

Fact or Fiction: Media's Tale of an Ideologically and Affectively Polarized Society

A Thesis

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Abstract

This research examines the role of news media in contributing to perceptions and feelings of political polarization present in contemporary American society. I argue that the media's framing of the American electorate as in the midst of a "culture war" perpetuates the misperception that the public is deeply divided on issues and may contribute to growing feelings of hostility and social distance among the parties. Scholarship has demonstrated that the U.S. Congress is highly polarized along ideological lines, but has turned up considerably less evidence of ideological polarization within society. The idea of a polarized public may not be evident from the survey data on ordinary Americans, but it lives on the pages of newspapers throughout the United States and is becoming a more popular news frame over the past two decades. Content analysis of national and regional newspapers documents the media's increasing portrayal, from 1988 to the present, of American society as in a culture war. An original experiment, embedded in an Internet survey, tests how media stories of polarization influence the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of Americans. The finds are mixed. News depicting political polarization can indeed lead readers to see parties and their supporters as even further apart, though this is true of stories portraying either societal and congressional polarization. On the other hand, these stories had, if anything, a moderating impact on levels of affective polarization relative to the control group.

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Preface: The Puzzle of Polarization

Sitting alone in the living room of my apartment my eyes are focused on the television screen as I continue to consume massive amounts of midterm election coverage. The 2014 midterm elections were particularly exciting for me due to the way they resonated with my project. Every television news outlet I scanned alluded to a culture war of some kind, whether it was Red and Blue America or the reportedly extreme divisions within the American electorate. Brian Williams said that purple disappeared from the map altogether as Colorado turned red with the election of Senator Cory Gardner. News teams looking at exit polls came to the conclusion that American voters are definitely polarized. Fox News reported a complete and total division among the public, and ABC News claimed the significant plunge in the number of split ballots indicated most voters stuck to party lines. This experience was invigorating because it not only reinforced the relevance of my research, but my question was front and center. It was the star of the show.

Just a couple months later as I was basking in the snow of northern Chicago during the holiday season, I was blessed with a gift from a University of Michigan communications professor. Susan Douglas published a personal column on December 15, 2014, in *In These Times*, entitled “We Can’t All Just Get Along.” The column begins with a short and simple three word sentence: “I hate Republicans.” The article continues to discuss her disgust with Republicans, or as I might put it: my thesis in action with particular relevance for Ann Arbor. Douglas’s sentiments are especially interesting because she worked for Republican Senate Minority Leader Fred Lippitt from Rhode Island in the 1970s. Thus her political evolution reflects the shift over time in issue positions of the Republican Party in Congress as well as the social or affective aspect of polarization. She even cites the most recent work of Shanto Iyengar

and Sean Westwood regarding polarization along party lines within the American electorate. Looking at comments from her RateMyProfessor.com profile, her liberal (and anti-Republican) views seem to manifest themselves outside of her column and within the classroom. Comments on her profile page from former students include “Prof. Douglas gets a bad rep because a lot of the students don’t buy into her liberal foundation” and “[s]he can be fun to listen to but her lectures have an underlying liberal tinge.” Furthermore the editor’s note displayed on the Internet version of the article expressed their wish to rename the article “It’s Okay to Hate Republicans” and their removal of many reader comments that were threats to Douglas’s life and personal safety—a further illustration of the affective hostility characterizing partisan polarization today.

The evidence on polarization gathered by social scientists to date presents an interesting puzzle. There is considerable consensus that the ideological space, the range of issue positions, in Congress today is divided into two highly distinct camps: liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans. There is even agreement concerning the existence of ideological polarization among issue activists and political elites more broadly. This ideological polarization, however, is not nearly as clear at the societal level. While the majority of scholars believe that both Democrat and Republican politicians and issue activists are becoming more extreme today, there is no such consensus regarding the political polarization of society. Maximalists like Alan Abramowitz believe that the general public’s views mirror those of the political elite and have become more extreme over time. In contrast, minimalists like Morris Fiorina claim that the public remains centrist while a partisan sorting process has simply led to more sharply-defined ideological political parties.

Complicating the picture, however, there are potential dimensions of mass polarization beyond issue distance that relate to the social distance and affective polarization between

partisans. For example, Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes argue that voters increasingly dislike their opponents that Democrats tend to automatically dislike Republicans and visa versa (2012). Like Fiorina, they do not see polarization arising in terms of policy preferences, but nonetheless they do believe polarization is arising in the form of increasingly negative sentiments (“affect”) towards the opposite party. With the increasing hostility between Democrats and Republicans, partisans associate negative traits with members of the out-group party, both politicians and voters. These findings give rise to a puzzle: If partisan voters have not moved very far in terms of issues and ideology, then why has their animosity toward one another grown?

The media, in the eyes of Fiorina, is primarily responsible for painting a picture of an ideologically polarized public. They have used the idea of a “culture war” to sell the news. Political conflict and disagreement make a more interesting story compared to consensus and compromise. The media has created the view of the American people as fighting a culture war through the “misrepresentations of election returns, lack of hard examination of polling data, systematic and self-serving misrepresentation by issue activists, and selective coverage by an uncritical media more concerned with news value than with getting the story right” (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2011: 8). Thus, though the policy positions of the public may have remained largely centrist, the media has created the impression of a public deeply divided along ideological lines. Is this media distortion the cause of the affective polarization witnessed by Iyengar and colleagues? Although Fiorina claims that the media is incorrectly portraying the public, he does not test this portion of his argument. He presents systematic data on neither the content of media coverage nor the causal relationship between that coverage, on the one hand, and the perceptions and feelings of voters, on the other hand. This is where my project comes in.

To more fully understand what is happening in terms of political polarization in the contemporary United States, this thesis takes a two-step approach that links together the claims of Fiorina and Iyengar. First, I conduct a content analysis of national and regional newspapers to investigate the extent to which contemporary news coverage is characterized by the media frame of a polarized American electorate. Media frames alter considerations. By highlighting certain aspects of a topic—in this case, the purported polarization, or ideological gulf, dividing Democrats and Republicans—such a media frame can influence how readers think about events, issues, or even their fellow citizens. Second, to test whether this sort of media frame is a cause of affective polarization I carried out an experiment. This experiment examines media frames of both a polarized Congress and a polarized society, and measures their impact on feelings, perceptions, and issue preferences. It is with this data that we gain a more comprehensive view of the puzzle. Fiorina and Iyengar pieced together the fuzzy edge pieces of the puzzle and I will attempt to fill in some of the center tiles. I hope to come to a better understanding of what polarization the public perceives to be occurring at both the congressional and societal level in addition to the extent of ideological and affective polarization among voters.

Literature Review

The current debate surrounding polarization in American politics serves as a launching point for the present investigation. I begin with a very brief history of news writing to understand the evolution of journalism in relation to its impact on public perception. While I seek to understand the sources and extent of polarization at the societal level, which remain under debate, current scholarship offers a fairly strong and consensual picture of ideological polarization at the congressional level. Lastly, to provide some context for thinking about media influence on perceptions and feelings of polarization, I will discuss agenda setting, priming, framing, and the current media landscape.

A Very Brief History of the American News Media

In thinking about media effects, it's important to take a brief look at the history of newsmaking. Understanding the history and trajectory of newsmaking is very telling of the political implications of news stories. History shapes the way news is written and disseminated today. The "partisan press" ruled from the late 1700s through the early 1800s. This era of news is characterized by journalism as the political mouthpiece of ruling politicians (Schudson 2002). The press mobilized elites and loyalty directed funding and staffing. The "penny press" or "commercial media" adapted to changes in printing and transportation technology. As newspaper circulation rose, writing became more politically neutral to appeal to larger parts of the market and gain revenue from private advertising. This more homogenous news product was well received in the public from a rise in education. The late 1960s marked a distinct shift in reporting as journalists transformed from "lapdogs" to "watchdogs" (Schudson 1995). The trust in the news media and credibility of the institution was at an all time high as journalists took a more

critical approach in an effort to hold politicians accountable for their actions (Patterson 1993). The current news environment is characterized by interpretative coverage in which facts are considered within a context or framework of meaning offered by the journalist (Downie Jr. and Schudson 2009). Scandal and conflict sells newspapers and the credibility of the media has plummeted. This is the media landscape against which my research is situated. Contemporary journalistic norms encourage the coverage of congressional conflict and quite congenial to a media frame, such as that at the center of my research, which portrays American society as deeply divided between antagonistic worldviews and lifestyles.

Congressional Ideological Polarization

Legislative gridlock has become the status quo in Washington with the highly polarized nature of Congress and the Democrat and Republican parties. The ideological distance between the two dominant political parties is the largest recorded gap going back to the Civil War (Jacobson 2013: 689). The decrease in moderate and centrist politicians produces what we see at the congressional level, the state of affairs which we call ideological polarization. The issue positions within each dominant political party have homogenized leading to greater disparity between the two parties, which has opened a no-man's land for moderates. Data shows Republican politicians becoming significantly more conservative, with Democratic politicians shifting towards the left. Jacobson finds that "elite polarization is firmly rooted in electoral politics" and thus cannot be undone without significant changes to the American electoral process. The current electoral institutions favors more extreme political candidates, which forces the moderate American electorate to choose between the two extremes on the ballot. America's governing institutions such as "the bicameral legislature, presidential veto, and separate electoral

bases and calendars of representatives, senators, and presidents” are naturally prone to gridlock (Jacobson 2013: 690). In addition, the political polarization evident at the congressional level represents the interests of the voters on the extremes better than the interests of “middle-of-the-road voters” (Poole and Rosenthal 1984: 1061).

The pervasive issue of elite polarization leaves the American legislative process prone to stalemate. Another implication of congressional polarization is that members of Congress have no incentive to support the President (Poole and Rosenthal 1984). Polarization causes even members of the President’s own party to have less reason to support him. In this case, the legislative process is prone to additional conflict and stalemate. This conflict can be further compounded by the dynamics of a divided government. A divided government occurs when the President’s political party is opposite from the majority party in the House of Representatives or the Senate via elections. With a divided government, it is much more difficult to pass legislation as Congress and the President have conflicting issue positions and agendas. This situation is evident in the current (114th) Congress as there is a Democratic executive branch and a Republican majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate.¹

It is also important to understand how recent polarization within the American political system has occurred. The principle of representative democratic elections holds that candidates generally “represented a diverse set of regional issues” (Hare and Poole 2014: 412). Political parties vary internally and externally by nature. Internally, there are intentional differences within each respective party due to geographic location. The geographic interests can provide common ground among members of different parties to pursue legislation beneficial for their

¹ This stalemate was front-page news when President Obama vetoed Congress’s Keystone XL bill in February 2015 and Congress’s attempt to defund the Department of Homeland Security in order to counteract Obama’s executive order concerning immigration.

district and state. Externally, there are overarching differences in terms of social and economic policy preferences. The emergence of recent polarization within Congress can be attributed to the decrease in internal diversity and thus the cross-cutting potential of geography.

Polarization among political elites has implications for the public at large. Polarization among politicians and issue activists has solidified their parties' ideological positions. This clarification of the political sphere for ordinary Americans has "increased party importance and salience on the mass level" (Hetherington 2001: 619). In addition, Hetherington asserts that changes in public opinion and behavior of the American electorate are reflections of elite or congressional behavior. He cites "changes in the behavior of Republican and Democratic elites as the engine for an issue evolution on race in the 1960s" and that the public takes cues from observing elite behavior (Hetherington 2001: 622). Using this logic, polarized elites and politicians should precede a polarized public. This claim will be assessed and discussed further below. Another effect that can impregnate the American electorate through elite level polarization is Layman and Carsey's concept of "conflict extension" which is defined as "a growth in mass party polarization on multiple distinct issue dimensions" (2002: 786). Looking at three major domestic policy agendas (social welfare, racial, and cultural issues), they argue that the polarization of Democratic and Republican elites should elicit an ideological response among mass policy attitudes due to the fact that "party elites structure the political choices offered to the mass public and thus play an important role in the development and expression of citizens' views" (Layman and Carsey 2002: 788). This shift in policy attitudes is dependent on two factors: strength of the individual's party affiliation and knowledge of the pervasiveness of polarization at the congressional level. Therefore mass ideological polarization should theoretically emerge given the current state of polarization among political elites. The average

voter, however, is generally not interested in or in tune with the everyday events of Washington. Any awareness of polarization at the elite level should bring about some sentiment of polarization at the societal level, whether it be ideological, affective, or behavioral.

The Debate Over Ideological Polarization Within Society

But what is the state of polarization in the American public? Does it mirror the developments and patterns at the elite level? The current notion of a “culture war” infiltrating society certainly suggests there are visible and extreme ideological differences among the American electorate, but these claims may be superimposing the image of political elites onto the map of society. “The culture war refers to a displacement of the classic economic conflicts that animated twentieth-century politics in the advanced democracies by newly emergent moral and religious ones” (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2011: 2). This “culture war,” however, does not truly exist in society for minimalists like Fiorina. He asserts that the media is responsible for the creation of the perception of societal conflict because stories of disagreement and political gridlock make a more compelling and profitable newspaper than compromise and consensus. In reality, the American electorate is moderate in their views, taking centrist policy positions while the media distorts their policy preferences (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2011). Media coverage tends to interpret society as ideologically polarized from the pattern of close presidential elections since 1988, but such a pattern does not necessarily imply that the public is polarized: it can signify that there are equal numbers of voters who strongly prefer one candidate over the other, equal numbers of voters who like both candidates, or equal numbers of voters who do not have strong feelings regarding either candidate. Thus, the typical social issues that define a “culture war” seem to only pertain to the phenomenon of political polarization among those most

likely to engage in political behavior: political elites, politicians, and issues activists as opposed to the public at large (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006: 94).

Another study on ideological polarization within the American electorate assesses twenty years of data from the General Social Survey and National Election Study. Dimaggio, Evans and Bryson found a significant decline in variance among issue positions (1996). While this study was done almost twenty years ago, it demonstrates a lack of severe polarization in terms of popular wedge issues including race, crime, and gender. There was some variance among issue positions concerning abortion and poverty, but the division within these issues declined over the twenty-year observation period.² They draw an important distinction defining polarization as “both a state and a process. Polarization as a state refers to the extent to which opinions on an issue are opposed in relations to some theoretical maximum. Polarization as a process refers to the increase in such opposition over time” (Dimaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996: 693). For the purpose of my research, I am focusing on polarization as a state, that is, the extent of polarization or opinion extremity within society today. With more extreme issue positions there is a greater tendency towards conflict and the inability to compromise, something that is being widely seen at the congressional level. Dimaggio and colleagues hint at the advent of affective polarization when they say “the greater the extent to which social attitudes become correlated with salient individual characteristics or identities, the more likely it is that they will become the foci of social conflict” (1996: 693). The concept of opinion polarization was ultimately evident when comparing data between different subgroups such as education level, race, religion, region, and political ideology. Political party affiliation was the only factor to show a significant divergence

² This study used data from the early 1970s to the middle 1990s. In addition, to overall public opinion, they broke down analysis into subset populations including voters, political activists, college graduates, and young people. Ultimately, there was no statistically significant data to demonstrate a trend towards great polarization.

in issue positions and attitudes leading to the conclusion that “social attitudes of groups in civil society have converged at the same time that attitudes of party identifiers have polarized” (Dimaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996: 738).

Fiorina argues that there is a lack of ideological polarization within society, Dimaggio argues that ideological polarization is only present in certain subsets of the population, and other social scientists argue that there has been an increase in ideological polarization within society in the past few decades. Using data from the American National Election Studies, Abramowitz and Saunders found evidence indicating a rise in ideological polarization since the 1970s (2008). Based on the seven-issue scale in Abramowitz and Saunders’s research design, the percentage of respondents at the low end of the polarization scale fell from 39 percent in the 1980s to 32 percent in the mid-2000s, but respondents at the high end of the polarization scale rose from 24 percent to 33 percent. These statistics provide evidence that ideological thinking is more prevalent among the American public today and runs counter to Fiorina’s claim that the public holds moderate issue positions. The well-defined political division between liberal Democratic and conservative Republican political beliefs over the past twenty years has supported the idea of significant differences between red state voters and blue state voters and between secular voters and religious voters (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008: 542).

Societal Affective Polarization

The extent of polarization in the electorate remains a matter of dispute among political scientists, but the focus of the debate for the past decade or more has been largely on ideological polarization—whether Americans are deeply divided in their views on political issues. Recently researchers have asked whether citizens have become divided in their feelings toward one

another—*affective polarization*—no matter the policy differences between them. Adopting a social psychological lens, these political scientists argue posit that societal polarization is emerging as a socially driven phenomenon. Specifically, Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes argue that citizens increasingly dislike their opponents (2012). Therefore increasingly negative sentiments towards the opposite party, rather than policy preferences, define contemporary society's "culture war." Partisanship is key for this phenomenon because identification with a political party activates out-group dislike (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012: 406). Affective polarization is then reinforced, they argue, through exposure to media campaigns that have a tendency to be saturated with attack advertisements and negative messages. Along with increasing dislike toward the opposing party, partisans ascribe negative traits to members of the out-group party. This increase in affective polarization could result from ideological polarization, but there turns out to be only a "weak association between ideological and affective polarization" in contrast to the impacts of negative campaigns and selective exposure (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012: 424). These findings nonetheless demonstrate that there is an additional dimension to polarization. The emergence of a polarized public may not derive from real differences in issue positions within society, so much as from the media-constructed images of demonized enemies activating strong party identities to create social distance between partisans.

Polarization based on social differences is "cultural in nature, that is, about fundamental values and beliefs that are more threatening to social stability" (Muste 2014: 433). By measuring favorability or antipathy towards in-groups and out-groups the degree of social conflict in society can be assessed. Muste found that polarization has not increased when looking solely at in-group favoritism and out-group hostility in terms of issue position. "Disagreements among the mass public about issues and values, no matter how contested, have not (yet) extended into direct

inter-group antipathy” (Muste 2014: 439). This overarching conclusion reinforces Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes findings that social group animosity is more prevalent than partisan differences in issue positions (2012). This finding seems to indicate that partisan ideology and political attitudes about public policy are separated from emotions about social groups.

Partisan Sorting and Behavioral Polarization

The third prong of polarization, behavioral, is inherently tied to partisan sorting. Partisan sorting is defined as “an increasing correlation between party and ideology” (Mason 2012: 3). Highly polarized political parties are better at sorting individuals on the basis of their policy preferences. Thus society is not polarized along ideological lines, but merely sorted into more ideologically-coherent political parties (i.e. partisan sorting). Mason argues that although issue positions in the public have not changed significantly enough to denote major ideological differences between ordinary Democratic and Republican partisans, a view that is consistent with minimalists like Fiorina, partisan sorting has polarized political behavior of the American electorate. Political behavior is innately driven by an individual’s political identity, which is responsible for “political bias, political participation, and political emotion” (Mason 2012: 5).³ Individuals can have different identities in regards to ideological preferences and religious beliefs, but the alignment of these identities polarizes political behavior. When group identities are non-aligned, people are generally more tolerant and less biased towards out-groups. Thus as the political sorting process solidifies, partisan identities become more closely aligned with other identities, generating behavioral polarization.

³ This phenomenon is independent of ideological polarization because partisan sorting is an alignment of opinions creating more cohesive political parties as opposed to the radicalization of opinions.

One fear of behavioral polarization and partisan sorting is the underrepresentation or exclusion of particular interests within American democracy (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Individuals who hold more extreme views that are consistent with the polarized parties are the most likely to engage in political behavior. At the same time, “over the last 40 years, American public opinion has remained stable or even become more moderate on a large set of political issues” (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008: 419). This can lead to increasing inequality through differential lobbying activity, campaign donations, and voting. Voting is the essential civic duty through which citizens exert their political influence, but the polarization of parties coinciding with partisan sorting can skew the American electorate (e.g., leaving it more heavily dominated by those higher on the socio economic scale).⁴

Behavioral polarization “affects political interactions and a person’s understanding of the political world, as well as the vehemence with which they react emotionally to political events” (Mason 2012: 25). It can occur while issue positions are held constant. Thus the extremity of issue positions or out-group dislike, Mason argues, is not necessarily the underlying mechanism of societal polarization. Even absent these, society may become behaviorally polarized via a more effective partisan sorting process and subsequent identity alignment.

⁴ The 1970s marks the beginning of modern polarization among parties in Congress via multiple social factors. These factors include Southern realignment, where Southern whites increasingly voted for Republican candidates starting during the Civil Rights Movement, income inequality, and immigration. Citizens with lower socioeconomic statuses and immigrants, who generally constitute low-income workers or non-citizens, have lower levels of political participation or engagement. This has shifted the position of the median voter to a higher socioeconomic status (Hare and Poole 2014: 420). Therefore, redistributive welfare spending policies are no longer as appealing as they have been in the past.

Media Effects: Political Persuasion and Selective Exposure

What role, if any, might the media play in creating or exacerbating political polarization in the contemporary United States? The concept of political persuasion is particularly helpful in understanding how media effects can promote polarization. Political persuasion involves the reinforcement of preexisting ideas, mobilization of the electorate, a learning process about campaigns, and conversion of perspectives. John Zaller's "Receive-Accept-Sample" (RAS) model demonstrates the method in which partisan messages can be internalized (1992). The model says that public opinion is influenced by elite discourse on current events. The basic assumption of this theory states that the level of an individual's political knowledge will determine whether or not the partisan message will be persuasive. Thus, an individual with sophisticated political knowledge will be less likely to be persuaded by counter-attitudinal messages from elites than an individual with little political knowledge. This occurs because individuals with previous, sophisticated political knowledge already have the information necessary to counteract and neutralize the message (Zaller 1992).

In addition to the RAS model, motivated reasoning can also impact the effect of exposure to partisan media sources on political attitudes. Motivated reasoning follows a more instinctive and automatic process, one in which attitudes can change in the opposite direction of the message (Kunda 1990). This means that a conservative message can make a liberal's attitude even more liberal whereas the RAS model would argue that the attitude of a liberal with little political knowledge could become more conservative. When exposed to neutral news, the RAS model and motivated reasoning can lead to polarization. Using the RAS model, balanced newscasts polarize attitudes "when recipients can use source cues to differentiate conservative and liberal arguments... or when they reject counter-attitudinal arguments based on prior

knowledge” (Prior 2013: 109). In the motivated reasoning framework, however, neutral or balanced news can lead to polarized attitudes when partisans choose to dismiss counter-attitudinal arguments and accept information consistent with their personal views (Prior 2013). While RAS and motivating reasoning offer two different explanations for the acceptance or rejection of persuasive information, both frameworks identify situations in which partisan and neutral news can polarize attitudes.

The concept of accepting or rejecting news based on its correspondence with partisan beliefs has become easier and more prevalent with the proliferation of partisan news outlets. This proliferation has increased the ability of Americans to select news products such as ideologically-driven websites or partisan blogs. Selective exposure refers to the selection of media outlets that match one’s beliefs and predispositions (Sears and Freedman 1967). Selective exposure reinforces partisan views and decreases exposure, even incidental exposure, to counter-attitudinal messages that are vital for creating a well-informed American electorate. Selective exposure increases the potential polarizing power of popular ideological media outlets and brands such as Rush Limbaugh and Keith Olbermann, especially on Americans with low political knowledge. Despite these concerns, empirical research remains mixed and concludes that public opinion is not swayed by these partisan messages because “citizens ignore them, resist them, or take them for granted” (Prior 2013). Prior found that “although political attitudes of most Americans have remained fairly moderate, evidence points to some polarization among the politically involved” (Prior 2013: 102). These politically involved constitute a minority within the American public, but it is also important to mention that they constitute an influential minority.

Media Influence Theories

Theories of agenda setting, framing, and priming, are widely understood as indirect effects of political communication (Iyengar 2011). By covering some issues and ignoring others, the media influences which issues people view as important and thereby set the agenda for American politics. The impact of agenda setting, however, is moderated by political awareness and personal relevance. Thus agenda setting effects will be largest for those who have low political awareness or for whom the issue is personally relevant. The media also plays a role in how large the agenda setting effect can be by the plausibility and prominence of the story. Plausibility refers to the relation to national significance. For example, a story connecting to American security or interests will have larger effects than a story about European security or interests in the U.S. market. There is also a positive correlation in regards to prominence, the more often a news story is discussed or presented as a lead story the more likely it is the issue or event will be viewed as an important agenda item (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Media attention can trigger policy action and therefore news can alter legislative agendas and influence public opinion. Through television news experiments, Iyengar and Kinder found that partisanship plays a role in the pervasiveness of this media effect, as Democrat and Republican partisans are less susceptible than Independents and non-identifiers to agenda-setting. By continuously writing about differences between Democratic and Republican partisans, news media may be making the issue of societal polarization increasingly salient whether or not these news stories are accurately depicting reality.

Priming has a more direct link with public opinion. By calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, news media influences the standards and criteria by which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are judged. This media effect may account

for some of the dissatisfaction with Congress and the President in regards to news stories. A rise in stories about congressional and societal polarization may affect the way citizens judge the President, their representatives, and other elected officials. While priming usually refers to the way the President is judged, it depends on the degree to which the viewers' connect the problem to the target population (Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

Framing is a crucial indirect effect of political communication. Simply put, framing alters relevant considerations. By highlighting some aspects of an event or issue and ignoring others, media influence how people think about that event or issue. Media frames will be directly manipulated in the experiment portion of this research to understand a) what polarization is present at the societal level and b) what the public perceives from news messages. Together framing and priming impacts the way in which the American public views and understands politics. Ultimately, "voters can be moved from indecision to strong preferences depending only on TV news coverage" (Iyengar and Kinder 1987: 112).

