Does Affective Polarization Make Citizens More Extreme? Experimental Evidence from Chile*

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Abstract

We study how affective polarization shapes ideological stances in a context of weak partisan identities: the 2022 Constitutional Plebiscite in Chile. We show that the plebiscite produced opinion-based identities with high levels of affective polarization and motivated reasoning, exemplified by a strong cue-taking effect. Using a survey experiment with an open-ended primer, we experimentally manipulate affective polarization. We do not find that heightened affective polarization directly influences ideological extremeness. However, a second experiment provides mixed evidence of an indirect impact on ideology via strengthening the effects of cues. Thus, while affective polarization does not polarize ideology in the abstract, it may shape ideological positions due to affective responses to the speaker's political camp. Our results suggest that even opinion-based groups based on new divides may shape how citizens interpret policy positions, raising concerns about the possibilities of democratic deliberation and agreement.

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1 Introduction

Around the world, concerns over political divisions and ideological extremeness are growing. Affective polarization—the animosity between parties, or the tendency to dislike and distrust those from the outgroup—has become a usual suspect. Indeed, Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes' (2012) seminal claim that people are divided on "affect, not ideology" sparked a growing research agenda and sustained debate over the ultimate causes and consequences of affective polarization.

The connections between polarization in ideology and affects are highly complex. A large literature has examined the intertwingled roots of interparty animus, with several studies concentrating on the role of ideology in affective polarization (e.g., Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016; Webster and Abramowitz, 2017; Lelkes, 2021; Orr and Huber, 2020; Dias and Lelkes, 2022; Orr, Fowler, and Huber, 2023). But does affective polarization causally influence ideology or issue positions? To the extent that animosity between political camps could make ideology more extreme, both types of polarization would reinforce each other creating a negative feedback loop.

Recent research has started exploring this channel, with experimental studies providing mixed evidence. Broockman, Kalla, and Westwood (2022) do not find effects of a reduction of affective polarization on several political outcomes related to accountability and democratic norms[1], while Levendusky (2023) does find reduced party cue-taking and a greater perceived common ground. Based on panel survey data, Comellas and Torcal (2023) find some mixed evidence on the association of affective polarization with political identity, whereas Druckman et al (2025) do find an impact on policy preferences, but only under certain circumstances. Hence, further research is needed, as the broader context seems relevant for the existence and strength of the relationship between affective polarization and ideology.

In this research, we study the effects of heightened animosity between political camps over a manifestation of ideological polarization: individuals' extremeness in policy issues.[2] In concrete, we assess how affective polarization shapes ideological extremeness—both directly and indirectly via cue-taking, using two survey experiments. Building on our previous work examining the

[1] Voelkel et al. (2023) focused on democratic norms and did not find that a decrease in affective polarization reduced anti-democratic attitudes.

[2] Following DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson, (1996), political polarization is a distributional property of individual positions in a society, and its individual correlate is ideological extremism, which is a necessary condition for polarization. Indeed, as Fiorina, Abram, and Pope argue (2008: 557), the commonsense notion of polarization is a movement towards the extremes.

effects of affective polarization on support for democracy (Cox, Cubillos, and Le Foulon, 2025), we again exploit the emergence of a new political divide in Chile, in the context of September 4, 2022 plebiscite, when voters had to approve (Approve) or reject (Reject) a new constitution drafted by a Constitutional Convention.

Whereas our earlier work focused on democratic attitudes, here we shift attention to ideological extremeness and cue taking as a mechanism through which affective polarization may shape policy positions. This is a context where political parties are extremely weak and uprooted from society (Luna and Altman, 2011; Bargsted and Maldonado, 2018; de la Cerda, 2022), where a relevant mass of people do not align with any political camp, and where some long-standing partisan divides do not clearly map onto the contending groups. Altogether, this setting offers a valuable opportunity to study polarization in a context where political identities are only weakly tied to ideological positions—particularly when compared to the United States, where most research on polarization has been conducted.

Based on a nationally representative survey, we start by showing that the Plebiscite generated strong identities with affective polarization as intense as those based on partisanship and that these new political divisions activate motivated reasoning among individuals. These results expand the comparative lens on Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley (2021)'s research on opinion-based groups based on the Brexit vote.

To assess the causal effect of affective polarization based on the Constitutional Plebiscite on ideological extremeness, we rely on the same approach as in Cox, Cubillos, and Le Foulon (2025) and induce (short-lived) affective polarization using an unobtrusive primer (based on the approach of Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay, 2022) on randomly selected respondents. We then measured respondents' ideological positions on several issues. We additionally explore cue-taking through a second experiment administered at the end of the survey. Respondents were presented with statements on two salient policy issues—abortion and inequality—made by hypothetical persons who were randomly assigned an electoral position on the Constitutional Plebiscite and asked about the extent to which they agreed with the person in the statement. Our experimental design relates to the party cues literature (e.g., Bullock, 2020), but differs in two relevant ways. First, we provide a weaker cue since we do not offer information on the party's position or elite stances on the issue (e.g., Broockman and Butler, 2017); we only state the position of a hypothetical, anonymous voter. Second, we analyze agreement with a proffered statement rather than the respondent's position on the issue. This enables us to directly measure the likelihood of

agreement conditional on the respondents' own issue positions and thus assess the possibilities of dialogue and consensus-building.

In addition to the effect of cues, and central to our research, the cross-randomization of the two experiments allows us to analyze the causal impact of affective polarization on the strength of cue-taking.

We measure affective polarization along multiple dimensions in the context of the Chilean Constitutional Plebiscite, as is Cox, Cubillos, and Le Foulon (2025), and study how polarization along the plebiscite's electoral lines relates to animosity along other relevant political divides in Chile. The nationally representative survey reveals that affective polarization over plebiscite voters is higher than other traditional divides such as left-right or over the runoff presidential candidates in a highly polarized election less than a year before the plebiscite. This finding highlights how strong affective polarization can emerge rapidly, even among groups defined by recent events. Our survey experiment additionally reveals a strong causal effect of cue-taking based on the political divide produced by the plebiscite. In line with the partisan-cue literature, for both abortion and inequality, when ideological statements are attributed to a voter from the respondent's outgroup rather than ingroup (i.e., Approve or Reject), her chances of agreeing with them decrease dramatically.

