative. These null effects on Hypothesis 1 and 3 may be explained by the fact that the ads containing group-based

appeals clearly made Republican participants in the experiment feel less aligned with the Republican Party.

Figure 4.9: Have a Lot in Common with the Opposite Party, by Condition & Party ID



Though the results of Experiment 2 do not support my theory that group-based appeals heighten affective polarization or mobilization, the results of Experiment 2 do somewhat replicate the findings of Experiment 1 when it comes to Hypothesis 2 (the effect of group-based appeals among strong and weak partisans). Experiment 1 showed that the results are stronger among Weak Partisans than they are among Strong Partisans (contrary to Hypothesis 2) and Table 4.9 provides modest evidence for this finding in Experiment 2 as well. The table shows that the feeling thermometer gap is larger among participants in the group-based appeals condition than the control (p-value < 0.1). However, the group-based appeals did not increase the points sent gap, increase voter mobilization, or increase preference for gridlock among weak partisans.[5] It's therefore hard to say with any certainty whether the group-based appeals increased affective polarization or voter mobilization among this group.

[5]The decline in the points sent gap among treatment 2 respondents is driven by both a decline in the points sent to the participants' co-partisan as well as the out-partisan. The group-based ad appears to have made weak partisans less trusting of everyone.

Table 4.9: Effect of Condition on Key Dependent Variables among Weak Partisans

Treatment	Feeling Thermometer Gap	Points Sent Gap	Gridlock (pct)	Turnout (1-4)
Control	27.4 (3.2)	1.6 (0.5)	0.07 (0.04)	3.2 (0.1)
T1 - All	35.9 (3.8)	1 (0.3)	0.17 (0.06)	3.1 (0.2)
T2 - Group	38.3ˆ (3.4)	0.4 (0.2)	0.08 (0.04)	3 (0.1)

Note:
Standard errors of the estimates are shown in parentheses.
ˆ = p-value < 0.1 (vs. control condition).

Thus, with the exception of the impact of group-based appeals on weak partisans, the results of Experiment 2 largely contradict those of Experiment 1. I found no evidence that the ads I created increased affective polarization or voter mobilization overall, and modest evidence suggesting that the group-based appeals heightened affective polarization among weak partisans. Because of this, I decided to run a third experiment, this time using a nationally-representative sample rather than undergraduates in a political science class, to better understand the effects of group-based appeals on individuals' political attitudes.

4.5 Experiment 3

The goal of Experiment 3 was to replicate Experiment 2, but with a nationally representative sample. Therefore, no changes to the setup of the experiment were made, with the exception of the removal of the trust game (I could not vary the incentive structure with this sample, so it wasn't possible to incentivize respondents to play the game strategically). Civis Analytics ran the experiment on Lucid, an online marketplace of opt-in, non-probability web sample providers, on my behalf. The field period was August 28 through September 8, 2020, and 3,208 individuals completed the survey.

Recently, there have been some concerns related to the quality of respondents on Lucid (Aronow et al., 2020). Despite these concerns, the sample source remains a prominent provider of web panelists. Civis Analytics regularly uses Lucid for ad tests similar to mine, in which participants are randomly assigned to treatment or control conditions, and those in treatment conditions are shown short political ads. The treatment effect of the ads is then

Table 4.10: Experiment 3: Effect of Treatments on Feeling Thermometer

Treatment	Mean In-Party Score	Mean Out-Party Score	Gap (SE)	n
Control	62.1	15.3	46.7 (1.3)	1077
T1 - All	61.7	14.9	46.8 (1.3)	1072
T2 - Groups	62.1	17.0	45.1 (1.3)	1059

calculated. Despite the recent uptick in satisficing behavior on Lucid noted by Aronow et al. (2020), Civis has not observed a decline in the size of the average treatment effects from the platform. Notably, the results of Experiment 3 do not change when individuals who have been flagged as engaging in satisficing behavior are removed.

4.5.1 Results

The results of Experiment 3 largely do not confirm my theory, though the appeal to group identities did enhance some feelings of political efficacy. Overall, there is only modest evidence that appeals to group-based identities enhanced affective polarization and voter mobilization in Experiment 3.

Beginning with the party feeling thermometer score, Table 4.10 shows the ads did not influence how participants felt about either their own or the opposite party. Partisans in the control condition rated the opposite party 15.3, about the same as the rating that participants in the groups-based condition (T2) gave to the opposite party (17.0, T-stat = -1.5, p-value =0.13). There is no difference between how participants across the condition rated their own party, nor is the gap between the in-party score and out-party score significantly different across conditions.

The effects of the ads on alternate measures of affective polarization in Experiment 3 are shown in Table 4.11; the results are decidedly mixed. When asked how much it would matter if a new neighbor were a Democrat or a Republican, participants in Condition 2 were significantly more likely to say it would mater "Quite a Bit." But that five point increase appears to mainly be driven by a shift from responses of "A fair amount." In other words, a shift from the second highest expression of affective polarization to the highest: a noticeable

Table 4.11: Effects of Experiment 3 Treatments on Affective Polarization

	Control	**T1 - All**	**T2 - Groups**
"Suppose a new neighbor were moving in next door to you. How much would it matter to you if that neighbor were a Democrat or a Republican?"			
Quite a bit	8	9	13**
A fair amount	18	17	14
Not much	22	21	21
Not at all	43	43	43
I don't know	8	9	9
"Generally speaking, do you think politicians in Washington should...?"			
Compromise to find solutions	78	79	82*
Stand on principle even if it means gridlock	22	21	18

Notes: Statistical tests compared to control condition.
* p-value < 0.05, ** p-value < 0.01

and statistically significant change, but not an overwhelming change in respondent opinion.

Further, participants in Condition 2 were significantly *more* likely to report that politicians in Washington should "compromise to find solutions" rather than "stand on principal even if it means gridlock," opposite my hypothesized effect. And finally, when asked a question on political efficacy, participants who saw the group-based appeals expressed significantly more political efficacy than those in the control condition or Condition 1.

Turning to Hypothesis 3, how did the ads in Experiment 3 impact voter mobilization and feelings of efficacy? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the results are fairly mixed, as shown in Table 4.12, and the ads had a subtle impact on mobilization. When asked who they would vote for if the candidates were running for Congress in their district, participants in both treatment conditions were significantly *less* likely to say they would not vote at all if the candidates were running for Congress in their district.[6]

[6]Though neither ad appeared significantly affected support for either the Democratic or Republican candidate, the group-based appeal appears to have most turned off from both candidates; participants in Condition 2were significantly *more* likely to say they would vote for someone aside from the Democratic and Republican candidates appearing in the ads.

Table 4.12: Effects of Experiment 3 Treatments on Voter Mobilization & Efficacy

	Control	**T1 - All**	**T2 - Groups**
"If these candidates were running for Congress in your district, who would you vote for?"			
Dan Baker, the Democrat	38	36	35
Mike Johnson, the Republican	34	41	37
I would vote for someone else	9	7	12**
I wouldn't vote	20	16*	16*
"How likely would you be to vote in that election?"			
Very likely	55	53	57
Somewhat likely	22	23	21
Somewhat unlikely	8	8	9
Very unlikely	16	16	13
"How much do government officials care what people like you think?"			
A great deal	9	10	13**
A lot	9	12	9
A moderate amount	26	25	25
A little	27	25	25
None at all	29	28	28
n	1077	1072	1059

Notes: Statistical tests compared to control condition.
* p-value < 0.05, ** p-value < 0.01

That evidence is contradicted, however, by the following question, which asks participants explicitly how likely they would be to vote in that election. Unlike Experiment 1, participants who viewed group-based appeals were not significantly more likely to report an intention of voting in an election where these two candidates were running (replicating the null results on this question from Experiment 2). Overall, therefore, there is only slight evidence supporting Hypothesis 3, that appeals to group identity would increase feelings of efficacy and voter mobilization, though the results are fairly mixed on this.