The Changing Media Landscape

The media landscape, now more than ever, has optimized the ability of citizens to self-select into viewing (or not) partisan news stories with the advent of the Internet and cable news channels. The growth of cable television and the Internet has proliferated the number of non-public affairs news sources. The increase in viewing and reading options marks a distinct shift from the 1950s news options of ABC, CBS and NBC (Turrow 1992). The changing media landscape has a correlative effect on political behavior. The voter turnout gap between news and entertainment fans has widened within the last twenty years because entertainment fans tend to be less partisan. Without inadvertent news exposure, registered voters are less likely to show up

to the polls. This drop in turnout rates demonstrates the current campaign environment is dominated by politically involved elites (Prior 2013). Thus the enemy here may not be partisan selective exposure to Fox News or MSNBC, but the conscious decision to watch entertainment programming such as ESPN and reality television. “The expansion of media choice can polarize elections in the absence of any attitude change, reinforcement, and polarization” because the media environment can generate more partisan voting behavior (Prior 2013: 107). Furthermore, network news audiences are dwindling while “online, ethnic and alternative media” are seeing an increase in general audience growth (Chinni 2004). The combined prime time Nielsen shares of the ABC, CBS, and NBC, networks totaled at least 90% from the late 1940s until the mid-1970s, but by 1990 the three networks’ share had declined to 65% (Turow 1992). The proliferation of news and entertainment outlets, seen through an idealistic lens, has the ability to reach a larger portion of the American electorate and thus empower more voters to fulfill their civic duty. In reality, it has been shown to create more partisan elections where voter turnout is monopolized by politically knowledgeable citizens and elites.

The Internet’s ability to empower the American electorate has been a point of much contention within today’s media landscape. One side of the debate argues that new technology will create an ideal media environment outside of the interests of media conglomerates and corporate power. On the other hand, the proliferation of news sources fragments audiences and reduces exposure to political news that is vital for democracy. Ultimately, the impact of the changing media landscape is dependent upon consumers: their incentives and strategies for selecting specific news outlets. Baum and Groeling compared news content from overtly partisan websites and sources that attempt to avoid political affiliation like the Associated Press and Reuters. Readership of partisan websites demonstrated an ideological filter in their news

audience suggesting a preference to consume news that directly aligns with their issue positions (2008). The newswires from the Associated Press and Reuters, however, did not show evidence of news selection based on its implications for the reader's ideological orientation (Baum and Groeling 2008). Overall, selective exposure is a key factor for online partisan news organization, but nonetheless their audiences remain small in comparison to mainstream media outlets.

The impact of new media outlets on political polarization has yet to reach concrete conclusions. The Internet and social media have been used in arguments for the intensification of polarization because they enhance the average voter's ability to self-select news or avoid political news coverage altogether. The publication medium can determine the type of coverage as well. "Most newspapers in the United States publish in one-paper markets and thus cater to an ideologically heterogeneous audience" (Prior 2013). Cable and Internet news outlets, on the other hand, face a competitive national market in which there is no incentive to appear moderate for an economic advantage. Talk radio shows, cable news channels and websites offer more ideologically extreme packages of news. That said, "[e]vidence for attitude polarization—individuals changing their issue positions, ideological convictions, or partisan sentiments to produce less centrist, more sharply opposed aggregate distributions of the most politically relevant attitudes—turns out to be ambiguous" (Prior 2013: 104). The Internet is much more accessible to the public and offers a wider range of news stories in comparison to the same five stories that dominate network news broadcasts. Thus, the American public is simultaneously being exposed to a homogenous product on national news broadcasts and a diverse product of ideological or entertainment news on cable and online. In addition, online news organizations have become more concerned with disseminating the news than with collecting it. This has been interpreted as placing increased pressure on journalists to maintain quality, credibility and trust

in the media (Chinni 2004). “Between 1985 and 2002 the number of Americans who think news organizations are highly professional declined from 72 to 49 percent” (Chinni 2004: 98). This statistic further complicates the impact of media coverage, as the news media has lost the trust of its audience. With less trust, news frames may not have an impact on the way society views Congress or themselves.

Finding a Causal Relationship with Media

Causal relationships are tough to detect in media studies. Influence can occur in both directions, with an interaction between political attitudes and media consumption choices. The media tends to serve as a primary source of political information. In the late 1900s, exposure to television news increased the likelihood that an individual would vote in the presidential election. More recent research has theorized that the increase in cynicism about the American political process among voters is a result of changes in election coverage and media behavior in the late 20th century (Patterson 1993). The use of game schema in which political candidates are portrayed as strategic actors as opposed to policy leaders and civil servants dominates journalists’ writing. Game schema employs battlefield metaphors, horse-race coverage and shorter soundbites in its repertoire of reporting, which tend to crowd out policy concerns. In addition, coverage of politics as conflictual and strategic in the United States can take the conversation away from the concrete facts of the policy debate and lend a cynical tone to overall political news (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). The change in media frames and the adoption of cynical tones for campaign coverage shifts the focus away from candidates’ issue positions to attract larger audiences. Ironically, the sheer pervasiveness of cynical political coverage in the American media garners larger news audiences and can improve levels of political knowledge

among consumers (Patterson 1993). Evidence shows a positive correlation between media exposure and political knowledge, interest and efficacy (Curran et al 2014). The directionality of the relationship is difficult to decipher as the media may be a reflection of public opinion or it may be shaping public opinion. This two-way street complicates the ability to come to an unambiguous, definitive conclusion about the directionality of media influence.

Media Content Analysis

This section of the thesis empirically examines evidence for Fiorina's claim that media hypes and distorts the image of American society fighting a culture war at home. I consider both the episodic (illustrative) evidence offered by Fiorina in his book and systematic content analysis data on news media coverage that I collected. The goal of this investigation is narrowly focused on ascertaining whether the news media have in fact extensively and increasingly pushed a culture war frame as descriptive of American politics. I therefore discuss over-time trends in media portrayals of political polarization in both national and regional sources.

Research Methods

As a reminder, Fiorina claims that the media has misrepresented election returns and falsely portrayed the political views of the American public. To investigate these claims a bit further, I used content analysis to assess whether the frequency of polarization coverage has risen over the past thirty years in the United States in both national and regional newspapers. The content analysis utilized two different media archives to obtain articles dating back to 1988: LexisNexis and NewsBank. LexisNexis contained archives of coverage from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* between 1988 and today. NewsBank was a particularly helpful database when looking at the frequency of coverage at the regional level, because of the broad

number of regional sources present in the archive.⁵ I examined the frequency of polarization coverage during three specific time periods: 1988-1992, 1998-2002, and 2008-2012. The database searches flagged articles containing the phrases “culture war,” “Red America,” and “Blue America.” These search terms imply that polarization is not just something happening in the halls of Congress, but happening within society. In the very name culture war the media evokes the idea that the country is deeply divided. “Red America” and “Blue America,” not just red states and blue states, is largely a shorthand for journalists to talk about two different societies in one country (rather than sorting states by political preference). The content analysis was constrained purposefully to news and opinion articles (excluding letters to the editor) in an attempt to eliminate false positive search results such as lifestyle pieces about polarized lenses or pop culture references. The search was further narrowed by a focus on story subject via pre-programmed lists in the online databases including government and public administration, presidents, and elections and campaigns.

Each time period—1988 to 1982, 1998 to 2002 and 2008 to 2012—contains an even distribution of elections which enables easy comparison across sources in a given time period. Thinking logically, the presence of midterm and presidential elections is more conducive to the frame of a polarized American electorate. Elections increase the amount of coverage dedicated to politics, especially surrounding the issue positions of candidates and voters. The first time frame,

⁵ Regions were determined by the database’s categorization of states. New England comprises Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. Middle Atlantic comprises New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. South Atlantic comprises Washington D.C., Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. East North Central comprises Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. East South Central comprises Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee. West North Central comprises Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, and South Dakota. West South Central comprises Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. Mountain comprises Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming. Pacific comprises Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.

1988-1992, and the third time frame, 2008-2012, contain two presidential elections and one midterm election, while the second time frame, 1998-2002, contains one presidential election and two midterm elections. The second time frame is the subject of Fiorina's book as its first edition was published in 2004. Newspaper evidence in Fiorina's book dates back to 1992, but the bulk of his evidence was published between 2003 and 2004 (Table 1). By analyzing trends in the frequency of stories depicting a split America before, during, and after this time, I am better able to evaluate Fiorina's assertion about media's frame of a culture war in society. Also, if this is the time period during and since which Iyengar and others seem to have found some growing inter-partisan hostility, then documenting news patterns over a similar period helps to establish (or set aside) any potential foundation for hypothesizing the media as a possible cause.

Table 1: Yearly distribution of news articles cited in Fiorina's book⁶

Year	Number of Articles
1992	1
1996	1
1998	1
2000	5
2001	3
2002	8
2003	11
2004	17
2005	11
2006	6
2007	4
2008	9
2009	2

⁶ The first edition of Fiorina's book was published in 2004, but he has since released two more editions. This table includes all articles in the third edition of "Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America."

The first timeframe used in the content analysis, the late 1980s and early 1990s, is particularly important for the idea of polarization within the American electorate as the contemporary idea of “culture war” was conceived. Although initially advanced in the work of sociologist James Davison Hunter (1991), Republican candidate Pat Buchanan put a primetime spotlight on the term “culture war” at the 1992 Republican National Convention. Buchanan said, “[t]here is a religious war going on in this country, a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America” (1992). The term culture war typically refers to the moral and religious conflicts that have arisen in U.S. politics since the 1960s, as opposed to the classic economic conflicts rooted in earlier Twentieth Century politics. It splits Americans into two camps: traditional and progressive. The emergence of this idea came closely on the heels of the emergence of the religious right as a strong force within the Republican Party in the 1980s. The year 1988 has specific resonance in relation to Fiorina’s claim about the media’s interpretation of close elections reflecting a society deeply divided. The 1988 election would mark the last year for a decade and a half in which any presidential candidate won a majority of the popular vote. Ultimately, “by themselves close election outcomes cannot tell us whether half the electorate hates the other half or whether everyone is flipping coins” (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2011: 15).

The second timeframe, 1998 to 2002, potentially offers a different sort of critical moment because it includes a major national event of singular importance: September 11, 2001. Fiorina acknowledges the anomaly of 9/11 and its opposing effects on the talk about a “culture war.” The terrorist attacks were widely seen as providing an at least brief moment of national unity and decreased internal conflict. Nonetheless, this is the same time period, for which Fiorina first expressly rejects the idea of voters as polarized, despite the increasing lack of ideological overlap

within both the House of Representatives and the Senate. In addition, with the 2000 election came a “pictorial representation of the culture war in the form of the red and blue map of the United States” (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2011: 4). The closeness of the election results was interpreted as a deeply divided nation, when as already noted, Fiorina contends that it can also be seen as merely a closely divided nation.⁷ Fiorina examines *USA Today*'s “One Nation, Divided” feature written by Jill Lawrence to highlight the media's role in painting the picture of a polarized America. This February 18, 2002 newspaper feature chose to focus on two polar opposite towns Montclair, New Jersey and Franklin, Tennessee to demonstrate the political differences between red states and blue states. Montclair has organizations and groups to the left of the political spectrum like chapters of Amnesty International and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, while Franklin has organizations and groups to the right of the political spectrum like Christian World Broadcasting and the Middle Tennessee Home Education Association (Lawrence 2002). Fiorina has an issue with this media profile because Montclair overwhelmingly supported Gore and Franklin overwhelmingly supported Bush during the 2000 election. This article is a prime example of the media's infatuation with the frame of societal polarization and the selection of extreme cases to support that frame.

The last timeframe, 2008 to 2012, brings us closer to the present and is thus crucial for understanding media's role today in shaping perceptions surrounding the phenomenon of polarization. This media content analysis aims to demonstrate the trend of media coverage on the issue of societal polarization. In addition to the database key terms searches, I briefly skimmed each article to eliminate false positive results. Fiorina conjectures that since the inception of the

⁷ President Bill Clinton won 43.01% and 49.23% of the popular vote in the 1992 election and the 1996 election respectively, neither of these percentages accounting for a majority. President George W. Bush won his first term with 47.87% of the popular vote in 2000 and won a minimal majority of the popular vote during his re-election in 2004 with 50.73%.

term “culture war” there has been an increasing number of articles characterizing the public as polarized in political news and editorials. The media frame of a polarized American electorate emphasizes terms such as “culture war,” Red America, and Blue America to signal issue and social distance among everyday citizens mirroring the gridlock of Congress. The data displays clear pattern: an increase in the number of stories over time dedicated to the ideological differences between the two parties, between regions of the United States, and between ordinary partisans.

Data and Trends

Overall, the data strongly reinforces Fiorina’s claim that the press has been increasingly painting the picture of a polarized society. Specifically there is a significant increase between the first and second time periods for both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The trends for the two newspapers are indeed strikingly similar (Table 2, Table 3). There were even more stories written about the culture war in the final time period and, in raw numbers, a larger increase between the second and third time period studies as well. In addition, the raw data tells a story about the frequency. The first time period for *The Washington Post* had a total of 13 stories about societal polarization, which breaks down to an average of just over two stories per year, though the bulk of those stories were written late in the period around the advent of the term “culture war” and Buchanan’s speech. The last time period for *The Washington Post* had a total of 267 stories about societal polarization, which breaks down to an average of four or five stories month. But of course the average masks periods of higher concentration. For example, in February 2012, *The Washington Post* published 20 articles concerned with the “culture war,” coming close to a story every day. With this level of repetition, especially in the last time period

analyzed, it can be concluded that the media is reinforcing the frame of a polarized American society.

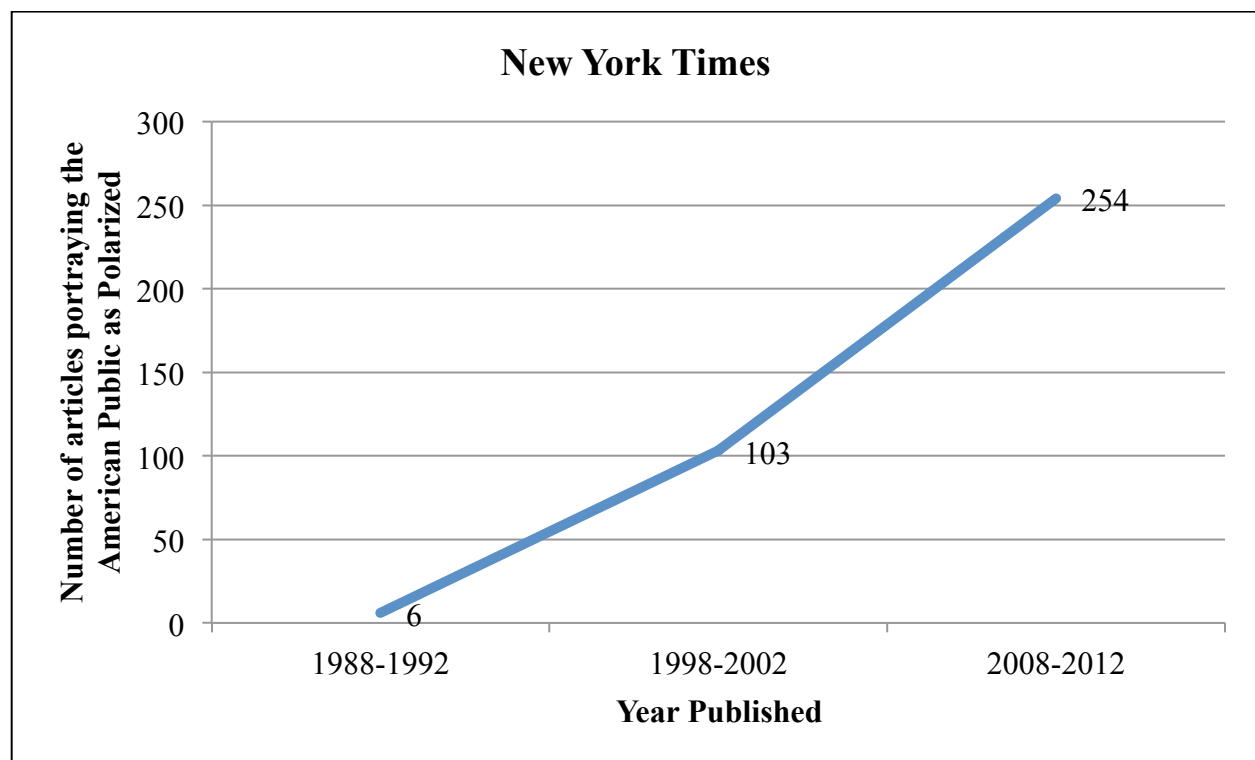
Table 2: Number of stories using the media frame of societal polarization in The New York Times and The Washington Post

	1988-1992	1998-2002	2008-2012
New York Times	6	103	254
Washington Post	13	80	267

Table 3: Percentage change for articles using the media frame of societal polarization in The New York Times and The Washington Post

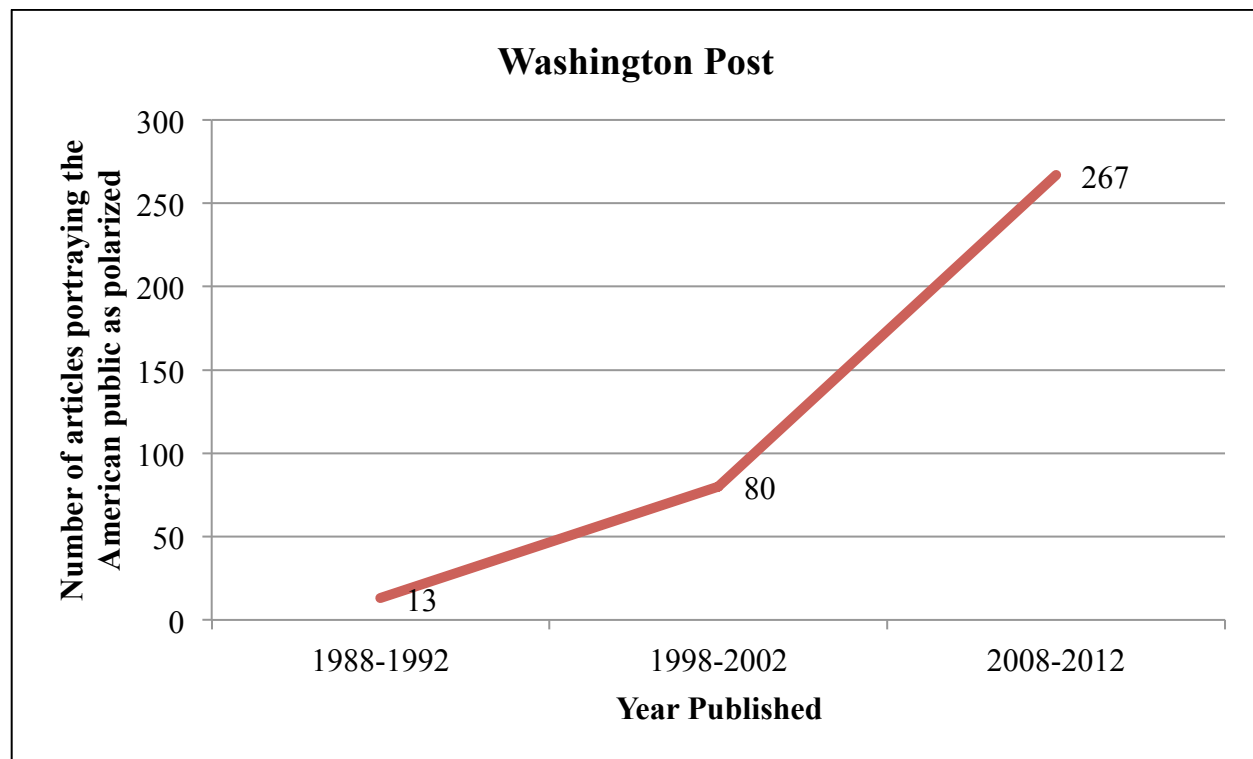
Percentage Change ⁸	Time 1-Time 2	Time 2-Time 3	Time 1-Time 3
New York Times	1617%	147%	4133%
Washington Post	515%	234%	1954%

Figure 1: The New York Times



⁸ Percentage change equation $\frac{B-A}{A} \times 100$

Figure 2: *The Washington Post*



When the “culture war” search is further broken down into Red America and Blue America there is the same overall trend but on a much smaller scale.⁹ This can occur because some of the more recent articles focus solely on one party as opposed to the overall composition of partisans in the American electorate. One such example includes “Blue-State Blues” published August 3, 2009 in *The New York Times* by Ross Douthat. This opinion piece specifically cites Obama’s speech during the 2004 Democratic Convention in which he insists there is only one United States of America as opposed to a Red America and a Blue America. Generally searching for Red America or Blue America will pull up similar results, but the specificity draws certain distinctions between stories such as those concerning Sarah Palin and her supporters and Rachel Maddow and her supporters. For example, one article from the Blue America search outlines

⁹ Data tables from these searches can be found in the appendix.

Obama's constituencies and traces his actions in the 2012 campaign to voter turnout and the demographics he carried.¹⁰

The number of articles between *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* not only seem to be somewhat comparable for every time period, but have similar peaks and valleys in each time period which I observed during the data collection process.¹¹ While conducting the searches, I noticed that the number of articles written about societal polarization tended to increase around the 2012 election focusing on the fact that Republican Presidential nominee Mitt Romney is a Mormon. This finding follows the idea of a "culture war" in which the religious and moral characteristics of the presidential candidate is the more relevant focus of the newspaper article as opposed to his policy positions in areas of defense, healthcare or education. Some popular keywords brought up throughout the search included gun control, abortion, stem cell research, evangelicals and social issues.¹²

In addition to looking at major national newspapers, I looked for the media frame of a polarized American electorate in more regional sources. For these newspapers, I hypothesize that there will be a similar pattern—that is, a rise in this media frame over time—to that of *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, but to a smaller degree. Most of the newspapers have

¹⁰ The article discussed here is "Red Versus Blue in a New Light" by Andrew Gelman and Avi Feller published on Monday November 12, 2012 in the Opinion section. It is important to note that Gelman is a political scientist at Columbia University who has published a book and numerous papers on polarization.

¹¹ If I had more time, money, and access to archival articles I would have broken down the content analysis research further looking at the month-by-month breakdown around campaigns and election. I hypothesize that stories about a polarized American electorate will be a more routine frame during these particular points in time as opposed to the summer in an off-election year.

¹² Headlines from the content analysis searches include the September 6, 2009 article "What is blue in '08, red in '09? Ask Virginia?", and the January 23, 2001 article "Not even Big Bird would be safe in this culture war" from the *The Washington Post*, the June 1, 2008 article "Taking their faith, but not their politics to the people" from *The New York Times*, and the September 18, 2009 article "The 'Culture War' is Real and Scary" from *The Miami Herald*.

smaller circulations and a more circumscribed geographic hub; as a result, there are fewer column inches dedicated to the federal government and national politics. A regional or local focus also translates, in many (though not all) settings, into discussing political communities that are more homogenous even from the perspective of the culture war frame. Local newspapers, however, do devote more attention and column inches to political races in state and local legislatures. Ultimately, the results were consistent with the hypothesis as we observe an increase in the number of stories devoted to the media frame of a polarized electorate over the three time periods, even if they were considerably fewer in number compared to *The Washington Post* and *The New York* (Table 4). Clearly the culture war frame spread beyond a few elite sources and seeped into political coverage throughout the American news media. Not surprisingly, the polarized frame was mostly used to describe politics on a national level as opposed to a local level.

Table 4: Regional Newspaper Analysis

Region	Paper	1988- 1992	1998- 2002	2008- 2012
New England	New Haven Register	0	5	24
Middle Atlantic	The Philadelphia Inquirer	3	15	41
South Atlantic	The Miami Herald	0	10	40
South Atlantic	Charlotte Observer	4	15	21
East North Central	Chicago Sun Times	9	17	28
East South Central	Lexington Herald–Leader	0	10	23
East South Central	The Anniston Star (AL)	2	12	32
West North Central	Omaha World Herald	1	7	13
West South Central	The Houston Chronicle	4	18	41
Mountain	The Desert News (AZ)	2	19	32
Pacific	San Francisco Chronicle	0	15	34
Pacific	The Oregonian	3	14	34

Every regional newspaper I analyzed followed that same pattern: very few stories regarding the “culture war” in the first time period, about 10 to 20 stories regarding the “culture

war” in the second time period, and double that amount of stories regarding the “culture war” in the final time period. Newspapers that contained the most stories using the “culture war” media frame came from publications in large metropolitan cities including San Francisco, Miami, and Philadelphia. Smaller cities including New Haven, Lexington, and Omaha published an average of 20 stories in the final time period using the media frame of societal level polarization, breaking down to approximately four stories a year.¹³ While this may not seem to make a significant difference, the increase in the use of the polarized public media frame over the past twenty years signifies a strikingly consistent pattern from which we can expect the number of stories, even in small cities and towns, will increase in the years to come.

Topics discussed on the regional level are consistent with the hot button issues discussed in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, including religion, gay marriage, drugs, and gun control. One such example includes “White House must be high if it thinks war on drugs is defensible” from the June 19, 2011, edition of the *New Haven Register*, or “Social Issues: in gay marriage fight, some brands take a stand” from the July 28, 2012, edition of *The Houston Chronicle*. Education was an increasingly prevalent topic throughout the three time periods analyzed in regards to the “culture war.” *The Houston Chronicle* published four articles, two in July 2010 and two in November 2012 about the influence of this societal conflict entering schools.

The clash between liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, and politics and religion were emphasized throughout the regional newspapers. The *Chicago Sun Times*

¹³ These cities were not intentionally picked. The cities were determined by the availability of online archival articles dating back to 1988. If more archival articles were available in the time frame I was looking at, I would have picked a few newspapers from each region (for example, one from a more rural city and one from a major city in the region with a larger readership to get a better picture of media frames on the regional level).

published articles entitled “Family Values Need Protection” and “Free Ideas Suffer in Liberals’ Culture War.” The connection between political parties and obvious hostility or incivility was demonstrated in articles including “GOPs out renewing America’s ‘culture wars’” from *The San Francisco Chronicle* and “Conservative fears U.S. ‘barbarism’ – Clinton acquittal seen as collapse of culture” from *The Houston Chronicle*. This focus on the differences between parties paints the picture of an ideologically polarized Congress infiltrating the American electorate, but it also seems to signify—and may contribute to—the growing sense of affective polarization. An emphasis on differences and partisan identity can bolster psychological out-group dislike among readers (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012).

