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Abstract

Scholars view elite polarization with trepidation. But polarization may clarify voters' choices and generate stronger party attachments. Such attachments may be desirable in developing democracies, where partisanship institutionalizes party systems and stabilizes elections. Yet the causal link between elite polarization and voter partisanship remains unclear and untested. I look to theories of partisanship to derive implications about the relationships among elite polarization, voters' perceptions of polarization, and voter partisanship. I test those implications using cross-national and longitudinal survey data. My results confirm the causal effect of elite polarization on voter partisanship. Polarization correlates with individual partisanship across a broad range of countries. Voters in polarized systems perceive their parties to be more polarized. Perceiving elite polarization makes voters more likely to be partisan. That relationship appears to be causal: using a long-term panel survey from the US, I find that voters become more partisan as they perceive elite polarization increasing.[1]

Keywords: Political parties, elite polarization, mass partisanship, cross-national surveys.

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Elite polarization poses serious problems for democracy. Studies link the polarization of the Democratic and Republican parties in the US to legislative gridlock, elite incivility, income inequality, and voter disengagement.[2] Across a broader range of countries, polarization also contributes to democratic breakdown, corruption, and economic decline (e.g., Brown et al. 2011, Frye 2002, Valenzuela 1978).

But elite polarization may also have some desirable effects. Party polarization may strengthen party brands and clarify voters' choices (Lupu 2011). Presented with a clearer set of choices among parties, voters may also form stronger party attachments.[3] In developing democracies – where democratic competition and party attachments are nascent – clearer choices and stronger party attachments may bolster electoral stability. Voter partisanship institutionalizes party systems, stabilizes elections, and consolidates new democracies (e.g., Mainwaring and Scully 1995, Rose and Mishler 1998). If party polarization indeed strengthens partisan attachments, then some degree of polarization may be welcome in new and developing democracy. Elite polarization may thus bring desirable outcomes that countervail its adverse effects.

Unfortunately, we still know little about the relationship between elite polarization and voter partisanship. Research on the US observes that the period of party polarization coincides with a resurgence of voter partisanship (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008, Bartels 2000, Brewer 2005, Hetherington 2001, Levendusky 2009). But these studies focus on the single US case, making it difficult to draw general conclusions. Even the handful of comparative studies on this topic focus on a very small sample of Western European countries (Berglund et al. 2006, Holmberg 1994, Schmitt 2009, Schmitt and Holmberg 1995). We still know little about the generality of the association between elite polarization and voter partisanship.

At the individual level, the causal link between elite polarization and voter partisanship also remains both unclear and untested. Both US and comparative studies suggest a macro-level relationship: elite polarization intensifies partisan conflict and makes parties more salient to voters, increasing partisanship. As a result, neither set of studies examines how voters' perceptions of party polarization affect their attachments to parties.

This inattention to voters' perceptions of polarization is particularly surprising given how we think voters form party attachments. I argue that the social-identity conception of partisanship and the competing rationalistic view both imply that greater differentiation between parties should make voters more partisan. From a social-identity perspective, party polarization allows individuals to better distinguish the parties and thus to feel more affinity with their party over another. From a rationalistic perspective, polarization implies that the utility-differential between parties increases. The implication is that party polarization should make it more likely for individuals to become partisan.

I test this hypothesis using both cross-national and longitudinal survey data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and American National Election Studies (ANES). My results confirm the causal effect of party polarization on individual partisanship. Elite polarization at the country-level correlates with individual partisanship across a far broader range of countries than any previous study has yet considered. Moreover, elite polarization registers with citizens: voters in polarized systems actually perceive their parties to be more polarized. Finally, perceiving elite polarization makes voters more likely to be partisan. In the first place, voters who perceive elites as more polarized identify more strongly with a party. In addition, that relationship appears to be causal: using a long-term panel survey from the US, I find that voters in fact become more partisan as they

[2] For reviews of this research, see Fiorina and Abrams (2008), Hetherington (2009), and Layman et al. (2006).

[3] I use the terms partisanship, party attachments, and party identification interchangeably to refer to an individual's self-identification with a political party.

perceive elite polarization increasing.

IMPLICATIONS OF ELITE POLARIZATION FOR VOTER PARTISANSHIP

Parties position themselves in response to strategic incentives. Party positions respond to the incentives that electoral rules and other formal institutions generate (Cox 1990, Sartori 1976). They form around structural contexts like social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), levels of development (Sigelman and Yough 1978), or degrees of political uncertainty (Lupu and Riedl in press). Parties shift their positions in response to changes in public opinion (Ezrow et al. 2011), economic conditions or shocks (Ura and Ellis 2012), and shifting international constraints (Haupt 2010). And parties also adjust in response to shifts by their competitors (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009).

The positions parties adopt affect voters' attachments to them. Prominent theories of public opinion emphasize that elite behavior plays a major role in influencing mass attitudes like voter partisanship (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989, Zaller 1992). And yet, studies of partisanship pay little attention to the effect of party positions. Parties in some advanced democracies may be fairly stable in the short term (e.g., Baumer and Gold 1995), but they do shift over time (Green et al. 2005, Ch. 5), quite rapidly in some developing democracies (Lupu 2011). As party positions shift, the polarization of the party system as a whole may also change.

The polarization of the US parties since the 1970s has raised widespread scholarly concern (e.g. Hetherington 2009, Layman et al. 2006, McCarty et al. 2006). So too comparative scholars worry about elite polarization, which they link to democratic breakdowns in Germany's Weimar Republic, France's Fourth Republic, and Chile prior to 1973 (Sani and Sartori 1983, Sartori 1976, Valenzuela 1978). More recent comparative studies also relate polarization to corruption, bad economic performance, and smaller government (Brown et al. 2011, Frye 2002, Lindqvist and Östling 2010).