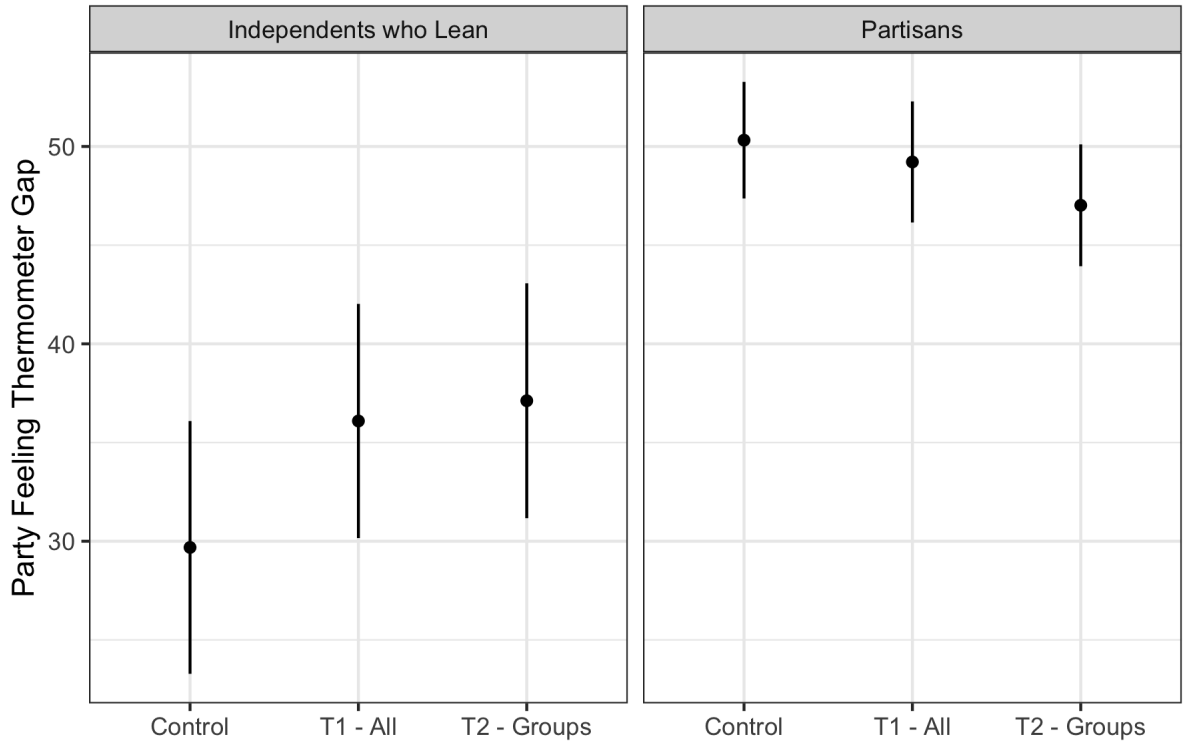
4.5.2 Heterogeneous Treatment Effects by Strength of Partisanship

Finally, in Experiments 1 and 2 we saw the effects of group-based appeals were strongest among weak partisans. Exactly replicating these tests in Experiment 3 is not possible, as the

Civis survey didn't have a measure of strength of partisanship. However, we can approximate these analyses by treating independents who lean toward either party as weak partisans.

Looking first at independents who lean toward one party or another, Figure 4.10 shows that appeals to group identity increase affective polarization among those who identify as independents but lean toward one party or another (n=494). Exposure to group-based appeals strengthens affective polarization among independents who lean toward either party (30 points among participants in the control condition, compared to 37 points among those in Treatment 2, p-value < 0.1). The right panel shows that the opposite relationship holds among partisans: the treatment may weaken affective polarization. The party gap among partisans in the control was 50, compared to 47 among partisans in Treatment 2 (p-value < 0.2).

Figure 4.10: Treatment Effect on Party Feeling Thermometer Gap, by Strength of Partisanship (Experiment 3)



Group-based appeals have no effect on the alternate measures of affective polarization, however. Weak partisans in Treatment 2 were no more likely than weak partisans in the

control condition to prefer gridlock over compromise (13% vs. 18%, p-value = 0.23), nor were they more likely to care about the partisanship of their neighbors (21% vs. 20%, p-value = 0.88). Overall, therefore, it appears that group-based appeals may somewhat strengthen affective polarization and party hostility among weak partisans.

Further, the results of Experiment 3 show some evidence that group-based appeals may mobilize and enhance feelings of efficacy among weak partisans. Figure 4.11 shows that weak partisans in both treatment conditions were significantly more likely to say they are Very or Somewhat likely to vote in an election compared to those in the control condition. 80% of participants who saw ads with group-based appeals reported they would be likely to vote, compared to just 70% of those in the control condition (p-value < 0.05).

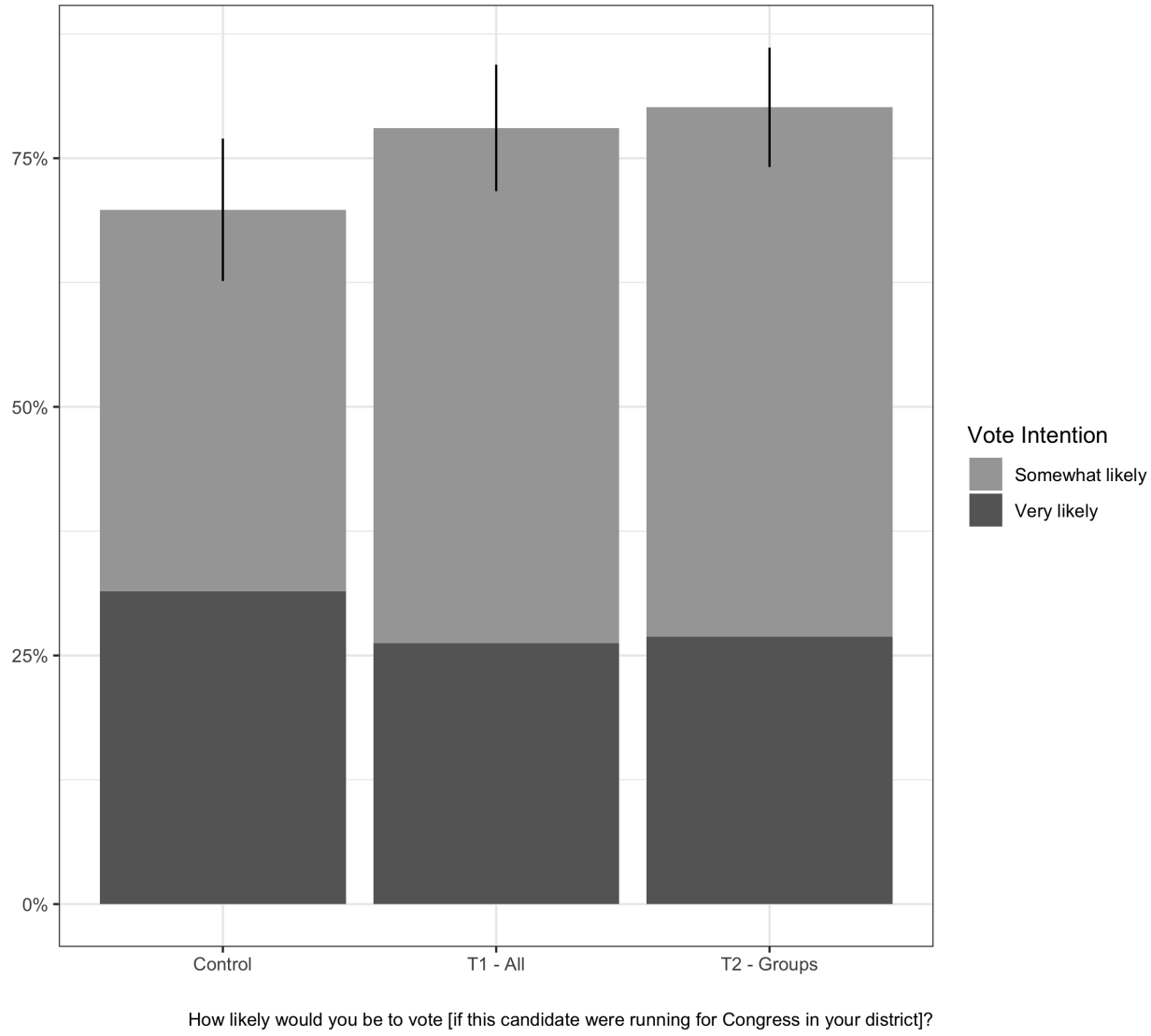
Similarly, there's some evidence the group-based appeals enhanced feelings of efficacy among weak partisans. Weak partisans who saw ads with group-based appeals were more likely to say that government officials care "A great deal" or "A lot" about what people like them think, compared to those in the control condition (13% vs. 8%, p-value = 0.23).