Overall the findings of this brief content analysis confirmed Fiorina’s claim that the media is spreading the story of the polarized American electorate. He asserts that there is an inherent journalistic bias in their exposure to politics, mainly interacting with politicians, interest groups, and issue activists. All of the column inches dedicated to “questions of partisan and ideological bias” have normative implications for the public as it may signify a change in news values (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2011: 22). News values refer to what is deemed to be news in the eyes of journalists, those who make decisions on what is printed and published. This suggests that the media frame of societal polarization is becoming an increasingly important angle for journalists, despite its lack of empirical evidence.

Experimental Methods and Data

The content analysis from the previous chapter serves as the foundation for my experiment. Having established that there is an increase in the use of the media frame of a polarized American electorate, the next step is to investigate the impact of this sort of media message on the public's perceptions and feelings of partisan polarization. The news messages prevalent in the content analysis were adapted into two experimental treatment conditions. In this chapter, I lay out specific hypotheses regarding the expected effects of these treatments, as well as describe the basic design of the online survey experiment, how the data was collected, and the measurement of key variables.

Hypotheses

I hypothesize that the media frame of a polarized American electorate will have an impact on both the perceived levels of ideological polarization and the reported levels of affective polarization. First and foremost, the societal polarization group, which is the treatment condition reading the article “A Nation Divided by Red and Blue” (described more fully below) will report the highest levels of perceived differences in issue positions within society and the highest levels of social distance and/or out-group dislike. The congressional polarization group, which is the second treatment condition reading the article “Congress Divided by Red and Blue,” will report similar effects to that of the first treatment condition, but to a lesser extent. I am beginning with the assumption that issue positions will be fairly centrist among all respondents regardless of treatment conditions. This will be measured in the experimental survey, as there is a section related to the respondents' policy positions on issues such as gay marriage, immigration, welfare spending, and English as the official language.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Press coverage indicating that the American electorate is polarized will increase the perceived levels of ideological polarization and will increase levels of affective polarization among respondents.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Press coverage indicating that Congress is ideologically and affectively polarized will increase the perceived levels of ideological polarization and affective polarization among respondents. But these effects will be smaller than what is observed among those who read that the American electorate as polarized.

Research Methods

In this section I will discuss my research methods in detail. The results of the content analysis revealed a trend in the media portrayal of the American electorate as an increasingly politically polarized entity over time, but this does not constitute evidence of a causal relationship between media coverage and public attitudes.¹⁴ Having established this trend nationally and regionally, the search for media effects can proceed in an experimental setting. An experiment is better suited to isolating the capacity of the news media to shape perceptions regarding polarization. Using a between subjects research design with fictional and personally manipulated news articles portraying a polarized Congress and a polarized American electorate, I am able to draw conclusions about the extent to which these sorts of news stories affect both ideological and affective polarization within society. With random assignment of subjects, it can be assumed that the mean level of individual feelings of each group is the same. Thus any

¹⁴ This finding is consistent with Fiorina's claim about the media's portrayal of the American public.

significant differences in data between groups can be attributed to the treatment condition, the news stimulus. Experiments allow for stronger causal inferences because the investigator is able to eliminate competing explanations while controlling the atmosphere and stimuli for study participants.

Experiment groups were created through the manipulation of news articles. The experiment contained three groups—a control group and two treatment groups. I used a “pure” control group for this research, which translates to the absence of any news article. The control group completed the survey except for the text introduction to the treatment article, the corresponding follow-up article questions, and the manipulation check. One treatment group discussed ideological and affective polarization within Congress, and the other treatment group discussed ideological and affective polarization within the American electorate.¹⁵ Both articles were nearly identical and were created by compiling current news stories from *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* in addition to the news articles discussed in Fiorina’s book.¹⁶ The goal is to see how, if at all, the media frame used affected a) respondents’ views of polarization in Congress and society and b) their feelings towards their own and the opposite political party. The treatment groups were led to believe that they were participating in a study to better understand the messages and clarity of political news articles. This deception was particularly helpful to distract participants, in order to avoid demand effects in which subjects try to anticipate the goals of the research and adjust their behavior accordingly.

¹⁵ From here on out I will refer to treatment group one as congressional polarization and treatment group two as societal polarization.

¹⁶ The full text of the treatment articles can be found in the appendix.

Survey Characteristics

Respondents were told that they were taking a ten-minute survey about media and politics with keywords including survey, demographics, media, and politics. The survey, created in Qualtrics, began by requesting basic demographic information as well as religious importance, media consumption habits, and political identification. Many of the questions used in the demographic and media habits section are taken from previous political science research studies, think tanks, and well known measures including the American National Election Studies, Pew Research Center, and the polarization work of Iyengar and colleagues (Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes 2012). These questions should increase the validity of the data because they have been widely used in similar scholarly contexts and, in many cases, have been thoroughly evaluated as measurements. The survey was broken into 24 question blocks: demographic, race, education, religion, party identification, ideology, media consumption habits, attention check, article questions, polarization perceptions, elected officials' willingness to compromise, political discussion, trust in government, ideological placement, party favorability, issue positions, partisan social identification measure, social distance, party affect batteries, party description checklist, job approval, participation, manipulation check, political knowledge, and income.¹⁷ These blocks will be discussed later in this section as to their measurements and connection to the independent and dependent variables.

Below is an image of the screen participants in the randomly assigned treatment groups encountered after the initial set of questions. The experiment stimulus is disguised as a front-page article from *The New York Times* to increase the credibility of the news story and to

¹⁷ Complete text of the survey can be found in the appendix.

heighten realism (Figure 3). Participants in the control group received no intervention and continued with questions regarding polarization perceptions, social distance, and issue position preferences. The survey was bookended by an introduction and a debriefing message. The introduction was part of the Amazon Mechanical Turk survey information for eligible respondents and contained a consent form (see Appendix). The debriefing section corresponded to the specific treatment condition. Those in the control group ended the survey with this message:

This survey is part of a scientific research project being conducted at the University of Michigan. We are studying how the portrayal of political polarization by the news media is shaping the views of ordinary American citizens.

Once again, your responses are very valuable for this important research and we appreciate the time you have taken to participate.

Those in the two treatment conditions of a polarized Congress and a polarized American electorate had a variation of the message above.

This survey is part of a scientific research project being conducted at the University of Michigan. We are studying how the portrayal of political polarization by the news media is shaping the views of ordinary American citizens. If you read a news story during this survey, it was fictional (created specifically for this study), although its content was inspired by and adapted from recent real news stories that appeared in newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*.

Once again, your responses are very valuable for this important research and we appreciate the time you have taken to participate.

Figure 3: Screenshot of experimental stimulus

Participants in the two treatment groups had the same survey with a few additional questions (not present for control subjects) regarding the clarity and informative nature of the article, to further distract participants from the true objective of the study. Treatment surveys also included a manipulation check to assess how closely participants had read the news article. At the end of the survey, respondents in the treatment groups were asked to report the main message of the news article they read earlier:

Do you remember which of the following answers conveys the main message of the article you read earlier?

- a. Decreased levels of polarization in Congress
- b. No change in polarization of Congress
- c. Increased levels of polarization in Congress
- d. Decreased levels of polarization in the American public
- e. No change in polarization of the American public
- f. Increased levels of polarization the American public

The majority of respondents in the treatment groups correctly answered the manipulation check confirming that they were properly exposed to the experimental stimuli. In treatment group one, the group who received a story about congressional polarization, 85.4% of respondents chose the correct answer. In treatment group two, the group who received a story about societal polarization, 82.6% of respondents chose the correct answer.

Sample

The study was conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT). This platform is beneficial for the quick collection of low-cost data from a large, diverse, random sample of adults (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2012). AMT is an online service in which Internet users are paid small fees, in this case \$1.50 for the first batch of respondents and \$1.70 for the second and third batch of respondents, to perform Human Intelligence Tasks (HIT). A HIT is defined as “a question that needs an answer” and “represents a single, self-contained task that a Worker can work on, submit an answer, and collect a reward for completing” (Amazon Mechanical Turk). AMT Workers were recruited to complete my Qualtrics-programmed survey and then randomly assigned to the experimental conditions. The survey and associated methods were reviewed by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Health and Behavioral Sciences in December 2014 and were determined to be exempt from additional oversight. The only

requirements for MTurk Workers to complete tasks on AMT and receive compensation were a computer with an Internet connection and to be at least 18 years old. Entry to the survey was restricted to MTurk Workers with a HIT approval rate greater than or equal to 95% (based on their performance on prior tasks). Furthermore I chose to limit users based on geographical location, an American IP address, and “number of HITs approved greater than or equal to 1000” (Amazon Mechanical Turk). This was done to ensure that every survey respondent is theoretically a voting-age American citizen and thus that the sample population is representative of the target population and somewhat established within the MTurk Worker community.

External validity issues are a primary concern when using AMT. Berinsky, Huber and Lenz investigate whether “estimated (average) treatment effects are accurate assessments of treatment effects for other samples and whether these estimates are reliable assessments of treatment effects for the same sample outside the MTurk setting,” (2012: 354). These concerns are particularly threatening to the generalizability of experimental results if the sample population is unrepresentative of the target population. The target population for my research is all voting-age Americans. Survey respondents ranged from age 18 to age 71, with a mean age of 35 and a standard deviation of 11. In addition, most of the survey respondents cluster around the 24 to 32 age range. When looking at the raw data, most of the respondents were Democrats (58.5%). Only 21.9% of respondents were Republicans and 19.6% of respondents were Independents (Table 5). These numbers indicate that I can better draw conclusions about Democratic and Independent partisans, but there is inherently a Democratic Party identification skew in AMT political science samples. Ultimately the AMT “sample does not perfectly match the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of the U.S. population but does not present a wildly distorted view of the U.S. population either” (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2012: 361). Thus

the MTurk population serves as a diverse pool of subjects, especially in comparison to other convenience samples, and has been suitable for replicating canonical experiments in social sciences. Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7 depict a few additional descriptive demographic statistics of the respondents in my sample.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by party identification

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Democrats	368	58.5%
Republicans	123	19.6%
Independents	138	21.9%
Total	629	100.0%

Table 6: Distribution of respondents by race

Race	Number of Respondents
White or Caucasian	530
Black or African American	45
American Indian or Alaska Native	13
Asian	49
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1
Other	13
Total	651 ¹⁸

Table 7: Distribution of respondents by Hispanic ethnicity¹⁹

Spanish, Hispanic or Latino descent	R	Percentage
Yes	52	8.3%
No	577	91.7%
Total	629	100.0%

¹⁸ For the race question, respondents were allowed to select multiple options. Thus, some people are counted more than once, and this table shows the number of times each category was checked.

To address issues of internal validity, the survey was purposefully designed with an attention check and manipulation check, in addition to timing measures for certain questions and the treatment conditions. The attention check attempts to reduce the problem of inattentiveness, as participants were not allowed to continue with the survey until they fully read the directions and correctly answered the corresponding question:

We would also like to know about your favorite television programs.

Many modern theories of communication suggest that everyday Americans prefer entertainment television programs to those carrying the news the television is a passive form of engagement. Individuals approach television to relax and minimize cognitive effort. To demonstrate that you've read this much, just go ahead and select both reality and gossip among the alternatives below, no matter what your favorite television program is. Yes, please ignore the question below and select both of those options.

What are your favorite types of television programs?

1. News
2. Comedy
3. Reality
4. Soap Opera
5. Drama
6. Gossip

Ultimately only three respondents failed the attention check twice and were subsequently eliminated from the data sample. Survey respondents were given two chances to pass the attention check question with a slight change in direction for the second attempt. The second attempt was preceded with the text “**PLEASE READ THIS QUESTION CLOSELY AND ANSWER AGAIN.”

The initial goal of data collection was to recruit 600 respondents divided evenly into the two treatment groups and control group, but I collected 696 responses from December 12 to

December 16, 2014. This enabled me to discard 66 responses without significantly decreasing the sample size and thus the statistical power of the study. Respondents were discarded by excluding the outliers in the average completion time of the entire survey and the time spent on the experimental stimulus (news article) to ensure that respondents were properly exposed to the treatment. Ideally, these discarded responses account for inattentive Workers that were not effectively treated to the experimental stimuli and Workers participating multiple times from different user accounts (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2012).²⁰ The low compensation for the length of the survey is also likely to discourage this behavior. Survey respondents who spent less than five minutes on the entire survey (n = 31), more than 2.5 hours on the entire survey (n=12), less than 10 seconds on the treatment article (n=10), or more than 45 minutes on the treatment article were dropped from the analysis (n=10). Table 8 shows the number of survey respondents in each treatment condition and Table 9 shows the breakdown of each treatment condition by party identification. One last concern regards the Workers tendency to focus on the experimental stimuli, but deceiving the respondents about the true purpose of the experiment should mitigate issues of signaling.

Table 8: Number of respondents by treatment condition

Treatment Condition	Number of Respondents
Control	230
Polarized Congress	198
Polarized Society	202
Total	630

²⁰ I released my survey in batches online collecting 200-250 responses at a time. Due to this method of data collection I did receive a follow-up email from a respondent acknowledging that he participated in the survey twice. Each survey batch was identically named, but the first batch paid MTurk Workers \$1.50 per HIT while the second and third batches paid workers \$1.70 per HIT. This adjustment in compensation was made to better pay MTurk Workers as the average time was higher than initial test runs.

Table 9: Party identification by treatment condition

	Control Group	Polarized Congress	Polarized Society
Democrats	57.6%	62.1%	55.9%
Republicans	23.6%	16.7%	25.3%
Independents	18.8%	21.2%	18.8%

Variables and Measurement

In addition to collecting information on demographic characteristics and political identities, the survey asks about other background variables such as media consumption and political knowledge. Media consumption habits were measured multiple ways. Respondents were asked to report on average how often they pay attention to what is happening in government in politics. In addition, they reported the number of days in a typical week that they watch, read, or listen to news on the radio, on the television, on the Internet, and in a newspaper. Lastly, media consumption was measured by the sources they regularly consult to learn about national news from a list including CNN, Fox News Channel, MSNBC, Politico, Google News, etc. (Table 10, Table 11).

Table 10: TV News Sources²¹

Source	N
CNN	110
ABC	121
NBC	93
CBS	140
FOX	140
MSNBC	133
PBS	51
BBC	67
Daily Show	111
Colbert Report	99

²¹ This question was presented as a checklist in which respondents could select more than one answer.

Table 11: Internet News Sources

Source	N
Websites of newspapers, magazines, or radio/TV stations	414
Google	239
Yahoo	182
Political Blogs	70
Huffington Post	208
Drudge Report	60
Slate	55
Politico	42
Talking Points Memo	15

In terms of outcome variables, the study examines effects of news articles on two aspects broad aspects of polarization. The first is ideological and the second is affective. I measure ideological polarization through a combination of questions involving polarization perceptions, issue positions, and ideological placement. To assess perceptions of polarizations, respondents were asked about whether they believed society is in the midst of a “culture war” in politics and whether they believe both Democratic and Republican members of Congress and Democratic and Republican supporters are moving farther apart on the issues, moving closer together, or the same distance they have always been. These questions individually and combined will shed light on the extent to which respondents perceive ideological polarization in the country. Questions regarding gay marriage, gun control, immigration, and a number of other issues, allow me to assess the relative centrality or extremity of policy positions among survey participants and whether reading news about polarization changes how people describe their own views.

Affective polarization was similarly measured a number of ways, including through partisan social identification, party favorability, and social distance questions. Social distance measures include questions about how partisan intermarriage (“[h]ow would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married a Republican?”), the number of friends that share the respondent’s political affiliation, and the extent to which the respondent enjoys discussing

politics with family, friends, and acquaintances, who either share their political affiliation or belong to the opposite political party. Affective polarization also is measured directly through feelings about the two parties. According to many social psychology experiments “group membership... triggers both positive feelings for the in-group, and negative evaluations of the out-group” (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012: 406). This is examined through questions asking about party favorability and whether Democrats’ and/or Republicans’ policies threaten the nation’s well-being. Survey respondents are also asked a set of party affect batteries, which measure the frequency with which respondents have felt specific positive and negative emotions towards the Democratic and Republican parties. Finally, the extent to which an individual feels connected to his or her political party is assessed through partisan social identification measures. These items ask respondents about the extent to which they think of themselves as part of the collective and to which their personal feelings are tied to the fortunes of the group. By combining all of the above measures, I seek to obtain a fairly comprehensive picture of the perceived and felt level of polarization among respondents, and in turn to assess which among these factors is vulnerable to influence by media portrayals of polarization.

Results

This section analyzes the results of my experiment. It is broken down into three sections by major themes: ideological polarization, polarization perceptions, and affective polarization. The experiment serves to demonstrate the link between the media frame of a polarized Congress and American electorate and the extent and perception of polarization in society.

Ideological Polarization

Here I will begin with the examination of ideological polarization within society. Much of the debate among social scientists concerns whether society is in fact polarized in regards to their issue positions. According Fiorina, society tends to be centrist in nature. This was reinforced by the average issue position recorded in my sample. Overall, on a basic ideological scale with 0 being liberal and 1 being conservative combining all issue position questions, there was a mean of 0.467 with a standard deviation of 0.232 (Table 12).²² This demonstrates that the average view among the sample is fairly centrist with a very slight liberal lean.²³ Opinions tend to be distributed in a unimodal fashion, where most are clustered around the most moderate issue position (Figure 4). The basic claim regarding moderation includes cases of consensus where the position itself may be on one end of the scale, but the key point is that societal views are not fractured by a deep divide.

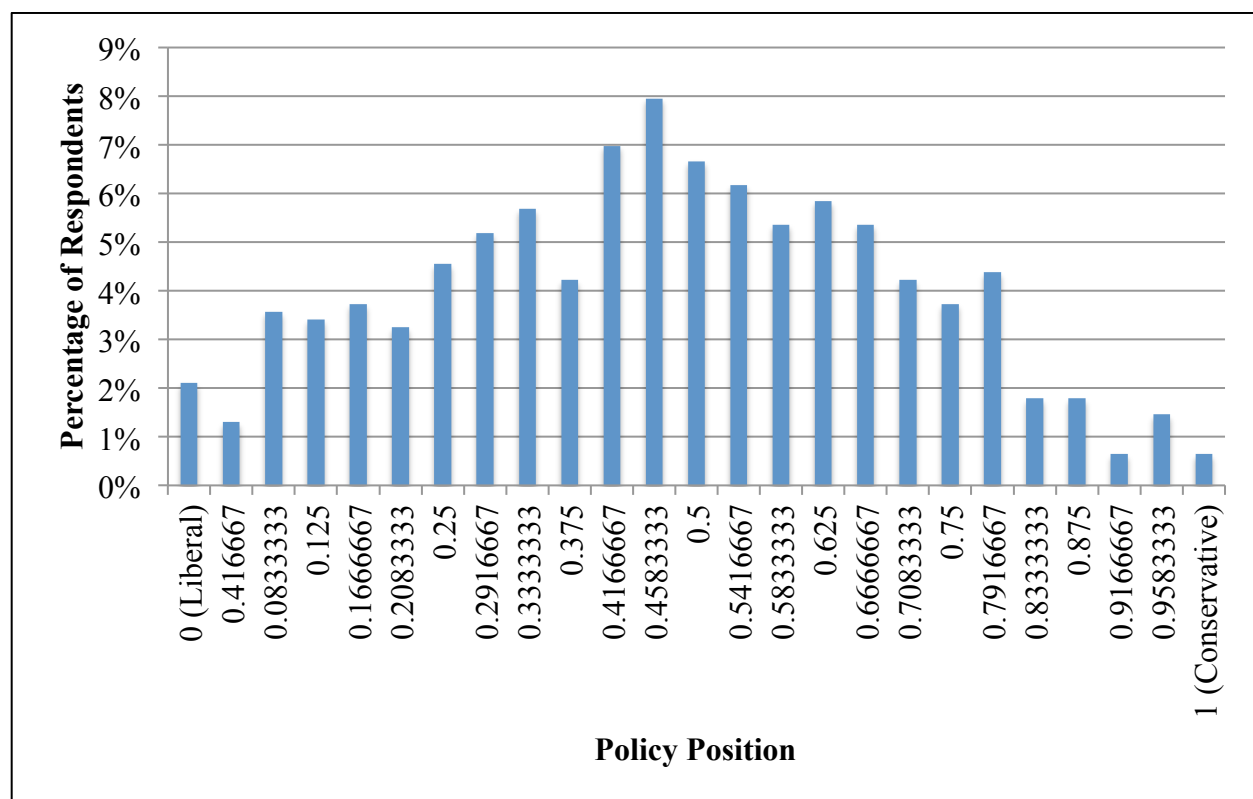
²² All issue positions are scaled 0-1 following the same pattern explained above with 0 representing the most liberal option and 1 representing the most conservative option. Thus means recorded as less than .5 can be interpreted as leftward leaning and means recorded as more than .5 can be interpreted as rightward leaning.

²³ I am not surprised to see a liberal lean considering that the majority of survey respondents identified as democrats, 58.5%. But it's particularly interesting that even with a significantly more liberal sample the overall mean issue position is fairly centrist.

Table 12: Difference of Means for Issue Positions

Issue	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall ²⁴	.467	.232
Gay Marriage	.173	.328
Gun Control	.307	.343
Immigration	.574	.297
English as the Official Language	.595	.340
Death Penalty	.478	.362
Welfare Spending	.449	.308

Figure 4: Issue Position Distribution

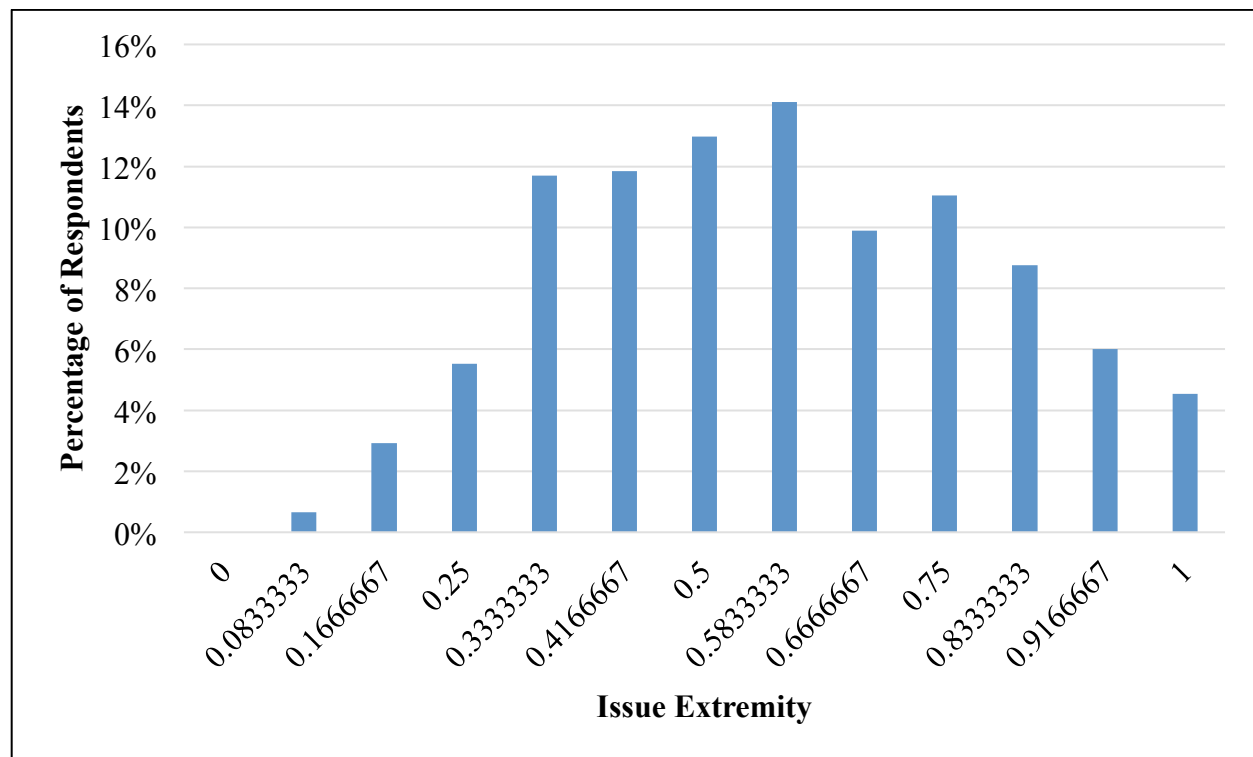


The lack of ideological polarization among my sample was further reinforced by analysis on issue extremity (Figure 5). The issue extremity measure is also a compilation of all policy

²⁴ The overall category is a summary measure that combines issue position questions on gay marriage, gun control, immigration, language, death penalty and welfare spending. This measure and the entire chart is scale from 0 to 1 with 0 being the most liberal issue position and 1 being the most conservative issue position.

preference questions, but instead of looking at the mean issue position it takes into account the extremity or moderation of the respondents' answers. It aims to gauge the ideological distance present in my sample. Overall, issue extremity was fairly similar among all treatment conditions with the largest distance recorded in the elite polarization treatment condition and the smallest distance recorded in the control group ($M_{\text{elitepolarization}} = .586$, $M_{\text{societalpolarization}} = .561$, $M_{\text{control}} = .574$).²⁵ The means show that the sample is not completely moderate, but rather a very modest half step in the more extreme direction (Table 13). Breaking down this analysis by political affiliation, different patterns emerge. Republican and Independent survey respondents reported higher issue extremity distance than Democratic respondents (Table 14, Table 15, Table 16). For both Republican and Democratic survey respondents the largest means were recorded in the elite condition, for Independent survey respondents the largest mean was recorded in the control group. In addition, there were statistically significant differences among issue extremity for Democrat respondents in the two treatment conditions and for Independent respondents in the control and treatment conditions.