Still, elite polarization may also have desirable outcomes. In some contexts, polarization correlates with increased voter turnout and more consistent ideological voting (Dalton 2008, Lachat 2008, van der Eijk et al. 2005). We might also expect polarization to clarify the differences between parties. The further apart the political parties, the easier it may be for voters to distinguish among their electoral options. And if voters can more clearly distinguish parties, they may find it easier to form a party attachment (Lupu 2011). That may be desirable in developing democracies that suffer from high electoral volatility, where electoral politics is too unstable and opportunities abound for unknown outsiders to capture elected office. In such contexts, some electoral stability grounded in widespread partisan attachments may be a desirable result of elite polarization.

We nevertheless know little about the relationship between elite polarization and voter partisanship. Research in the US highlights the coinciding rise in party polarization and resurgent voter partisanship (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008, Bartels 2000, Brewer 2005, Hetherington 2001). But these studies primarily describe trends within a single case. They leave unexamined the causal connection between elite polarization and individual partisanship. A handful of comparative studies find a similar association between elite polarization and rates of partisanship in aggregate terms (Berglund et al. 2006, Holmberg 1994, Schmitt 2009, Schmitt and Holmberg 1995). But these studies rely on simple correlations from a very small sample of Western European countries. Do these correlations generalize beyond this limited sample? Do voters actually register elite polarization and change their perceptions of their parties? Most importantly, is there a causal chain between elite polarization, voters' perceptions of polarization, and voter partisanship? These are the unanswered questions this paper takes up.

Why might we expect elite polarization

to strengthen voter partisanship? Studies of the US and Western Europe emphasize the salience of party competition. Following Carmines and Stimson (1989), they expect voter partisanship to increase as parties become more and more salient in political discourse. When parties agree on policies, they become irrelevant to voters. But when they disagree, partisan conflict becomes more heated and parties seem more important. As Hetherington (2001) notes, "More partisan elite behavior caused by polarization should clarify party positions for the public, which in turn should influence the importance and salience of parties" (623). Similarly, Schmitt and Holmberg (1995) posit that, "Declining levels of ideological and issue conflict undercut the relevance of both parties and partisan ties" (110). In other words, elite polarization simply makes parties more relevant.

An alternative set of explanations for the effect of elite polarization on voter partisanship derive from theories about the origins of partisan attachments. Some of these theories suggest that partisanship is a social identity, an enduring psychological attachment with a party that is inherited like a religious affiliation and tends to persist over the life of an individual (Campbell et al. 1960, Green et al. 2005, Miller 1976 1991, Miller and Shanks 1996). If we think of partisanship as such a social identity, then increased polarization among political parties allows voters to better distinguish party categories from one another. Voters have some image, or prototype, in their minds when they think about a typical Democrat or typical Republican (Green et al. 2005), and they identify with one party if they think they resemble its prototype more than the other party's. In theories of social identity, this concept is known as *comparative fit* (Hogg et al. 2004, Turner 1999). All else equal, then the more different a voter perceives these party prototypes to be, the more likely she is to identify with a party (Lupu in press).

A revisionist perspective of voter partisanship offers a more rationalistic conceptualization. Voters evaluate parties over time to form a "running tally" and choose the party most likely to benefit them (Achen 1992, Fiorina 1981, Franklin and Jackson 1983, Jackson 1975, Jennings and Markus 1984, Page and Jones 1979). From this perspective, partisanship is not an identity but rather a product of voters maximizing their expected utilities. Party polarization still implies greater partisanship under this revisionist view. For voters to calculate their net utility from supporting a particular party, they must take into account their expected gains from supporting other parties. When parties are close together, the net benefit from supporting one over the other is fairly small. But as the difference between parties grows, that net benefit increases, all else equal. In other words, a voter stands to net much more from her party if she also stands to gain very little (or lose a lot) from other parties.

Both social-identity and rationalist conceptions of voter partisanship imply that greater distances between parties should make voters more partisan.[4] But voters must actually notice party polarization. If parties polarize but voters hardly take notice, then these theories of partisanship would not expect to see voters becoming more attached to parties. In that case, the issue-salience hypothesis would still predict increasing partisanship: parties are simply becoming more relevant to politics, even if voters fail to realize that parties are more polarized. But theories of partisanship predict greater attachments only if elite polarization registers with voters. Then, voters who come to perceive the parties as further apart will become partisan, all else equal.

The "all else equal" caveat is critical. In a dynamic sense, party polarization may mean that parties move further away from some voters and, perhaps, closer to others.

[4] This hypothesis may seem to fly in the face of a conventional wisdom in US politics that voters prefer bipartisanship (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Ramirez 2009; but see Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). However, it would not be inconsistent for voters to both prefer bipartisanship or consensus consciously and for such elite cooperation to weaken attachments through the more subconscious process of identity formation.

Polarization could turn a voter off from her party – if it looks too different or too extreme – or it could make her more attached to her party – if other parties look more different or worse by comparison, or if polarization brings her party closer to her values. In other words, a party shift can simultaneously affect both the overall polarization of the party system and its proximity to certain voters. My focus here is on examining the former effect, that is the effect of party polarization per se. If we wanted to generate predictions about the aggregate impact of elite polarization in any given place and time, we would need to know something about the distribution of voters.[5] Only then could we begin to predict whether aggregate rates of voter partisanship would increase, decline, or stay the same. But first we need to convince ourselves that party polarization per se matters for individual voter partisanship, independent of its potential effect on voters' proximity to the parties. And we need to better understand why this is the case.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Theories of partisanship imply that if voters perceive elite polarization, they are more likely to become partisan. The more polarized the party systems, the easier it will be for voters to distinguish parties from one another. This will make it more likely that voters either identify with a particular party over others or stand to gain relatively more from supporting their closest party.