Thus, Experiment 3 replicates the results of Experiments 1 and 2 when it comes to Hypothesis 2. Specifically, when looking at the effects of appeals to group identity among weak partisans, the evidence suggests the ads have a larger impact on weak partisans' level of hostility toward members of the opposite party and likelihood to vote, compared to strong partisans.

4.6 Discussion

In this chapter, I presented the results of three experiments in which I examined the effects of appeals to group identities on two main factors: affective polarization and voter mobilization. These dependent variables reflect a key tension that my theory highlights; that appeals to group identity may be a double-edged sword. On one hand, I expect this type of rhetoric to have a beneficial effect on the American electorate. I theorized that incorporating appeals to group identity highlights the concerns of specific groups who have largely been ignored throughout much of American history. In doing so, these appeals to group identity

Figure 4.11: Treatment Effect on Voter Mobilization, among Weak Partisans (Experiment 3)



enhance feelings of efficacy among many voters, leading to higher turnout and participation in elections. All of these potential effects are normatively good.

At the same time, however, I expect that this type of appeal may have a deleterious impact on American democracy as well. In particular, appeals to group identity may enhance and prime stereotypes about who belongs in each party, heightening the perception that members of the opposite party are *just different* from people like you, creating higher levels of animosity between the parties. This could strengthen legislative gridlock, along with other

potentially harmful outcomes.

The potentially double-edged nature of appeals to group identity led me to measure two key dependent variables throughout the three experiments reported in this chapter: affective polarization and voter mobilization. Further, if, as I theorize, appeals to group identity enhance both mobilization and affective polarization, this may spell trouble for American civil discourse. If appeals to group identity are affective mobilization tools, parties, campaigns, and interest groups face strong incentives to use this type of appeal. However, in doing so, they may have the unintended consequence of heightening partisan animosity in the United States.

4.6.1 Summary of Results

In this chapter, I presented the results of three experiments, each with multiple tests, to evaluate the theoretical supposition that group-based communication drives affective party polarization in the United States. The main tests had as their dependent variables affective polarization, voter mobilization, candidate support, and frustration with Washington gridlock.

The first experiment largely supported expectations for the effects of group-based communication on these variables, but the second and third experiments, with larger samples and stronger designs, largely failed to support my theorizing. Overall, then, the main results were mostly but not entirely negative.

In Experiment 1, I found convincing evidence that appeals to group identity increased affective polarization and voter mobilization overall, and among weak partisans in particular. The ads in Experiment 1 impacted both voter attitudes and behavior. But weaknesses in the design of Experiment 1 led me to develop Experiment 2, which differed from Experiment 1 in that it contained a true control condition, and showed respondents multiple ads. The results of Experiment 2, however, were mostly null. I found that the ads I showed to participants had had very little impact on affective polarization or voter mobilization, with the possible exception of weak partisans, who expressed a slight increase in affective polarization when

shown group-based appeals.

The contradictory nature of the results in Experiment 2 led me to run the experiment again, with a larger and more representative sample. A major drawback of both Experiments 1 and 2 was their reliance on undergraduate political science students as participants. When it came to Experiment 3, I was able to run the experiment using a large national sample of adults. Across the board, the results of Experiment 3 were modest and somewhat mixed. Overall, I found some evidence that appeals to group identity enhanced affective polarization and mobilization, both in the sample as a whole and among weak partisans.

Table 4.13 provides a summary of the findings of all three experiments. When it comes to affective polarization, group-based appeals increased respondents' preference for gridlock over compromise in two of the three experiments, and increased the importance individuals place on their neighbors' partisanship (only asked once). However, group appeals only increased the feeling thermometer gap in one of the three experiments (and that difference did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance).

Table 4.13: Summary of Key Results: Difference from Control Condition

	Feeling Thermometer Gap	Trust Game	Preference for Gridlock	Neighbor's Partisanship	Mobilization	Vote Choice
Experiment 1						
n = 371						
Group images only	No effect	No effect	Significant difference	NA	Significant difference	No effect
Significance test			p <0.05		p <0.05	
Group words only	No effect	Significant difference	Significant difference	NA	Significant difference	No effect
Significance test		p <0.05	p <0.05		p <0.01	
Group words & images	Directional difference	Directional difference	Significant difference	NA	Significant difference	No effect
Significance test	p <0.2	p <0.2	p <0.05		p <0.01	
Experiment 2						
n = 243						
Collective appeals (T1)	No effect	No effect	No effect	NA	No effect	No effect
Significance test						
Group appeals (T2)	No effect	No effect	No effect	NA	No effect	Significant difference
Significance test						p <0.05
Experiment 3						
n = 3208						
Collective appeals (T1)	No effect	NA	No effect	No effect	No effect	No effect
Significance test						
Group appeals (T2)	No effect	NA	Significant difference	Significant difference	No effect	Significant difference
Significance test			p-value <0.05	p-value <0.01		p-value <0.01
Note: p-values are two-tailed						

I also tested some secondary expectations about which subgroups would be most affected by group-based communication. I theorized that effects of group appeals would be largest among strong partisans. However, results were either non-significant or trended toward statistical significance in the opposite direction I had expected. Table 4.14 summarizes the effects of group appeals across the three experiments among weak partisans.

Table 4.14: Summary of Key Results among Weak Partisans: Difference from Control Condition

	Feeling Thermometer Gap	**Trust Game**	**Preference for Gridlock**	**Neighbor's Partisanship**	**Mobilization**	**Vote Choice**
Experiment 1						
Group words & images	No effect	Significant difference	Significant difference	NA	Significant difference	No effect
Significance test		p <0.1	p <0.1		p <0.05	
Experiment 2						
n = 114						
Group appeals (T2)	Significant difference	No effect	No effect	NA	No effect	Significant difference
Significance test	p-value <0.1					p-value <0.05
Experiment 3						
n = 494						
Group appeals (T2)	Significant difference	NA	No effect	No effect	Significant difference	No effect
Significance test	p-value <0.1				p-value <0.05	

Note: p-values are two-tailed

Among weak partisans, group-based appeals inconsistently increase partisan animosity and voter mobilization across the three experiments. When there were effects, group-based appeals made weak partisans think and behave more like their strong partisan counterparts.

Taking the three experiments as a whole, therefore, there is only mild support for my theory that appeals to group identity enhance affective polarization and voter mobilization. Despite these mainly disappointing results, I believe that the theoretical reasoning underlying my experimental tests is sound and worth further development and testing. In the remainder of this chapter and in the next, I will consider possible reasons for the disappointing results I obtained and some directions future research should take.

4.6.2 Understanding Mixed Results

The results of these three experiments show modest but mixed support for my theory that group-based appeals increase affective polarization. In Experiment 1, participants who saw an ad which emphasized the groups associated with the Democratic Party expressed greater levels of affective polarization, as measured by the feeling thermometer and trust games. Group-based appeals also increased preference for gridlock over compromise, and were more mobilizing than the control condition. But while the results of Experiment 1 showed strong support for my theory, these results failed to replicate completely when I ran a modified test in Experiment 2, and only modestly replicated in Experiment 3. Why were the results of Experiments 2 and 3 so dramatically different from the initial test?