²⁵ This measure was created late in the writing process and does not accurately convey issue extremity as the survey questions regarding issue positions vary in number of response options. For example, the question about gay marriage only has three options and thus is more likely to skew the issue extremity measure as most survey respondents were in favor of the legal recognition of same-sex unions. Questions regarding welfare spending and the death penalty, however, contained a 7-point scale. The difference in number of response options do not make this measure as reliable as possible. With more time, I would recreate the issue position portion of my survey, using the same policy preference questions, ensuring that each question had the same 7-point scale or number of response options to accurately collect data on issue extremity.

Figure 5: Issue Extremity**Table 13: Issue Extremity**

	R	Mean	Standard Error
Elite Polarization	197	.586	.015
Societal Polarization	197	.561	.016
Control	222	.584	.015
Treatments	394	.574	.011

*Note: *p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01 (two-tailed).*

Table 14: Democratic Issue Extremity

	R	Mean	Standard Error
Elite Polarization	122	.581*	.019
Societal Polarization	108	.526*	.021
Control	127	.543	.019
Treatments	230	.555	.014

Table 15: Independent Issue Extremity

	R	Mean	Standard Error
Elite Polarization	42	.583	.035
Societal Polarization	38	.539	.036
Control	41	.636*	.035
Treatments	80	.563*	.025

Table 16: Republican Issue Extremity

	R	Mean	Standard Error
Elite Polarization	33	.611	.036
Societal Polarization	51	.650	.029
Control	54	.640	.029
Treatments	84	.635	.022

When looking at the means for each individual question, every question but gay marriage and gun control turns up moderate issue positions. It is interesting to note that the average welfare spending and death penalty issue positions lean slightly to the left²⁶ and the average immigration and English as the official language issue positions lean slightly to the right.²⁷ The average issue position for gay marriage and gun control holds a significantly more liberal, and somewhat extreme, view on the ideological scale.

Questions regarding immigration and welfare spending, two hot topics in the latest midterm election were consistent with the assumption of a centrist society. The majority of survey respondents, 41.8%, took the neutral position, keeping immigration levels consistent with current laws and regulations, when asked about the ideal number of immigrants permitted to live

²⁶ Here leaning slightly to the left signifies more liberal policy preference such as increased welfare spending at the federal level and the elimination of capital punishment.

²⁷ Here leaning slightly right signifies more conservative policy preferences such as making English the official language of the United States.

in the United States (Table 17).²⁸ Given the liberal bias in the experiment sample, I was surprised to see a pretty even distribution of responses regarding the increase or decrease in federal spending on welfare programs. The most popular issue position with 26.2% was the neutral one, neither increase nor decrease federal spending on welfare (Table 18). Thus these questions confirm my initial assumption and Fiorina's claim that society remains moderate in issue positions.

Table 17: Immigration

	Respondents	Percentage
Decreased a lot	135	21.6%
Decreased a little	99	15.8%
Left the same as it is now	261	41.8%
Increased a little	75	12%
Increased a lot	55	8.8%

Table 18: Welfare Spending

	Respondents	Percentage
1 (Spend less on welfare programs)	66	10.6%
2	55	8.8%
3	559	9.4%
4	164	26.2%
5	106	17%
6	73	11.7%
7 (Spend more on welfare programs)	102	16.3%

Looking at the distribution of issue positions among respondents, if they were not moderate in nature then there was nonetheless consensus. Certain issues such as gay marriage,

²⁸ While the majority of respondents reported that they believe the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the U.S. to live should be left the same as it is now, there seems to be a conservative lean to this question. This is interesting given the significant Democratic presence of the sample. Respondents were more likely to be in favor of decreasing immigration (37.4%) as opposed to increasing immigration (20.2%).

the majority of survey respondents, 75.6%, answered with a traditionally progressive²⁹ position, the legalization of marriage for gay and lesbian couples, but there was significant agreement (Table 19). Thus, issue positions are not necessarily clustered around the extremes, but they may be congregating towards a more liberal or conservative view as opposed to occupying the centrist position. Gay marriage is a particularly interesting issue position to measure in regards to the question of “culture war” because this conflict is directly concerned with moral and religious issues as opposed to the more traditional economic issues. According to the culture war storyline, we should see a significant number of respondents recorded in two categories: gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry and there should be no legal recognition of gay or lesbian couple’s relationship. My sample, however, shows a different picture where the majority of respondents support the legalization of marriage for gay and lesbian couples with similarly small support for the more moderate and conservative gay marriage views. Thus on an issue directly related to the phenomenon of the culture war, there is not conflicting extreme views but rather a majority favoring a policy of marriage equality.

Table 19: Gay Marriage

	Respondents	Percentage
Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry	475	75.6%
Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions, but not legally marry	89	14.2%
There should be no legal recognition of gay or lesbian couple’s relationship	64	10.2%

²⁹ Historically, in the United States, the legalization of gay marriage was not the norm and thus support of marriage equality is presented as the progressive, liberal issue position. As of late, however, there has much debate about the legality of marriage for gay and lesbian couples and may be ultimately decided by the U.S. Supreme Court this summer.

The only issue that seemed to have a wide range of issue positions and a significant amount of support in the extremes was the death penalty. Respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale of 1 to 7 with a score of 1 indicating strong opposition to the death penalty and a score of 7 indicating strong support for the death penalty. The two most popular answers were the most extreme options with 22.9% and 17.0% of respondents placing themselves as strongly opposed and strongly supportive of the death penalty respectively (Table 20). Ultimately the distribution of responses for this issue seems to support the claim of an ideologically polarized society as most respondents place themselves on the more extreme sides of the scale. This is the only issue position question that displayed this pattern though. Every other question had a majority of respondents selecting the neutral position or more moderate views.

Table 20: Death Penalty

	Respondents	Percentage
1 (Strongly oppose)	143	22.9%
2	73	11.7%
3	57	9.1%
4	80	12.8%
5	99	15.9%
6	66	10.6%
7 (Strongly favor)	106	17.0%

From the data gathered, the majority of survey respondents occupy centrist issue positions or congregate around an agreed upon view, like that of the legalization of gay marriage. Contemporary moral and religious issues such as gay marriage and gun control or consistent party issues such as welfare spending do not follow a pattern of more and more support for the extremities. While the question concerning gun control favored a liberal issue position making it more difficult for people to buy a gun than it is now, 50.2% of respondents, there was still a

decent amount of support for the more moderate option, keeping the rules about the same as they are now, 38.2% of respondents (Table 21). We cannot definitively say that society is ideologically polarized over this issue as there would need to be a significant amount of support for easing current gun control laws and restrictions.³⁰

Table 21: Gun Control

	Respondents	Percentage
More difficult	315	50.2%
Keep the rules about the same	240	38.2%
Easier	73	11.6%

Transitioning to average issue positions among respondents based on treatment condition, there is slight variation. The elite polarization treatment condition yielded slightly more liberal positions (.437) while the societal polarization treatment condition is basically completely centrist (.499) on the ideological scale. When issue positions are further broken down by political affiliation, there are significant differences between Democrats and Republicans with Independents acting as the moderate policy preference (Table 22). Republican respondents took the more conservative position on every policy preference question, with relatively moderate positions on gay marriage, gun control and the death penalty, and the most extreme view on English as the official language. Democratic respondents took the more liberal position on every policy preference, with more extreme positions recorded for the legalization of gay marriage and stricter gun control laws, while reporting centrist positions on immigration, making English the official language, and the death penalty. The largest differences in mean issue position between Democratic and Republican respondents were recorded for the legalization of gay marriage and

³⁰ This question would perhaps be better suited if this experiment had a better Republican presence. Most of the respondents were Democrats who generally support more difficult gun control laws.

the amount of money spent on welfare spending. Overall, the data suggests that the sample is moderate in issue position. There seems to be significant distance between certain political issues such as gay marriage,³¹ but this distance does not extend to every issue. Of the five issues represented in my survey Democrats and Independents reported moderate views for four of those issues and Republicans reported moderate views for three of those issues. Thus, I can conclude that the media's picture of a polarized American electorate is not an accurate depiction of my sample's ideological distribution. The responses regarding issue position in the survey is consistent with Friona's view of media's construction of a mythological polarized American electorate.

Table 22: Issue positions by political identification

Issue	Democrat			Independents			Republican		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Gay Marriage	368	.086	.231	122	.127	.291	138	.446	.422
Gun Control	367	.191	.285	123	.431	.375	138	.507	.325
Immigration	364	.505	.277	123	.563	.305	138	.764	.258
English as the official language	368	.508	.323	123	.600	.345	138	.822	.260
Death Penalty	364	.412	.338	122	.481	.388	138	.649	.346
Welfare Spending	364	.352	.259	123	.440	.297	138	.714	.283

³¹ Again, this finding may be particularly significant because of the current political climate and the prominence of this issue. In the months leading up to the experiment there was wide discussion of marriage equality with California's Proposition 8 and Defense of Marriage Act, Alabama's Supreme Court and Chief Justice Roy Moore's denial of gay marriage during the data collection period, and the U.S. Supreme Court's announcement to hear arguments on the legality of marriage for gay and lesbian couples in Summer 2015.

Political Approval, Party Favorability and Trust

In addition to issue positions, approval of President Obama and Congress, party favorability, trust in government, and the willingness to compromise preferences were other important survey measures to complete the picture of society's view of American politics. Looking at the distribution of responses for questions for trust in government, willingness to compromise, and job approval, there is an overall agreement among survey respondents, as opposed to varying levels of approval based on treatment condition. My sample overwhelmingly prefers politicians who are willing to compromise as opposed to politicians who stick to their principles no matter what ($M_{\text{treatment}} = .775$, $M_{\text{control}} = .742$). There is a slightly greater preference for willingness to compromise among respondents who read news articles about polarization at either level, but this finding can not be stated with certainty ($p = .318$). Despite a vast majority of the American electorate preferring candidates who reach across the aisle, most elected officials are consistently sticking to their principles. Furthermore this preference for compromise in policy-making is highest among respondents in the elite polarization treatment group ($M_{\text{elitepolarization}} = .788$, $M_{\text{societalpolarization}} = .767$). Thus, the media's depiction of incivility and social distance in Congress adds to the desire for more moderate elected officials. It posits an interesting question: If American voters desire candidates who compromise to create public policy, why are these actions more and more infrequent in the federal government?³²

Presidential and congressional approval differ slightly in that more respondents approve of the way President Obama is handling his job than of the way Congress is handling their job.³³ "Approve" is the most popular response option for President Obama. Fifty-one percent of

³² This question will be discussed in the next section.

³³ It should be noted that President Obama was not explicitly named or discussed in either treatment condition.

respondents in the elite polarization treatment condition, 39% of respondents in the societal polarization treatment condition, and 41% of respondents in the control group indicate that they approve of the way President Obama is handling his job. There is a (marginally) statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses between the treatment conditions ($p = .091$) suggesting that the focus on congressional polarization either took the spotlight away from President Obama or made him look good (Table 23). Job approval for Congress yielded no significant differences among treatment conditions, but contains more negative response options when compared to Obama's approval distribution with a majority of respondents responding strong disapproval or disapproval (Table 24). Trust in government, however, is not entirely pessimistic. Fifty-eight percent of respondents in the elite polarization treatment condition, 54% of respondents in the societal polarization treatment condition, and 52% of respondents in the control group report that they can trust the federal government most of the time. The next most reported response was that the public trusts the federal government to do the right thing about half of the time.

Table 23: President Obama Approval

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Strongly disapprove	20.8%	22.3%	27.2%	21.6%
Disapprove	23.9%	33.7%	27.7%	28.8%
Approve	50.8%	39.0%	41.1%	44.9%
Strongly approve	4.5%	5.0%	4.0%	4.7%

Table 24: Congressional Approval

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Strongly disapprove	35.9%	36.0%	43.3%	35.9%
Disapprove	52.5%	51.5%	43.3%	52.0%
Approve	10.6%	12.5%	13.4%	11.6%
Strongly approve	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%

Lastly, overall party favorability for the Democratic Party and the Republican Party was impacted in terms of the difference of means and the distribution of responses within the treatment conditions and the control group. On the whole, the Democratic Party had higher average favorability levels than the Republican Party in both the treatment conditions and the control group.³⁴ Average favorability of the Democratic Party was higher and significantly different between the treatment conditions and the control group ($M_{\text{treatment}} = .503$, $M_{\text{control}} = .449$, $p = .015$). Favorability of the Republican Party did not show a statistically significant difference in means, but just over one percentage point change in the scale higher in the treatment conditions ($M_{\text{treatment}} = .308$, $M_{\text{control}} = .291$). This suggests that press coverage of polarization regardless of the focus leads to a more positive view of the political parties. This contradicts the idea that media frames are influential in shaping public opinion or perception, but as you will see in the next section perceptions of polarization is affected by the type of media coverage.

Polarization Perceptions

Moving from the extent of ideological polarization present in my sample, or rather lack thereof, I look at the perceived levels of polarization. This section assesses feelings about the trajectory of the country, assumed levels of polarization in Congress and in society, and Fiorina's

³⁴ This is not particularly surprising given the political skew of the sample.

culture war concept. According to the hypotheses laid out earlier, perceived levels of ideological polarization among the American electorate should be highest for the societal condition followed by the elite condition and the control group reporting the lowest levels of perceived mass ideological polarization.

While the overall difference in means of the summary measure for polarization perceptions was not statistically significant,³⁵ individual measures about the current state of the U.S. and the distance between politicians resulted in statistically significant differences ($p < .01$ for both questions). When asked “[h]ow do you feel about the way things are going in the country?” respondents in the elite polarization treatment group reported higher levels of dissatisfaction than the societal polarization treatment group, an eight percentage point change in the scale. This finding sheds light on the media’s role in shaping perceptions as the treatment group read an article completely concerned with congressional polarization and were subsequently more dissatisfied than those who read about conflict among the American electorate. Thus the media’s direct depiction of the ideological and social distance between politicians played a role in shaping respondents view of the country as a whole (Table 25, Table Table 26).³⁶

³⁵ I will be using a p-value of less than .05 to indicate statistical significance unless otherwise noted. In addition, all t-values reported are results of a two-sided difference of means testing.

³⁶ This common sentiment of dissatisfaction with the United States was not unique to the treatment groups as identical percentages of respondents (76%) in the control group and the two treatment groups reported that they were either very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied. This question like all questions were scaled 0-1 with 0 indicating total dissatisfaction with the way things are going in the country and 1 indicating total satisfaction with the way things are going in the country.

Table 25: Polarization Perceptions by Treatment Conditions

	Elite Polarization Treatment Group	Societal Polarization Treatment Group
Polarization Perceptions	.575	.565
Country Perceptions	.217***	.292***
Elite Perceptions	.879*	.829*
Society Perceptions	.768	.700
Culture War Perceptions	.537 ³⁷	.498
N	198	202

Note: *p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 26: Polarization Perceptions by Treatment Group

	Treatment Groups	Control Groups
Polarization Perceptions	.570	.559
Country Perceptions	.255	.273
Elite Perceptions	.854***	.793***
Society Perceptions	.734	.680
Culture War Perceptions	.517 ³⁸	.531
N	400	229

Media's influence is also seen in the responses to the perceived distance amongst Democratic and Republican members of Congress. On average, every respondent answered that members of Congress are moving farther apart, but the mean was significantly higher in the treatment conditions ($M_{\text{treatment}} = .854$, $M_{\text{control}} = .793$, $p = .008$). This finding emphasizes the power of framing and its influence on how politics and politicians are perceived. This suggests that the idea of politicians moving farther apart in terms of issue positions is a relatively common view among society without the prompting of a newspaper article and that the manipulated news articles strengthened the perception of an ideologically polarized Congressmen. When specifically comparing the two treatment conditions the difference of means falls just short of the conventional threshold of statistical significance suggesting that media is influential in shaping

³⁷ This question only received 197 responses. Most questions in my survey were not mandatory to answer and thus respondents were free to skip questions.

³⁸ Similar to the footnote above, this question only received 399 responses.

perceptions ($p = .053$). Additionally, the distribution of answers changes with the direct discussion of congressional gridlock. In the elite polarization treatment group 80% of respondents believed that congressmen are moving farther apart. Only 17% of respondents believed that congressmen are about the same distance on the issues³⁹ in the elite polarization group, but 30% of respondents in the societal polarization treatment group and 28% of respondents in the control group believed that congressmen are the same distance they have always been. These findings suggest the news coverage specifically concerning ideological polarization within Congress influences readers' perceptions of Capitol Hill.

The major question underlying Fiorina's argument is whether people believe, as a result of media's portrayal of the masses, that the American public is ideologically polarized. Although we do not see any statistically significant difference in means, the average opinion of the respondents in the two treatment conditions and the control group overwhelmingly believed that Democratic and Republican supporters are moving farther apart ($M_{\text{treatment}} = .734$ $M_{\text{control}} = .680$). Most importantly, the differences in response distributions between the control group and the two treatment conditions were statistically significant ($p = .006$) demonstrating that media's frame of polarization whether it be about ordinary partisans or politicians led respondents to believe society is in fact ideologically polarized. When looking at the distribution of responses it is interesting to note that the elite polarization treatment condition reported the highest frequency of partisans moving farther apart (Figure 6). Seventy-five percent of respondents in the elite polarization treatment condition perceived ordinary partisans to moving farther apart in comparison to 68% in the societal polarization treatment condition and 63% in the control group.

³⁹ "Same distance" refers to the perception that members of Congress are consistent in issue distance when compared to a historical context i.e. they are the same distance apart that they have always been.

Additionally, the elite polarization treatment condition consistently reported the most extreme mean in regards to polarization perceptions whether it be that they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country or that America is in the midst of a culture war (Table 27).

Figure 6: Perception of Movement of Democratic and Republican Supporters

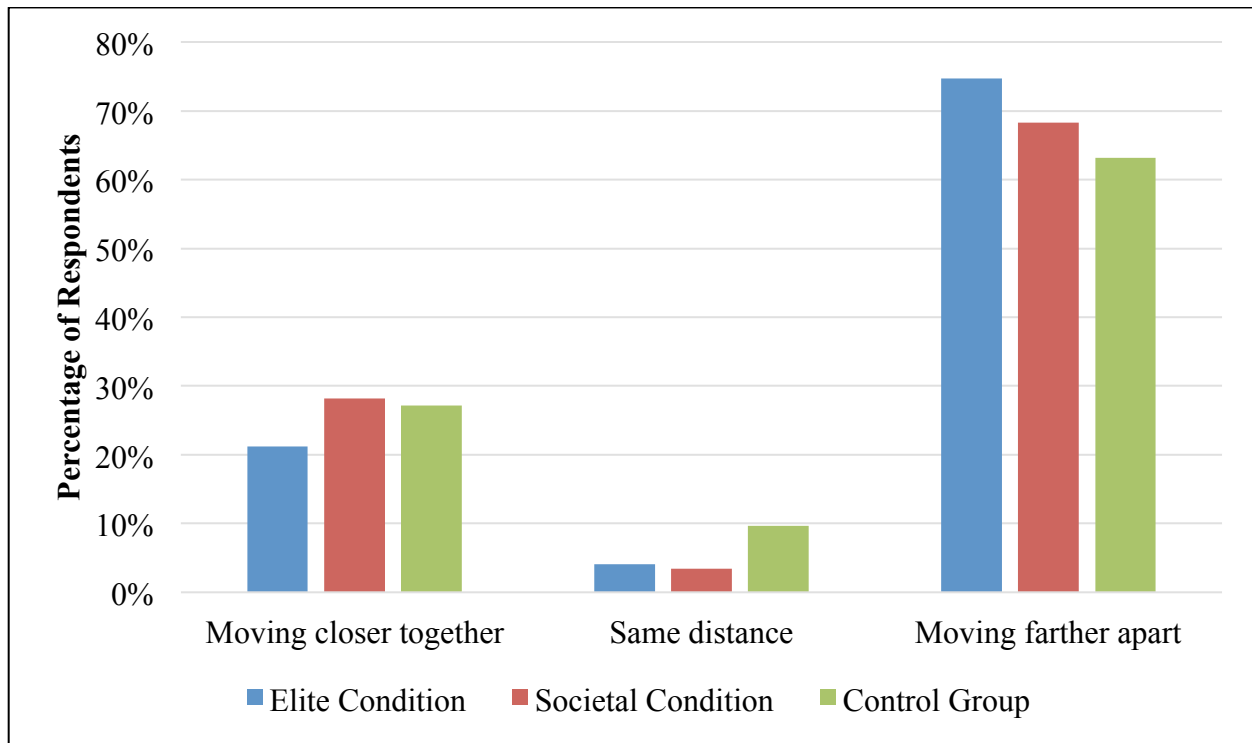


Table 27: Polarization Perceptions

	Treatment Group	N	Means	Std Error
Polarization Perceptions Summary Measure	Elite Polarization	197	.575	.012
	Societal Polarization	201	.565	.011
	Control	227	.559	.012
Country Perceptions	Elite Polarization	198	.217	.015
	Societal Polarization	201	.292	.017
	Control	228	.273	.017
Elite Perceptions	Elite Polarization	198	.879	.018
	Societal Polarization	202	.829	.018
	Control	229	.793	.020
Society Perceptions	Elite Polarization	198	.768	.030
	Societal Polarization	202	.700	.032
	Control	228	.680	.030
Culture War Perceptions	Elite Polarization	197	.537	.018
	Societal Polarization	202	.498	.018
	Control	229	.531	.019

Looking directly at the question of the culture war, the story of societal clash as portrayed in the pages of newspapers throughout the United States, there are small differences in means but none are statistically significant. Here what is more interesting is comparing the distribution of responses between the combined treatment conditions and the control group (**Figure 7**). Chi-squared analysis resulted in very statistically significant difference in frequencies between the control and treatment conditions ($p = .008$). While the most popular response in both the treatment conditions and the control group was that the term culture war describes today's politics moderately well, respondents in the control group were more likely to report extreme answers—not at all or extremely well. Furthermore, the treatment conditions followed a more normal bell-curve distribution with approximately equal number of respondents for the options slightly well and very well, 27.32% and 27.57% respectively. Figure 8 provides more detail on the distribution of each treatment condition. Interestingly, the society treatment group receiving a news article completely concerned with this idea of a culture war reported the fewest extreme

answers, but the group with the absence of a news intervention reported the highest levels of a perceived culture war (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Culture War Perceptions for Treatment Groups

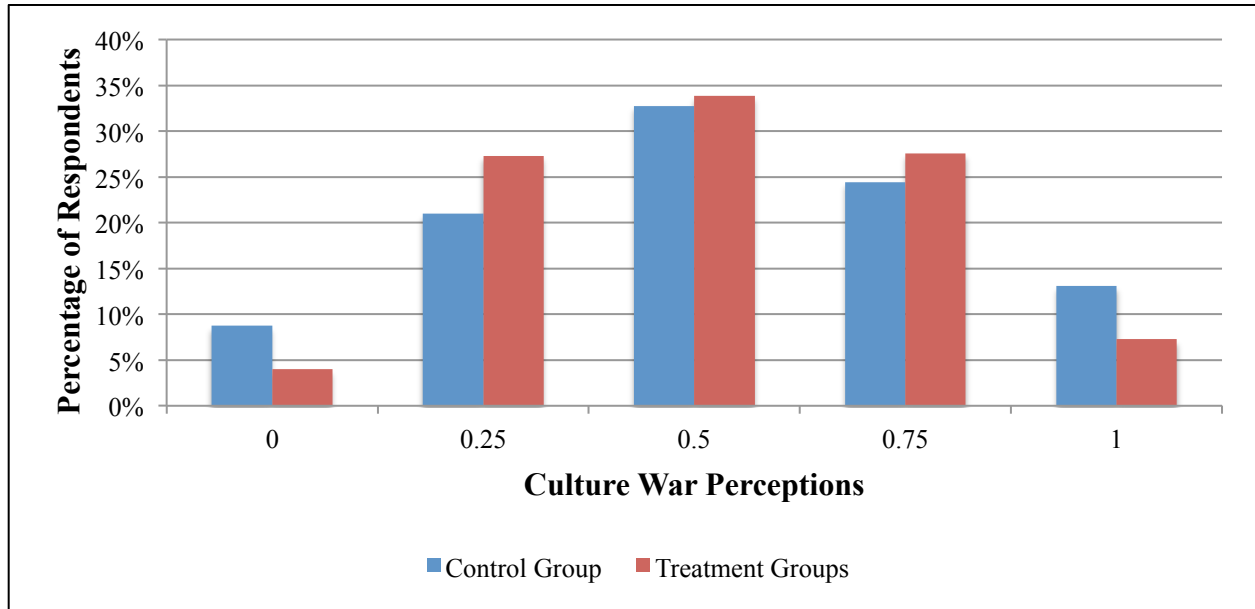
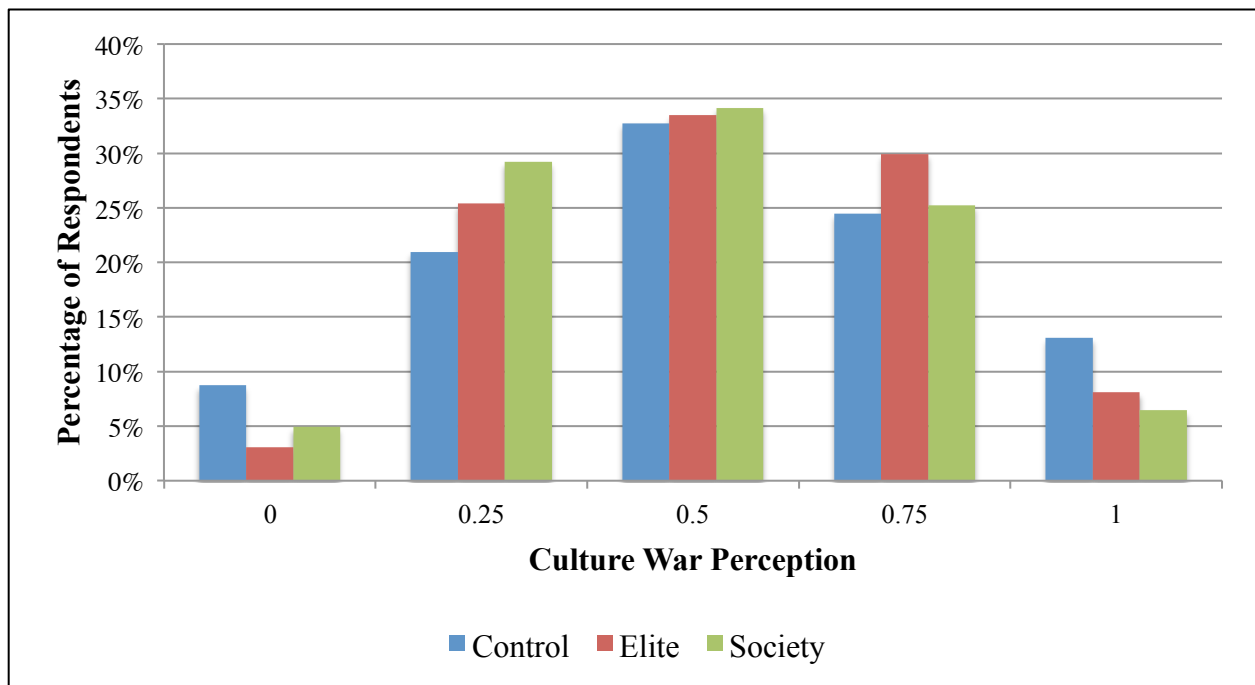