I test this proposition in three stages. In the first stage, I ask whether elite polarization is associated with mass party attachments using a wider range of countries than previous analyses. I then examine whether elite polarization in fact registers with voters: do citizens in countries with more polarized elites perceive their party system to be more polarized? Finally, I test whether individual voters who perceive polarization in their country are more likely to be partisan. The causal relationship between perceived polarization and individual partisanship is difficult to identity with cross-sectional survey data. A voter who identifies with a party may see her party as being very different from other parties as a result of her attachment. I turn to a long-term panel survey from the US to see whether voters become more partisan as they perceive polarization increasing.

[5] We might also need to know which parties are contributing to polarization.

Data and Measures

To address these questions, I rely on two sets of survey data.[6] The first is cross-national, combining the three modules of the CSES.[7] This dataset comprises nationally representative surveys conducted shortly before or after national elections across a wide range of countries. I include only those surveys conducted in democratic settings (i.e., those with a Polity score above six for the year of the election). The surveys asked respondents both about their individual partisanship and about the ideological positions of the political parties in their country. This latter set of items reference a limited number of parties (six in the first CSES module and nine thereafter), so we might be concerned that they leave out important parties in very fragmented systems. I therefore exclude studies in which the parties referenced in the survey together received less than 80% of the vote in the relevant election.[8] I end up with a sample of 73 election studies across 33 countries over the period 1996-2011.[9]

[6] Descriptive statistics and information about survey methodology for these studies are available in a supplementary appendix.

[7] On the comparability challenges of the CSES, see Howell and Jusko (2009).

[8] Setting the threshold at 85% of the vote excludes an additional two surveys but does not substantively change my results.

[9] The countries included are Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK, Uruguay, and US. I also omit surveys conducted in Albania, Australia, and Belgium because the questions about either partisanship or party placement were not comparable to the rest of the sample.

A second set of survey data come from the repeated cross-sections of the ANES, which follows every national election in the US since 1948. The survey items I use are only available beginning in 1972, and missing in 2002, so my dataset consists of 17 survey-years between 1972 and 2008.

I am interested in measuring two key concepts: partisanship and polarization. Using CSES data, I measure voter partisanship using that project's standard item, "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?" and code the yes/no responses dichotomously. There are well-known debates about the appropriate way to tap party attachment in surveys, and existing cross-national options are not perfect (Johnston 2006). This item is one of few defensible options and one that is used widely in comparative analyses of partisanship (e.g., Dalton and Weldon 2007, Huber et al. 2005).

The ANES uses a slightly different item to capture partisanship (see Barnes et al. 1988). More directly aimed at identities, it asks "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" Respondents who call themselves Independent are then asked whether they are "closer to the Republican or Democratic party." For comparability with the CSES analysis, I code as partisan both respondents who identified outright and those who said they were close to one of the parties.[10] If the results using these slightly different measures are substantively similar then we can be more confident that they are not artifacts of question wording.

I measure polarization both at the country level and in terms of individual perceptions. I want to capture elite polarization in terms of party positions on the dimension of politics that is salient to voters. Across countries, the economic left-right dimension tends to be the most salient for most electorates (e.g., Huber and Inglehart 1995). But there are multiple ways to identify party positions along this dimension. I do so in three ways, relying on survey respondents, country experts, and party manifestos. CSES respondents were asked to place the major national parties in their country on a 0-10 left-right scale.[11] Averaging across these individual responses allows us to identify where respondents place that party on a left-right dimension. An alternative is to rely on more objective measures of party positions, such as those made by country experts or based on party manifestos. The CSES asks its coordinators to place their country's parties on the same 0-10 left-right scale.[12] I also measure party placement using the left-right positions identified by the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP). These placements are based on the number of times particular keywords appear in the preelection manifestos of political parties (see Budge et al. 2001).[13] To gain confidence in the robustness of my results, I repeat my analysis using these three different country-level measures of party positions.

These party positions allow me to gener-

[10] In US studies, these latter respondents are typically referred to as leaners, although they behave more like outright partisans than true independents (Petrocik 2009). Most analyses either include these respondents as identifiers or measure partisanship on an ordinal scale. My ANES results are substantively equivalent using an ordinal scale, but I report results with the dichotomous measure for comparability with the CSES.

[11] The specific wording was: "In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place [party name] on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?"

[12] The correlation between respondent- and expert-based party placement is 0.85. Another set of expert surveys conducted by scholars based in Chapel Hill offers similar measures of party placement (Hooghe et al. 2010). Those surveys were conducted in 1999, 2006, and 2010, but only in the subset of European Union countries. Their advantage is that they rely on the responses of multiple experts per country, making their measures more reliable. Matching each country-year in my CSES dataset to the temporally closest Chapel Hill survey, my results are substantively equivalent.

[13] The CMP measure is based on the promises parties make in their election manifestos, which few voters actually read (Adams et al. 2011, Fortunato and Stevenson in press). Conceptually, I am more interested in voters' perceptions of party polarization, which appear to respond to party behavior (Ansolabehere and Jones 2010, Woon and Pope 2008). But it seems likely that party manifestos reflect the positions parties take so I use the CMP-based measure to corroborate my other results.

ate a measure of party polarization. Following previous scholars, I measure polarization as the weighted sum of squared distances between each party's position on a left-right scale and the system's weighted average position (e.g., Dalton 2008, Ezrow 2007, Lachat 2008, Sigelman and Yough 1978):

$$P = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \omega_i (p_i - \bar{p})^2, \qquad (1)$$

where ω_i is the share of the vote received by party i, p_i is the position of party i on the left-right scale, and $\bar{p}$ is the weighted average position of the parties.[14] Party polarization is thus a function of the spread of the parties in the system, weighted by their size in terms of vote share.[15]

In the US, measuring elite polarization over time is straightforward. Here we can use the actual policy positions taken by the two parties in congressional voting records. Like previous scholars, I measure elite polarization in the US as the absolute distance between the average DW-NOMINATE scores for House Democrats and Republicans at each election (Hetherington 2001, McCarty et al. 2006). The DW-NOMINATE distance between the US parties has the advantage of measuring actual party behavior rather than voters' or experts' perceptions.