While we cannot conclude with certainty that any of the following explanations are the reason for the null results outlined above, I offer these three points as my best guess as to why the experiment failed. First: the racial diversity of the Republican participants in both studies was significantly greater than the racial diversity of the Republican Party as a whole. In Experiment 1, 46% of Republicans identified as non-Hispanic white, as did 54% of Republicans in Experiment 2. Affective polarization is highest in those with aligned identities, so perhaps affective polarization is weaker among the Republicans in the sample, on average, because of the relatively large proportion of non-white Republicans.

This, however, does not explain the discrepancy between the results of Experiment 1 and Experiment 2.

One thing that does differentiate the two experiments is the addition of the ad attacking the Democratic candidate. In hindsight, this ad was not as well-executed as the ad attacking the Republican candidate. First, the ad is not a strict attack ad like the attack on the Republican candidate; it is a contrast ad which begins by attacking the Democrat, but the second half extols the virtues of the Republican candidate. The fact that Republican participants in the group-based condition strongly preferred voting for another candidate rather than the member of their party put forward suggests the way this candidate was framed in Condition 2 did not resonate. Again, the racial diversity of the Republicans in the first two studies perhaps meant that the appeals to typically-Republican aligned identities did not resonate with the participants in this study. Finally, the ad attacking the Democrat may have simply been worse: it's possible my preference for Democratic candidates made it more difficult for me to craft an ad successfully attacking a Democrat.

Relatedly, none of the language used in the ads was racist in nature; attacks were framed so as to emphasize the groups who would be hurt by the candidates' proposed policies. Though these types of appeals are common in political rhetoric, more negative racial rhetoric is also prevalent (Scott, 2019). It's possible that racist attacks may increase affective polarization to a greater extent than the framing I used throughout my experiments.

A third possibility for the differences in the results between Experiments 1 and 2 is the course content around the time the experiments were conducted. During the time I ran Experiment 2, students enrolled in the course were learning about partisanship and identity. It's therefore possible that the topic of identity groups were top of mind for the students, and they were less likely to be affected by group-based appeals.

Turning to Experiment 3, while the treatments did not impact affective polarization as measured by the feeling thermometer ratings of the Democratic and Republican Parties, they did slightly impact alternative measures of affective polarization, though to a somewhat contradictory extent. In Experiment 3, group-based appeals enhanced the third-party vote

and the proportion who say they wouldn't vote, increased the importance of a new neighbor's partisanship, made participants more willing to embrace compromise over gridlock in Washington, and enhanced external efficacy. Experiment 3 has a few advantages over the first two: a larger, more representative sample size, and a true control condition. Yet the results are somewhat contradictory, and alone cannot explain the rise in affective polarization over the past few decades.

All in all, these explanations are only post hoc rationalizations for why the results of the three experiments were contradictory. More work should be done to clarify the impact of group based appeals on voter attitudes and behavior. Future work should aim to identify when and why group based appeals can heighten interest in politics and stated turnout intention. Do they increase personal efficacy or make politics seem more relevant to marginalized individuals? Or, on the other hand, do they increase racial stereotypes and feelings of racial resentment? If group-based appeals increase affective polarization, but also increase the saliency of political debates and interest in politics, they are potentially a double-edged sword, and their use may have both normatively positive and negative results. In that case, political actors interested in election are incentivized to use this type of appeal, despite the potential increase in affective polarization that may result.

4.7 Appendix

Table 4.15 shows the results of a linear regression model predicting to key dependent variables: the Feeling Thermometer Gap (feeling thermometer score of co-partisan - feeling thermometer score of out-partisan) and the Points Sent Gap (number of points sent to co-partisan in trust game - number of points sent to out-partisan). The models show the interaction between treatment condition and party identification.[7]

Table 4.16 shows the effect of each condition broken out by partisanship.

[7]Note that true independents are excluded from this analysis, and independents who lean toward either party are allocated to their respective parties.

Table 4.15: Experiment 1: Effect of Treatment on Feeling Thermometer and Send Gap

	Dependent variable:	
	Feeling Thermometer Gap	Points Sent Gap
	(1)	(2)
2: Group Script	1.110	0.143
	(3.837)	(0.463)
3: Group Images	−0.867	0.887**
	(3.943)	(0.476)
4: Images + Script	6.067*	0.691*
	(3.994)	(0.482)
Republican	−21.963***	−0.694
	(6.814)	(0.822)
2: Group Script (R)	7.533	−0.0003
	(9.036)	(1.091)
3: Group Images (R)	6.530	0.916
	(8.772)	(1.059)
4: Group Script + Images (R)	6.076	−0.048
	(8.848)	(1.068)
Intercept	42.821***	1.051***
	(2.658)	(0.321)
Observations	360	360
R^2	0.093	0.030
Adjusted R^2	0.075	0.011
Residual Std. Error (df = 352)	23.476	2.834
F Statistic (df = 7; 352)	5.138***	1.568*
Note:		*p<0.2; **p<0.1; ***p<0.05

Table 4.16: Effect of Condition on Key Dependent Variables, by Party

Party	Treatment	Feeling Thermometer Gap	Points Sent Gap	Turnout (1-4)	Gridlock (pct)
Democrats	Control	44 (2.8)	1.4 (0.4)	3.4 (0.1)	0.09 (0.04)
	T1 - All	42.6 (3.1)	1.5 (0.3)	3.5 (0.1)	0.17 (0.05)
	T2 - Group	43.4 (4)	1 (0.3)	3.5 (0.1)	0.1 (0.04)
Republicans	Control	35.1 (7.1)	0.2 (0.8)	3.2 (0.2)	0.13 (0.09)
	T1 - All	43.6 (6.9)	1.4 (0.9)	3.2 (0.2)	0.15 (0.1)
	T2 - Group	37.2 (6.8)	0 (0.4)	2.8 (0.2)	0.1 (0.07)

Note:
Standard errors of the estimates are shown in parentheses. Leaners are allocated with their respective party.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

5.1 Overview

American politics in the 21st century is characterized by intense inter-party hostility. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2019 found that 85% of Americans believe that political discourse in this country has become more negative (Doherty, 2019b). In this dissertation, I have addressed *why* affective polarization has risen so dramatically over the past 60 years. Specifically, I focused on the ways in which party elites can shape individuals' attitudes with strategic appeals to politically-aligned group identities.

Extreme partisan hostility often results in normatively undesirable democratic outcomes. Previous research has found that angry partisans interact less with members of the opposite party, and even discriminate against them in social and workplace situations (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Lelkes and Westwood, 2017). Further, partisans who express high levels of affective polarization are also less trusting of members of the opposite party. This lack of trust leads to a decreased willingness to compromise, reducing the incentive for Members of Congress to compromise. Therefore, high levels of affective polarization incentivize gridlock. Finally, affective polarization increases the likelihood that political violence occurs. The same Pew study found that 78% of Americans believe that the "heated" rhetoric used by politicians could lead to political violence (Doherty, 2019b), and another survey found that 29% of Americans agree with the statement "If elected leaders will not protect America, the people must do it themselves even if it requires taking violent actions" (Cox, 2021).

So far, the root cause of affective polarization has not yet been fully identified. Multiple theories have been suggested and tested; the rise of the internet (Lelkes et al., 2015),

an overall disgust with politics (Klar et al., 2018), ideological polarization (Huddy et al., 2015), a polarized media environment (Levendusky, 2013a; Levendusky, 2013b). Even the simple discussion of political polarization can heighten affective polarization (Levendusky and Malhotra, 2016).