Figure 8: Culture War Perceptions for Treatment Conditions

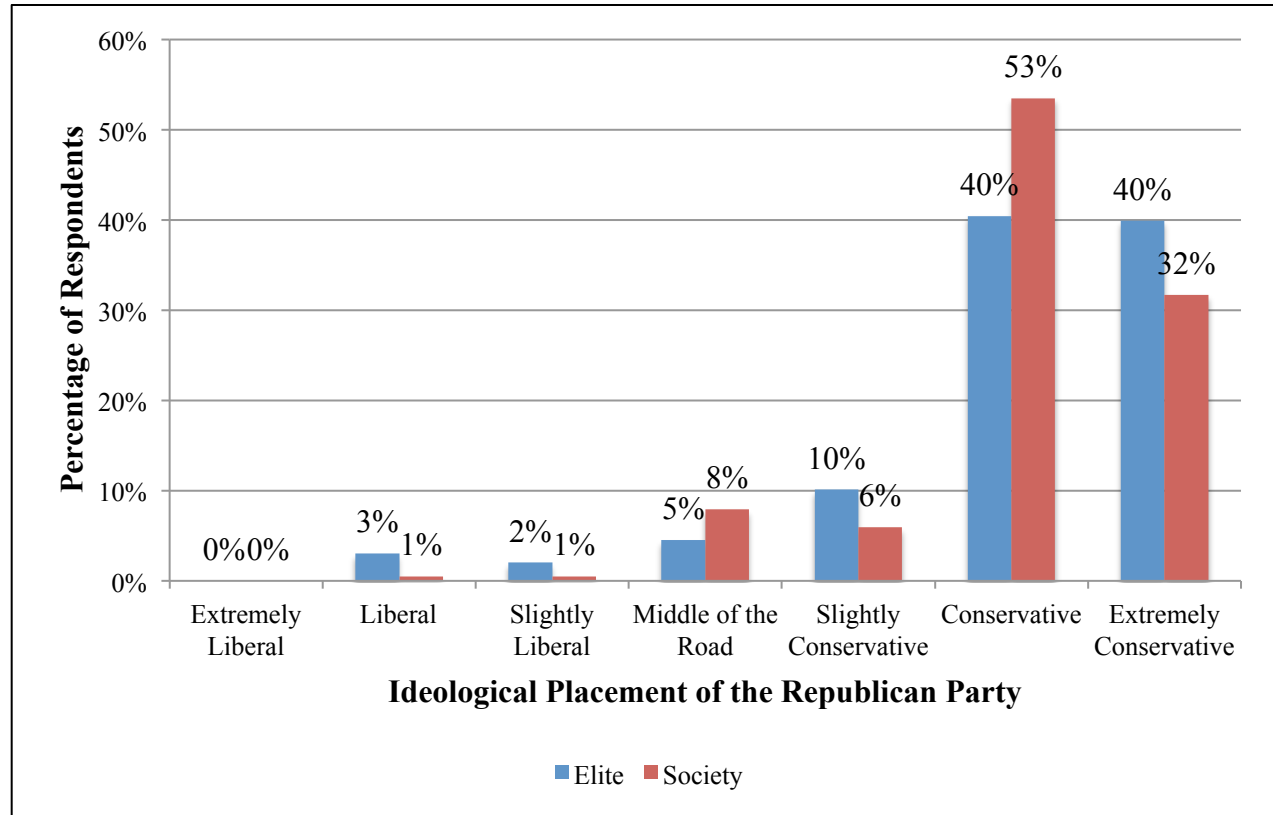


Party and Policy Perceptions

Respondents were asked to place the Democratic and Republican party on a 7-point ideological scale ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservatives. The results were pretty unanimous across treatment conditions with nearly identical means for the ideological placement of the Republican Party ($M_{\text{treatment}} = .841$, $M_{\text{control}} = .841$).⁴⁰ Most respondents categorized the Republican Party as conservative as opposed to slightly conservative or extremely conservative and the Democratic Party as liberal as opposed to slightly liberal or extremely liberal. The most interesting distinctions appear in the distribution of responses between the elite polarization treatment condition and the societal polarization treatment condition for the ideological placement of the Republican Party (Figure 9). Figure 9 demonstrates that respondents in the elite polarization treatment condition classified the Republican Party as more conservative than the societal polarization treatment condition. This was also evident in comparison to the control group in which 36% of respondents categorized the Republican Party as extremely conservative. This suggests that the media frame of an ideologically and affectively polarized Congress pushes the perceived ideological placement of Republican Party farther to the right.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The ideological scale was re-scaled from 0-1 with 0 indicating the most liberal score and 1 indicating the most conservative score.

⁴¹ This finding was only statistically significant ($p = .10$) for the ideological placement of the Republican Party as respondents in the elite polarization treatment condition did not classify the Democratic Party in more liberal terms than the societal treatment condition. This seems to be an asymmetrical effect that hints to a difference in coverage between the Democratic and Republican Party. An interesting new investigation might not only manipulate the polarized population, but distinguish between polarization within both parties.

Figure 9: Ideological Placement of Republican Party

Perceptions regarding the policies of both political parties were significantly different in the treatment conditions when compared to the control group. Respondents were asked how threatening the policies of both the Democratic and Republican parties were to the well-being of the nation. Overall Republican Party policies were seen as more threatening than policies from the Democratic Party, but respondents in the control group perceived both parties' policies to be more threatening than respondents in either treatment condition (Table 28, Table 29).⁴² This finding seems to suggest that the experimental stimuli, the news articles are having a moderating effect. The media frame of a polarized Congress and society is unexpectedly leading readers to view the parties less harshly and by extension their policies.

⁴² As expected given the Democratic skew of the sample.

Table 28: Do Republican or Democratic Policies Threaten the U.S.?

	Elite Polarization Treatment Group	Societal Polarization Treatment Group
Democratic Policies	.296	.335
Republican Policies	.522**	.457**
N	197	202

Table 29: Do Republican or Democratic Policies Threaten the U.S.?

	Treatment Groups	Control Groups
Democratic Policies	.305*	.349*
Republican Policies	.489*	.537*
N	399	229

Affective Polarization

The third set of results concerns the level of affective polarization among the American public. According to the hypotheses laid out earlier, affective polarization, both Republicans and Democrats increasingly dislike their opponents, will be higher for both treatment conditions, with the largest effects believed to be seen among those receiving press coverage focusing on polarization within the American electorate. The data suggests some movement in feelings and increased dislike of the opposing party similar to what Iyengar found (2012). The picture of affective polarization is a composite of four sets of survey questions: social distance, political discussion, partisan social identification, and party affect batteries.

Social Distance

The social distance measure was operationalized by two sets of questions regarding inter-party marriage and the political affiliation makeup of one's peer group. While the overall

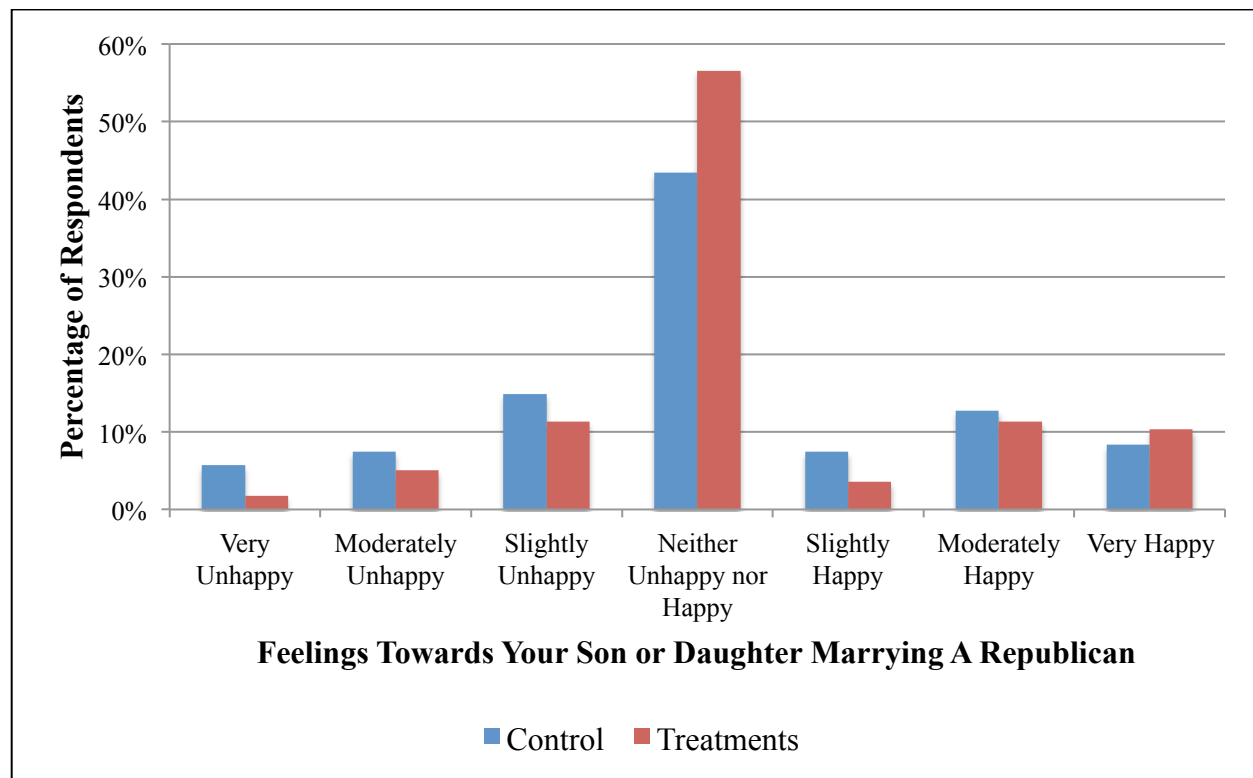
difference of means in the summary measure was not significantly different across treatment conditions, the rescaled variable indicates somewhat high levels of social distance. Social distance was scaled from 0 to 1 with 0 indicating no distance and 1 indicating the complete distance between ordinary partisans.⁴³ The largest overall social distance mean was reported for the control group ($M_{\text{control}} = .542$), followed by the elite polarization treatment condition ($M_{\text{elitepolarization}} = .535$) and the societal polarization treatment condition ($M_{\text{societypolarization}} = .507$). It is interesting to see the largest levels of social distance reported in the group that did not receive any news intervention. This is important for two reasons. First, it stands in for the baseline level of social distance among those participating in the study. Due to the absence of news about declining friend requests on Facebook and incivility within U.S. government, control group respondents were not given added impetus to think about the political parties in us-vs.-them terms as subjects in the treatment conditions were. Second, it is important because it runs against my initial hypothesis that stories about congressional and societal polarization will increase the social distance between ordinary partisans as the media frame is incorporated into their perceptions of politics and the public.

Inter-party marriage was only statistically significant when respondents were asked how they would feel if their son or daughter married a Republican. Here, we may be seeing a timing interaction with the recent results of the midterm elections or with the composition of the sample. There are almost no differences between the two treatment conditions, but the differences between the treatment conditions and the control group are significantly different ($p = .095$). Additionally, when looking at the distribution of answers for this question ranging from very unhappy to very happy, the treatment group is more likely to take a neutral stance. As Figure 10

⁴³ Complete distance between ordinary partisans refers to a total dislike or even loathing for their opponents or the out-group.

shows, respondents in the treatment conditions are also more likely to be happy about the prospect of their child marrying a Republican. These differences in the distribution of responses were not found for the converse, the prospect of marrying a Democrat.

Figure 10: How would you feel if your son or daughter married a Republican?



Lastly, the sample overall seemed to have more Democratic friends, which again is expected given the liberal skew. Respondents in every experimental conditions reported that less than half of their friends were Republicans (about 37%). There was a little more variation when asked about how many of their friends were Democrats. The elite polarization treatment group reported that over half, 53.8%, of the respondents' friends were Democrats. Respondents in the societal polarization treatment condition reported that about 48.1% of their friends were Democrats and the control group reported that 50.2% of their friends were Democrats. With increasing levels of affective polarization, we should see ordinary partisans surrounding

themselves with friends that have the same political identification. The data is consistent with this idea as the majority of respondents in the survey were Democrats and the respondents reported that a majority of their friends are Democrats.

Political Discussion

Another aspect of affective polarization is feelings towards political discussion with members of their own and the opposing party. While there were no significant differences in means among respondents, we see the expected pattern by political party in which respondents like talking about politics most with friends and acquaintances of the same party and least with their opponents. The variable is rescaled from a 7-point scale (ranging from disliking political discussion a great deal to liking political discussion a great deal) to 0 to 1 with 0 indicating dislike of discussion and 1 indicating liking of discussion. Looking at discussion with Democrats, respondents who identified as Democrats reported that they liked political discussion with members of the same party the most (Table 30). Republicans reported the highest dislike of political discussion with Democrats, followed by Independents who also reported some dislike. This pattern was identical for discussion with Republicans as the reported averages for discussion with the respondents' in-group and out-group being nearly identical to those for discussion with Democrats (Table 31). Overall, the highest levels of liking for Republican and Independent respondents are present in the control group and for the Democratic respondents are present in the elite polarization treatment group. The lack of meaningful differences between the treatment conditions suggests that this facet of affective polarization exists outside of the influence of media. The news articles did not alter the way my sample responded to the survey

question about discussion with their in-group or out-group party. The pattern does follow the idea of affective polarization as my sample enjoys talking about politics with those who have the same political identification to a significantly higher degree than talking about politics with those of the opposite political identification.

Table 30: Discussion with Democrats

Democrats	N	Mean	Std Error
Elite Polarization	123	.603	.021
Societal Polarization	113	.593	.024
Control	132	.573	.024
Treatments	236	.598	.016

*Note: *p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01 (two-tailed).*

Independents	N	Mean	Std Error
Elite Polarization	42	.448	.040
Societal Polarization	38	.425	.043
Control	43	.457	.042
Treatments	80	.438	.029

Republicans	N	Mean	Std Error
Elite Polarization	33	.384	.049
Societal Polarization	51	.389	.040
Control	54	.426	.040
Treatments	84	.387	.031

Table 31: Discussion with Republicans

Democrats	N	Mean	Std Error
Elite Polarization	123	.377	.024
Societal Polarization	113	.357	.026
Control	132	.345	.024
Treatments	236	.367	.017

Independents	N	Mean	Std Error
Elite Polarization	42	.397	.042
Societal Polarization	38	.430	.042
Control	43	.430	.044
Treatments	80	.413	.030

Republicans	N	Mean	Std Error
Elite Polarization	33	.636	.056
Societal Polarization	51	.627	.038
Control	53	.670	.034
Treatments	84	.631	.032

Partisan Social Identification

Partisan social identification questions measure how strongly the respondent feels attached to their respective political party. While we don't see any meaningful differences in the overall partisan social identification summary measure, there is an interesting difference between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. For both respondents who identified as Republicans or as Independents, identification was stronger in the control group (Table 32, Table 34). Thus the experimental news article was not responsible for increasing the strength of their political affiliation. This finding seems to be consistent with the moderating effects discussed in connection with the favorability of the political party. Even without statistically significant differences in means or distribution of responses, when breaking down the measure into individual questions there were larger differences between the treatment conditions and the control group for both Republicans and Independents. Neither of these findings were true for Democrats who reported stronger identification in the treatment conditions and more specifically the elite polarization treatment condition (Table 33).

Table 32: Republicans

	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	33	.367	.034	.778
Societal Polarization	51	.355	.025	
Control	54	.414	.030	.122
Treatments	84	.360	.020	

Table 33: Democrats

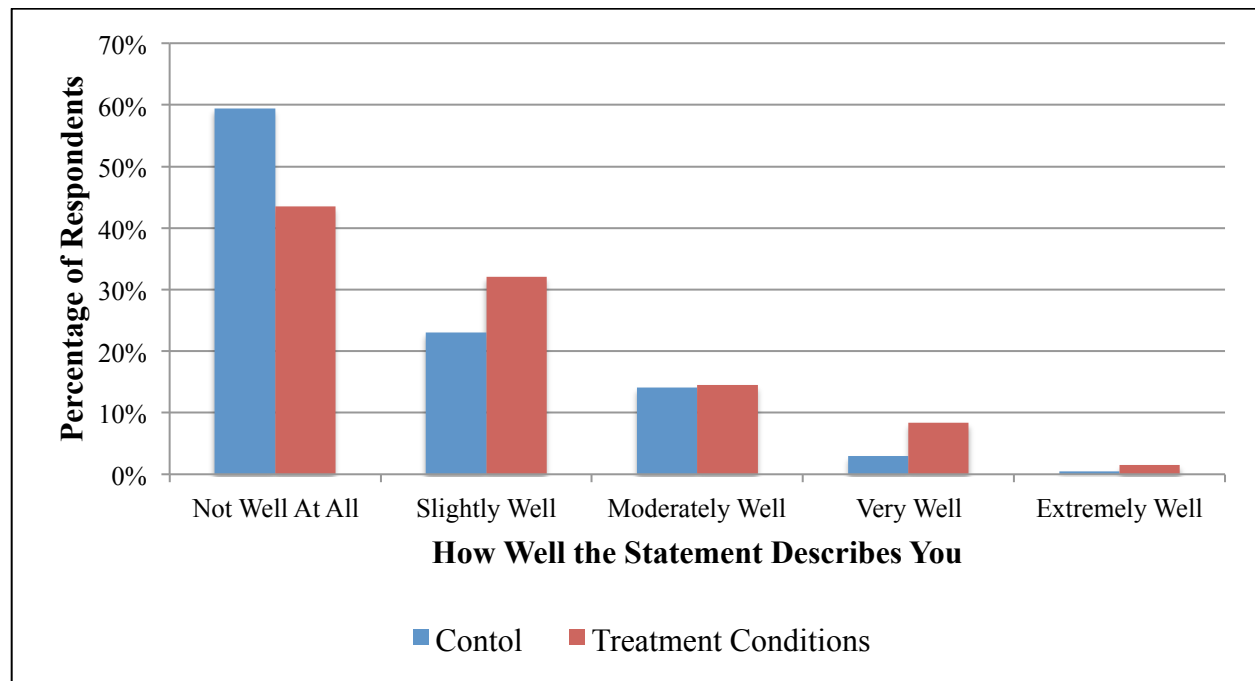
	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	121	.397	.018	.239
Societal Polarization	11	.365	.020	
Control	131	.371	.018	.630
Treatments	232	.381	.013	

Table 34: Independents

	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	41	.329	.030	.516
Societal Polarization	38	.303	.028	
Control	43	.337	.036	.589
Treatments	79	.316	.020	

One particularly important question within this set of questions for Democratic respondents was the statement “I don’t have much in common with Democrats.” There were statistically significant differences between the distribution of respondents in the treatment conditions and the control group, as more respondents in the control group reported that this statement does not describe them well at all (Figure 11). Most Democratic respondents, 59% to be exact, believed that they had a lot in common with members of their own party. This was similar to the parallel question for Republican respondents, as the results fell just short of the conventional threshold of statistical significance ($p = .103$) with 52% in the treatment conditions and 44% in the control group indicating that the statement “I don’t have much in common with Republicans” did not fit well at all.

Figure 11: Identification with the statement: “I don’t have much in common with Democrats”



Party Affect Batteries

Party affect batteries are instrumental in understanding overall affective polarization as they provide insight into feelings towards the political parties.⁴⁴ According to Iyengar, affective polarization is a combination of positive thoughts and feelings towards one’s political party in combination with increasingly negative thoughts and feelings towards the opposing political party (2012). People’s views about their in-group seem to be firmly anchored, but what is interesting is the movement in feelings about the out-group. For both Democratic and Republican survey respondents, in-group positive feelings were lower than out-group positive feelings. In

⁴⁴ The party affect batteries were coded to create multiple measures in addition to specific feelings of happiness, fear, hopefulness, pride, anger, and disgust. These categories include net affect (the addition of positive feelings and subtraction of negative feelings), absolute affect (the addition of all feelings), negative feelings (fear, anger, disgust), and positive feelings (happiness, hopefulness, pride).

other words, the Republican survey respondents recorded higher means in terms of happiness, hopefulness, and pride towards the Democratic Party than Democratic survey respondents (Table 35, Table 37). This trend was true for Democratic survey respondents' positive feelings towards the Republican Party. The converse, negative feelings towards in-group and out-group political party, follows a more intuitive pattern (Table 36, Table 38). Members of the opposite political party have higher means for feelings of fear, anger, and disgust for the out-group. This finding seems to be consistent with the long-established motivation that identity development is not just driven by positive feelings towards a group, but often negative feelings towards another group (Angus, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). This idea combined with the results of in-group and out-group feelings demonstrates that negative feelings can be a strong force driving the change, in this case affective polarization within society.

Table 35: Democratic Positive Affect

Democrats	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	121	.433	.015	.719
Societal Polarization	112	.426	.016	
Control	130	.440	.015	.571
Treatments	233	.430	.011	

Republicans	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	33	.498	.036	.340
Societal Polarization	50	.456	.027	
Control	52	.500	.024	.470
Treatments	83	.473	.020	

Table 36: Democratic Negative Affect

Democrats	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	123	.533	.016	.670
Societal Polarization	113	.542	.018	
Control	130	.562	.016	.201
Treatments	236	.537	.012	

Republicans	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	33	.688	.022	.733
Societal Polarization	50	.678	.018	
Control	54	.646	.019	.130
Treatments	83	.682	.014	

Table 37: Republican Positive Affect

Democrats	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	122	.542	.021	.187
Societal Polarization	113	.504	.019	
Control	128	.553	.020	.227
Treatments	235	.524	.014	

Republicans	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	33	.475	.029	.596
Societal Polarization	51	.455	.023	
Control	53	.495	.025	.286
Treatments	84	.463	.018	

Table 38: Republican Negative Affect

Democrats	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	122	.640	.013	.569
Societal Polarization	113	.628	.016	
Control	129	.633	.013	.954
Treatments	235	.634	.010	

Republicans	N	Mean	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	33	.488	.033	.755
Societal Polarization	51	.501	.025	
Control	53	.444	.024	.103
Treatments	84	.496	.020	

Independent survey respondents, on the other hand, were significantly impacted by the treatment conditions. The elite polarization article seemed to have an impact on feelings towards the Democratic and Republican parties (Table 39). For absolute party affect and positive affect towards both political parties, Independent survey respondents reported higher levels of overall affect and positive feelings in the elite polarization treatment group. Negative feelings towards the Democratic and Republican parties among Independent respondents, however, were significantly higher in the societal polarization treatment condition. This pattern seems to suggest that the news article about congressional polarization amplified positive feelings towards the parties, but the news article about societal polarization amplified negative feelings. Thus, the two media frames utilized in the experiment seem to have a good deal of influence over feelings towards the political parties among Independents. Independents are less firmly anchored to a political identity in comparison to Democratic and Republican identifiers who typically have strong and often quite stable attachments to their political parties (Angus, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). This identity provides a strong anchor for their worldview and framework for thinking about politics. The greater movement in terms of party affect among Independents is consistent with the fact that they are less strongly motivated to like or dislike the Democratic or Republican parties. They generally do not have a particularly strong attachment to any single political party and thus their feelings and attitudes are more susceptible to changes.

Table 39: Independent Party Affect Batteries

	Treatment Group	N	Means	Std Error
Democratic Absolute Affect	Elite Polarization	42	.446**	.035
	Societal Polarization	38	.322**	.035
	Control	41	.386	.030
Democratic Positive Affect	Elite Polarization	42	.487**	.043
	Societal Polarization	38	.357**	.040
	Control	41	.428	.035
Democratic Negative Affect	Elite Polarization	42	.636**	.031
	Societal Polarization	38	.742**	.030
	Control	43	.686	.026
Republican Absolute Affect	Elite Polarization	42	.433*	.033
	Societal Polarization	38	.339*	.036
	Control	42	.422	.030
Republican Positive Affect	Elite Polarization	42	.474**	.041
	Societal Polarization	38	.357	.042
	Control	43	.483	.036
Republican Negative Affect	Elite Polarization	42	.608	.032
	Societal Polarization	38	.678	.034
	Control	42	.643	.028

Note: *p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01 (two-tailed).