In addition to elite polarization, I also want to examine individual perceptions of polarization. With the CSES data, I rely on how individual respondents placed each party. I measure a respondents' perception of her country's polarization as the weighted average of left-right distances between all the parties that she places:

$$\sum_{j=1}^{m-1} \sum_{i=1}^{m} \frac{\omega_i + \omega_j}{m-1} |p_i - p_j|, \qquad (2)$$

where i and j are different parties, p_i and p_j are the positions the respondent assigned parties i and j, ω_i and ω_j are their vote shares, and m is the number of parties the respondent placed. I generate a similar distance-based measure of perceived polarization with the ANES data. Beginning in 1972, the ANES asked respondents to place the two US parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, on an ideological liberal-conservative scale. With only two parties, I measure polarization as simply the (unweighted) difference in their perceived positions.[16]

This distance-based measure of perceived polarization assumes a left-right ideological dimension. While this assumption seems reasonable, the ANES data allow me to relax it. Most ANES surveys also asked respondents whether they "think there are any important differences in what the Republicans and Democrats stand for." Although this item reduces perceived polarization to a dichotomous variable, it has the advantage of not imposing a left-right dimension. Some respondents may perceive little difference between the parties on the liberal-

[14] That is, $\bar{p} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \omega_i p_i$.

[15] Vote shares may not completely capture the prominence of each party, but an unweighted measure of polarization risks generating high values as an artifact of small, fringe parties. Rehm and Reilly (2010) propose a measure of party polarization that takes into account party homogeneity. Their intuition is that parties with clear positions are more polarized than parties with identical mean positions that are more heterogeneous. I agree with most research on US politics that conceptually this sorting phenomenon is not the same as polarization (e.g., Levendusky 2009). Moreover, while we can arguably measure party homogeneity at the country level (Rehm and Reilly use the ideological spread of a party's voting constituency), existing surveys that ask respondents to place each party do not typically measure her uncertainty about those placements.

[16] The placement question in the ANES offers respondents only seven categories, as compared to the 11 in the CSES. The question states: "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you [from 1996 on: Here is] a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place the [Democratic/Republican] Party on this scale?" Respondents who did not place themselves on the ideological scale were not asked to place the parties. Beginning in 1984, a follow-up question was included that asked respondents where they would place themselves ideologically "if you had to choose." This significantly reduced non-response and thereby increased the number of respondents asked to place the parties. Limiting my sample to surveys from 1984 on does not substantively change my results.

conservative scale, but may still see important differences between the parties on other dimensions. It is therefore useful to corroborate my results from the distance-based measure of perceived polarization with this agnostic one.[17]

To analyze these data, I specify multilevel models that account for the structure of the data by clustering on country-years for the CSES and years for the ANES. These models also control for various individual characteristics thought to affect an individual's propensity to develop a party attachment. We expect that individuals who place themselves close to a party on the left-right scale are more likely to be partisan. I measure an individual's proximity to a party as the left-right distance between her position and the position she assigns her nearest party. In many democracies, unions socialize voters into attachments with labor-based parties, so I include a dichotomous measure of union membership. Some authors suggest that political information allows individuals to better distill the positions of parties; in this case, more knowledgable individuals are more likely to be partisan (Albright 2009, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). We might alternatively expect that more knowledgable individuals are less likely to rely on partisan heuristics (Dalton 1984). To account for either possibility, I control for the respondent's level of education.[18] Finally, I control for demographic characteristics: an individual's household income, age, and gender.

The CSES models also control for three country-level factors that might confound the relationships between elite polarization, perceived polarization, and voter partisanship. The effective number of electoral parties measures the amount of choice voters have when casting ballots. Some systems may be more polarized simply by virtue of having more parties, and a larger number of parties may offer voters a more nuanced set of party choices (Andrews and Money 2009). Related to this is the effective number of legislative parties, although this measures the degree to which a legislature is fragmented. The more fragmented a legislature, the more likely it becomes that forming a government will require a disparate coalition of parties. As a result, voters may have difficulty attributing policy stances to individual parties or blaming individual parties for bad government performance.[19] Thus, we would expect the effective number of parties to be associated with greater partisanship while the effective number of legislative parties is associated with lower partisanship. I measure both using the standard Laakso and Taagepera (1979) calculation with electoral vote shares and lower-house seat shares, respectively.[20] A final potential confound is the degree to which a party system is institutionalized and parties' reputations are widely known. Voters need to observe party behavior in order to develop party attachments, which may be why older democracies tend to have more partisans (Dalton and Weldon 2007). To account for this possibility, I control for the (natural log of the) weighted average of the ages of the parties at each election, a standard proxy for institutionalization (e.g., Roberts and Wibbels 1999).

Elite Polarization and Voter Partisanship

Is elite polarization associated with voter partisanship, as studies with more limited samples have suggested? A glimpse at country-year averages from the CSES data suggests so. Figure 1 plots the proportion of respondents who identify with a party against party polarization at each country-

[17] The party-difference item was not asked in the 1974, 1978, and 1982 studies, shrinking my sample to 14 survey-years.