Our first, priming, experiment effectively activated affective polarization, but this did not directly influence respondents' ideological stances. However, the second experiment shows evidence of an indirect impact of affective polarization on ideology that appears when ideological positions are linked to speakers associated with a political camp. For abortion, we do find that affective polarization has an independent effect on cue-taking: the differential agreement based on the speaker's position is further reinforced among respondents who received the affectively polarizing treatment.

Thus, although affective polarization may not make citizens' ideology more extreme in the abstract, it can importantly affect ideology when speakers mediate policy stances, as occurs in real life where political interactions and decisions never take place in the abstract. These results suggest that even where partisanship is weak and political identities are new and blurry, belonging to a political group defined by a highly salient and divisive election shapes how citizens interpret policy positions. These results raise serious concerns about the possibilities of democratic deliberation and agreement on policy issues among affectively polarized citizens.

By analyzing a presidential democracy in Latin America, we help shed light on a region where affective polarization has been understudied; our study is one of the first to address this issue experimentally in the region. This scarcity may be partly explained by two important challenges associated with studying polarization along party lines in the region in general and in Chile in particular. The first is a measurement challenge given that there are several political parties. Recent studies have applied approaches drawn from Europe, where multiparty systems are also the norm (Wagner, 2021; Knudsen, 2020; Gidron, Adams, and Horne, 2023; Garzia, Ferreira, and Maye, 2023). Yet the very low levels of partisan identity in Latin America pose an additional challenge to our traditional understanding of polarization based on party identification. In Chile—where identification with parties, and even coalitions, is extremely low (e.g., LAPOP, 2018)[3]—it is not even clear that parties or coalitions are the main dividing line in politics. Although low levels of party identification represent a challenge to the study of ideology and partisanship, they do not necessarily rule out the possibility of animosity between political camps, as we show in this article. Indeed, as said above, affective polarization based on opinion groups is stronger than that based on traditional divisions like left-right. In addition to contributing to our knowledge of affective polarization beyond partisan lines, this context provides an opportunity to study the links between affective and ideological polarization with a lower risk of confounding ideology and partisanship (Dias and Lelkes, 2022; Orr et al., 2023).

Overall, this research advances our understanding of the links between affective and ideological polarization. Although affective polarization may not, in the abstract, produce more extreme ideological positions, it can do so when individuals are exposed to extreme positions within their political ingroups—through cue-taking—even in the absence of long-standing political identities. These results also raise a cautionary note on a possible negative effect of plebiscites: given their bipolar and highly contested nature, they may be especially suited to generate affective polarization over opinion-based groups, as in the cases of the Chilean Constitutional Plebiscite and Brexit (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley, 2021).

[3]In the 2018 LAPOP survey, Chile ranked second-to-last among 18 countries in party identification, with only 10.7 percent of respondents reporting identification with a political party, only after Guatemala (10.3 percent). (https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/lapop.central/viz/LAPOPV3_2/Combination?publish=yes). Recent research on affective polarization has addressed the problem of low partisan identification by relying on the evaluations of political figures that are members of political parties (e.g., Segovia 2022) or on the left-right identification (Comellas and Torcal, 2023).

2 Affective Polarization, opinion-based groups, and ideology

2.1 Affective polarization and opinion-based groups

The literature on affective polarization as a phenomenon distinct from ideological polarization usually considers parties as a key source of group identities. But affective polarization may not be restricted to partisanship. Divisions over key political events might create political camps that coalesce into social identities, especially if those events are framed in a binary fashion, like referenda or plebiscites generally do.[4] Indeed, Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley (2021) start from social identity theory and show that opinion-based groups along Brexit lines generated identities as strong as partisanship, producing high levels of affective polarization. In this article, we expand their scope and analyze whether groups defined over the Constitutional Plebiscite in Chile also behave as opinion-based groups. In concrete, we explore whether these groups exhibit affective polarization and, in line with social identity theory, whether they generate evaluative biases such as those observed along the Brexit divide (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley, 2021).

Motivated reasoning tends to drive such evaluative biases, and we extend the analysis to one of its specific manifestations that has a broad impact on policy positions: cue-taking. Specifically, we build on the literature that explores how party cues shape policy positions. Prior studies have analyzed a wide range of issues, based on both observational data and experimental surveys. But in all cases they have relied on party leaders (Tappin and Hewitt, 2023; Barber and Pope, 2019; Broockman and Butler, 2017), party positions (Guntermann, 2019; Armstrong and Wronski, 2019), or the positions of the majority of the party's representatives (Bolsen, Druckman and Cook, 2014; Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014; Cohen, 2003). Overall, although most studies find an effect of party cues on policy positions, there is wide variation in its estimated magnitude (Bullock, 2020). Recent work suggests this may be partly due to the type of issue (Tappin, 2022), which highlights the relevance of including more than one issue in studies of party cues, as we do.

[4] We follow Altman's (2014) typology, which distinguishes plebiscites from referendums based on their mode of initiation: plebiscites are initiated from above (top-down), whereas referendums are citizen-initiated (bottom-up).

2.2 Affective polarization and ideology

Iyengar et al.'s (2012) seminal work inspired a rich and growing literature on affective polarization as a distinct phenomenon from ideological polarization or extremeness. Indeed, people who are affectively polarized—i.e., who despise those from the other party—in the U.S. context do not necessarily hold extreme issue positions (Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2015; Bougher, 2017). Iyengar et al. (2012) established that over time, both Republicans and Democrats increasingly disliked their opponents and that this "us vs. them" approach to politics is inconsistently associated with policy stances. While both types of polarization are linked, they "do not fully cover each other" (Wagner, 2021, p. 11). For example, Mason (2018) finds that affective polarization in the U.S. is primarily due to the increasing overlap of religious, racial, and partisan identities, but not ideology. Likewise, Reiljan (2019) explores correlations between both types of polarization in Europe but highlights that high levels of ideological polarization do not necessarily lead to strong inter-party hostility.