Discussion

As discussed above, congressional ideological polarization does not serve as a mirror for society. In fact, the overarching ideological polarization seen in Congress is not present at the societal level. My sample had relatively moderate issue positions in terms of political preferences and consensus on issues generally associated with the culture war such as the legalization of gay marriage. In addition, analysis of issue extremity analysis only yielded small movement towards more extreme policy positions. Affective polarization seems to be at work, not ideological polarization. Affective polarization and an us-vs.-them mentality was evident among the sample population. Political discussion and feelings towards the political parties were skewed in favor of the political party to which survey respondent belongs. In addition, Democratic and Republican identifying survey respondents were significantly more likely to have strong negative feelings

towards the opposite political party. These findings reinforce Iyengar's claim that society is not polarized along ideological lines, but rather affective ones. Media didn't seem to play the instigator role for Democratic and Republican survey respondents, but it was influential for Independent survey respondents.

Although ideological polarization was not found, the picture of a polarized society was increasingly evident in respondents' perceptions about the distance between members of Congress and ordinary partisans. What is perhaps most interesting about these perceptions, was that news frame of congressional polarization yielded the largest perceived ideological distance between ordinary Democrats and Republicans. Pairing this with levels of satisfaction with the U.S. government, the data shows a gloomy picture for citizens. My sample was moderate in issue position, with preferences for politicians who are willing to compromise and low approval ratings of Congress. Ultimately, these views are compounded by the media's depiction of reality—a depiction in which society is increasingly described to be more and more similar to the gridlock on Capitol Hill and a depiction which influences the way readers view politics and partisans.

Conclusion

I began this research to understand better the nature and sources of political polarization in contemporary American society. Social scientists largely agree that a deep ideological divide has emerged in recent decades at the congressional level, but the extent to which this arises from or permeates broader society remains a heavily debated topic in academic literature. Despite the popular view that a vast cultural divide increasingly separates Democratic and Republican voters, it is not clear that there is issue polarization among the American electorate. However, there is growing evidence of affective polarization. Fiorina attributes misperceptions about an ideological culture war to media coverage, though he does not empirically investigate this claim. In this thesis, I sought to investigate whether the news media is playing a role in increasing the public *perception* of ideological polarization and hypothesized that this might contribute to affective polarization uncovered by Iyengar and colleagues. Specifically, I undertook a two-part study. The content analysis portion looked at trends in media coverage of recent politics and found that there was indeed the increasing focus on the American electorate as a polarized entity over time. In light of the content analysis results, I then conducted an experiment to understand whether the type of media emphasis on congressional and/or societal polarization could change feelings and attitudes, convince readers of a culture war, and increase out-group dislike.

Ideological polarization was largely absent in my sample as, consistent with Fiorina's characterization of the American public, there was very little issue extremity and generally moderate issue positions prevailed. Perceptions and affective polarization, on the other hand, demonstrated larger divides. The sample was consistent in reporting that they perceived increasing issue distance between Democrat and Republican supporters as well as and Democrat and Republican members of Congress. These perceptions were further influenced by the

treatment condition in which the frame of congressional polarization resulted in higher levels of perceived ideological polarization within both populations. In addition, affective polarization was visible primarily in the form of out-group dislike, as respondents' in-group sentiments seemed to be fairly anchored. In terms of feelings towards both political parties, Independents were most susceptible to higher levels of positive and negative emotions. Ultimately, I found support for Fiorina's claim that the media is falsely portraying a deeply divided society despite the lack of ideological polarization in my sample. The media frame additionally increased the perceived levels of polarization among political parties and their supporters. I also found increasingly negative sentiments towards out-group political parties consistent with Iyengar's affective polarization theory, but the news article may have only had a moderating impact on the levels of affective polarization. This section discusses the implications of media's portrayal in light of the media voter model, next logical step for future research, and some recent news stories on the culture war.

Limitations and Future Research

No study is without limitations, and it is important to keep these in mind both in interpreting the findings and for envisioning the most fruitful avenues for future research. One of the major limitations of my research is the sample size and composition. I did not have the time nor the money to gather a large and representative sample to be able to draw broad conclusions about society as a whole. A larger sample would not only be better for making generalizations about society, but it would enable a better balance of partisans. My sample was heavily skewed as 58.5% of respondents identified as Democrats, 19.6% of respondents identified as Republicans, and 21.9% of respondents identified as Independents. This sample composition

does not lend itself well to confirming which patterns of in-group and out-group like/dislike hold for Republicans, or whether there are asymmetric findings with respect to the two parties. Future research with a larger and more representative sample can address some of these limitations of my study and of course will also carry the benefit of replication.

In addition to the sample of the study there are further limitations in some of the experimental measurements. In the future I would update the issue position question block to improve the issue extremity measure. As the survey is currently written, the issue position questions have different response options based on the topic. The issue extremity measure is skewed from the fact that welfare spending has seven response options, but gun control only has three response options. To address this measurement weakness, the new issue position question block would contain either an identical scale for each question, or at least the same number of response options.

Furthermore, to build upon this research the next step is to look at different moderating variables. In my study, I had initially planned to look at certain independent variables such as age, religious importance, media consumption habits, and political sophistication in regards to ideological polarization, polarization perception, and affective polarization measures. Media consumption habits and political sophistication, in my opinion, could have a significant impact on how the news frames are accepted and in turn moderate polarization perceptions and affective polarization. Ultimately, I did not have enough time to adequately analyze these moderating variables within the context of my experiment; such analysis may provide another interesting

piece to the puzzle of polarization.⁴⁵ This sort of analysis would also benefit from a larger sample size, with which it is easier to uncover subgroup differences.

In terms of the content analysis portion of my research, my argument could be enhanced by better data availability. Some of the newspapers analyzed were picked simply due to the fact that they had archival data in the given time periods of my analysis. In an ideal world with complete information availability, media content analysis could be conducted on a broader and randomly-chosen selection of national and regional newspapers. In addition, I could expand the regional analysis to focus on newspapers with similar circulation and city sizes to increase the comparability of trends throughout the different regions. Having said all this, the trends in my data were strikingly parallel across all sources.

A more detailed analysis of the retrieved news articles might also turn up additional insights. For example, one could examine the tone of news coverage in stories about polarization, which may be influential in shaping public perceptions. This analysis could result in a number of different frames used to describe a polarized American electorate in addition to the search terms I used (culture war, Red America, Blue America). Further media content analysis could also try to construct a comparison category, to provide a point of reference for the culture war searches. One possible comparison category might entail all news stories regarding the polarization present at the congressional level.⁴⁶ While this phenomenon is not debated in the literature, it would be interesting to compare news coverage of elite-level and societal-level

⁴⁵ If I had more time I would have looked at the results of my experiment in relation to several demographic and moderating variables. The two most interesting ones, in my mind, would be media consumption and political knowledge. In the appendix you will find some difference of means tests for these variables.

⁴⁶ One challenge to collecting this data might be the lack of ready and reliable search terms for narrowing the scope to appropriate articles. Discussions of congressional polarization lack the colorful catchphrases that have been used to label societal polarization.

polarization to see if there are fundamental differences in the type of coverage these two populations receive. In the analysis of both news frames, I would conduct these searches over similar time periods, but broken down by monthly periods. The monthly periods would enable comparison between coverage during election and non-election cycles.

Outside of the confines of my study, future research on the puzzle of polarization should take a closer look at incivility. This involves more than just the affective and ideological components of polarization, but open hostility and rudeness between partisans and politicians. While this aspect may have been weakly suggested by the experimental stimuli in details such as declined Facebook friend requests and the empty congressional cafeteria, I set aside a direct look at the role played by incivility. Displays of incivility could be an additional factor impacting the extent of affective polarization at both the societal level and the congressional level. For example, a decade ago, researchers found that televised political incivility generates heightened emotional arousal at the apparent violation of social norms and provokes increased distrust toward the political process (Mutz and Reeves 2005). At the outset of the present study, I briefly considered including incivility as a separate variable in my experimental research design. In this research design option, I would have run a 2 x 2 study that would have featured similar articles about polarization with and without references to inter-partisan incivility in Congress and in society (Table 40). Stories about conflict and incivility may have implications for political trust at the expense of public intrigue.

Table 40: Potential 2 X 2 Design

Congressional Polarization	Congressional Polarization + Incivility
Societal Polarization	Societal Polarization + Incivility

Implications

The widespread belief that society is an ideologically polarized entity may have larger electoral implications. The median-voter model predicts that candidates running for office in a two-party democratic system will converge on centrist issue positions to cater to the political views of the “median voter.” Thus the presence of societal ideological polarization is threatening to this model as a divergence in issue positions among the American electorate would incentivize political entrepreneurs to cater towards a more popular issue position within their respective political party. In the case of societal ideological polarization, the median view for each party candidate is no longer the middle and the distribution of issue positions becomes bimodal among society (even though this is not the current picture of my sample). Political entrepreneurs in this new model are incentivized to take more extreme issue positions to not only win elected office, but to inhibit the ability of third party candidates to throw their hat in the ring. In addition, if there is a tendency for more extreme candidates, then the centrist American electorate is forced to choose between two candidates that don’t accurately reflect their political views. With more partisan candidates, a new question pops up: will society adopt more extreme policy preferences to match that of political elites or will society remain centrist and underrepresented by their elected officials? In addition, the experimental sample showed an overwhelming desire for candidates who compromise, but this is inherently impacted by the extent of ideological polarization in Congress and perceived levels of ideological polarization in society. With increasing issue distances among current members of Congress, voters may believe that their views are not being accurately represented. In addition to the desire for compromise, the sample reported strong disapproval for the way Congress is handling its job. Given this finding, I am led

to ask another question: is the median-voter model able to coexist in a polarized environment, whether it be ideological or affective?

Implications outside of the electoral institution concern the cohesion of society and the democratic process. A possible danger of mistaking the media frame of a polarized American electorate is the development of increasing hostility towards political opponents despite no serious change in their actual policy disagreements. This news frame combined with the increasing ease to self-select news sources that cater to an individual's personal views, negative sentiments towards the out-group party will only increase. Partisan news sources routinely demonize the out-group party and thus may further the levels of affective polarization within society. In addition, biased beliefs about opposing elites will influence the framework that an individual uses inside the voting booth. The bias can fail the ideal of accountability in democracy via elections as in-group party incumbents are not punished by their supporters incumbents and out-group party incumbents are not credited for their policy performance, especially in terms of the economy. The perception of polarization and impact of affective polarization may challenge the democratic process.

The media landscape is constantly changing with new technologies, institutions and norms. Iyengar and Kinder's priming and agenda-setting experiments occurred in an environment dominated by the 24-hour CNN news cycle and devoid of 140-character news via Twitter. Polarization infiltrates the Internet and is strewn across my Facebook newsfeed as my peers publicly celebrate International Women's Day and voice their support for congressional and presidential candidates as they proudly change their Facebook status to "I voted." As evidenced by the brief history of newsmaking at the outset of this thesis, the norms of journalism are constantly changing. Today, Fox News, a partisan media outlet, continues to dominate

Nielsen cable news ratings during an era of objective, non-partisan reporting. Keith Olbermann, Brian Williams, and Bill O'Reilly are in the midst of reporting scandals as some of their anecdotes were either exaggerations of the truth or offensive to subsets of the population. These recent media scandals coincide with an era in which trust in the media continues to decline, yet there is an overarching perception that the American electorate is polarized.

As we take a step back from the data and look at reality, it is interesting to think about what the "culture war" means for the future. According to E.J. Dionne Jr., a columnist and opinion writer for *The Washington Post*, the culture war is retreating as the legality and public opinion of gay marriage is changing. Support for gay marriage has doubled in the last decade as 27% of Americans favored gay marriage in 1996 and 54% reported their support in the 2014 Pew Research Center survey (Gay Marriage). When this number is broken down by age group, there is a visible trend among Millennials accepting and supporting the legalization of marriage among gay and lesbian couples. This idea was furthered by the text of President Obama's 2015 State of the Union address which reads "I've seen something like gay marriage go from a wedge issue used to drive us apart to a story of freedom across our country, a civil right now legal in states that seven in ten Americans call home" (State of the Union 2015). Is this idea of the culture war just the end one generational entelechy and the beginning of a new one? Dionne defines the new culture war as one "about national identity rather than religion and 'transcendent authority'" (Dionne). This involves the ethnic, racial, and linguistic norms regulating society, which lends itself to the hot topic issue of immigration. Whether or not this new "culture war emerges," the media continues to belabor the frame of a polarized American electorate, where the evidence of significant ideological divides is weak.

In concluding this project I reflect back to the question Professor Douglas so infamously posed. Is it ok to hate partisans of the opposite party or as she scribed “Is it ok to hate Republicans?” The lack of ideological polarization is a good sign, but the media continues to portray the American electorate as a deeply divided entity. This news frame and the existence of affective polarization supports voices like Professor Douglas. These misperceptions and overwhelming negative sentiments may threaten the cohesion of diversity within society and the democratic process.

Appendices

Content Analysis Data

Red America

	1988-1992	1998-2002	2008-2012
New York Times	0	4	16
Washington Post	1	0	31

Blue America

	1988-1992	1998-2002	2008-2012
New York Times	0	4	21
Washington Post	0	0	39

Regional Breakdown

Region	States
New England	Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, Vermont
Middle Atlantic	New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania
South Atlantic	Washington D.C., Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia
East North Central	Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin
East South Central	Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee
West North Central	Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota
West South Central	Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas
Mountain	Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming
Pacific	Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington

Headlines

Chicago Sun Times

- “Family Values Need Protection”
- “PBS drops film on Catholic Church, AIDS”
- “Free ideas suffer in liberals’ culture war”

Atlanta Journal-Constitution

- “Gingrich: misfire in culture war”
- “The real issue in culture war”
- “Shame on us if this happens again”
- “Religion has its place in politics; drawing the line is the tough part”

San Francisco Chronicle

- “Another victim in the culture war”
- “Ground zero on the tolerance issue”
- “GOPs out renewing America’s ‘culture wars’”

The Seattle Times

- “Political olive branch from Christian right?”
- “All quiet on same-sex battlefield”
- “An evangelical divide in debate over torture”

The Miami Herald

- “Obama borrows campaign tactics from Bush”
- “Tweeting trivializes serious issues”
- “The ‘Culture War’ is real and scary”

New Haven Register

- “White House must be high if it thinks war on drugs is defensible”
- “What about gay marriage?”

The Houston Chronicle

- “A fair shake in the textbook debate”
- “Social Issues: in gay marriage fight, some brands take a stand”
- “JFK speech under fire in culture war”

Experiment Survey

Consent Form

We are carrying out a study of what people think about current issues and politics. We are interested in learning what people are thinking about some of the issues that have been in the news lately.

This survey is for scientific research purposes only. The data collected will be used solely for academic research. Your participation will help us understand better the reception and consumption of news in the American public.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked your thoughts and feelings about a range of issues. You also may be asked to read a brief news story. Participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this survey at any time. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer. We expect that the survey will take 15 minutes to complete and you will be compensated upon completion.

Your participation is confidential. The researchers will not know the identity of individual participants.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation. Your opinions are very valuable to us.

The University of Michigan Institutional Review Board has determined that this research is exempt from IRB oversight. If you have any questions about the research, you may contact Molly Block, University of Michigan researcher, at merinb@umich.edu.

If you wish to continue with the study, please proceed to the next screen. By proceeding to the next screen and continuing, you are acknowledging that:

- a) you have read the information provided above,
- b) the researchers have offered to answer any questions you have concerning the study,
and
- c) you hereby consent to participate in this study

Thank you for participating in this survey. We will begin with several questions about your background.

Demographics

1. What is your age in years?
2. Gender
 1. Male
 2. Female

Race

3. Please check one or more categories below to indicate what race(s) you consider yourself to be.
 1. White or Caucasian
 2. Black or African American
 3. American Indian or Alaska Native
 4. Asian
 5. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 6. Other
4. Are you of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino descent
 1. Yes
 2. No

Education

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 1. Less than high school
 2. High school diploma (diploma or equivalent)
 3. Some college/Associate's degree
 4. College degree
 5. Advanced degree

Religion

6. Do you consider religion to be an important part of your life and, if so, how important?
 1. Not important at all
 2. Slightly important
 3. Moderately important
 4. Very important
 5. Extremely important
7. Do you ever attend religious services, apart from occasional weddings, baptisms or funerals?
 1. Yes
 2. No
8. Do you go to religious services...
 1. Never
 2. A few times a year
 3. Once or twice a month
 4. Almost every week
 5. Every week
9. Regardless of whether you now attend any religious services, do you ever think of yourself as part of a particular church or religion?
 1. Yes

2. No
10. Please choose the religion you consider yourself to be
 1. Catholic
 2. Protestant
 3. Other Christian
 4. Jewish
 5. Other (please specify)

Party ID

11. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?
 1. Democrat
 2. Republican
 3. Independent
 4. Other / Don't know
12. Would you call yourself a STRONG Democrat, or a NOT VERY STRONG Democrat?
 1. Strong
 2. Not very strong
13. Would you call yourself a STRONG Republican, or a NOT VERY STRONG Republican?
 1. Strong
 2. Not very strong
14. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?
 1. Closer to Republican Party
 2. Closer to Democratic Party
 3. Neither

Ideology

15. We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?
 1. Extremely liberal
 2. Somewhat liberal
 3. Slightly liberal
 4. Neither liberal nor conservative
 5. Slightly conservative
 6. Somewhat conservative
 7. Extremely conservative

Media Consumption Habits

16. How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?
 1. Always
 2. Most of the time
 3. About half of the time
 4. Some of the time
 5. Never

17. During a typical week, how many days do you watch, read, or listen to news, not including sports?

	None	One day	Two days	Three days	Four days	Five days	Six days	Seven days
On the radio								
On the TV								
On the Internet								
In a printed newspaper								

18. Please indicate which, if any, of the television news sources listed below you watch to learn about *national news* on a regular basis?

1. CNN
2. ABC National News
3. NBC National News
4. CBS National News
5. Fox News Channel
6. MSNBC
7. PBS News Hour
8. BBC
9. The Daily Show
10. Colbert Report

19. Please indicate which, if any, of the Internet news sources listed below you consult to learn about *national news* on a regular basis?

1. Websites of newspapers, magazines, or radio/TV stations (e.g. CNN, Fox News, New York Times, NPR)
2. Google News
3. Yahoo News
4. Political blogs
5. Huffington Post
6. Drudge Report
7. Slate
8. Politico
9. Talking Points Memo

Attention Check

20. We would also like to know about your favorite television programs.

Many modern theories of communication suggest that everyday Americans prefer entertainment television programs to those carrying the news the television is a passive form of engagement. Individuals approach television to relax and minimize cognitive effort. To demonstrate that you've read this much, just go ahead and select both reality and gossip among the alternatives below, no matter what your favorite television program is. Yes, please ignore the question below and select both of those options.

What are your favorite types of television programs?

7. News
8. Comedy
9. Reality
10. Soap Opera
11. Drama
12. Gossip

Treatment

We're especially interested in what people think about current issues and politics through news dissemination. The computer will randomly pick on of several news stories from The New York Times front page in the past few months to display on the following screen. Please take a moment to read the story. When you have finished, you may continue with the survey. We will ask you some questions about the story later.

Article Questions

21. How clearly written was the preceding news story?
 1. Very unclear
 2. Somewhat unclear
 3. Somewhat clear
 4. Very clear
22. How interesting was the preceding news story?
 1. Not at all interesting
 2. Slightly interesting
 3. Moderately interesting
 4. Very interesting
 5. Extremely interesting
23. How informative was the preceding news story?
 1. Not at all informative
 2. Slightly informative
 3. Moderately informative
 4. Very informative
 5. Extremely informative

Polarization perceptions

24. How do you feel about the way things are going in the country?
 1. Very dissatisfied
 2. Somewhat dissatisfied
 3. Indifferent
 4. Somewhat satisfied
 5. Very satisfied
25. In your opinion have Democratic and Republican politicians moving farther apart on the issues, been moving closer together on the issues, or are they more-or-less the same distance they have always been?
 1. Moving farther apart
 2. Moving closer together

3. About the same distance
26. In your opinion have ordinary Democratic and Republican supporters been moving farther apart on the issues, been moving closer together on the issues, or are they more-or-less the same distance they have always been?
 1. Moving farther apart
 2. Moving closer together
 3. About the same distance
27. Some people say we are in the midst of a “culture war” in our politics. How well do you think “culture war” describes American politics these days?
 1. Not well at all
 2. Slightly well
 3. Moderately well
 4. Very well
 5. Extremely well

Willingness to Compromise

28. Do you prefer politicians who are willing to compromise to get things done or those who stick to their principles no matter what?
 1. Willing to compromise to get things done
 2. Stick to principles no matter what

Political Discussion

29. Do you like or dislike talking about politics with family, friends, and acquaintances, who are Republican?
 1. Dislike a great deal
 2. Dislike a moderate amount
 3. Dislike a little
 4. Neither like nor dislike
 5. Like a little
 6. Like a moderate amount
 7. Like a great deal
30. Do you like or dislike talking about politics with family, friends, and acquaintances, who are Democrats?
 1. Dislike a great deal
 2. Dislike a moderate amount
 3. Dislike a little
 4. Neither like nor dislike
 5. Like a little
 6. Like a moderate amount
 7. Like a great deal

Trust in Government

31. How often can you trust the federal government in Washington to do what is right?
 1. Always
 2. Most of the time
 3. About half of the time

4. Some of the time
5. Never

Ideological Placement

34. Recall the ideological scale earlier. Where would you place the Republican Party on this scale?
 1. Extremely liberal
 2. Liberal
 3. Slightly liberal
 4. Middle of the road
 5. Slightly conservative
 6. Conservative
 7. Extremely conservative
35. Where would you place the Democratic Party on this scale?
 1. Extremely liberal
 2. Liberal
 3. Slightly liberal
 4. Middle of the road
 5. Slightly conservative
 6. Conservative
 7. Extremely conservative

Party Favorability

36. Would you say your overall opinion of Democrats is favorable?
 1. Very unfavorable
 2. Mostly unfavorable
 3. Mostly favorable
 4. Very favorable
37. Would you say your overall opinion of Republicans is favorable?
 1. Very unfavorable
 2. Mostly unfavorable
 3. Mostly favorable
 4. Very favorable
38. Do Democrats' policies threaten the nation's well being?
 1. Not at all threatening
 2. Somewhat threatening
 3. Very threatening
 4. Extremely threatening
39. Do Republicans' policies threaten the nation's well being?
 1. Not at all threatening
 2. Somewhat threatening
 3. Very threatening
 4. Extremely threatening

Issue Positions

40. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

1. Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry
 2. Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions, but not legally marry
 3. There should be no legal recognition of gay or lesbian couple's relationship
41. Do you think the federal government should make it more difficult for people to buy a gun than it is now, make it easier for people to buy a gun, or keep these rules about the same as they are now?
1. More difficult
 2. Easier
 3. Keep the rules about the same
42. Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the U.S. to live should be...
1. Decreased a lot
 2. Decreased a little
 3. Left the same as it is now
 4. Increased a little
 5. Increased a lot
43. Do you favor a law making English the official language of the U.S., meaning government business would be conducted in English only, or do you oppose such a law?
1. Strongly favor
 2. Favor
 3. Neither favor nor oppose
 4. Oppose
 5. Strongly oppose
44. Some people strongly favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. Other persons strongly oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. Where would you place yourself on this scale?
1. 1 (strongly oppose the death penalty) – 7 (strongly favor the death penalty)
45. Some people feel the government in Washington should spend less on welfare programs for the poor. These people are at point 1 of the scale. Others think the government in Washington should increase spending on welfare programs for the poor. These people are at point 7 of the scale. Where would you place yourself on this scale?
1. 1 (spend less on welfare programs) – 7 (spend more on welfare programs)
46. Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement. "This country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world." Do you...
1. Strongly disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly agree

Partisan Social ID Measure

47. Please tell us how well each of the following statements describes you.

	Not at all	Slightly well	Moderately well	Very well	Extremely well
When someone criticizes the Republican Party, it feels like a personal insult					
When I talk about Republicans, I usually say “we” rather than “they”					
I don’t have much in common with Republicans					
When the Republican Party does well in an election, I feel proud					
When Republicans do something wrong, I feel personally embarrassed					

	Not at all	Slightly well	Moderately well	Very well	Extremely well
When someone criticizes the Democratic Party, it feels like a personal insult					
When I talk about Democrats, I usually say “we” rather than “they”					
I don’t have much in common with Democrats					
When the Democratic Party does well in an election, I feel proud					
When Democrats do something wrong, I feel personally embarrassed					

	Not at all	Slightly well	Moderately well	Very well	Extremely well
When someone criticizes Independent politicians, it feels like a personal insult					
When I talk about Independents, I usually say “we” rather than “they”					

I don't have much in common with Independents					
When Independents do well in an election, I feel proud					

Social Distance

48. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married a Republican?

1. Very unhappy
2. Moderately unhappy
3. Slightly unhappy
4. Neither happy nor unhappy
5. Slightly happy
6. Moderately happy
7. Very happy

49. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married a Democrat?