[18] A preferable measure would more directly capture the respondent's political knowledge, but comparability and reliability across countries and time pose serious challenges. Still, educational attainment and political knowledge are highly correlated (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Highton 2009).

[19] The effective numbers of electoral and legislative parties are related, but they measure distinct concepts and should therefore both be included, as Huber et al. (2005) argue.

[20] Specifically, $1/\sum_{i=1}^{n}\omega_i^2$.

year.[21] Here I use the measure of polarization based on respondent party placements. The scatterplot shows a positive relationship between elite polarization and voter partisanship, consistent with expectations: rates of voter partisanship appear to be higher when parties are more polarized. That relationship also holds once I account for institutional differences, illustrated by the dashed line in Figure 1.[22] But while country-level correlations look promising, I want to know whether individuals are more likely to identify with a party where parties are polarized.

Multilevel probit analyses of individual-level data point in the same direction as aggregate correlations. As Table 1 shows, individuals are more likely to be partisan in countries with more polarized party systems. Whether I measure polarization using respondent's placement of the parties (model 1), experts' judgements (model 2), or the manifestos parties publish (model 3), voter partisanship is associated with elite polarization. This relationship appears both in the cross-national CSES data and over time in the ANES (model 4).[23]

Across the four models in Table 1, the correlations between individual characteristics and partisanship are consistent with previous studies of partisanship. The closer an individual thinks she is to a party, the more likely she is to be partisan. And more educated, more affluent, and older individuals are also more likely to identify with a party. On average, union members are more likely to be partisan across countries, but within the US union membership seems unrelated to partisanship. Interestingly, women appear to be less partisan than men in comparative perspective, but more partisan in the US.

I find less strong relationships between partisanship and other country-level variables in the CSES models. Systems with older parties do appear to be associated with greater partisanship, although that relationship is statistically significant only in model 1. Countries with more fragmented legislatures correlate with lower partisanship, although that relationship is not statistically significant in model 2. And I find no statistically significant relationship between the electoral fragmentation of a system and voter partisanship.

Recall that the analysis here sets aside the dynamic effect that elite polarization may have on voters' proximity to a party. We might expect that parties that move further apart also move away from voters. And if a voter is more likely to identify with a party because she either thinks she resembles it or else expects to gain utility from its policies, then her attachment may weaken as the party moves further away from her. Since my analyses control for proximity, I am essentially comparing two voters equally proximate to a party but in more or less polarized systems. Holding constant a voter's proximity to a party, as other parties move away from her own, her attachment to her party will intensify.

How substantive are these effects? Among the countries with more than one survey in the CSES sample, the average change in party polarization is 1.04. Such a change corresponds to increasing an individual's predicted probability of identifying with a political party by 4 percentage points. While that is a small number, these changes in party polarization span, on average, only 4.6 years, roughly a typical election cycle. Over several election cycles, the effect of elite polarization on voter partisanship would be substantial.[24]

[21] The values in this figure, as well as all other analyses, are weighted using the design and demographic weights provided in the dataset along with a weight to account for different sample sizes.

[22] A more accurate consideration of aggregate variation must also account for the distribution of voters. But my interest is in the individual-level relationship. I include this figure merely to illustrate the cross-national variation in these data.

[23] This result is consistent with recent analysis by Curini and Hino (2012). They find that the proportion of non-partisans in a country is negatively associated with party polarization, although they assume that the proportion of non-partisans is exogenous to polarization.

[24] These predicted probabilities are based on model 1, assuming a male respondent who is not a union member, with sample means for all other variables.

Elite Polarization and Perceived Polarization

Elite polarization is associated with voter partisanship across a wide range of countries and over a long span of time within the US. But do voters actually register this elite polarization? Are voters in more polarized systems more likely to perceive elite polarization? Or are they instead mostly oblivious to the machinations of political parties, as some studies suggest (Adams et al. 2011)?

Multilevel linear models suggest that voters do register elite polarization in their perceptions. The results in Table 2 indicate that voters in more polarized systems are significantly more likely to perceive polarization in their party system. This relationship holds across the measures of party polarization and both cross-nationally and over time within the US.[25] The more polarized the party system, the more distance voters perceive between the parties.

Country-level characteristics also correlate with voters' perceptions of polarization. The older, more institutionalized the party system, the more voters see polarization. This might be because voters simply know very little about younger parties; as parties age and institutionalize, voters are better able to perceive the differences between them (see Brader et al. in press). A larger number of legislative parties dampens perceptions of polarization, perhaps because legislative fragmentation means that more parties join governing coalitions. Doing so may blur the distinctions between these parties, reducing voters' perceptions of polarization (see Fortunato and Stevenson in press). Finally, the correlation between a fragmented party system and perceived polarization is mixed.

Perceived Polarization and Voter Partisanship

Voters notice when parties polarize. But does noticing elite polarization make them more likely to form a party attachment? Theories of partisanship suggest that voters are more likely to identify with a party the more they think it differs from other parties. Perceiving more polarization among the parties should therefore make individuals more likely to be partisan.

Multilevel probit models confirm this proposition. As Table 3 shows, respondents who perceive greater polarization among their country's political parties are more likely to identify with a party. This result appears both cross-nationally in CSES data and over time within the US. It also holds whether we measure polarization in terms of ideological distances (models 9 and 10) or, more flexibly, in terms of perceived differences between the major parties (model 11). As before, proximity to a party, education, and age continue to correlate with partisanship at the individual level. Household income and union membership also correlate with partisanship cross-nationally, although not in the US.