My work builds most directly off the work of Liliana Mason, who suggests that affective polarization is driven by the decline of "cross-cutting identities." She posits that, as Americans' various social identies increasingly align with partisanship, American partisans have fewer interactions with members of the opposite party, making it easier to paint the whole group with one brush (Mason, 2015, 2016, 2018). There is meaningful evidence for this: American partisans today are significantly more sorted into social groups aligned their political party than they were 50 years ago.

In this dissertation I expand on this theory, and suggest an intermediate step between social sorting and affective polarization. Specifically, elite appeals to group identities make these identities salient and create and enhance stereotypes about who belongs in each party. I argue that political elites make this type of appeal because they are effective tools for mobilizing and persuading voters. But in making these appeals to Americans' social identities, they may solidify partisans' understanding of what a *typical Democrat* and *typical Republican* look like, making it easier to demonize members of the opposite party.

The impact of political appeals to group identity is key to our understanding of affective polarization because it is a potential mechanism for translating social group sorting into heightened inter-party hostility. Mason's work clearly demonstrates that affective polarization is associated with increased identity alignment. But the question of how identity alignment is communicated to American partisans remained unanswered. Specifically, I set out to understand what creates the "picture in our heads" about *who* belongs in each party? More generally, very little research has been conducted examining how communication styles can impact affective polarization.

The theory that elite appeals to aligned identity groups can create affective polarization requires three variables to move together. For this theory to hold, the period characterized

by a rise in affective polarization must also be marked by a rise in social group alignment and elite appeals to these social group identities. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that these trends do in fact move together. As affective polarization has risen to become a defining characteristic of American politics, so has identity alignment and appeals to these group identities.

We cannot infer a causal relationship simply from these three trends moving together, however. To that end, I also tested this mechanism directly with a series of experiments. And though the observational analysis suggests that affective polarization, social group sorting, and elite appeals to group identities have trended together over the past several decades, the experimental work directly testing this mechanism fails to find a robust, replicable, significant relationship between appeals to group identity and affective polarization.

Thus, the takeaways from this dissertation are decidedly mixed. Overall, I find robust evidence that affective polarization has occurred among broad swaths of the American electorate, and confirm the findings of Mason (2018) that social group sorting has occurred during that same time period. Further, I demonstrate that the language that party elite use to describe their priorities and goals reflects these changing party coalitions, and that appeals to group identities have therefore increased over time – particularly within the Democratic Party. However, I do not confirm that social sorting or the rise in appeals to group identity have created a more hostile public.

Despite the mixed results, however, this dissertation adds to our understanding of affective polarization and political communication. Though not of the evidence runs in the expected direction, there remains some compelling evidence that my theory may hold. Further, I demonstrate that affective polarization is malleable, and can be influenced by campaign communication. Overall, therefore, my dissertation contributes to our knowledge of American political behavior and suggests more work should be done to strengthen our understanding of the ways in which political communication shapes partisan hostility.

5.2 Summary of Findings

In this section, I outline a brief summary of the findings of my dissertation. In Chapter 1, I presented evidence of the rise of affective polarization in the past few decades. I demonstrated that this increase in inter-party hostility has occurred among both strong and weak partisans, among white Americans and people of color, Democrats and Republicans, and both heavy and light news consumers. The magnitude of the trend often varies by subgroup, but evidence of increased affective polarization exists widely across the American electorate. The question motivating this dissertation is: Why?

I began to answer this question in Chapter 2. I explored two potential drivers of affective polarization: social group sorting and issue-based polarization. In this chapter, I asked: what differentiates the membership of the country's two main political parties? Specifically, how has party composition changed over time, both in terms of issue preferences and demographics?

Using data from the American National Election Study between 1956 and 2016, I traced the shifts in the party coalitions over the past few decades. The results clearly demonstrate a significant rise in inter-party difference across both factors. In terms of the party group membership, the data show that the parties are more demographically distinct than ever before. The Democratic Party is increasingly non-white, non-religious, and composed of more women. Meanwhile, the Republican Party composition remains overwhelmingly white, relatively religious, older, and less educated. These trends lay the groundwork for the theory that demographic divergence drives affective polarization.

But Chapter 2 also lays out evidence that issue-based divergence has occurred over time, is another potential underlying cause of affective polarization. I examined how Democratic and Republican attitudes have shifted across 15 issues over the past 30+ years. Across 11 of the 15 issues, the gap between Democrats and Republicans has grown by more than 10 points during the time periods I examined. The divergence in partisan attitudes has been largest on issues related to abortion, the environment, immigration.

The findings from Chapter 2 lay the foundation for future chapters. To be considered as

a potential driver of affective polarization, the variable in question must have shifted over the same time period that affective polarization has increased. The rise of affective polarization began in the 1990s and picked up steam throughout the 2000s. Chapter 2 shows that, during that time, the parties have grown increasingly distinct across both demographic identities and issue-based attitudes.

Having demonstrated that the parties are diverging demographically, I turn in Chapter 3 to investigate whether if this divergence is being communicated to American partisans. Specifically, I ask: Have group-based appeals increased over time? Do parties prioritize appeals to groups aligned with their party? To answer this question, I gathered the platforms of the Democratic and Republican Parties and used them for an automated text analysis. By creating a dictionary of words related to social identities, I was able to examine how the rate of appeals to these group identities has changed over time.

The results of Chapter 3 demonstrate clearly that the language used by party elites reflect the increasing demographic divergence shown in Chapter 2. In particular, the Democratic Party's use of explicit identity-based language has increased over time. The Democratic platform increasingly contains explicit references to race, gender, and class-based identities, reflecting the changes in the party's coalition that have occurred since the 1970s and 1980s.

Meanwhile, the Republican Party platform does not for the most part contain significantly more references to aligned group identities. But there are two areas where the Republican Party's use of this type of language has increased over time: on religious identity and national identity. The Republican Party platform of today contains significantly more references to religiousity and nationalism than the party's platform 40 years ago. A notable difference between the parties' platforms exists on appeals to ideology; particularly in the 1990s, there was a large spike in the use of this rhetoric among the Republican Party platform, though it has declined significantly since then. Overall, however, the Republican platform is more likely to contain references to ideology than the Democratic platform.

Chapter 3 shows that party communication on social identity has occurred in tandem

with the increase in divergence between the parties. Democratic platforms increasingly highlight the role of key constituencies in their party coalition; as that coalition has shifted over time, so has the language the Democratic Party uses to describe their priorities. Over this same time period, however, the Republican Party coalition has shifted only slightly. The rhetoric used in their platforms reflects this as well; Republican Party elites have increased their use of appeals to religious identities, but aside from that, their language continues to prioritize the groups making up their party.

In contrast to the weakness of my evidence from experiments, the evidence on party platforms is consistent with the main thesis of my dissertation and, as such, encourages further research on it.

Finally, in Chapter 4 I test the impact of these appeals to group identity on affective polarization. Specifically, in this chapter I ask: How do group appeals in political advertisements affect affective polarization and voter participation? Do they mobilize? Are there alternatives? The question of mobilization is particularly important, because if there is evidence that a certain type of appeal is a successful tool to turn out voters, politicians are likely to use it.

To answer these questions, I ran a series of three experiments, with contradictory results. The experiments varied slightly in their design, but the general setup was the same: participants viewed one (or two) political ads which were designed to appeal to party-aligned group identities (explicitly or implicitly). After viewing the ads, participants in 2 of the 3 experiments played an economics-style trust game, and answered a series of questions about their attitudes related to the parties (the third experiment excluded the trust game).

The results of the first experiment showed some support for my theory, and affective polarization (as measured by both mistrust of the opposite party in the behavioral game, and in terms of attitudinal based on feeling thermometers) was highest among participants who saw ads with the group-based appeals. The effect was strongest among weak partisans; group based appeals made weak partisans think and act like strong partisans, perhaps because their attitudes about the opposite party were less firmly held to begin with. Further, group-based

appeals increased respondent vote likelihood and feelings of efficacy.