Given the rising levels of affective polarization in the U.S. (Iyengar et al., 2019), its underlying causes have become a central scholarly concern. Several studies explore the direct impact of ideological polarization on affective polarization (see, for example, Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016; Webster and Abramowitz, 2017; Lelkes, 2021). Yet ideology and party identity are inextricably linked because ideological stances are often party branded, and party identities are not independent of ideology. These complexities have inspired a debate in the literature about how best to empirically identify each—and how much each element contributes to affective polarization (e.g., Dias and Lelkes, 2022; Orr et al., 2023).[5]

In this article, we examine how affective polarization influences ideological polarization through its impact on ideological extremism, both directly and through cue-taking. Our goal is to determine whether there are mechanisms through which outgroup dislike can intensify ideological extremeness, creating a process of mutual reinforcement between affective and ideological polarization. We build mainly on two strands of literature. First, on work by Simonovits, McCoy and Littvay (2022), who use an unobtrusive primer to enhance respondents' affective polarization and assess how it shapes democratic commitment. We employ a similar primer to assess how affective polarization shapes ideological extremeness. In a similar vein, Broockman, Kalla, and

[5]There is a longstanding debate in the literature regarding the nature of partisan identity—whether it represents a strong psychological attachment or a running tally of policy preferences and past political experience (Campbell et al. 1960; Fiorina 1981)—which continues today (Fowler 2020; Rogers 2020).

Westwood (2022) experimentally reduce levels of affective polarization using a trust game and find that it does not affect electoral accountability or support for either bipartisanship or democratic norms. Levendusky (2023) also experimentally decreases affective polarization and finds a reduction in ideological polarization and sorting.

Second, recent studies have focused on how affective polarization influences party cues. Druckman et al. (2025) based on panel data find that affectively polarized Americans are less likely to distinguish their views about the U.S. response to the Covid-19 pandemic from their opinions of President Trump. As mentioned above, studies that have experimentally reduced affective polarization find mixed results: Levendusky (2023) found that it decreased party cue-taking, but Broockman, Kalla, and Westwood (2022) did not. Therefore, further research is needed to better understand the relationship between these two types of polarization.

Finally, regarding our study region, Latin America has exhibited the greatest increase in affective polarization in recent decades based on individual countries' Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) scores (UNDP 2023).[6] A small and emerging literature explores this trend. Comellas and Torcal (2023) investigate the sources of affective polarization in different multiparty systems, including Argentina and Chile, and based on panel data find a robust positive relationship between ideological identity and affective polarization, which is stronger than the one between stances on issues and affective polarization. Using the same panel data, they find little evidence of a reverse influence of affective polarization on ideological identity. Finally, data and research on affective polarization in Chile are scarce, albeit recently growing, which makes it difficult to provide context on its extent and evolution over time. Building on our previous work on affective polarization and democratic commitment in Chile, this article is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to study opinion-based groups in the country and, perhaps, in the region.

[6]UNDP (2023) refers to "political polarization," which is measured based on the following question: "Is society polarized into antagonistic, political camps? Clarification: Here we refer to the extent to which political differences affect social relationships beyond political discussions. Societies are highly polarized if supporters of opposing political camps are reluctant to engage in friendly interactions, for example, in family functions, civic associations, their free time activities and workplaces." We argue that this question is closely related to the concept of affective polarization.

3 Context: Chile and the Constitutional Plebiscite

By the time Chile held the plebiscite on a new draft constitution in September 2022, the country had already undergone several years of political realignment and institutional flux. The immediate backdrop to this process was the social upheaval that began in October 2019, originating in student protests over a rise in public transportation fares that quickly broadened into a more general challenge to Chile's prevailing development model.[7] The massive protests and intense episodes of violence that followed precipitated a far-reaching political crisis and, within weeks, led most political parties (with the exception of the Communist Party) to sign an agreement opening a formal constitutional process. In October 2020, an entry plebiscite produced an overwhelming mandate to draft a new constitution: 78 percent of voters supported the initiative, and a Constitutional Convention was elected in April 2021.

The broader political context in which this process unfolded was already one of considerable reconfiguration of the political landscape. The presidential election of 2021 took place in a party system that no longer resembled the two-coalition structure that had dominated Chilean politics since the return to democracy. Gabriel Boric, a founder of the Frente Amplio coalition that emerged from the 2011 student movement, won the presidency after defeating José Antonio Kast in the second-round election, who also ran on the platform of a newly founded party, the far-right Republican Party. Kast led the first round with 28 percent of the vote, ahead of the candidate of the traditional right (Sebastián Sichel, with 13 percent), but lost the runoff held in December 2021. For the first time since 1990, neither runoff candidate represented the two coalitions that had structured politics for nearly three decades. Turnout in the second round reached 56 percent, and Boric won with 56 percent of the vote.

The 2021 elections described by Segovia (2022) as one of the most affectively polarized moments since 1990—thus featured new coalitions to both the left and the right of the traditional blocs. Furthermore, nearly twenty parties won seats in the concurrent parliamentary contest, yet this proliferation of parties has not translated into strong partisan attachments. At the time of our study (CEP, November-December 2022), only 24 percent of the population identified with a political party, a steep decline from approximately 70 percent in the early 1990s (CEP November 1994), and identification with coalitions was only marginally higher. Although ideological

[7] On the social upheaval, see also Somma et al., (2021), Rhodes-Purdy and Rosenblatt, (2023), and Cox et al., (2023) for complementary analyses.

self-placement remains a relevant predictor of vote choice (Argote and Visconti 2025; de la Cerda 2022), only 30 percent of respondents reported identifying with a coalition in 2017 (CEP September-October 2017), and nearly a third of Chileans (31 percent) did not place themselves on the left-right scale (CEP April-May 2022). As Meléndez and Rovira (2019) argue, a large share of the electorate can be characterized as "apartisans," that is, citizens who lack both positive and negative partisan identities and display low levels of political engagement. In this setting, political competition is not organized around religious, familial, or personalistic cleavages, and while multiple policy disputes are present, it is not obvious which single divide, if any, structures political conflict. This makes the definition of ingroups and outgroups for the study of affective polarization far from straightforward.