These results are also substantively impressive. Using CSES data, at mean perceived polarization, an individual's predicted probability of being partisan is 50%. But shifting perceived polarization up by one standard deviation increases that predicted probability by eight percentage points, to 58%. In the US, moving up one standard deviation from mean perceived polarization changes an individual's likelihood of being partisan by four percentage points.[26]

This suggests that one link between elite polarization and voter partisanship is voters' perceptions of polarization. As elites polarize, voters take note, and those who perceive that elite polarization are more likely to become partisan, all else equal. This stands in marked contrast to the argument that elite polarization intensifies voter partisanship by making parties more salient. While my analysis does not rule out this macro-level phenomenon, my results are consistent with overlooked micro-level theories of partisanship. They imply that elite

[25] This is consistent with Hetherington's (2001, 627) results from a more limited ANES sample.

[26] These are predicted probabilities based on models 9 and 10, assuming a male respondent who is not a union member and who has sample mean values on all the other variables.

polarization will strengthen voters' party attachments among those who observe it.

Identifying Causal Effects

Across both time and space, elite polarization is associated with voter partisanship. More polarized systems and times are associated with greater partisanship, both cross-nationally and over time in the US. Voters appear to register elite polarization in their own perceptions, and those who perceive polarization are more likely to be partisan. Yet, these associations fail to identify the causal relationship between elite polarization and voter partisanship. The survey data from the CSES and ANES measure both perceived polarization and partisanship in the context of the same interview. These association may indicate the reverse causal direction, or perhaps a feedback loop between perceived polarization and partisanship.

One way to address this problem and identify the causal relationship between perceived polarization and partisanship is through repeated interviews of the same survey respondents.[27] Indeed, part of the definition of a cause is that it occurs prior to an outcome (Finkel 1995). Panel surveys allow us to test whether perceptions of party polarization affect changes in partisanship within the same individuals over time, helping to identify the causal link (Bartels 2006). Such surveys necessarily imply focusing on a specific country and therefore limit generalizability. But we gain confidence in the causal interpretation of the correlational analysis if we can identify that causal relationship in the same context with panel survey data. Another limitation of most panel surveys is their short time-frames of one or two years, if not mere months. Since perceptions of party positions and partisan attachments are fairly slow to change, we need to cover a much longer span of time if we expect to identify the effect of perceived polarization on partisanship.

Fortunately, a long-term panel study is available for the US. The Political Socialization Study (PSS) is a nationally representative sample of high school seniors from the class of 1965 who were reinterviewed in 1973, 1982, and 1997. The long spans of time between the survey waves, and the fact that the four waves cover over 30 years, makes these data particularly useful for examining slow changes in perceptions and attitudes.[28] The major disadvantage of the PSS lies in its limited generalizability. Since the initial sample of high-school seniors necessarily excluded dropouts, results may not generalize to the least educated individuals in the US population (Highton and Kam 2011, 208). Even the US population in 1965 may not be representative of the broader, comparative set of democratic electorates. Nevertheless, the PSS offers a uniquely long time-horizon that offers at least an initial opportunity to identify causality in the relationship between perceived polarization and partisanship.[29]

To analyze the causal effect of perceptions of polarization on partisanship, I specify a cross-lagged structural equation model.[30] This approach uses simultaneous equations to model current partisanship and current perceived polarization as functions of prior partisanship and prior perceived polarization. The logic behind cross-lagged causality is that a variable X is said to cause another variable Y if prior observations of X are associated with current observations of Y, holding constant prior observations of Y (Finkel 1995, 25-6). In this way, cross-

[27] The gold standard for identifying causality is an experiment, although they entail drawbacks in terms of external validity. I report elsewhere on a survey experiment that tests the effect of perceived polarization on partisanship (Lupu in press).

[28] Indeed, there is quite a bit of variation on both partisanship and perceived polarization over the course of the panel. The polychoric correlation of partisanship across waves is, on average, 0.55; that of perceived polarization is, on average, 0.45.

[29] Another potential problem with panel survey data is attrition. Across the three reinterviews, the average retention rate was a remarkably high 82%. Jennings et al. (2009, 783) also note that, "panel status never accounts for over 2% of the variation in the scores of explicitly political measures."

[30] This approach is also used by other scholars of public opinion working with the PSS data (e.g., Highton and Kam 2011, Layman and Carsey 2002).

lagged models are akin to Granger causality in time-series analysis (Hood et al. 2008). In this context, we want to know whether prior perceptions of polarization affect current partisanship while taking account of preexisting partisan commitments.

I measure perceived polarization in terms of whether the respondent affirmed "important differences" between the US parties, as in the ANES analysis,[31] and control for two individual characteristics: political knowledge and gender. I construct a standard five-question index of political knowledge based on answers to factual questions about the length of a US Senate term, the number of members of the Supreme Court, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's party affiliation, the country that Marshall Tito headed, and the country that had concentration camps for Jews during World War II. The index is simply the sum of correct answers, so that it ranges from 0 to 5.[32] I do not control for age since the age of all respondents is roughly the same within each wave. In both models, since there are multiple waves in the PSS, I pool observations of respondents in each two-wave dyad and cluster standard errors by respondent.

The results reveal a causal effect of perceived polarization on partisanship. Table 4 reports estimates from the cross-lagged model. The top half of the table shows that both prior perceived partisanship and prior partisanship positively affect current partisanship. Since partisanship in the US is fairly stable, it is not surprising that prior partisanship would increase the likelihood of current partisanship (c.f. Green et al. 2005). But the fact that prior perceptions of polarization affect current partisanship is evidence that voters become more partisan as they perceive more polarization in the US.

