Political Polarization in America
The Debate over Elite, Mass, and Affective Polarization

J. Cryer

Stanford University
PS120B (2016)

October 27, 2016
Mid-Term Exam Study Aids

1 Midterm

Your mid-term is scheduled to take place on November 7, 2016. You will be responsible for the content taught in the course up until that date. For your assistance, a study guide will be uploaded to my personal site.

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https://people.stanford.edu/jcryer/mid-term-study-aids
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Office Hours

Visit https://jcryer.youcanbook.me/ and select your time choice.
Mid-Quarter TA Review

Please take 5-10 minutes to fill out an online evaluation in class. You will answer questions about my availability, instruction style, and how much you have learned. Your feedback is important!
Mid-Quarter Review & Feedback

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Section 1 Survey - Thursday, 4:30PM

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VPTL Evaluations
Overview

1. The Influence and Significance of Polarization
2. Analyzing Political Polarization among the Mass Public
3. Fiorina and Abrams [2010]: Polarization in Mass Public
4. Abramowitz [2010]: The 2008 Election, Polarization Continues
5. Iyengar and Westwood [2015]: Fear and Loathing across Party Lines
6. Next Week’s Agenda
7. References
**Explaining Factors in Persuasion**

“The major determinants of attitude change are source, message, and receiver characteristics” [Iyengar and McGrady, 2007, 260].

**Persuasion:** An attitude change; can involve creating an opinion, or changing strength of opinion.

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**Conclusions and Assumptions.**

1. **Two Factor Theory of Persuasion:** Persuasion is dependent on being first exposed to information, and second on accepting that information.

2. **Message-Related Factors:** Source, exposure, content, and issue ownership all influence whether a message is properly delivered.

3. **Receiver-Related Factors:** Partisan loyalties, background, interest in information, and polarization all influence how messages are interpreted.
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“The importance of the party filter has increased dramatically in the last two decades as the two major parties have moved apart on the issues, leaving very few elected officials in the political center” [Iyengar and McGrady, 2007].

NEW MEDIA & THE POWER OF CHOICE.

1. Activation: Principal effect of campaigns now is to activate partisans.
2. Reinforce: Political advertisements, campaigns, and news work to reinforce beliefs, rather than persuade voters to change positions.

Polarization among elites matters if (1) candidates, information, and news media are evaluated through a partisan lens; or (2) elite polarization spreads to the mass public.
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Polarized America / voteview.com
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$r = 0.9$

Polarized America / voteview.com
Stop & Think!: Assessing Elite Polarization

Stop and think about any one of the following questions (3 minutes)

1. Describe what these graphs are displaying in your own words.
2. What DV and IV can/does this figures use? (Hint: X & Y axes)
3. Do you find these arguments persuasive or convincing?
4. What do you think is occurring?
5. Do you believe that elites are polarized?

When answering your question try to use a proper causal inference framework: (1) Hypothesis, (2) Dependent Variable, (3) Independent Variable.

Let’s share our answers in a group!
It is easy to document the rise in polarization among elites in Congress. However, the question remains about whether this polarization has seeped into the mass public. To what degree is the public polarized?

**Theories of Polarization.**

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**Hypothesis:** A highly polarized mass public exists if the number moderates ↓ and the number of party members ↑.

**Central Claim:** There is no indication in the data that the moderates are waning and the extremes waxing, thus there is no polarization.

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## Conclusions and Assumptions.

1. **Activists Sort:** Activists in both parties are polarized, but the mass electorate is not polarized on any dimension [Layman et al., 2006].

2. **Engaged Sort:** No clear pattern of polarization within any one population, but evidence for polarization among the politically active. [Evans, 2003].

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Stop & Think!: Assessing the Party Sorting Theory

Stop and think about any one of the following questions (3 minutes)

1. Describe the Party Sorting hypothesis in your own words.
2. What DV and IV can/does this theory use?
3. Do you find these arguments persuasive or convincing?
4. Think about what you see among the public and your friends/family—do you think is party sorting is occurring?

When answering your question try to use a proper causal inference framework: (1) Hypothesis, (2) Dependent Variable, (3) Independent Variable.

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Theory of Mass Polarization & the Mass Public

A Polarized Public

**Hypothesis:** A highly polarized mass public exists if the differences in policy views between voters in both parties increases.

**Central Claim:** No disconnect between the elite polarization and the public; public opinion differences exist between voters in both parties.

Conclusions and Assumptions.

1. **Educated Polarized:** More informed voters more polarized along ideological lines [Abramowitz, 2010].

2. **Reinforcement:** Individual Democrats and Republicans becoming more liberal and conservative [Levendusky, 2009].

3. **Public Polarized:** Ideological differences between parties clearly evident among voters [Mann and Ornstein, 2012, Mann, 2014].
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*When answering your question try to use a proper causal inference framework: (1) Hypothesis, (2) Dependent Variable, (3) Independent Variable.*

Let’s share our answers in a group!
An Emotional, Affective Public

Hypothesis: A highly polarized mass public exists if voters harbor negative sentiment, feelings or emotions towards the out-party or out-group.

Central Claim: Voters display high levels of animus and bias, as well as high levels of social distance, and this is a form of polarization.