The constitutional process itself further intensified these dynamics. The draft produced by the Convention addressed a wide range of issues, including the rights of nature, collective rights for Indigenous peoples, gender equality and reproductive rights, labor rights, the role of the state in the economy, and the status of private property. Its opening article defined Chile as plurinational, intercultural, regional, and ecological, marking a sharp break with the existing constitutional framework. Over time, however, public support for the Convention eroded, and from April 2022 onward most opinion polls indicated that a majority of voters intended to reject the proposed text. The plebiscite held on September 4, 2022, took place under mandatory voting and drew an exceptionally high turnout of 86 percent. The draft constitution was ultimately rejected by 62 percent of voters. According to the CEP survey conducted in November-December 2022, the main motivations cited by Reject voters were the controversial behavior of Convention members and the belief that the proposed constitution would deepen social divisions and harm the economy. In contrast, Approve voters most frequently pointed to the promise of expanding social rights, the authoritarian origins of the existing constitution, and the expectation that the new text would improve coexistence, promote equality, and advance women's rights.

A final question concerns the extent to which this plebiscite-based division represented a genuinely new cleavage rather than a simple reactivation of older political conflicts. Recent evidence from Cox, Cubillos, and Le Foulon (2025) shows that affective polarization over the plebiscite is most strongly correlated with polarization rooted in the 2021 presidential election (0.78) and in evaluations of Allende's government (0.72), while correlations with divides linked to the dictatorship or the 1988 plebiscite are notably lower (0.64 and 0.50, respectively). This pattern suggests that although the plebiscite divide is connected to longer-standing political fault

lines, a substantial share of its variance cannot be reduced to them, underscoring its relative autonomy as a contemporary axis of political conflict.

4 Research design and implementation

We start by characterizing opinion-based groups structured around a recent political divide and to show that these groups generate affective polarization. To better understand and contextualize the level of affective polarization triggered by the Constitutional Plebiscite, we examine other dimensions of division by measuring affective polarization in multiple ways. We rely on a nationally representative survey for the characterization of these opinion-based groups; descriptive results from our own original online survey are consistent. We also causally evaluate the extent of cue-taking over these groups through a survey experiment embedded in our original online survey, as explained below.

We designed and implemented this online survey to enable us to assess the causal effects of affective polarization on ideological extremeness and cue-taking through two sequential survey experiments. The first, "priming" experiment, is designed to exogenously increase affective polarization through a priming intervention. The second measures cue-taking by randomly varying the group affiliation of hypothetical speakers who express policy positions. The two experiments are cross-randomized, which allows us to assess both the direct effect of heightened affective polarization on ideological positions and its indirect effect through the amplification of cue-taking.

In the priming experiment, we manipulate affective polarization by assigning respondents randomly to either a treatment or a placebo condition. In the treatment condition, participants were prompted to reflect on and write about aspects they disliked about voters on the opposing side of the plebiscite, following Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay (2022). The prompt was designed to activate existing negative affect toward the political outgroup without providing any new factual or political information. In the placebo condition, respondents completed a neutral writing task unrelated to politics but matched in cognitive effort and time requirements. This design ensures that any differences between groups can be attributed to the activation of affective considerations rather than to differential fatigue, attention, or task engagement. The exact wordings are as follows:

Treatment: *"Thinking of [outgroup] voters, please list a few things you dislike about them. Please note that we are not asking you about the constitutional proposal, but about the people who vote for the proposal. We are very interested in your views on this. Please take at least thirty seconds to answer this question without rushing".*

Placebo: *"Thinking about the times you have been called to offer you a product or service, please write down at least three things that bother you about those calls. Please note that we are not asking you about the service or product offered, but about the calls. We are very interested in your views on this. Please take at least 30 seconds to answer this question without rushing".*

Following the writing task, as a manipulation check, we measured affective polarization using several indicators based on respondents' evaluations of relevant political and social groups. We assessed affective polarization as the difference in the evaluations of binary groups defined based on the Constitutional Plebiscite (Approve vs. Reject voters) alongside other relevant political divisions in Chile (presidential runoff election Boric vs. Kast voters, left vs. right, rich vs. poor, and pro-life vs. pro-choice supporters). We also included questions about whether the outgroup voters are perceived as a threat or as evil (Kalmoe and Mason, 2022). We then measured ideological stances on various policy issues, including economic and social issues, and measured ideological polarization or extremeness by calculating each respondent's distance from the median respondent.

The second, "randomized speaker" experiment investigates cue-taking based on the Constitutional Plebiscite opinion groups. Given the sequential structure of our survey, it allows us to assess on the first experiment's placebo group, the extent of cue-taking based on plebiscite opinion-groups. And, in the full sample, the extent to which affective polarization affects people's cue taking on relevant issues. It included two statements by persons 1 and 2, who randomly support either the Approve or Reject options, and asked respondents the degree to which they agree with this "speaker."[8] The statements cover an economic policy issue ("economic growth should always be given a higher priority than reducing inequality") and a social issue ("abortion should always be permitted"), in random order. Thus, for example, the economic policy statement read:

"Person 1, who votes [Reject/Approve, assigned at random], says that economic growth should

[8] Strictly speaking, the experiment included three persons and a third statement about democracy, which was the core of the analysis in Cox, Cubillos, and Le Foulon (2025).

always be given a higher priority than reducing inequality. To what degree do you agree with Person 1?"

To causally estimate the degree of cue-taking, we estimate the degree to which respondents' answers to each statement vary depending on whether the speaker voted the same way as the respondent on the plebiscite, in line with the longstanding literature on party cues. We estimate this effect only for respondents in the placebo group on the first experiment, who were not exposed to our priming treatment. To assess the causal effect of affective polarization on cue-taking, we exploit the cross-randomization between the priming treatment and the speaker cues, and using the whole sample, test whether respondents who were primed to be more affectively polarized in the first experiment answer these questions differently.