1. Very unhappy
2. Moderately unhappy
3. Slightly unhappy
4. Neither happy nor unhappy
5. Slightly happy
6. Moderately happy
7. Very happy

50. Roughly speaking, how many of your friends would you say are Republicans?

1. None
2. A few
3. About half
4. Most
5. All

51. Roughly speaking, how many of your friends would you say are Democrats?

1. None
2. A few
3. About half
4. Most
5. All

Party Affect Batteries

52. Thinking about the Democratic Party, how often does it make you feel...

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Happy					
Afraid					
Hopeful					
Proud					
Angry					
Disgusted					

53. Thinking about the Republican Party, how often does it make you feel...

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Happy					
Afraid					
Hopeful					
Proud					
Angry					
Disgusted					

Party Description Checklist

54. Below is a list of words that people sometimes use to describe political parties and their supporters. In your view, which of these words or phrases best describes the Democrats and the Democratic Party?

Please check all the options that you believe describe Democrats well.

Care only about themselves	On the right side more often than not
Think they are better than other people	Genuinely try to make America a better place, Even if they don't always succeed
Corrupt to the core	Better than the alternative
Evil	The lesser of two evils
Un-American	Not perfect but our best hope
Unwilling to consider different points of view	They have the right priorities, despite Occasional mistakes
Whiners who don't know how lucky they have it	
Hypocritical	Trustworthy
	Tolerant
They once stood for something valuable but Have lost their way	Guided by common sense
Well-meaning but misguided	Possess the best ideas for the country's future
Good at heart, yet blind to what is really going on	Capable of putting things in perspective
Despite their many flaws, they occasionally Have good ideas	They stand up for ordinary people
Easily led astray by their good intentions	Willing to fight for justice
Reasonable even if wrong most of the time	Hard working

55. Now think about Republicans. Again, in your view, which of these words or phrases best describes Republicans and the Republican Party? Please check all the options that you believe describe Republicans well.

Care only about themselves	On the right side more often than not
Think they are better than other people	Genuinely try to make America a better place, Even if they don't always succeed
Corrupt to the core	Better than the alternative
Evil	The lesser of two evils
Un-American	

Unwilling to consider different points of view
Whiners who don't know how lucky they have it
Hypocritical

They once stood for something valuable but
Have lost their way
Well-meaning but misguided
Good at heart, yet blind to what is really going on
Despite their many flaws, they occasionally
Have good ideas
Easily led astray by their good intentions
Reasonable even if wrong most of the time

Not perfect but our best hope
They have the right priorities, despite
Occasional mistakes

Trustworthy
Tolerant
Guided by common sense
Possess the best ideas for the country's future
Capable of putting things in perspective
They stand up for ordinary people
Willing to fight for justice
Hard working

Job Approval

56. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?

1. Strongly disapprove
2. Disapprove
3. Approve
4. Strongly approve

57. Do you approve or disapprove of the way the US Congress is handling its job?

1. Strongly disapprove
2. Disapprove
3. Approve
4. Strongly approve

Participation

58. How likely are you to contact (for example, write, call, or email) your member of Congress or some other government official in the next month to share your concerns and let the official know your views?

1. No chance
2. Slightly likely
3. Somewhat likely
4. Very likely
5. Definitely will contact

59. Did you vote in the 2014 midterm elections?

1. Yes
2. No

Manipulation Check

60. Do you remember which of the following answers conveys the main message of the article you read earlier?

- a. Decreased levels of polarization in Congress
- b. No change in polarization of Congress
- c. Increased levels of polarization in Congress

- d. Decreased levels of polarization in the American public
- e. No change in polarization of the American public
- f. Increased levels of polarization the American public

Political Knowledge

Now we would like to ask you a few factual questions about politics. Some people follow politics all of the time, others are not that interested in politics. We're curious about which facts people remember off the top of their head, without needing to look them up.

If you don't know the answer, you may try your best guess or simply select "don't know."

- 61. Do you happen to know how many times an individual can be elected President of the United States under current laws?
 - 1. Once
 - 2. Twice
 - 3. Three times
 - 4. Four times
 - 5. Unlimited
 - 6. Don't know
- 62. For how many years is a US Senator elected - that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a US Senator?
 - 1. Two years
 - 2. Four years
 - 3. Six years
 - 4. Eight years
 - 5. Ten years
 - 6. Twelve years
 - 7. Don't know
- 63. What job or office does Joe Biden now hold?
 - 1. Open response
- 64. What is medicare?
 - 1. A program run by the U.S. federal government to pay health care for the elderly
 - 2. A program run by state governments to provide health care for low income individuals
 - 3. A private health insurance plan sold to individuals in all 50 states
 - 4. A private, non-profit organization that runs free health clinics
 - 5. Don't know

Income

- 65. Do you ever think of yourself as belonging in one of these classes?
 - 1. Lower class or poor
 - 2. Working class
 - 3. Middle class
 - 4. Upper middle class
 - 5. Upper class or rich

66. In the past year, roughly what was your household income before taxes?

1. Under \$10,000
2. 10,000-19,999
3. 20,000-29,999
4. 30,000-39,999
5. 40,000-49,999
6. 50,000-59,999
7. 60,000-69,999
8. 70,000-79,999
9. 80,000-89,999
10. 90,000-99,999
11. 100,000 or more

Debrief




Thank you for your participation. Please provide any feedback you like in the space below (optional).

This survey is part of research being conducted at the University of Michigan. We are studying the impact of polarization news articles on the extent of ideological distance and social distance polarization within the American electorate. The news story you read is fictional, but they are adopted from recent news stories from The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post. Your responses are very valuable for this research and we appreciate it.

Please contact Molly Block at merinb@umich.edu if you have further questions or concerns.

Please record the following six digit code to be paid for your participation through Amazon Mechanical Turk.

The New York Times

Monday, December 1, 2014 |  Today's Paper |  Video |  29°F | Nasdaq -1.26% ↓

A Nation Divided by Red and Blue

Friend requests are revoked, dinner invitations are withheld. With fewer and fewer Americans willing to reach across partisan lines in today's polarized political atmosphere, Democratic and Republican voters rarely socialize with one another and even remove (or "de-friend") those who disagree from their online social networks.

Where friendships once flourished in the face of political disagreements, today Democrats and Republicans across America tend to travel in separate social circles. Political issues that might have once prompted meaningful discussion or vigorous but friendly debate, now give rise mostly to shouting or silence.

The ideal of democratic compromise has been vanishing, as extreme voices come to dominate the political process across the country. America is being torn in two, red versus blue, by a culture war rooted in sharply contrasting core beliefs, values, and lifestyles.




American society has become more ideologically polarized on matters of social policy, religion, and the role of government. The ideological distance between Democrats and Republicans has widened to an extent nearly unseen since the slavery debate leading up to the Civil War.

Polarization within the American electorate took center stage during the 2004 presidential campaign. Democrats routinely attacked not only George W Bush but also his supporters with the familiar Red stereotypes – they were, according to the charges, ignorant, belligerent, cowboys, and religious zealots. Likewise, Republicans branded John Kerry and his supporters as elitists, snobs, lacking conviction and unpatriotic.

The ideological division of society does not appear to be changing anytime soon. Rather the splitting of the public along economic lines and cultural divisions looms large.

Although ostensibly a single nation, America is deeply divided by two cultures: red and blue.

The New York Times

Wednesday, December 3, 2014 |  Today's Paper |  Video |  66°F | S. & P. 500 +0.38% ↑

A Congress Divided by Red and Blue

The Congressional cafeteria has been empty as of late. With fewer and fewer attempts to reach across the aisle in today's polarized political atmosphere, Democratic and Republican members of Congress no longer eat lunch together.

Where friendships once flourished in the face of political disagreements, today Democratic and Republican members of Congress tend to travel in separate social circles. Political issues that might have once prompted meaningful discussion or vigorous but friendly debate, now give rise mostly to shouting or silence.

The ideal of democratic compromise has been vanishing as extreme political voices come to dominate the political process in Washington, DC, and state capitals. The legislative branch is being torn in two, red versus blue, by a culture war rooted in sharply contrasting core beliefs, values, and lifestyles.

Congress has become more ideologically polarized on matters of social policy, religion, and the role of government. The ideological distance between Democrats and Republicans has widened to an extent nearly unseen since the slavery debate leading up to the Civil War.

Elite political polarization took center stage during the 2004 presidential campaign. Democratic leaders routinely attacked George W. Bush with the familiar Red stereotypes -- he was, according to the charges, ignorant, belligerent, a cowboy, and a religious zealot. Likewise, Republican leaders branded John Kerry an elitist, a snob, lacking conviction and unpatriotic.

The ideological division of Congress does not appear to be changing anytime soon. Rather the splitting of Representatives and Senators along economic lines and cultural divisions looms large.

Although intended to represent a single nation, Congress is deeply divided by two cultures: red and blue.

Survey Characteristics

PID	Respondents
0	20.19%
1	23.37%
2	14.94%
3	19.55%
4	7.00%
5	10.17%
6	4.77%

PID	Control	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization
0	20.52%	23.23%	16.83%
1	22.27%	24.75%	23.27%
2	14.85%	14.14%	15.84%
3	18.78%	21.21%	18.18%
4	7.42%	3.03%	10.40%
5	10.92%	9.60%	9.90%
6	5.24%	4.04%	4.95%

TV Sources

Source	# of Respondents
CNN	110
ABC	121
NBC	93
CBS	140
FOX	140
MSNBC	133
PBS	51
BBC	67
Daily Show	111
Colbert Report	99

Internet Sources

Source	# of Respondents
Websites of newspapers, magazines, or radio/TV stations	414
Google	239
Yahoo	182
Political Blogs	70
Huffington Post	208
Drudge Report	60
Slate	55
Politico	42
Talking Points Memo	15

Data Tables

Difference of Means

Polarization Perceptions

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.574527	.012	.5534
Societal Polarization	201	.5649028	.011	
Control	227	.5594714	.012	.4629
Treatments	398	.5696665	.008	

Partisan Social ID

CONSERVATIVE	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	33	.36666667	.034	.7783
Societal Polarization	51	.354902	.025	
Control	54	.4138889	.030	.1219
Treatments	84	.3595238	.020	

LIBERAL	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	121	.3966942	.018	.2385
Societal Polarization	11	.3648649	.020	
Control	131	.3706107	.018	.6303
Treatments	232	.3814655	.013	

INDEPENDENT	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	41	.3292683	.030	.5164
Societal Polarization	38	.3026316	.028	
Control	43	.3372093	.036	.5889
Treatments	79	.3164557	.020	

Social Distance

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	149	.5345158	.013	.1424
Societal Polarization	164	.5069686	.014	
Control	183	.5421546	.012	.1535
Treatments	313	.5200822	.009	

Party Affect Batteries

Net Democratic Affect	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	196	.3557514	.012	.9272
Societal Polarization	199	.3572408	.011	
Control	222	.3751023	.011	.1702
Treatments	395	.3565017	.008	

Democrat Positive	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	196	.4557823	.015	.0722
Societal Polarization	200	.42	.014	
Control	223	.4519183	.013	.0746
Treatments	396	.4377104	.010	

Democrat Negative	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.580303	.014	.0746
Societal Polarization	201	.6139304	.014	
Control	227	.6057269	.012	.5799
Treatments	399	.5872431	.009	

Abs Democratic Affect	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	196	.4606009	.012	.0371
Societal Polarization	199	.4232273	.013	
Control	222	.444945	.012	.8307
Treatments	395	.4417722	.009	

Net Republican Affect	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.5875635	.010	.0351
Societal Polarization	202	.5573432	.010	
Control	223	.5878176	.011	.2218
Treatments	399	.572264	.007	

Republican Positive	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.5160745	.016	.0196
Societal Polarization	202	.4642464	.015	
Control	224	.5257937	.014	.0520
Treatments	399	.4898357	.011	

Republican Negative	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.6006768	.012	.5304
Societal Polarization	202	.6122112	.013	
Control	224	.5902778	.012	.2858
Treatments	399	.6065163	.009	

Abs Republican Affect	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.4576988	.013	.0785
Societal Polarization	202	.4260176	.013	
Control	223	.4676134	.011	.0764
Treatments	399	.4416597	.009	

Democratic Net Party Affect

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	121	.2937641	.012	.8926
	Societal Polarization	112	.2962662	.014	
	Control	129	.3255814	.012	.0451
	Treatments	233	.2949668	.009	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.4876033	.025	.2162
	Societal Polarization	49	.4471243	.021	
	Control	52	.4527972	.026	.7119
	Treatments	82	.4634146	.016	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.4307359	.028	.7752
	Societal Polarization	38	.4210526	.017	
	Control	41	.4323725	.023	.8292
	Treatments	80	.4261364	.017	

Democratic Absolute Party Affect

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	121	.4761249	.014	.6596
	Societal Polarization	112	.4667659	.016	
	Control	129	.4633936	.015	.6482
	Treatments	233	.4716261	.011	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.4225589	.027	.5486
	Societal Polarization	49	.4024943	.020	
	Control	52	.4455128	.023	.2068
	Treatments	82	.4105691	.016	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.4457672	.035	.0150
	Societal Polarization	38	.3216374	.035	
	Control	41	.3861789	.030	.9880
	Treatments	80	.3868056	.026	

Democratic Positive Affect

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	121	.4334252	.015	.7191
	Societal Polarization	112	.4255952	.016	
	Control	130	.440171	.015	.5705
	Treatments	233	.4296614	.011	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.4983165	.036	.3399
	Societal Polarization	50	.4555556	.027	
	Control	52	.5	.024	.4703
	Treatments	83	.4725569	.020	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.4867725	.043	.0307
	Societal Polarization	38	.3567252	.040	
	Control	41	.4281843	.035	.9484
	Treatments	80	.425	.030	

Democratic Negative Affect

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	123	.5325203	.016	.6704
	Societal Polarization	113	.5424779	.018	
	Control	130	.5623077	.016	.2013
	Treatments	236	.5372881	.012	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.6878788	.022	.7330
	Societal Polarization	50	.678	.018	
	Control	54	.6462963	.019	.1301
	Treatments	83	.6819277	.014	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.6357143	.031	.0168
	Societal Polarization	38	.7421053	.030	
	Control	43	.6860465	.026	.9955
	Treatments	80	.68625	.022	

Republican Net Party Affect

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	122	.6084071	.012	.2789
	Societal Polarization	113	.6277322	.013	
	Control	128	.640625	.013	.1540
	Treatments	235	.6184397	.009	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.4722222	.017	.8370
	Societal Polarization	51	.4673203	.015	
	Control	53	.4544025	.021	.4989
	Treatments	84	.469246	.012	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.5615079	.023	.2474
	Societal Polarization	38	.5263158	.019	
	Control	42	.5952381	.022	.0567
	Treatments	80	.5447917	.015	

Republican Absolute Party Affect

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	121	.4567395	.015	.2585
	Societal Polarization	113	.4321534	.015	
	Control	128	.4592014	.014	.4283
	Treatments	235	.4449173	.011	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.493266	.029	.6503
	Societal Polarization	51	.4771242	.022	
	Control	53	.5251572	.050	.1228
	Treatments	84	.4834656	.017	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.4325397	.033	.0615
	Societal Polarization	38	.3391813	.036	
	Control	42	.4206349	.030	.4256
	Treatments	80	.3881945	.025	

Republican Positive Affect

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	122	.5418944	.021	.1874
	Societal Polarization	113	.5044248	.019	
	Control	128	.5529514	.020	.2274
	Treatments	235	.5238771	.014	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.4747475	.029	.5961
	Societal Polarization	51	.4553377	.023	
	Control	53	.4947589	.025	.2858
	Treatments	84	.462963	.018	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.473545	.041	.0501
	Societal Polarization	38	.3567252	.042	
	Control	43	.4832041	.036	.1829
	Treatments	80	.4180556	.030	

Republican Negative Affect

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	122	.640118	.013	.5690
	Societal Polarization	113	.6284153	.016	
	Control	129	.633075	.013	.9543
	Treatments	235	.6340426	.010	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.4882155	.033	.7548
	Societal Polarization	51	.5010893	.025	
	Control	53	.4444445	.024	.1030
	Treatments	84	.4960318	.020	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.6084656	.032	.1407
	Societal Polarization	38	.6783626	.034	
	Control	42	.6428572	.028	.9754
	Treatments	80	.6416667	.024	

Issue Positions

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.4369712	.016	.0059
Societal Polarization	197	.499154	.016	
Control	222	.4660285	.016	.9170
Treatments	394	.4680626	.011	

Issue Extremity

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.5862944	.015	.2481
Societal Polarization	197	.5609137	.016	
Control	222	.5837087	.015	.5837
Treatments	394	.5736041	.011	

Issue Positions

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	122	.5806011	.019	.0564
	Societal Polarization	108	.5262346	.021	
	Control	127	.5426509	.019	.6042
	Treatments	230	.5550725	.014	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.6111111	.036	.3977
	Societal Polarization	51	.6503268	.029	
	Control	54	.6404321	.029	.8806
	Treatments	84	.6349206	.022	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.5833333	.035	.3911
	Societal Polarization	38	.5394737	.036	
	Control	41	.6361789	.035	.0917
	Treatments	80	.5625	.025	

Marry Republican

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	194	.5472509	.016	.7495
Societal Polarization	202	.5544554	.016	
Control	228	.5182749	.017	.0949
Treatments	396	.5509259	.011	

Marry Democrat

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	196	.6062925	.014	.3133
Societal Polarization	202	.5849835	.015	
Control	227	.5660793	.015	.1031
Treatments	398	.5954774	.011	

Republican Friends

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.357868	.015	.3300
Societal Polarization	202	.3799505	.017	
Control	228	.3673246	.015	.9270
Treatments	399	.3690476	.011	

Democrat Friends

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.5378788	.016	.0161
Societal Polarization	202	.4814356	.017	
Control	227	.5022026	.015	.7121
Treatments	400	.509375	.011	

Country Perceptions

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.2171717	.015	.0012
Societal Polarization	201	.2922886	.017	
Control	228	.2730263	.017	.3650
Treatments	399	.2550125	.012	

Elite Perceptions

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.8787879	.018	.0529
Societal Polarization	202	.8292079	.018	
Control	229	.7925764	.020	.0079
Treatments	400	.85375	.013	

Society Perceptions

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.7676768	.030	.1199
Societal Polarization	202	.700495	.032	
Control	228	.6798246	.030	.1358
Treatments	400	.73375	.022	

Culture War Perceptions

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.536802	.018	.1164
Societal Polarization	202	.4975248	.018	
Control	229	.5305677	.019	.5330
Treatments	399	.5169173	.013	

Willingness to Compromise

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.7878788	.030	.6223
Societal Polarization	202	.7673267	.030	
Control	229	.7423581	.029	.3182
Treatments	400	.7775	.021	

Political Discussion with Republicans

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.4242424	.021	.6144
Societal Polarization	202	.4389439	.021	
Control	228	.4364035	.020	.8472
Treatments	400	.4316667	.021	

Political Discussion with Democrats

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.53367	.019	.3817
Societal Polarization	202	.509901	.020	
Control	229	.5167394	.019	.8309
Treatments	400	.5216667	.014	

Trust in Government

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	1.267677	.058	.9562
Societal Polarization	202	1.272277	.060	
Control	228	1.162281	.060	.1312
Treatments	400	1.27	.042	

ID Placement of Republican Party

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.8375421	.014	.7073
Societal Polarization	202	.8440594	.011	
Control	228	.8406433	.011	.9894
Treatments	400	.8408333	.009	

ID Placement of Democratic Party

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.239899	.014	.5435
Societal Polarization	201	.2280265	.013	
Control	229	.2474527	.013	.4034
Treatments	399	.2339181	.010	

Democratic Favorability

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.526936	.018	.0633
Societal Polarization	202	.4785479	.018	
Control	228	.4488304	.018	.0152
Treatments	400	.5025	.013	

Republican Favorability

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.3148148	.018	.6045
Societal Polarization	202	.3019802	.018	
Control	229	.2911208	.019	.4292
Treatments	400	.3083333	.012	

Democratic Threatening Policies

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	.2961083	.022	.5606
Societal Polarization	202	.3135314	.021	
Control	229	.349345	.022	.0851
Treatments	399	.304929	.015	

Republican Threatening Policies

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	196	.5221089	.020	.0253
Societal Polarization	202	.4570957	.021	
Control	229	.5371179	.021	.0549
Treatments	398	.4891122	.015	

Discussion with Democrats

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	123	.602981	.021	.7523
	Societal Polarization	113	.5929204	.024	
	Control	132	.5732323	.024	.3731
	Treatments	236	.5981638	.016	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.3838384	.049	.9368
	Societal Polarization	51	.3888889	.040	
	Control	54	.4259259	.040	.4373
	Treatments	84	.3869048	.031	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.4484127	.040	.6946
	Societal Polarization	38	.4254386	.043	
	Control	43	.4573643	.042	.6949
	Treatments	80	.4375	.029	

Discussion with Republicans

Democrats		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	123	.3766938	.024	.5734
	Societal Polarization	113	.3569322	.026	
	Control	132	.344697	.024	.4482
	Treatments	236	.3672316	.017	

Republicans		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	33	.6363636	.056	.8913
	Societal Polarization	51	.627451	.038	
	Control	53	.6698113	.034	.4217
	Treatments	84	.6309524	.032	

Independents		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	42	.3968254	.042	.5834
	Societal Polarization	38	.4298246	.042	
	Control	43	.4302326	.044	.7325
	Treatments	80	.4125	.030	

President Approval

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	197	1.390863	.061	.1542
Societal Polarization	202	1.267327	.061	
Control	224	1.21875	.060	.1345
Treatments	399	1.328321	.043	

Congress Approval

	# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
Elite Polarization	198	.7676768	.048	.9680
Societal Polarization	200	.765	.046	
Control	224	.7008929	.046	.2460
Treatments	298	.7663317	.033	

Chi Squared Tests

How do you feel about the way things are going in the country?

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Very dissatisfied	36.87%	26.37%	29.82%	31.58%
Somewhat dissatisfied	45.96%	43.28%	46.05%	44.61%
Indifference	11.11%	18.91%	10.09%	15.04%
Somewhat satisfied	5.56%	9.95%	12.16%	7.77%
Very satisfied	0.51%	1.49%	0.88%	1%
P-VALUE	.025		.123	

Congressmen moving farther apart?

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Closer	3.54%	1.98%	6.99%	2.75%
Same	17.17%	30.20%	27.51%	23.75%
Apart	79.29%	67.82%	65.50%	75.50%
P-VALUE	.007		.016	

Partisans moving farther apart?