However, these results largely did not replicate in the two subsequent experiments. Both follow up experiments showed participants multiple political ads (one attacking a hypothetical Republican, and another attacking a hypothetical Democratic candidate). In these experiments, respondents in the group-based appeals condition expressed similar levels of affective polarization and voter motivation.

As a whole, chapters 2 through 4 show that the parties have diverged over the course of the past few decades, in terms of demographics and voter attitudes. The language the parties use to describe their priorities reflects this divergence; just as the Democratic and Republican Parties no longer look very similar, neither is the language that party elites use. Yet there little evidence tying this type of appeal to an increase in affective polarization.

5.3 Unique Measurement Strategies

Besides testing a theory of the cause of affective polarization, I have sought in this dissertation to improve on the measures typically used in polarization research. Most of this research, at least in the United States, leans heavily on measures of simple attitudes. This research can be critiqued for producing only small effects on transient sentiments, without any real-world consequences on respondent behavior. This critique can easily be aimed at researchers examining partisan attitudes toward members of the opposite party, which are most often measured using feeling thermometer or Likert scales. A critic of this approach might ask what is the tangible impact of moving from rating the opposite party at a 50 on the feeling thermometer to a 20 on that same 100-point scale. I have sought to satisfy these critics by relying on a combination of attitudinal and behavioral measures in my dissertation.

Though I lean heavily on surveys and survey experiments to answer key questions in this dissertation, I also utilized other creative measurement strategies aimed at identifying the root causes of affective polarization. The trust games I used in Chapter 4 serve as a potential replacement of traditional, attitudinal-based measures of affective polarization like the feeling thermometer. These trust games obscure the purpose of the exercise, reducing

the likelihood that response patterns will exhibit social desirability bias or similar types of measurement error. Further, the trust games allow us to get a read on actual behavior.

Though I am not the first to use these trust games to study affective polarization, [1] trust games have not previously been used to study the cause of affective polarization in an experimental setting. I showed that participants' behavior while engaging in these games is malleable, and can be influenced by stimuli. Though my stimuli were limited to campaign ads, alternative stimuli such as clips of news videos, articles, or social media feeds could also be used. I hope that future research builds on this work, and tests how affective polarization can be minimized or exacerbated by certain stimuli.

A second creative approach to measurement in this dissertation is the use of text analysis. Text analysis allows a large body of text to be measured by consistent standards. Though text analysis requires some subjective decision-making by humans in the creation of the dictionary and the key-word-in-context analysis, it allows for a text corpus to be analyzed objectively.

In this dissertation, I used text analysis to examine shifting trends in the language used in party platforms. A similar approach could be used to study other kinds of text; the language used in candidate ads, speeches, or websites are all potential alternatives. Future work should determine whether the changes in political communication that I found in party platforms replicate when looking at other, even more public-facing communication.

5.4 Implications and Future Research

In this dissertation, I seek to understand the roots of the extreme partisan animosity on display in the United States today. To do so, I explored one potential driver of affective polarization; I ask whether political appeals to identity groups which are increasingly aligned with either party heighten partisan hostility and motivate voters. I set out to an-

[1] Iyengar et al. (2012), for example, use trust games to demonstrate mistrust between members of opposite parties is larger than mistrust between members of different racial groups

swer this question because its implications are important for both political practitioners and observers of American democracy. To practitioners, the answer could provide a mechanism for increasing voter turnout; to observers, the answer may be more normatively troubling. Yet the answer to this question is remains ambiguous.

This question is worth investigating because candidates, campaigns, party committees, and interest groups spend billions dollars each election cycle to ensure their voters turn out to support their preferred candidate. Over $14 billion was spent at the federal level during the 2020 cycle (ope, 2020), more than twice what was spent in 2016. With elections drawing increasingly large sums of money, political practitioners are constantly looking to optimize this spending. In this dissertation, I tested one method practitioners may be able to use to increase voter turnout and interest in an election: strategic appeals to group identities.

Yet group-based appeals may be a double-edged sword. Appeals to group identities may be useful tools for enhancing voter turnout, and certain types of group-based appeals may serve as tools to empower individuals and ensure their concerns are addressed. But the continued use of this type of appeal may have normatively troubling consequence. I hypothesized that appeals to aligned identity groups might also increase affective polarization, leading to lower levels of trust between members of opposite parties, less willingness to compromise, and even, potentially, political violence.

Whether or not appeals to group identities do all this remains an open question. There is clear evidence that the parties are increasingly sorted by identity groups; the demographic composition of the Democratic Party of today is vastly different from the Democratic Party of 60 years ago, while the demographics of the Republican Party have remained largely constant over time. Further, there is strong evidence that appeals to these identity groups have increased over time. Yet the causal evidence tying these appeals to increased partisan hostility is lacking. Despite initially promising experimental results, as a whole, the experiments which explicitly test the causal link between appeals to identity groups and affective polarization have decidedly mixed results.

My work examining this causal effect of appeals to group identity raises four key follow

up questions which future work should address. First, the contradictory findings from the experiments in Chapter 4 suggest the experiment should be clarified and replicated. My dissertation provides some evidence that appeals to group identity are, at least partially, responsible for the rise in inter-party hostility that defines American politics in the 21st century, but more work should be done before this finding can be treated as certain.

Second, future work should address the relationship between group-based appeals, racial resentment, and affective polarization. Under what circumstances do appeals to group identity increase racial resentment? Among what type of people does this happen? Is this the underlying mechanism behind the rise of affective polarization?

Third, while my research is focused on group-based appeals' impact on affective polarization, more work should be done examining how this type of language can also empowering individuals, and make them feel included. In this dissertation, my focus has been on how group-based appeals can harm democratic norms, but provides some evidence that it can be a force for good as well. Specifically, appeals to group identities may empower groups who have historically been disenfranchised or marginalized in the American political system. By centering marginalized groups in American political discourse, politicians may increase individuals' efficacy, belief in the political system, and motivation to participate in politics. By doing so, they demonstrate the concerns of marginalized groups are a priority, and can improve outcomes for these people.

Finally, more work should be done disentangling the differences in the way individuals respond to issue-based appeals compared to appeals to group identities. In Chapter 2, I show that issue-based appeals are an alternative dimension along which American partisans have polarized in recent decades. But I do not investigate whether policy content has increased in prominence in party platforms during that time, nor do I explicitly test the effect of appeals based strictly on policy content on affective polarization. Future work should examine this more closely, to understand whether focusing on policy, rather than identity, can increase voter motivation while reducing partisan animosity.

There is also more work to be done examining how political actors use appeals to

group identities in their rhetoric, and how this has changed over time. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I studied changes in party platforms with a fairly small dictionary of what qualifies as an appeal to group-identities. Future research should expand the dictionary. In particular, the type of language Republicans are likely to use to refer to group identity may not be well-captured by the current dictionary. Previous work has shown Republicans are more likely to use coded language and dog whistles, particularly when making race-based appeals. Implicit appeals such as these are harder to detect with a dictionary-based text analysis approach.

Further, it would be appropriate to study other forms of political text. In particular, future research should examine the extent to which these changes in political language appear other, more visible, modes of communicating with the electorate. Specifically, I would expect these changes in party convention speeches, the Congressional record, and political ads. The barriers to getting the text of political ads going back 50 years were prohibitively high for this project, but I expect changes in the language used in these ads would be particularly interesting. Expanding the scope to include images used in political ads, as well as text, would also be worthwhile.

Most broadly, I hope that future researchers continue to explore the causes of affective polarization in the United States. Existing research has identified a key underlying driver: social sorting (Mason, 2018). Yet the causal link between the increasing difference between the parties remains unclear, as does the mechanism by which this difference is made apparent to partisans. For example, future work could prime respondents with information about the composition of the parties to measure the impact on inter-party hostility. Other potential hypotheses should be explored as well. How does the increasingly lengthening campaign cycle contribute to affective polarization? And how to individual-level behaviors like media diet and social media use impact affective polarization?