Ethical Considerations: The study protocol was approved by the relevant ethics committee. The priming task was designed to activate existing sentiments rather than to introduce hostile or misleading information,[9] and the survey was fielded sufficiently in advance of the plebiscite to minimize any risk of persistent effects on respondents' political attitudes or behavior. The questionnaire and prompts were pretested to ensure clarity and to minimize any potential discomfort or confusion.

5 Data and measurement

We rely on two data sources with a common set of questions that allow us to measure affective polarization. First, to characterize opinion-based groups based on the Constitutional Plebiscite, we use a nationally representative survey of Chilean adult population conducted by Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP survey) about two months after the Plebiscite.[10] Second, to assess the causal effects of affective polarization on ideological extremeness and cue-taking, we fielded an original experimental online survey two weeks before the election via Netquest, an experienced online polling firm and programmed it in Qualtrics. To guarantee sufficient observations for each socioeconomic group and geographic area, and to achieve balance across gender and age groups, we applied non-proportional quotas in the first wave. The quotas, as shown in Appendix Table

[9] A March 2022 Datavoz survey found that 58 percent of Chileans reported exposure to fake news (available here).

[10] Complex design, face-to-face survey fielded in continental Chile between November 8, 2022 and December 18, 2022, with 1,441 final respondents, and a 62.8% response rate. Participants are selected via a multi-stage random probability sampling, without replacement and post-stratification weights. More details in www.cepchile.cl/encuestas.

A.1, are based on socioeconomic groups (five categories defined by Netquest), geographic areas (northern regions, capital city region, and southern regions), gender, and four age groups (18-29, 30-44, 45-59, and 60+). Hence, when analyzing the aggregate results for descriptive evidence, we use weights to reflect the population distribution (see Appendix C).

We measure affective polarization using respondents' evaluative judgments of socially and politically relevant groups. The central idea is to capture the extent to which individuals express systematically different affect toward opposing political camps, rather than their absolute levels of sympathy or hostility. To do so, respondents were asked to rate a series of groups on a scale ranging from 0 (very negative) to 10 (very positive). The survey includes evaluations of groups defined by the two sides of the constitutional plebiscite (Approve voters and Reject voters), as well as evaluations of groups defined by other salient political and social divides in Chile, including voters in the most recent presidential runoff (Boric and Kast), people on the left and the right, supporters and opponents of abortion, and the rich and the poor (Appendix Table A.2 provides exact wordings). This gives us three and five measures of affective polarization, depending on the survey, based on: "plebiscite voters", "presidential voters", "left-right", "rich-poor", and "abortion", respectively. The order of presentation of group pairs, as well as the order of the groups within each pair, was randomized to minimize ordering effects. For each pair of opposing groups, we construct an individual-level measure of affective polarization as the absolute difference between the respondent's ratings of the two groups. Higher values indicate a sharper affective distinction between the two sides of a given divide. This approach allows us to compare the intensity of affective polarization across different divisions using a common metric.

To complement these feeling-based measures, the online survey also included two items that capture more moralized or dehumanizing perceptions of political opponents. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they consider voters on the opposing side of the plebiscite to be "a threat to Chile and its people" and whether they view them as "downright evil," following of Kalmoe and Mason (2022). In a similar vein, the national representative survey asked respondents to rate groups of Approve and Reject voters on a scale from 0 (very evil) to 10 (very good) persons. Finally, to summarize the overall intensity of affective polarization along the plebiscite divide, we combine the different indicators into a single standardized index (Anderson, 2008; Kling, Liebman, and Katz, 2007). This index aggregates the feeling-based distance measure and the two moralized perception items, providing a comprehensive measure of affective polarization toward the plebiscite outgroup.

As for ideological extremeness, the online survey included a set of questions on ideological issues that ask respondents to place themselves on a scale from 0 to 10, and we calculate ideological extremeness as the absolute distance from the median position. We explore several issues that were relevant in the presidential election and constitutional process, such as taxes, growth vs. inequality, abortion rights, liberty vs. public order and security, government responsibility for personal advancement (replication from an American National Election Surveys, ANES, question), as well as left-right and liberal-conservative scales for social issues (full wordings in Appendix Table A.2). In all cases the median position coincides with the midpoint of the scale (5), except for the questions on liberty vs. public order and security, and on government responsibility, for which the medians were 7 and 4, respectively.

6 Affective polarization over plebiscite options in Chile

Based on the case of the Brexit referendum in the U.K., Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley (2021) found that these opinion-based groups can be as strong as those based on partisanship. In this section, we focus on political camps generated by the Chilean Constitutional Plebiscite and show that these opinion-based identities also generated high levels of affective polarization and motivated reasoning, exemplified by a strong cue-taking effect. We compare these opinion-based groups with two other political divides that produce an "us vs. them" dynamic: another electoral divide, defined over vote choice on the runoff presidential candidates, and the traditional left-right divide. Because groups are defined by reported vote choice in the recent plebiscite, they include both strong and weak identifiers, potentially leading to attenuation bias.

We first analyze how these opinion-based groups over the Constitutional Plebiscite options overlap with the other two political divisions (left/right and Boric/Kast). Panel A in Table 1 shows the distribution of vote choice in the 2021 runoff Presidential election across groups defined by plebiscite preference, while Panel B displays the distribution of political positions on the left-right scale. Despite the considerable overlap, there are distinct differences. Regarding vote choice in the runoff, there is greater overlap among Approve than Reject voters or those without a preference. Nevertheless, almost one quarter of Approve voters did not vote for the left-wing candidate, Gabriel Boric, and more than half of Reject voters did not vote for the rightist candidate, J.A. Kast. Looking at the left-right divide, less than 5% of Approve voters place themselves in the right, and less than 10% of Reject voters on the left; yet for both opinion-based groups, about

40% of respondents place themselves in the political center, and another considerable fraction do not place themselves in the left-right axis.