There is no evidence of reverse causation in the PSS data. The bottom half of Table 4 reports the estimated effects of prior perceptions of polarization and prior partisanship on current perceptions of polarization. Prior perceptions of polarization increase the likelihood of perceiving polarization currently, confirming the intuition that perceptions of polarization, like partisanship, are stable over time. The concern that partisanship affects perceptions of polarization, on the other hand, finds no support. Prior partisanship does not have a statistically significant effect on current perceptions of polarization. This suggests that there may be little cause for concern that perceived polarization is endogenous to partisanship.

ELITE POLARIZATION, VOTER PARTISANSHIP, AND DEMOCRACY

Scholars view elite polarization with trepidation. In the US and cross-nationally, polarization is associated with gridlock, instability, incivility, and disengagement. Yet I have argued that there are good theoretical reasons to suspect that elite polarization could also produce desirable outcomes. If theories of partisanship are right, then polarization promotes clearer choices that lead to stronger voter attachments with parties.

Cross-national and US surveys bear out this proposition. Elite polarization correlates with voter partisanship across time and space regardless of whether I measure polarization with party positions from survey respondents, experts, party manifestos, or legislative behavior. And this polarization does not go unnoticed by voters, again regardless of which measure we employ. As theories of partisanship would predict, those voters who perceive that parties are more polarized become more partisan as a consequence.

Elite polarization may thus generate stronger party attachments, a desirable outcome in certain settings. Voter partisanship institutionalizes party systems, stabilizes elections, and consolidates new democracies (e.g., Mainwaring and Scully 1995, Rose and Mishler 1998). As a result, voters are presented with a recurring set of party options, making it easier to hold parties ac-

[31] Respondents in the PSS were asked to place the two US parties on an ideological dimension only in 1965, so I am unable to use the distance-based measure of perceived polarization.

[32] The same index is used by Highton (2009).

countable for bad performance and reducing the electoral prospects of unknown outsiders. Stable party competition also makes campaign promises more credible, giving voters greater confidence in predicting what each party would do if elected. All are desirable outcomes for new and developing democracies.

In other settings, such outcomes may be less important. In established democracies, or in specific institutional settings where deliberation is important, stronger party attachments may instead be detrimental. Too strong attachments could rule out compromise and embolden extremists. Elite polarization may, in these contexts, weaken democratic institutions. Yet even in advanced democracies, the ills of elite polarizations should not be overstated. After all, it was only six decades ago that the American Political Science Association encouraged American politicians to be more partisan (APSA 1950). Scholars should recognize that the effects of elite polarization may be cause for concern in some instances even as they are cause for celebration in others.

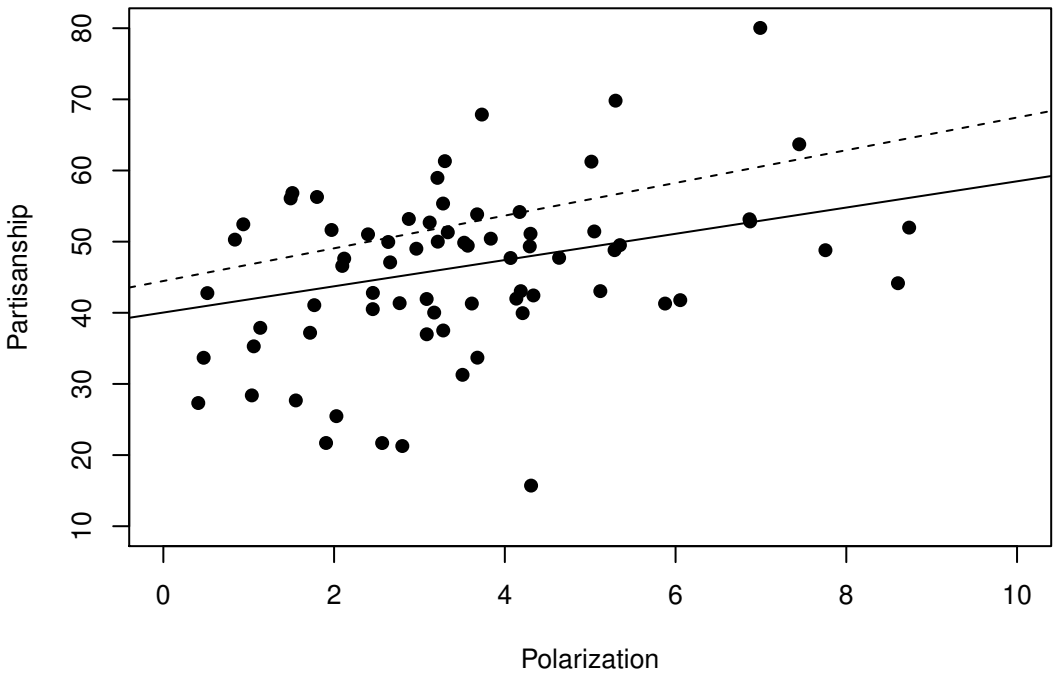
Still, this study leaves open the question of how elite polarization affects voter partisanship in the aggregate. I have shown that party polarization increases voter partisanship, holding all else constant. But in the real world party polarization may not hold all else constant. Parties moving apart also shift away from some voters, closer to others. The aggregate implications of these effects are not immediately obvious. Some forms of polarization may reduce overall voter partisanship; others may net no discernible effect. The aggregate relationship illustrated in Figure 1 suggests a positive overall effect of party polarization on aggregate voter partisanship, at least for this sample of countries and years. But future studies should consider how different voter distributions and types of polarizing party shifts explain this aggregate relationship.

If elite polarization strengthens voter partisanship, it would also follow that party convergence erodes party attachments. Scholars are increasingly concerned about the erosion of partisanship in both advanced democracies and some developing democracies like those in Latin America (e.g., Dalton 1984, Lupu 2011, Wattenberg 1990). This study suggests that party convergence may help to explain this phenomenon.[33] Cross-nationally, differences in elite polarization may help to explain why rates of voter partisanship are significantly lower in some countries than in others (see Dalton and Weldon 2007).

