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For replication, go to: https://github.com/DamonCharlesRoberts/book_project/chapter_4.

How does visual information influence attitudes and behaviors about groups of people?

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ABSTRACT Previous chapters of this project demonstrate that the colors red and blue convey information about the partisan affiliation of another individual, and that this information influences a number of attitudes and behaviors. This chapter's goal is to add to these findings in a couple of directions: (1) do these findings generalize to shaping the attitudes and behaviors directed towards groups of people and (2) do these results contribute to the growing literature about the effects of polarization on seemingly non-political attitudes and behaviors?

Introduction

The previous chapters demonstrated that the colors red and blue conveyed information about the partisanship of politicians and about potential discussion partners. The previous chapters also demonstrated that these effects on attitudes also influenced behaviors such as a willingness to vote for the candidate as well as willingness to have a conversation with another about politics. The previous chapter also demonstrated two other pieces to the story: (1) that the group-based information conveyed by the colors red and blue are dependent on the context, and (2) that the snap-judgments people form based on this simple visual information can shape attitudes and behaviors even when provided with more clear and explicit information about the partisan affiliation of another person.

This chapter builds on these findings to examine whether these associations between the colors red and blue with the partisanship of another can convey information about groups of people and can guide attitudes and resulting behaviors towards interactions with these groups of people. Specifically, the chapter builds upon a growing set of work suggesting that the political differences between Democrats and Republicans are shaping seemingly non-political attitudes and behaviors such as one's choice in which neighborhood to live in. I argue in this chapter that the prevalence of red and blue cars in the driveways of houses in a neighborhood shift people's perceptions of the partisan composition of the neighborhood, and as a result, will make people less willing to move to that neighborhood when they perceive they'd be in the political minority of that neighborhood.

The implications of such findings corroborate existing work that suggests that there are an increasing number of cultural signals that people use to guess the partisanship of not just

other individuals but groups of people, and that as a result partisanship and polarization are bleeding into our non-political decision-making. The implications of the argument advanced in the chapter build upon these existing findings by providing one causal mechanism as to the connection between cultural cues conveyed visually and the cognitive processing of such information. The chapter not only generalizes findings from the previous chapters to groups of people and to non-political attitudes and behaviors, but it contributes to a literature suggesting that political polarization is pervasive and is approaching universal.

Politicultural differences and their effects

While political polarization certainly reflects a growing gap and consolidation of two camps of policy preferences and attitudes (DellaPosta 2020; Lüders, Carpentras, and Quayle 2023), it manifests as something more consequential for our every-day experiences. Political polarization has come to reflect social groups that distinguish “us” versus “them” with increasingly fewer and fewer non-political social groups that are not wrapped up in our partisan group (Mason 2018). That is, we are not only holding fewer and fewer cross-cutting attitudes that moderate our political viewpoints (Lüders, Carpentras, and Quayle 2023), but we also have fewer and fewer cross-cutting social groups that encourage interaction and experiences with perspectives of out-partisans (Mason 2018). The consequence of such phenomena is that we are becoming increasingly willing to harbor strong negative feelings towards those of the other political party and strong positive affectations to members of our political party (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Iyengar and Westwood 2015).

The consequences of this affective polarization encourages discomfort being around those who identify with the other political party and finding comfort around those that share the same partisanship. In fact, some evidence suggests that it is even more sinister than comfort but rather predicts lower empathy for outpartisans (Allamong and Peterson 2021), as well as an increased willingness to describe outpartisans as subhuman (Martherus et al. 2021). Racists commonly use dehumanizing language to describe racial minorities (Utych 2018).

Evidence of this discomfort and its manifestations with out-partisans is piling up. For example, Carlson and Settle (2022) demonstrates that individuals perceive that they may incur social costs with friends and neighbors by engaging in a conversation with those they disagree with and expressing that disagreement, and avoid such situations as a result. Other work corroborate this finding by suggesting that individuals will be less likely to share the social media posts of political viewpoints they agree with if they perceive that they are in the political minority of those that would see that sharing of the post (Van Der Does et al. 2022). As a result of this tendency to speak out as a political minority in front of a group of people, individuals have fewer outpartisans in their group of folks they regularly discuss politics with (Butters and Hare 2022).

Building on this set of evidence, a growing area of the literature suggests that we are able to make inferences about the partisanship about other individuals, but we are able to do this for groups of people through the increasing policultural distinctions between Republicans and Democrats. Hetherington and Weiler (2018) demonstrates that Republicans and Democrats are not just different in their policy preferences but rather that they live in different places and have different lifestyles. Others have replicated and built upon this work by suggesting that while there are many different types of lifestyles that Republicans and Democrats can

take on, there is increasingly clear distinction between Republicans and Democrat archetypes (Rogers 2022). These politicultural distinctions are clear enough that we train a computer to make accurate guesses (upwards of 80%) of the partisanship by using only images of the cars in a particular neighborhood.

Though not inherently or necessarily political, our communities often act in political ways. For example, some evidence suggests despite variation between counties' partisan composition and lockdowns discouraging people from leaving their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, those living in Republican counties spent more time away from home than those living in Democratic counties (Roberts and Utych 2021). Further, we see a place-based identity for rural individuals that predict partisanship (Cramer 2016; see also Lyons and Utych 2021) and characteristics like expression of anti-intellectual attitudes (Lunz Trujillo 2022). While place-based identities could be separate or informative of partisan identities, some literature argues that partisanship may actually inform which community we choose to make ours.

The consequences of the fewer cross-cutting social groups and increasingly homogenous cultural preferences of Republicans and Democrats manifest as dramatic differences in preferences about the communities that we are part of. Gimpel and Hui (2015) demonstrates that describing a neighborhood with explicit and implicit information (e.g., racial composition) about the partisan composition influences whether one expresses a desire or not to move and live there. Further work corroborates this finding by providing evidence from a number of studies which demonstrate that not only do people associate particular characteristics of a neighborhood such as the prevalence of churches with Republicans and hybrid cars with

Democrats, but also that these features attract copartisans and repulse outpartisans (Motyl, Prims, and Iyer 2020).

Some work suggests, however, that these expressed preferences to live near copartisans do not carryover to migration patterns (see Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). In fact, there is some evidence suggesting that controlling for everything else but a political sorting, we would have less political homogeneity than we had in 2008 (Martin and Webster 2020). Further, evidence by Martin and Webster (2020) suggests that people switch their party registration after moving as opposed to moving to be more aligned with their party registration.

The goal of the following sections is to discuss one potential mechanism that may help to tease out why there is weak observational empirical evidence for a dearth of theoretical and empirical evidence

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