We now turn to affective polarization. Figure 1 depicts the levels of affective polarization based on plebiscite options for respondents who reported a vote choice (69.1% of the sample), as well as separately for each of the groups defined by plebiscite vote. For comparison, we also include the levels of affective polarization based on the 2021 runoff's vote choice and the left-right divide among the same group of respondents. The plebiscite emerges as the most polarizing dimension, while the (oldest) left-right divide is the least polarizing. The levels of affective polarization for those with a plebiscite preference are somewhat lower than those found in the evaluations of Democrats and Republicans for partisans in the U.S. (56 for Democrats and 63 for Republicans, on a 0-100 scale; ANES 2020). Looking separately at each of the groups defined by plebiscite vote (see Figure A.1), we find that Approve voters are more affectively polarized than Reject voters along both the plebiscite and the runoff's lines. There are no statistically significant differences in polarization over the left-right divide between Approve and Reject voters. Results are consistent with Cox, Cubillos, and Le Foulon (2025) based on an online survey, in which the divisions over the plebiscite are associated, but not fully covered by previous divides. We replicate these analyses using our original survey and find similar patterns (see Appendix Figure A.1).

A related indicator of affective polarization is the degree to which individuals perceive opposing voters as a threat to the country or even as "downright evil," as Kalmoe and Mason (2022) analyze for the US. The national survey includes a similar question regarding whether voters for each of the plebiscite options are good or evil. Figure 2 presents the results for the nationally representative survey, our original survey and, as a benchmark, Kalmoe and Mason (2022)'s for the U.S. Both countries exhibit high degrees of affective polarization, although in the U.S., outgroup voters are more frequently viewed as a threat than in Chile.[11]

Finally, we analyze whether cue-taking behavior extends to these recently created opinion-based groups. The second experiment asks respondents whether they agree with the statements associated with two salient policy positions stated by a hypothetical "speaker" who is randomly said to vote for either Approve or Reject: an economic policy (tradeoff between inequality and

[11] Results for the U.S. come from Kalmoe and Mason (2022), who use binary questions; thus, for comparability, we consider responses from 0 to 4 in the CEP survey and over 5 on our 0-10 scales as a "yes," for those with a plebiscite choice. For the "evil" item, Kalmoe and Mason report levels of those who "somewhat" or "strongly" agree.

growth), and a social policy (abortion). Our estimating equation is:

$$Agreement_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Opposite_i + \beta_2 Position_i + X_i'\gamma + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where $Opposite$ is an indicator for whether the speaker and respondent have opposite voting preferences. Note that since we randomized the speaker's position, $Opposite$ is a random variable. We also control for $Position$, the respondent's position on the same or a very similar policy question that was asked before the randomized speaker experiment, and was unmediated (i.e., without a speaker), β_1 corresponds to the effect of the speaker's vote choice being the opposite vs. the same as the respondent's, our main coefficient of interest.

Table 2 summarizes the results (among the prime experiment's control group).[12] For inequality-growth, we find that having the opposite position to the speaker decreases the probability of agreeing by approximately 0.42 standard deviations, while for abortion it does so by 0.16 (columns 1 and 4); both are highly statistically and substantively significant. These changes represent 31.7 percent and 12.0 percent of their sample means, respectively, placing them in the middle to upper range (3-43 percent) of the party-cue effects surveyed by Bullock (2020). These results are not statistically different by political position, although the coefficient for $Opposite$ is no longer significant among Reject voters.

Our findings thus demonstrate that individuals rely on opinion-group based cues, even when the statement is proffered by an anonymous voter. Overall, the effect of a statement from an outgroup member is larger for inequality vs. growth than for abortion, likely because abortion is a more polarized issue (see Appendix Figure A.1) and most respondents have stronger opinions about it. Respondents react to the speaker's position in the plebiscite, conditioning their agreement on salient issues even after having answered questions about these same issues a couple of minutes before. Several mechanisms may play a role, and further research is needed to understand and identify them. Yet perhaps, as Cohen (2003) argues, group information "defined the object to be processed," and thus the imagined content of the policy differs depending on the speaker's position. Orr, Fowler, and Huber (2023: 953) similarly maintain that "learning of a speaker's partisanship likely also communicates their values and policy commitments." Either way, these results raise serious concerns about the prospects for political agreement: group identity influences

[12] See Appendix Table B.1 for the results without covariates (Panel A) and with covariates including a pre-treatment control variable (Panel B), and following Lin (2013) and Lin et al. (2016)'s strategy for covariate adjustment using mean-centered covariates.

political behavior in a way that hinders the possibility of reaching a consensus through rational deliberation.

7 The effect of affective polarization on ideological extremeness

7.1 Treatment and manipulation checks

Our priming experiment elicits individual affective polarization, which allows us to causally identify its effects in an unobtrusive way. The treatment asked respondents to list at least three things they dislike about outgroup voters. Almost all treated respondents engaged with the prompt[13] and on average spent considerably more time than the required minimum thirty seconds: the average time on the question was 121 seconds for the treatment and 107 for the placebo, statistically different at the 5 percent level. The average number of words for the treatment was 16, and 15 for the placebo.

To assess whether respondents interpreted the treatment in policy rather than affective terms, we examined references to relevant policy issue areas in their open-ended responses. We defined families of words related to four policy areas discussed in the plebiscite: inequality/economic growth, abortion, the environment, and indigenous peoples (see Appendix Table A.3). We then measured the percentage of responses that included at least one of the words in the policy area. Very few respondents used these words: only 2.8 percent mentioned words related to inequality/economic growth, 2.9 percent about abortion, 0.1 percent about environmental issues, and 1.4 percent about indigenous peoples. As a reference, we included words related to misinformation and fake news; 38 percent of respondents mentioned at least one of these words. We conclude that the treatment did not lead respondents to think of policy disagreement with the outgroup.

To assess the treatment effects on respondents' views toward the outgroup, we first use answers to the question that we included for all respondents at the end of the survey: "What is the main feeling that the people who vote for the different options generate in you? Remember that we are asking you about the people who support these options and not about the constitutional proposal.