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Closer	21.21%	28.22%	27.19%	24.75%
Same	4.04%	3.47%	9.65%	3.75%
Apart	74.75%	68.32%	63.16%	71.50%
P-VALUE	.266		.006	

Culture War

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	3.05%	4.95%	8.73%	4.01%
Slightly well	25.38%	29.21%	20.96%	27.32%
Moderately well	33.50%	34.16%	32.75%	33.83%
Very well	29.95%	25.25%	24.45%	27.57%
Extremely well	8.12%	6.44%	13.10%	7.27%
P-VALUE	.620		.008	

Willingness to compromise

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
No	21.21%	23.27%	25.76%	22.25%
Yes	78.79%	76.73%	74.24%	77.75%
P-VALUE	.621		.317	

Political discussion with republicans

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Dislike a great deal	13.64%	14.85%	17.11%	14.25%
Dislike a moderate amount	20.2%	14.85%	16.23%	17.50%
Dislike a little	14.65%	18.32%	12.72%	16.50%
Neither like nor dislike	23.23%	17.82%	18.86%	20.50%
Like a little	11.11%	16.83%	17.11%	14%
Like a moderate amount	12.12%	12.87%	12.72%	12.50%
Like a great deal	5.05%	4.46%	5.26%	4.75%
P-VALUE	.376		.745	

Political discussion with democrats

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Dislike a great deal	6.06%	9.41%	9.17%	7.75%
Dislike a moderate amount	9.09%	9.90%	12.66%	9.50%
Dislike a little	16.67%	17.33%	14.41%	17%
Neither like nor dislike	24.24%	20.30%	18.78%	22.25%
Like a little	20.71%	20.30%	19.21%	20.50%
Like a moderate amount	17.17%	17.33%	19.21%	17.25%
Like a great deal	6.06%	5.45%	6.55%	5.75%
P-VALUE	.889		.710	

Trust in government

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Always	13.13%	14.85%	21.49%	14%
Most of the time	57.58%	53.96%	51.75%	55.75%
Half	18.69%	20.79%	16.67%	19.75%
Some	10.61%	9.90%	9.21%	10.25%
Never	0%	.50%	.88%	.25%
P-VALUE	.791		.116	

ID placement Republican Party

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Extremely Liberal	0%	0%	.44%	0%
Liberal	3.03%	.50%	.88%	1.75%
Slightly Liberal	2.02%	.50%	1.32%	1.25%
Middle of the road	4.55%	7.92%	6.14%	6.25%
Slightly Conservative	10.10%	5.94	9.21%	8%
Conservative	40.40%	53.47%	46.49 %	47%
Extremely Conservative	39.90%	31.68%	35.53%	35.75%
P-VALUE	.010		.834	

ID placement Democratic Party

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Extremely Liberal	18.69%	17.91%	17.90%	18.30%
Liberal	45.96%	50.75%	44.10%	48.37%
Slightly Liberal	17.17%	15.42%	17.90%	16.29%
Middle of the road	12.63%	11.94%	13.54%	12.28%
Slightly Conservative	2.02%	1.99%	4.80%	2.01%
Conservative	3.54%	.50%	1.75%	2.01%
Extremely Conservative	0%	1.49%	0%	.75%
P-VALUE	.218		.367	

Democrats favorable

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Very unfavorable	12.12%	11.88%	17.54%	12%
Mostly unfavorable	23.23%	39.11%	35.09%	31.25%
Mostly favorable	59.09%	42.57%	42.54%	50.75%
Very favorable	5.56%	6.44%	4.82%	6%
P-VALUE	.004		.100	

Republican favorable

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Very unfavorable	28.79%	32.67%	41.48%	30.75%
Mostly unfavorable	48.48%	45.05%	32.31%	46.75%
Mostly favorable	22.22%	21.29%	23.58%	21.75%
Very unfavorable	.51%	.99%	2.62%	.75%
P-VALUE	.778		.001	

Democrats threatening policies

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not at all threatening	39.09%	35.64%	34.06%	37.34%
Somewhat threatening	41.62%	40.59%	39.74%	41.10%
Very threatening	10.66%	17.82%	13.54%	14.29%
Extremely threatening	8.63%	5.94%	12.66%	7.27%
P-VALUE	.171		.168	

Republicans threatening policies

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not at all threatening	7.14%	15.35%	10.92%	11.31%
Somewhat threatening	44.39%	45.05%	38.74%	44.72%
Very threatening	33.16%	26.73%	26.64%	29.90%
Extremely threatening	15.31%	12.87%	22.71%	14.07%
P-VALUE	.052		.053	

When someone criticized the Republican Party, it feels like a personal insult

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	39.39%	50.98%	42.59%	46.43%
Slightly well	39.39%	31.37%	33.33%	34.52%
Moderately well	12.12%	13.73%	12.96%	13.10%
Very well	9.09%	3.92%	7.41%	5.95%
Extremely well	0%	0%	3.70%	0%
P-VALUE	.595		.503	

When I talk about Republicans, I usually say “we” rather than “they”

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	48.48%	60.78%	46.30%	55.95%
Slightly well	24.24%	19.61%	22.22%	21.43%
Moderately well	21.21%	11.76%	11.11%	15.48%
Very well	6.06%	5.88%	14.81%	5.95%
Extremely well	0%	1.96%	5.56%	1.19%
P-VALUE	.636		.203	

I don't have much in common with Republicans

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	45.45%	43.14%	51.85%	44.05%
Slightly well	20.20%	33.33%	18.52%	32.14%
Moderately well	24.24%	17.65%	18.52%	20.24%
Very well	0%	3.92%	11.11%	2.38%
Extremely well	0%	1.96%	0%	1.19%
P-VALUE	.653		.103	

When the Republican Party does well in an election, I feel proud

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	24.24%	21.57%	14.81%	22.62
Slightly well	30.30%	21.57%	25.93%	25%
Moderately well	30.30%	27.45%	24.07%	28.57%
Very well	3.03%	25.49%	24.07%	16.67%
Extremely well	12.12%	3.92%	11.11%	7.14%
P-VALUE	.070		.592	

When Republicans do something wrong, I feel personally embarrassed

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	42.42%	49.02%	38.89%	46.43%
Slightly well	33.33%	23.53%	25.93%	27.38%
Moderately well	18.18%	15.69%	14.81%	16.67%
Very well	6.06%	11.76%	18.52%	9.52%
Extremely well	0%	0%	1.85%	0%
P-VALUE	.648		.390	

When someone criticized the Democratic Party, it feels like a personal insult

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	48.78%	53.10%	50.38%	50.85%
Slightly well	25.20%	23.01%	27.48%	24.15%
Moderately well	17.89%	15.04%	12.21%	16.53%
Very well	5.69%	7.08%	8.40%	6.36%
Extremely well	2.44%	1.77%	1.53%	2.12%
P-VALUE	.921		.723	

When I talk about Democrats, I usually say “we” rather than “they”

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	52.03%	55.75%	55.73%	53.81%
Slightly well	15.45%	18.58%	17.56%	16.95%
Moderately well	18.70%	16.81%	14.50%	17.80%
Very well	8.94%	7.08%	6.87%	8.05%
Extremely well	4.88%	1.77	5.34%	3.39%
P-VALUE	.637		.815	

I don't have much in common with Democrats

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	63.93%	54.46%	43.51%	59.40%
Slightly well	22.95%	23.21%	32.06%	23.08%
Moderately well	9.02%	19.64%	14.50%	14.10%
Very well	4.10%	1.79%	8.40%	2.99%
Extremely well	0%	.89%	1.53%	.43%
P-VALUE	.104		.013	

When the Democratic Party does well in an election, I feel proud

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	19.67%	25.66%	22.14%	22.55%
Slightly well	27.05%	24.78%	27.48%	25.96%
Moderately well	27.05%	18.58%	25.19%	22.98%
Very well	17.21%	20.35%	17.56%	18.72%
Extremely well	9.02%	10.62%	7.63%	9.79%
P-VALUE	.502		.945	

When Democrats do something wrong, I feel personally embarrassed

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	44.72%	51.79%	45.80%	48.09%
Slightly well	32.52%	25.89%	24.43%	29.36%
Moderately well	13.01%	14.29%	16.79%	13.62%
Very well	6.50%	7.14%	9.16%	6.81%
Extremely well	3.25%	.89%	3.82%	2.13%
P-VALUE	.537		.575	

When someone criticized the Independent Party, it feels like a personal insult

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	69.05%	76.32%	74.42%	72.50%
Slightly well	11.90%	18.42%	4.65%	15%
Moderately well	16.67%	5.26%	13.95%	11.25%
Very well	2.38	0%	4.65%	1.25%
Extremely well	0%	0%	2.33%	0%
P-VALUE	.270		.199	

When I talk about Independents, I usually say “we” rather than “they”

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	59.52%	68.42%	67.44%	63.75%
Slightly well	19.05%	13.16%	11.63%	16.25%
Moderately well	14.29%	10.53%	9.30%	12.50%
Very well	7.14%	7.89%	9.30%	7.50%
Extremely well	0%	0%	2.33%	0%
P-VALUE	.822		.611	

I don't have much in common with Independents

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	35.71%	47.37%	44.19%	41.25%
Slightly well	21.43%	26.32%	23.26%	23.75%
Moderately well	38.10%	15.79%	16.28%	27.50%
Very well	4.76%	7.89%	6.98%	6.25%
Extremely well	0%	2.63%	9.30%	1.25%
P-VALUE	.208		.196	

When Independents do well in an election, I feel proud

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Not well at all	41.46%	52.63%	34.88%	46.84%
Slightly well	21.95%	21.05%	25.58%	21.52%
Moderately well	18.51%	13.16%	23.26%	16.46%
Very well	12.20%	10.53%	6.98%	11.39%
Extremely well	4.88%	2.63%	9.30%	3.80%
P-VALUE	.857		.428	

Marry Republican

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Very unhappy	2.06%	1.49%	5.70%	1.77%
Moderately unhappy	4.64%	5.45%	7.46%	5.05%
Slightly unhappy	11.34%	11.39%	14.91%	11.36%
Neither unhappy nor happy	57.73%	55.45%	43.42%	56.57%
Slightly happy	3.61%	3.47%	7.46%	3.54%
Moderately happy	10.31%	12.38%	12.72%	11.36%
Very happy	10.31%	10.40%	8.33%	10.35%
P-VALUE	.993		.003	

Marry Democrat

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Very unhappy	0.51%	1.98%	3.08%	1.26%
Moderately unhappy	1.53%	3.96%	4.41%	2.76%
Slightly unhappy	4.59%	4.46%	7.93%	4.52%
Neither unhappy nor happy	57.65%	54.95%	50.66%	56.28%
Slightly happy	9.69%	10.89%	11.01%	10.30%
Moderately happy	14.80%	12.87%	14.10%	13.82%
Very happy	11.22%	10.89%	9.81%	11.06%
P-VALUE	.625		.223	

Republican Friends

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
None	9.14%	10.40%	10.53%	9.77%
A few	53.81%	48.02%	49.56%	50.88%
About half	22.34%	21.29%	22.81%	22.80%
Most	14.21%	19.80%	16.67%	17.04%
All	0.51%	0.50%	0.44%	0.50%
P-VALUE	.610		.994	

Democratic Friends

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
None	2.53%	3.47%	2.64%	3%
A few	25.25%	34.65%	31.28%	30%
About half	30.30%	30.69%	31.72%	30.5%
Most	38.38%	28.22%	31.28%	33.35%
All	3.54%	2.97%	3.08%	3.25%
P-VALUE	.168		.983	

Democratic Party Happy

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	21.72%	25.37%	26.43%	23.56%
Seldom	20.71%	31.34%	30.40%	26.07%
Sometimes	40.91%	31.34%	31.72%	36.09%
Most of the time	13.13%	9.95%	9.69%	11.53%
Always	3.54%	1.99%	1.76%	2.76%
P-VALUE	.057		.506	

Democratic Party Afraid

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	43.65%	45.54%	39.65%	44.61%
Seldom	30.96%	27.72%	28.19%	29.32%
Sometimes	16.75%	21.29%	20.70%	19.05%
Most of the time	4.57%	4.95%	9.69%	4.76%
Always	4.06%	0.50%	1.76%	2.26%
P-VALUE	.127		.156	

Democratic Party Hopeful

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	19.29%	26.87%	25.11%	23.12%
Seldom	20.81%	20.90%	27.31%	20.85%
Sometimes	34.52%	33.83%	29.96%	34.17%
Most of the time	21.32%	14.93%	14.98%	18.09%
Always	4.06%	3.48%	2.64%	3.77%
P-VALUE	.306		.288	

Democratic Party Proud

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	27.78%	34.16%	32.46%	31%
Seldom	20.71%	27.23%	28.95%	24%
Sometimes	37.88%	26.24%	27.63%	32%
Most of the time	11.62%	10.40%	9.65%	11%
Always	2.02%	1.98%	1.32%	2%
P-VALUE	.114		.553	

Democratic Party Angry

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	21.21%	20.90%	17.78%	21.05%
Seldom	30.30%	25.87%	28%	28.07%
Sometimes	34.85%	41.79%	36.44%	38.35%
Most of the time	9.09%	9.95%	13.78%	9.52%
Always	4.55%	1.49%	4%	3.01%
P-VALUE	.275		.450	

Democratic Party Disgusted

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	32.32%	26.24%	25%	29.25%
Seldom	27.27%	27.23%	27.63%	27.25%
Sometimes	28.28%	33.66%	30.26%	31%
Most of the time	8.08%	10.40%	10.53%	9.25%
Always	4.04%	2.48%	6.58%	3.25%
P-VALUE	.473		.305	

Republican Party Happy

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	42.13%	42.57%	49.11%	42.36%
Seldom	35.03%	32.18%	26.79%	33.58%
Sometimes	20.30%	20.30%	18.75%	20.30%
Most of the time	2.03%	4.46%	3.57%	3.26%
Always	.051%	.050%	1.79%	.50%
P-VALUE	.727		.180	

Republican Party Afraid

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	20.81%	29.21%	17.78%	25.06%
Seldom	20.81%	23.76%	26.22%	22.31%
Sometimes	35.03%	31.19%	29.33%	33.08%
Most of the time	15.23%	12.87%	17.78%	14.04%
Always	8.12%	2.97%	8.89%	5.51%
P-VALUE	.065		.069	

Republican Party Hopeful

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	42.64%	43.56%	48%	43.11%
Seldom	32.99%	27.72%	26.22%	30.33%
Sometimes	18.78%	19.31%	16.89%	19.05%
Most of the time	4.57%	7.92%	6.67%	6.27%
Always	1.02%	1.49%	2.22%	1.25%
P-VALUE	.573		.583	

Republican Party Proud

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	53.81%	50.99%	55.11%	52.38%
Seldom	24.87%	23.76%	24.89%	24.31%
Sometimes	18.27%	19.31%	13.78%	18.80%
Most of the time	2.03%	5.45%	3.56%	3.76%
Always	1.02%	0.50%	2.67%	0.75%
P-VALUE	.446		.197	

Republican Party Angry

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	9.64%	14.85%	12.05%	12.28%
Seldom	19.29%	18.32%	16.52%	18.80%
Sometimes	32.99%	40.10%	31.70%	36.59%
Most of the time	30.46%	20.30%	27.68%	25.31%
Always	7.61%	6.44%	12.05%	7.02%
P-VALUE	.096		.212	

Republican Party Disgusted

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Never	11.17%	17.82%	12.44%	14.54%
Seldom	22.34%	18.81%	18.22%	20.55%
Sometimes	36.14%	36.14%	29.78%	32.33%
Most of the time	19.80%	19.80%	23.11%	23.56%
Always	7.43%	7.43%	16.44%	9.02%
P-VALUE	.059		.094	

Job Approval Obama

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Strongly disapprove	20.81%	22.28%	27.23%	21.55%
Disapprove	23.86%	33.66%	27.68%	28.82%
Approve	50.76%	39.11%	41.07%	44.86%
Strongly approve	4.57%	4.95%	4.02%	4.76%
P-VALUE	.091		.444	

Job Approval Congress

	Elite Polarization	Societal Polarization	Control	Treatment
Strongly disapprove	35.86%	36%	43.3%	35.93%
Disapprove	52.53%	51.5%	43.3%	52.01%
Approve	10.61%	12.5%	13.39%	11.56%
Strongly approve	1.01%	0%	0%	.5%
P-VALUE	.503		.124	

Difference of Means Moderating Variables

Polarization Perceptions

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	100	.5618182	.016	.3639
	Societal Polarization	97	.5407685	.017	
	Control	126	.52886	.016	.2399
	Treatments	197	.5514536	.012	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	97	.5876289	.017	.9924
	Societal Polarization	104	.5874126	.015	
	Control	101	.5976598	.017	.6081
	Treatments	201	.587517	.011	

Partisan Social ID
Conservatives

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	18	.3055556	.042	.9580
	Societal Polarization	19	.3026316	.036	
	Control	27	.3796296	.051	.1656
	Treatments	37	.3040541	.027	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	15	.44	.050	.3699
	Societal Polarization	32	.3859375	.034	
	Control	27	.4481482	.032	.3092
	Treatments	47	.4031915	.028	

Liberals

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	60	.3466667	.024	.7275
	Societal Polarization	55	.3345455	.025	
	Control	67	.3559702	.026	.6168
	Treatments	115	.3408696	.017	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	61	.4459016	.026	.2019
	Societal Polarization	56	.3946429	.031	
	Control	64	.3859375	.025	.2832
	Treatments	117	.4213675	.020	

Independents

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	22	.2670455	.027	.2377
	Societal Polarization	24	.3229167	.037	
	Control	33	.3484848	.040	.2324
	Treatments	46	.2961957	.023	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	19	.4013158	.052	.0659
	Societal Polarization	14	.2678571	.040	
	Control	10	.3	.087	.5824
	Treatments	33	.344697	.036	

Social Distance

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	74	.5067568	.017	.7513
	Societal Polarization	74	.4980695	.022	
	Control	94	.550152	.018	.0347
	Treatments	148	.5024131	.014	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	75	.5619048	.019	.0641
	Societal Polarization	90	.5142857	.017	
	Control	89	.5337079	.016	.9164
	Treatments	165	.5359307	.013	

Issue Positions

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	101	.4269802	.020	.0215
	Societal Polarization	97	.4974227	.023	
	Control	125	.469	.022	.7723
	Treatments	198	.4614899	.015	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	96	.4474826	.025	.1106
	Societal Polarization	100	.5008333	.022	
	Control	97	.4621993	.025	.6739
	Treatments	196	.4747024	.017	

Marry Republican

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	99	.5488215	.200	.4915
	Societal Polarization	98	.5289116	.206	
	Control	127	.507874	.259	.2287
	Treatments	197	.5389171	.202	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	95	.545614	.246	.3423
	Societal Polarization	104	.5785256	.241	
	Control	101	.5313531	.024	.2919
	Treatments	199	.5628141	.017	

Marry Democrat

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	100	.6033333	.019	.0392
	Societal Polarization	98	.5459184	.020	
	Control	127	.5380577	.237	.1289
	Treatments	198	.5749158	.200	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	96	.609375	.021	.6942
	Societal Polarization	104	.6217949	.023	
	Control	100	.6016667	.021	.5962
	Treatments	200	.6158333	.016	

Republican Friends

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	100	.3475	.020	.4385
	Societal Polarization	98	.372449	.025	
	Control	127	.3425197	.020	.5025
	Treatments	198	.3598485	.016	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	97	.3685567	.023	.5650
	Societal Polarization	104	.3870192	.022	
	Control	101	.3985149	.022	.4573
	Treatments	201	.3781095	.016	

Democrat Friends

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	101	.5321782	.023	.0099
	Societal Polarization	98	.4438776	.025	
	Control	127	.503937	.022	.5826
	Treatments	199	.4886935	.017	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	97	.5438144	.231	.3985
	Societal Polarization	104	.5168269	.221	
	Control	100	.5	.021	.2721
	Treatments	201	.5298507	.016	

Country Perceptions

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	101	.2079208	.020	.0026
	Societal Polarization	97	.3041237	.025	
	Control	127	.265748	.023	.6932
	Treatments	198	.2550505	.016	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	97	.2268041	.023	.1078
	Societal Polarization	104	.28125	.024	
	Control	101	.2821782	.024	.3559
	Treatments	201	.2549751	.017	

Elite Perceptions

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	101	.8663366	.025	.0425
	Societal Polarization	98	.7908163	.027	
	Control	128	.7695313	.027	.0594
	Treatments	199	.8291457	.019	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	97	.8917526	.027	.4520
	Societal Polarization	104	.8653846	.024	
	Control	101	.8217822	.032	.0932
	Treatments	201	.8781095	.017	

Society Perceptions

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	101	.7623762	.041	.0962
	Societal Polarization	98	.6581633	.047	
	Control	127	.6377953	.041	.1507
	Treatments	199	.7110553	.031	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	97	.7731959	.042	.5827
	Societal Polarization	104	.7403846	.042	
	Control	101	.7326733	.041	.6458
	Treatments	201	.7562189	.030	

Culture War Perceptions

Low Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	100	.5175	.026	.1193
	Societal Polarization	98	.4617347	.024	
	Control	128	.4882813	.026	.9575
	Treatments	198	.489899	.018	

High Media Consumption		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	97	.556701	.024	.4641
	Societal Polarization	104	.53125	.025	
	Control	101	.5841584	.027	.1934
	Treatments	201	.5435323	.017	

Polarization Perceptions

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	111	.5839476	.016	.6833
	Societal Polarization	99	.5748393	.016	
	Control	115	.5328063	.017	.0169
	Treatments	210	.5796537	.011	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.5623679	.017	.7655
	Societal Polarization	102	.5552585	.016	
	Control	112	.5868507	.016	.1486
	Treatments	188	.5585106	.012	

Partisan Social ID
Conservatives

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	14	.35	.055	.8773
	Societal Polarization	19	.3605263	.041	
	Control	24	.425	.049	.2322
	Treatments	33	.3560606	.033	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	19	.3789474	.043	.6139
	Societal Polarization	32	.3515625	.033	
	Control	30	.405	.038	.3346
	Treatments	51	.3617647	.026	

Liberals

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	70	.3771429	.025	.9941
	Societal Polarization	54	.3768519	.030	
	Control	64	.3976563	.027	.5345
	Treatments	124	.3770161	.019	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	51	.4235294	.025	.0621
	Societal Polarization	54	.3535088	.027	
	Control	67	.3447761	.024	.1709
	Treatments	108	.3865741	.019	

Independents

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	25	.2975	.035	.7488
	Societal Polarization	26	.28125	.036	
	Control	28	.3169643	.045	.5613
	Treatments	51	.2892157	.025	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	16	.3789063	.053	.6668
	Societal Polarization	12	.3489583	.036	
	Control	15	.375	.060	.8889
	Treatments	28	.3660714	.034	

Social Distance

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	80	.5321429	.016	.2769
	Societal Polarization	74	.5028958	.021	
	Control	88	.5275974	.019	.6760
	Treatments	154	.5180891	.013	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	69	.5372671	.020	.3114
	Societal Polarization	90	.5103175	.017	
	Control	95	.5556391	.016	.1110
	Treatments	159	.5220126	.013	

Issue Positions

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	111	.4331832	.017	.0147
	Societal Polarization	96	.5008681	.022	
	Control	113	.4605457	.021	.8676
	Treatments	207	.4645733	.014	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.4418605	.029	.1301
	Societal Polarization	101	.4975248	.023	
	Control	109	.4717125	.026	.9946
	Treatments	187	.4719251	.018	

Marry Republican

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	109	.5489297	.021	.3714
	Societal Polarization	100	.5216667	.022	
	Control	116	.5143678	.022	.4141
	Treatments	209	.5358852	.015	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	85	.545098	.025	.2168
	Societal Polarization	102	.5866013	.022	
	Control	112	.5223217	.025	.1185
	Treatments	187	.5677362	.017	

Marry Democrat

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	110	.6181818	.019	.0626
	Societal Polarization	100	.565	.021	
	Control	116	.5617816	.022	.2165
	Treatments	210	.5928571	.014	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.5910853	.022	.6695
	Societal Polarization	102	.6045752	.023	
	Control	111	.5705706	.021	.2844
	Treatments	188	.5984043	.016	

Republican Friends

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	111	.3175676	.019	.2772
	Societal Polarization	100	.35	.023	
	Control	116	.3448276	.022	.6446
	Treatments	211	.3329384	.015	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.4098837	.024	.9866
	Societal Polarization	102	.4093137	.023	
	Control	112	.390625	.020	.4824
	Treatments	188	.4095745	.017	

Democrat Friends

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	112	.5580357	.022	.0005
	Societal Polarization	100	.4425	.024	
	Control	116	.4827586	.023	.4628
	Treatments	212	.5035377	.017	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.5116279	.024	.8079
	Societal Polarization	102	.5196078	.022	
	Control	111	.5225225	.021	.8043
	Treatments	188	.5159574	.016	

Country Perceptions

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	112	.2366071	.021	.0494
	Societal Polarization	99	.3005051	.025	
	Control	116	.2758621	.024	.7434
	Treatments	211	.2665877	.016	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.1918605	.022	.0057
	Societal Polarization	102	.2843137	.024	
	Control	112	.2700893	.023	.3148
	Treatments	188	.2420213	.017	

Elite Perceptions

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	112	.8794643	.023	.0478
	Societal Polarization	100	.81	.026	
	Control	116	.7155175	.032	.0001
	Treatments	212	.8466981	.018	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.877907	.029	.4297
	Societal Polarization	102	.8480392	.025	
	Control	113	.8716814	.023	.7416
	Treatments	188	.8617021	.019	

Society Perceptions

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	112	.7857143	.038	.3782
	Societal Polarization	100	.735	.043	
	Control	115	.5956522	.042	.0010
	Treatments	212	.7617925	.029	

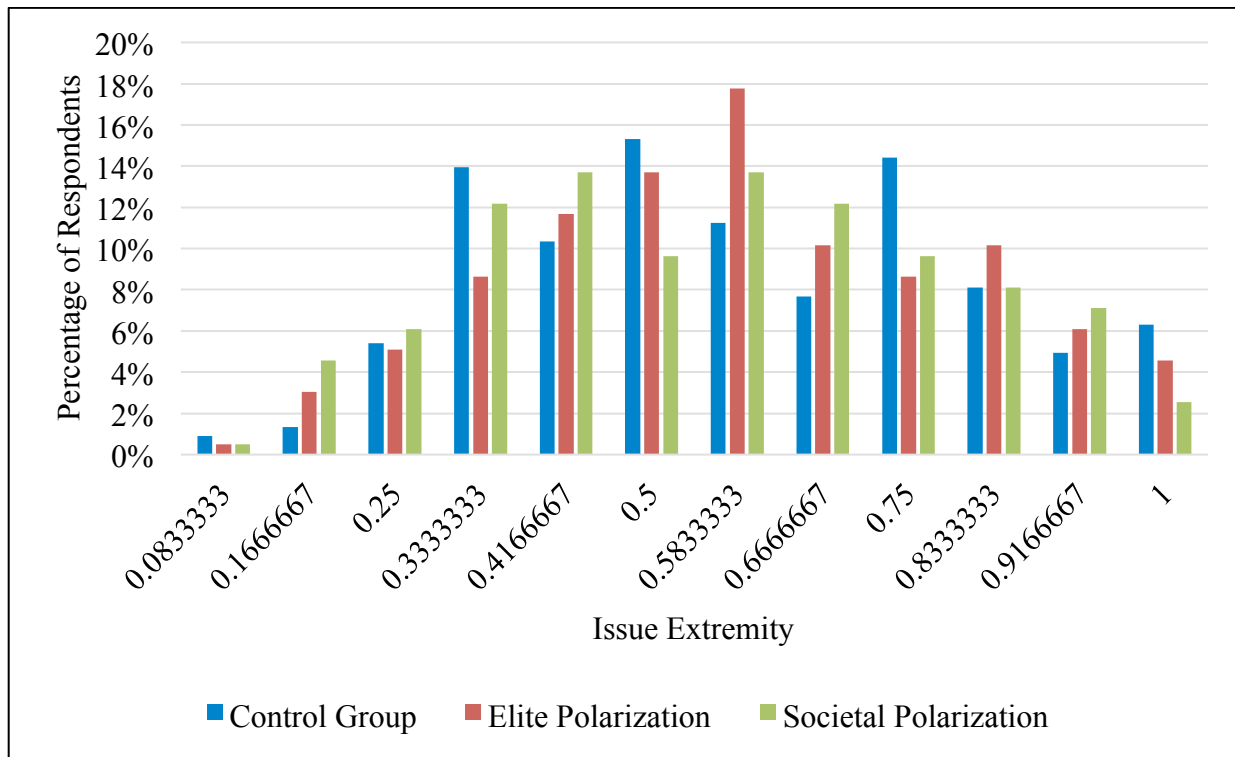
High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.744186	.046	.2369
	Societal Polarization	102	.6666667	.046	
	Control	113	.7654867	.039	.2211
	Treatments	188	.7021277	.033	

Culture War Perceptions

Low Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	111	.5315315	.023	.5197
	Societal Polarization	100	.51	.024	
	Control	116	.5344828	.027	.6622
	Treatments	211	.521327	.017	

High Political Knowledge		# of Obs	Means	Std Error	p-value
	Elite Polarization	86	.5436047	.027	.1243
	Societal Polarization	102	.4852941	.026	
	Control	113	.5265487	.027	.6488
	Treatments	188	.5119681	.019	

Figure 12: Issue Extremity by Treatment Group



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