Comparative studies of partisanship rarely consider variables like party polarization. Instead, they often focus on how either fixed institutions or changing voter characteristics condition party attachments (e.g., Huber et al. 2005, Richardson 1991). This study suggests that a different set of contextual variables, ones that are more dynamic than institutions, also affect voters' attachments to parties. If we want to understand how voter partisanship varies across space and time, scholars must consider characteristics of the objects of identification – the parties themselves – and how they relate to each other.

[33] Katz and Mair (1995) offer an explanation of partisan erosion in Western Europe that relies in party on policy convergence, although the micro-level foundations of their theory are quite different from those suggested here.

FIGURE 1: Polarization and partisanship in the CSES



Country-year values are the proportion of partisans in each survey sample and party polarization measured from respondent party placements (see text). The solid line represent the best-fit line between the two variables. The dashed line represents the best-fit line with country-level controls.

TABLE 1: Elite polarization and voter partisanship

	CSES (1)	**CSES (2)**	**CSES (3)**	**ANES (4)**
Polarization (CSES respondents)	0.039**			
	(0.004)			
Polarization (CSES experts)		0.059**		
		(0.014)		
Polarization (CMP)			0.067**	
			(0.021)	
Polarization (DW-NOMINATE)				0.453**
				(0.174)
Party age (logged)	0.041**	0.014	-0.007	
	(0.004)	(0.019)	(0.008)	
Effective number of electoral parties	-0.031	-0.108	0.000	
	(0.018)	(0.172)	(0.018)	
Effective number of legislative parties	-0.056**	0.074	-0.074**	
	(0.018)	(0.194)	(0.022)	
Proximity	0.061**	0.061**	0.058**	0.127**
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.016)
Household income	0.029**	0.031**	0.034**	0.033*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.015)
Education	0.042**	0.029*	0.061**	0.069**
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Union member	0.091**	0.080*	0.087**	0.012
	(0.016)	(0.035)	(0.019)	(0.024)
Age	0.011**	0.011**	0.011**	0.008**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female	-0.074**	-0.070**	-0.075**	0.197**
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.025)
Constant	-1.214**	-1.339**	-1.109**	-0.366**
	(0.110)	(0.112)	(0.119)	(0.116)
Observations	77,052	72,615	64,571	18,905
Surveys	73	69	63	17
Log-likelihood	-48302.79	-45478.90	-41600.94	-5599.40

Robust standard errors in parentheses
** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

TABLE 2: Elite polarization and perceived polarization

	CSES (5)	**CSES (6)**	**CSES (7)**	**ANES (8)**
Polarization (CSES respondents)	0.125**			
	(0.005)			
Polarization (CSES experts)		0.220**		
		(0.006)		
Polarization (CMP)			0.217**	
			(0.032)	
Polarization (DW-Nominate)				1.981**
				(0.106)
Party age (logged)	0.089**	0.099**	0.009	
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.009)	
Effective number of electoral parties	-0.152**	0.047*	0.042	
	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.025)	
Effective number of legislative parties	-0.094**	-0.164**	-0.169**	
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.029)	
Proximity	0.013	0.008	0.023	-0.056
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.036)
Household income	0.022*	0.027**	0.021*	0.042**
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.014)
Education	0.033**	0.044**	0.037*	0.141**
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Union member	0.087**	0.069**	0.079**	0.010
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.019)	(0.033)
Age	0.003**	0.003**	0.003**	0.006**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female	0.066**	0.063**	0.077**	0.020
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.033)
Constant	2.593**	1.494**	2.301**	0.444*
	(0.146)	(0.161)	(0.195)	(0.196)
Observations	77,052	74,606	66,591	18,616
Surveys	73	69	63	17
Log-likelihood	-116658.42	-113023.17	-101441.07	-34774.34

Robust standard errors in parentheses
** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

TABLE 3: Perceived polarization and voter partisanship

	CSES	**ANES**	**ANES**
	(9)	**(10)**	**(11)**
Perceived polarization (distance)	0.161**	0.156**	
	(0.008)	(0.013)	
Perceived polarization (difference)			0.553**
			(0.038)
Proximity	0.064**	0.136**	0.126**
	(0.009)	(0.017)	(0.027)
Household income	0.026**	0.023	0.021
	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.019)
Education	0.041**	0.048**	0.038**
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Union member	0.076**	0.014	-0.003
	(0.016)	(0.025)	(0.047)
Age	0.010**	0.007**	0.007**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Female	-0.085**	0.203**	0.208**
	(0.012)	(0.023)	(0.040)
Constant	-1.810**	-0.334**	-0.169
	(0.111)	(0.117)	(0.185)
Observations	77,052	18,543	11,745
Surveys	73	17	14
Log-likelihood	-47578.87	-5334.49	-3133.40

Robust standard errors in parentheses
** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

TABLE 4: Perceived polarization and voter partisanship, panel analysis

	PSS (12)
Partisanship	
Perceived polarization (lagged)	0.079**
	(0.019)
Partisanship (lagged)	0.307**
	(0.021)
Political knowledge	0.009
	(0.007)
Female	0.087**
	(0.021)
Constant	0.253**
	(0.028)
Perceived polarization	
Perceived polarization (lagged)	0.284**
	(0.019)
Partisanship (lagged)	0.011
	(0.019)
Political knowledge	0.057**
	(0.007)
Female	0.061**
	(0.019)
Constant	0.244**
	(0.028)
Observations	2,669
Respondents	1,178

Robust standard errors in parentheses
** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

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