[13] Only 0.67 percent of respondents left the question blank.

We are very interested in your views on this. Please take at least thirty seconds to answer this question without rushing." We then asked the respondents how they felt about Approve and Reject voters, in random order. Following Ferrario and Stantcheva (2022), we employ keyness analyses to compare the frequency of words used in their responses to the question on feelings toward outgroup voters between the treated and control groups. To determine whether the differences in the prevalence of keywords are statistically significant, we use chi-square statistics at the 95 percent level ($|\chi^2| > 3.84$). Figure 3 depicts the results for respondents who indicated how they planned to vote in the plebiscite (85.2 percent of the sample).

While the words that significantly distinguish the control group's responses do not have a clearly negative connotation (majority, lack, inform, rights), at least seven of the terms that distinguish treated respondents have a strongly negative tone: grief, anger, deluded, radicals, inequality, disgust, and ignorance. We repeat this analysis on feelings toward the opposite group on subgroups defined by the respondents' baseline plebiscite position. There are less statistically different words used because the sample sizes are smaller, but they are in the same direction and, as in the main analysis, the concepts that distinguish the responses by treatment assignment and plebiscite position have little to do with policy disagreement (see Appendix Figure B.1). This finding suggests that our open-ended priming question effectively activated animosity toward outgroup voters.[14] Furthermore, they are consistent with plebiscite groups as social identity groups, as discussed in the previous section, and suggest our treatment worked by enhancing such identities, rather than priming policy issues.

We now report the results of a series of manipulation checks to further confirm that the treatment indeed increased the levels of affective polarization. Then, we move to the effects on ideological extremeness. In all cases, we use ordinary least squares (OLS) reduced-form estimates that control for sociodemographic variables (age, sex, metropolitan region, education, and socioeconomic status), left-right ideology (in three groups), interest in politics, party ID, and baseline preferences for the past runoff and plebiscite. All our dependent variables are standardized, and the errors are robust. We posit that our priming treatment should affect ideological polarization only or mostly through affective polarization.

The validity of our prime experiment rests on whether it successfully activated affective polarization. Figure 4 displays the treatment effects on our measures of affective polarization

[14] Appendix Figure B.2 shows the keyness analysis of responses to the open-ended priming question by the respondents' baseline plebiscite choice.

associated with the plebiscite, plus a summary index following Anderson (2008) and Kling, Liebman, and Katz (2007) that includes all three measures. All the effects are positive and of the same order of magnitude, ranging from 5-15 percent of a standard deviation. The result for the plebiscite's affective polarization is positive, although not statistically significant, likely because it may be subject to ceiling effects (see Appendix Figure A.1). The two additional affective polarization outcomes from Kalmoe and Mason (2022) point more directly to the idea of despising the outgroup and consequently show stronger results. Receiving the treatment significantly increased the chances of considering the outgroup a threat or evil by 0.19 and 0.1 standard deviations, respectively. For confirmation, Figure 4 also includes the Affective Polarization Index. The treatment effect on this summary index is 0.11 standard deviations, and is significant at the 99 percent level, showing an important increase in affective polarization. In both cases, the results are stronger among Approve voters. The effect for the extent to which Reject voters believe Approve voters are a threat is significant only at the 90 percent level, and there is no effect in the extent to which they believe Approve voters are evil (although the differences in the coefficients by vote choice are not statistically significant).

Altogether, the keyness analysis plus the results depicted in Figure 4 reveal that our priming experiment increased respondents' affective polarization along multiple lines.

7.2 Impacts on ideological extremeness

We start by evaluating whether affective polarization causally affects ideological extremeness in the abstract. Figure 5 presents the estimated treatment effect for our six measures of ideological extremeness for those who have a plebiscite choice, plus a summary index following Anderson (2008) and Kling, Liebman, and Katz (2007) that includes all six measures (see Appendix Table B.3 for results). The coefficients switch signs, and none is statistically significant. Figure 5 also permits to assess whether there are heterogeneous effects according to the plebiscite's choice. The results reveal no relevant differences across ideological extremeness measures. The coefficients are generally small, and none is statistically significant after correcting for multiple hypotheses testing.[15] Thus, overall, we do not find that inducing affective polarization directly affects ideological extremeness.

[15]Model and resample p-values are not statistically significant at 10% in all but one outcome (Inequality vs. Growth). We correct for multiple hypotheses, following the method proposed by Clarke, Romano, and Wolf (2020). With this correction, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected for any of the outcomes shown in in Figure 5.

Our finding that heightened affective polarization does not directly affect ideological extremeness suggests respondents' policy preferences are not an irreflexive response to group belonging. We now explore whether greater affective polarization alters the degree to which respondents' agreement with policy stances varies depends on whether they share the speaker's position on the plebiscite that is, the extent to which affective polarization shapes cue-taking. We replicate equation (1), but in order to assess the impact of affective polarization we add an indicator of the priming treatment ($Treat_i$) and its interaction with $Opposite$, the indicator for whether the speaker and respondent have opposite voting preferences; β_3 is now our main coefficient of interest:

$$Agreement_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Opposite_i + \beta_2 Treat_i + \beta_3 Opposite_i \times Treat_i + \beta_4 Position_i + X_i'\gamma + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

Table 3 summarizes the results.[16] There is no effect for the interaction with the priming treatment for inequality-growth, but for abortion, it reinforces the effect of having the speaker's opposite position, with a sizable interaction of -0.16 standard deviations, significant at the 95 percent level. Thus, affective polarization enhances this, say, affective, response to who the speaker is. The results for the interaction by political position in the abortion case do not differ much, although they are not statistically significant for Reject voters. Albeit further research is needed to uncover the mechanisms underlying this effect of affective polarization on cue-taking, we speculate that as it increases social distance with the outgroup, it may impact agreement, as Cohen (2003) argues, due to the imagined content of the statement.