Research on these questions should continue because there is no end in sight to the increasingly hostile environment in the United States. Despite President Biden's appeals to unite the country, there is little reason to believe that he will be able to do so. Many presidents in recent decades have promised to bring Americans together – George W. Bush

promised to be "a uniter not a divider" (Lowry, 2000) and Barack Obama memorably declared in his 2008 victory address that we "have never been a collection of red states and blue states; we are, and always will be, the United States of America" (Obama, 2008). Even events like the eruption of a world-wide pandemic or an insurrection in the U.S. Captiol – events which, in years past, may have inspired a rally-round-the-flag effect – have not seemed to had any effect on partisan animosity. Thus, research on this topic should continue because only when we have identified the cause can we begin to find alternatives, and work to lower the temperature in American politics.

Bibliography

(2016). The american presidency project, national political party platforms.

(2016). Anes data center. American National Election Studies (ANES).

(2020, October). Center for responsive politics.

Abrajano, M. (2010). *Campaigning to the new American electorate: Advertising to Latino voters*. Stanford University Press.

Abramowitz, A. I. and K. L. Saunders (2008). Is polarization a myth? *The Journal of Politics 70*(2), 542–555.

Achen, C. H. and L. M. Bartels (2017). *Democracy for realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*, Volume 4. Princeton University Press.

Ahler, D. J. and G. Sood (2018). The parties in our heads: Misperceptions about party composition and their consequences. *The Journal of Politics*.

Andris, C., D. Lee, M. J. Hamilton, M. Martino, C. E. Gunning, and J. A. Selden (2015). The rise of partisanship and super-cooperators in the us house of representatives. *PloS one 10*(4), e0123507.

Aronow, P. M., J. Kalla, L. Orr, and J. Ternovski (2020). Evidence of rising rates of inattentiveness on lucid in 2020.

Axelrod, D. (2017). *Episode 135 - Senator John McCain*. The Axe Files.

Baker, P. (2019). Trump assails elijah cummings, calling his congressional district a rat-infested 'mess'. *The New York Times*.

Barreto, M. (2010). *Ethnic cues: The role of shared ethnicity in Latino political participation*. University of Michigan Press.

Barreto, M. A. (2007). Isí se puede! latino candidates and the mobilization of latino voters. *American Political Science Review*, 425–441.

Bartels, L. M. (2000). Partisanship and voting behavior, 1952-1996. *American Journal of Political Science*, 35–50.

Berelson, B., P. Lazarsfeld, and W. McPhee (1954). *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. University of Chicago Press Chicago, IL.

Binder, S. A. (1999). The dynamics of legislative gridlock, 1947–96. *American Political Science Review 93*(3), 519–533.

Bishop, B. (2009). *The big sort: Why the clustering of like-minded America is tearing us apart*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Blow, C. M. (2016). Stop playing the 'race card' card. *The New York Times*.

Bobo, L. and V. L. Hutchings (1996). Perceptions of racial group competition: Extending blumer's theory of group position to a multiracial social context. *American Sociological Review*, 951–972.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Brader, T. (2006). *Campaigning for hearts and minds: How emotional appeals in political ads work*. University of Chicago Press.

Brandt, M., G. Wetherell, and J. Crawford (2016). Moralization and intolerance of ideological outgroups. *The Social Psychology of Morality*, 239.

Broockman, D. E. and D. M. Butler (2017). The causal effects of elite position-taking on voter attitudes: Field experiments with elite communication. *American Journal of Political Science 61*(1), 208–221.

Brown, J. R. and R. D. Enos (2021). The measurement of partisan sorting for 180 million voters. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1–11.

Campbell, A., P. E. Converse, W. E. Miller, and D. E. Stokes (1960). *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.

Carlin, R. E. and G. J. Love (2013). The politics of interpersonal trust and reciprocity: An experimental approach. *Political Behavior 35*(1), 43–63.

Carmines, E. G. and M. Fowler (2017). The temptation of executive authority: How increased polarization and the decline in legislative capacity have contributed to the expansion of presidential power. *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies 24*(2), 369–398.

Converse, P. E. (1964). The nature of belief systems in mass publics. *Ideology and Discontent*, 206–61.

Cox, D. A. (2021, February). After the ballots are counted: Conspiracies, political violence, and american exceptionalism. *Survey Center on American Life*.

Craig, M. A. and J. A. Richeson (2014). More diverse yet less yolerant? how the increasingly diverse racial landscape affects white americans' racial attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 40*(6), 750–761.

Cramer, K. J. (2016). *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press.

Daniel, M. (2010). *Scandal & Civility: Journalism and the Nirth of American Democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Davis, N. T. and J. L. Dunaway (2016). Party polarization, media choice, and mass partisan-ideological sorting. *Public Opinion Quarterly 80*(S1), 272–297.

Dawson, M. C. (1995). *Behind the mule: Race and class in African-American politics*. Princeton University Press.

Devos, T. and M. R. Banaji (2005). American= white? *Journal of personality and social psychology 88*(3), 447.

Dietrich, B. J. (Forthcoming). Social polarization in the us house of representatives. *Political Analysis*.

Doherty, Carroll; Kiley, J. A. N. (2019a, oct). Partisan antipathy: More intense, more personal. *Pew Research Center*.

Doherty, Caroll; Kieley, J. J. B. (2016a). Partisanship and political animosity in 2016.

Doherty, Carroll; Kiley, J. J. B. (2016b). Partisanship and political animosity in 2016. *Pew Research Center*.

Doherty, Carroll; Kiley, J. T. A. J. B. (2019b, June). Public highly critical of state of political discourse in the u.s. *Pew Research Center*.

Druckman, J. N., E. Peterson, and R. Slothuus (2013). How elite partisan polarization affects public opinion formation. *American Political Science Review 107*(1), 57–79.

Fiorina, M. P., S. J. Abrams, and J. C. Pope (2005). *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. Pearson Longman New York.

Gabel, M. and K. Scheve (2007). Estimating the effect of elite communications on public opinion using instrumental variables. *American Journal of Political Science 51*(4), 1013–1028.

Gilens, M. (1999). *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Anti-Poverty Policy*. University of Chicago Press.

Giles, M. W. and K. Hertz (1994). Racial threat and partisan identification. *American Political Science Review 88*(2), 317–326.

Goggin, S. N., J. A. Henderson, and A. G. Theodoridis (2018). What goes with red and blue? mapping partisan and ideological associations in the minds of voters. *Political Behavior*, 1–29.

Good, C. (2010, sep). Signs of the times: Slogans and images from the tea party rally. *The Atlantic*.

Green, D. P., B. Palmquist, and E. Schickler (2002). *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. Yale University Press.

Grossmann, M. and D. A. Hopkins (2016). *Asymmetric politics: Ideological Republicans and group interest Democrats*. Oxford University Press.

Hare, C. and K. T. Poole (2014). The polarization of contemporary american politics. *Polity 46*(3), 411–429.

Hetherington, M. J. (2001). Resurgent mass partisanship: The role of elite polarization. *American Political Science Review 95*(3), 619–631.

Hill, S. J. and C. Tausanovitch (2015). A disconnect in representation? comparison of trends in congressional and public polarization. *The Journal of Politics 77*(4), 1058–1075.

Hill, S. J. and C. Tausanovitch (2018). Southern realignment, party sorting, and the polarization of american primary electorates, 1958-2012. *Public Choice 176*, 107–132.

Huddy, L., L. Mason, and L. Aarøe (2015). Expressive partisanship: Campaign involvement, political emotion, and partisan identity. *American Political Science Review 109*(01), 1–17.

Hulse, C. (2009). House rebukes wilson for shouting 'you lie'. *The New York Times*.

Hutchings, V. L. and A. E. Jardina (2009). Experiments on racial priming in political campaigns. *Annual Review of Political Science 12*, 397–402.

Iyengar, S. and D. R. Kinder (1987). *News that Matters: Agenda-Setting and Priming in a Television Age*. University of Chicago Press Chicago, IL.