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1. Bias: Partisans prefer own parties arguments [Druckman et al., 2013].
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5. Image: Stereotyping of out-party increased [Iyengar et al., 2012].
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2. What DV and IV can/does this theory use?
3. What data sources could be used to test this theory?
4. Do you find these arguments persuasive or convincing?
5. Think about what you see among the public and your friends/family—do you think is affective polarization is occurring?

When answering your question try to use a proper causal inference framework: (1) Hypothesis, (2) Dependent Variable, (3) Independent Variable.

Let’s share our answers in a group!
Political Polarization in the American Public

**Background:** Political scientists concerned with effects of elite polarization.

**Puzzle:** How does elite polarization influence the polarization of voters?

**Hypothesis:** Shifts in distribution of party affiliation, imply ↑ mass polarization.

**Central Claim:** Stable partisanship shows elite polarization ≠ mass polarization.

Conclusions and Assumptions.

1. **Views:** Worldviews do not say much about political polarization.
2. **Ideology Stable:** Ideological self-descriptions largely same over 30 years.
3. **Moderates:** More people place themselves near center of scales.
4. **Party Sorting:** No overall change, but subpopulations can sort out.
5. **Elites:** Blame public officials, candidates, and active citizens.
Political Polarization in the American Public

**Background:** Political scientists concerned with effects of elite polarization.

**Puzzle:** How does elite polarization influence the polarization of voters?

**Hypothesis:** Shifts in distribution of party affiliation, imply ↑ mass polarization.

**Central Claim:** Stable partisanship shows elite polarization \( \neq \) mass polarization.

**Conclusions and Assumptions.**

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Fiorina and Abrams [2010]: Political Polarization in the American Public

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Stop & Think!: Analyzing Fiorina and Abrams [2008]

Stop and think about any one of the following questions (3 minutes)

1. How would you describe the central finding and argument of this paper?
2. What DV and IV can/does Fiorina and Abrams [2008] use?
3. Do you find this argument persuasive or convincing?
4. Do you find that most of your contacts are moderate? Partisan?
5. What similarities do you see between this paper and the Party Sorting hypothesis?

When answering your question try to use a proper causal inference framework: (1) Hypothesis, (2) Dependent Variable, (3) Independent Variable.

Let’s share our answers in a group!
The 2008 Election: Polarization Continues

**Background:** Political scientists concerned with effects of elite polarization.

**Puzzle:** How does elite polarization influence the polarization of voters?

**Hypothesis:** ↑ polarized opinions in parties, implies ↑ mass polarization.

**Central Claim:** Ideological polarization among most politically engaged/informed.

**Conclusions and Assumptions.**

1. **PID Salient:** PID affects presidential approval and presidential vote.
2. **Matching:** Voter opinion matches elite leaders behavior.
3. **Opinions Linked:** “[O]pinions on climate change were strongly related to opinions on health care” [Abramowitz, 2010, 5].
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Stop & Think!: Critiquing Abramowitz [2010]

Stop and think about any one of the following questions (3 minutes)

1. How would you describe the central finding and argument of this paper?
2. What DV and IV can/does Abramowitz [2010] use?
3. Do you find this argument persuasive or convincing?
4. Do you find that most of your contacts are moderate? Partisan?
5. What similarities do you see between this paper and the Mass Polarization hypothesis?

When answering your question try to use a proper causal inference framework: (1) Hypothesis, (2) Dependent Variable, (3) Independent Variable.

Let’s share our answers in a group!
Iyengar and Westwood [2015]: Loathing across Party Lines

**New Evidence on Group Polarization**

**Background:** Political scientists concerned with effects of elite polarization.

**Puzzle:** How does elite polarization influence the polarization of voters?

**Hypothesis:** ↑ social identity and partisan affect, implies ↑ mass polarization.

**Central Claim:** Hostile feelings for out-party automatic and as powerful as racism.

**Conclusions and Assumptions.**

1. **Affective Polarization:** View out-party negatively, in-party positively.
2. **Party Cues:** In hiring task, party cue strongest impact on selection.
3. **Bias:** IAT scores show implicit bias between partisans—prefer in-party.
4. **Give Less:** In trust/dictator games, partisans gave less to out-party.
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Stop & Think!: Analyzing Iyengar and Westwood [2015]

Stop and think about any one of the following questions (3 minutes)

1. How would you describe the central finding and argument of this paper?
2. What DV and IV can/does Iyengar and Westwood [2015] use?
3. Do you find this argument persuasive or convincing?
4. Do you find that most of your contacts are moderate? Partisan?
5. What role do advertisements, news, and campaign messages, play in increasing affective polarization?

When answering your question try to use a proper causal inference framework: (1) Hypothesis, (2) Dependent Variable, (3) Independent Variable.

Let’s share our answers in a group!
Next Week’s Agenda

Framing Questions (Keep in Mind While Reading)

How do candidates determine their campaign strategies? Why do candidates use the messages that they do? What factors should come into consideration? Why?

1. Mid-Term Preparation and Review
2. Research Writing and Paper Organization.
3. Proposal Due-Date Countdown: 20 days
4. Understanding Primaries and Strategies.
5. Analyzing Candidate Positioning & Location.
References