Iyengar, S., G. Sood, and Y. Lelkes (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly 76*(3), 405–431.

Iyengar, S. and S. J. Westwood (2015). Fear and loathing across party lines: New evidence on group polarization. *American Journal of Political Science 59*(3), 690–707.

Jardina, A. (2019). *White Identity Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Jardina, A. E. (2014). Demise of dominance: Group threat and the new relevance of white identity for american politics.

Junn, J. and N. Masuoka (2008). Asian american identity: Shared racial status and political context. *Perspectives on Politics 6*(4), 729–740.

Kahan, D. M., E. Peters, E. C. Dawson, and P. Slovic (2017). Motivated numeracy and enlightened self-government. *Behavioural Public Policy 1*(1), 54–86.

Kalmoe, N. P. and K. Gross (2016). Cueing patriotism, prejudice, and partisanship in the age of obama: Experimental tests of us flag imagery effects in presidential elections. *Political Psychology 37*(6), 883–899.

Khalid, A. (2016a). Is donald trump playing the 'man card'? *NPR*.

Khalid, A. (2016b, sep). To some democrats, clinton's 'deplorables' comment is insensitive but 'honest'. *NPR*.

Kinder, D. R. and N. P. Kalmoe (2017). *Neither Liberal Nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public*. University of Chicago Press.

Kinder, D. R. and L. M. Sanders (1996). *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*. University of Chicago Press.

Klar, S. and Y. Krupnikov (2016). *Independent politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Klar, S., Y. Krupnikov, and J. B. Ryan (2018). Affective polarization or partisan disdain? untangling a dislike for the opposing party from a dislike of partisanship. *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

Lasala Blanco, M. N., R. Y. Shapiro, and J. Wilke (2020). The nature of partisan conflict in public opinion: Asymmetric or symmetric? *American Politics Research 49*(1), 46–58.

Lau, R. R., D. J. Andersen, T. M. Ditonto, M. S. Kleinberg, and D. P. Redlawsk (2017). Effect of media environment diversity and advertising tone on information search, selective exposure, and affective polarization. *Political Behavior 39*(1), 231–255.

Layman, G. C. and E. G. Carmines (1997). Cultural conflict in american politics: Religious traditionalism, postmaterialism, and us political behavior. *The Journal of Politics 59*(3), 751–777.

Lelkes, Y., G. Sood, and S. Iyengar (2015). The hostile audience: The effect of access to broadband internet on partisan affect. *American Journal of Political Science*.

Lelkes, Y. and S. J. Westwood (2017). The limits of partisan prejudice. *The Journal of Politics 79*(2), 000–000.

Levendusky, M. (2009). *The partisan sort: How liberals became Democrats and conservatives became Republicans*. University of Chicago Press.

Levendusky, M. (2013a). Partisan media exposure and attitudes toward the opposition. *Political Communication 30*(4), 565–581.

Levendusky, M. (2013b). Why do partisan media polarize viewers? *American Journal of Political Science 57*(3), 611–623.

Levendusky, M. (2021). Has donald trump destroyed the unifying effects of american identity?*. *Working Paper*.

Levendusky, M. and N. Malhotra (2016). Does media coverage of partisan polarization affect political attitudes? *Political Communication 33*(2), 283–301.

Levendusky, M. S. (2018). Americans, not partisans: Can priming american national identity reduce affective polarization? *The Journal of Politics 80*(1), 59–70.

Lewis, Jeffrey B., K. P. H. R. A. B. A. R. L. S. (2020). Voteview: Congressional roll-call votes database. Technical report.

Lowry, R. (2000, October). "i'm a uniter, not a divider". *The Washington Post*.

Luker, K. (1984). *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, Volume 759. Univ of California Press.

Margolis, M. F. (2018). How politics affects religion: Partisanship, socialization, and religiosity in america. *The Journal of Politics 80*(1), 30–43.

Martin, G. J. and A. Yurukoglu (2017, September). Bias in cable news: Persuasion and polarization. *American Economic Review 107*(9), 2565–99.

Mason, L. (2015). I disrespectfully agree: The differential effects of partisan sorting on social and issue polarization. *American Journal of Political Science 59*(1), 128–145.

Mason, L. (2018). *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity*. University of Chicago Press.

Mason, L. and J. Wronski (2018). One tribe to bind them all: How our social group attachments strengthen partisanship. *Political Psychology 39*(S1), 257–277.

McCarty, N. (2007). The policy effects of political polarization. In P. Pierson and T. Skocpol (Eds.), *The Transformation of American Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism*, pp. 223–55. Princeton University Press.

McIlwain, C. and S. M. Caliendo (2011). *Race appeal: How candidates invoke race in US political campaigns*. Temple University Press.

Mendelberg, T. (2001). *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality*. Princeton University Press.

Mummolo, J. and C. Nall (2017). Why partisans do not sort: The constraints on political segregation. *The Journal of Politics 79*(1), 45–59.

Nicholson, S. P. (2012). Polarizing cues. *American Journal of Political Science 56*(1), 52–66.

Obama, B. (2008, November). Transcript of barack obama's victory speech. *NPR*.

Olson, L. R. and J. C. Green (2006). The religion gap. *PS: Political Science and Politics 39*(3), 455–459.

Olson, L. R. and A. L. Warber (2008). Belonging, behaving, and believing: Assessing the role of religion on presidential approval. *Political research quarterly 61*(2), 192–204.

Poole, K. T. and H. Rosenthal (1984). The polarization of american politics. *The Journal of Politics 46*(4), 1061–1079.

Prior, M. (2013). Media and political polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science 16*, 101–127.

Robison, J. and K. J. Mullinix (2016). Elite polarization and public opinion: How polarization is communicated and its effects. *Political Communication 33*(2), 261–282.

Roccas, S. and M. B. Brewer (2002). Social identity complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review 6*(2), 88–106.

Schickler, E. (2016). *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932–1965*. Princeton University Press.

Scott, E. (2019). Trump's race-baiting base strategy is now evident — and it's a big gamble. *The Washington Post*.

Senior, J. (2013). In conversation: Antonin scalia. *New York Magazine*.

Sprunt, B. (2020). 'i could not allow that to stand': Ocasio-cortez rebukes republican for vulgar insult. *NPR*.

Stevenson, P. W. (2017, May). A texas republican is accused of threatening to 'put a bullet on one of my colleagues' heads'. *The Washington Post*.

Stroud, N. J. (2011). *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

Tate, K. (1994). *From protest to politics: The new black voters in American elections*. Harvard University Press.

Tesler, M. (2012). The spillover of racialization into health care: How president obama polarized public opinion by racial attitudes and race. *American Journal of Political Science 56*(3), 690–704.

Theodoridis, A. G. (2017). Me, myself, and (i),(d), or (r)? partisanship and political cognition through the lens of implicit identity. *The Journal of Politics 79*(4), 1253–1267.

Valentino, N. A., V. L. Hutchings, and I. K. White (2002). Cues that matter: How political ads prime racial attitudes during campaigns. *American Political Science Review 96*(1), 75–90.

Valentino, N. A. and D. O. Sears (2005). Old times there are not forgotten: Race and partisan realignment in the contemporary south. *American Journal of Political Science 49*(3), 672–688.

Vespa, Jonathan; Medina, L. A. D. M. (2018, mar). Demographic turning points for the united states: Population projections for 2020 to 2060. *The US Census Bureau*.

Ward, J. (2019). *Camelot's End: Kennedy Vs. Carter and the Fight that Broke the Democratic Party*. Twelve.

Winter, N. J. (2006). Beyond welfare: Framing and the racialization of white opinion on social security. *American Journal of Political Science 50*(2), 400–420.

Wood, G. S. (2009). *Empire of liberty: a history of the early Republic, 1789-1815*. Oxford University Press.

Yglesias, M. (2019). Trump's racist tirades against "the squad," explained. *Vox.com*.

Zaller, J. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge university press.