Overall, we have mixed evidence of how an increase in affective polarization influences the degree to which opinion-based groups respond to cues from their in/outgroup. For abortion, an increase in affective polarization causally decreases the probability of agreement with someone from the outgroup, further reducing the possibility of deliberation and reaching a working political compromise. We do not find such an effect for the economic issue (inequality vs. growth). One possible explanation why we find an interactive effect on cue-taking for abortion, but not for inequality vs. growth, may be that abortion is the most ideologically polarized of our six issues, whereas inequality versus growth is the least contested (see Appendix Figure A.1), suggesting that affective and ideological polarization may have compounding effects on how citizens process political cues.

[16] See Appendix Table B.4 for the results without covariates (Panel A) and with covariates including a pre-treatment control variable (Panel B), as well as using Lin, Green and Coppock's correction, without and with pre-treatment variable (Panels C and D, respectively).

8 Discussion and conclusion

A rich and growing literature analyzes whether and how affective polarization shapes political behavior, its relationship with ideological polarization, and its implications for governance and the quality of democracy. Previous studies have argued that affective polarization may hinder cross-partisan agreements (Iyengar et al., 2019; Levendusky, 2018; Mason, 2018), undermine electoral accountability and thus democratic checks (Graham and Svolik, 2020; Pierson and Schickler, 2020), or weaken democratic norms (Simonovits, McCoy and Littvay, 2022; McCoy and Somer, 2019; Cox, Cubillos, and Le Foulon, 2025). Despite these concerns, recent research has suggested affective polarization does not have real-world political-behavioral implications (Broockman, Kalla, and Westwood, 2022; Voelkel et al., 2023), although there is some evidence that it does (Levendusky 2023; Druckman et al, 2025). Hence, more research is needed to better understand how affective polarization influences political behavior.

We investigate how affective polarization based on opinion-based groups influences ideological extremeness, and its potential effect on deliberation and the possibility of reaching agreements. We examine a context of low party identification among groups recently defined by the 2022 Constitutional Plebiscite in Chile—a high-stakes binary election with multiple issues at play. Thus, policy disagreements are expected to be less closely linked to group identities, which decreases the amount of information on ideological positioning implied by group membership (for a recent discussion of the empirical relevance of this, see Dias and Lelkes, 2022; Orr et al., 2023). By doing so, we also broaden the comparative lens as we empirically study the relationship between affective and ideological polarization in a Latin American country with a multiparty system.

Despite the plebiscite being a new divide, we show that it produced opinion-group based identities, in line with the findings of Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley (2021) for the case of Brexit. Specifically, the plebiscite produced strong levels of affective polarization and motivated reasoning, as shown by a substantive cue-taking effect. Prior work had demonstrated that references to parties influence citizens' views and that elite position taking affects voters' attitudes (e.g., Bullock, 2020; Broockman and Butler, 2017). Our study does not mention parties' views on the issue, nor the position of a party leader, but just a hypothetical, anonymous person who happens to vote (or not) in the same way as the respondent in the plebiscite. In our case it is unlikely

to find any ideological association based on a strong, long-held shared identity or trust. Even in a context where parties are weak, newly born, opinion-group based political identities seem to (indirectly) shape how people take positions on policy issues as relevant as abortion.

We find that an increase in affective polarization has no consistent direct causal effects on ideological extremeness. However, when ideological positions were attributed to an individual who voted the opposite way on the plebiscite, we found evidence that, at least for the most polarized issue (abortion), the increase in affective polarization (induced by our treatment) compounds the effect of the speaker's position. Hence, although affects do not seem to shape ideological stances in the abstract, they may importantly influence people's ideological positions due to affective responses to the speaker's political camp.

In real world politics, ideological choices are mostly associated with speakers (especially political representatives) who have positions on various issues. Therefore, our finding that affective polarization influences cue-taking for abortion is relevant. In a pure world of ideas, people's views on critical issues should not depend on who the messenger is, but affective responses to political identities may lead us to ad hominem ideological extremeness.

Finally, our results also shed light on a possible negative externality of referendums: to the extent that they divide the world into two political camps that can rapidly produce strong opinion-based group identities, they may end up intensifying the "us versus them" dynamics and thus hinder the possibilities for political compromise.

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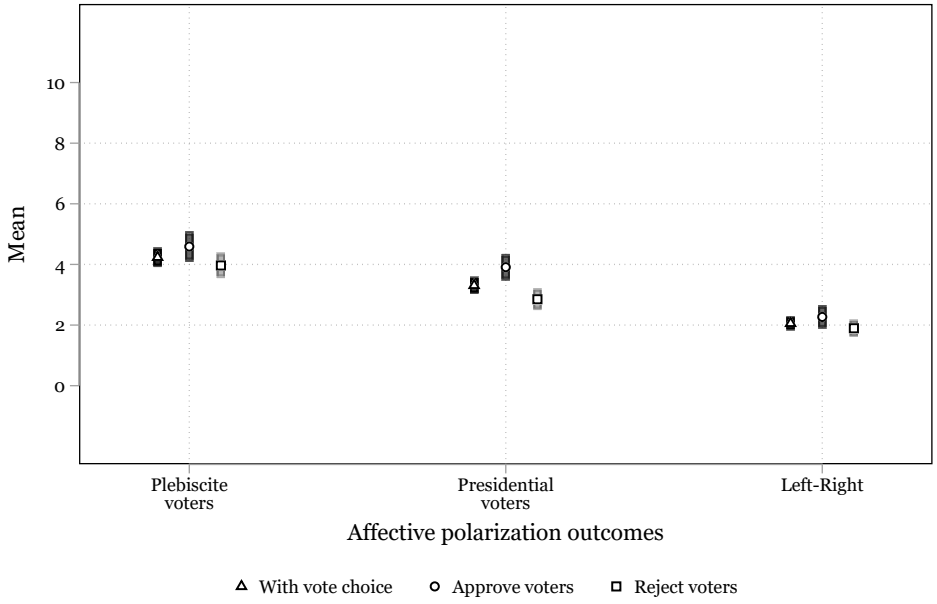
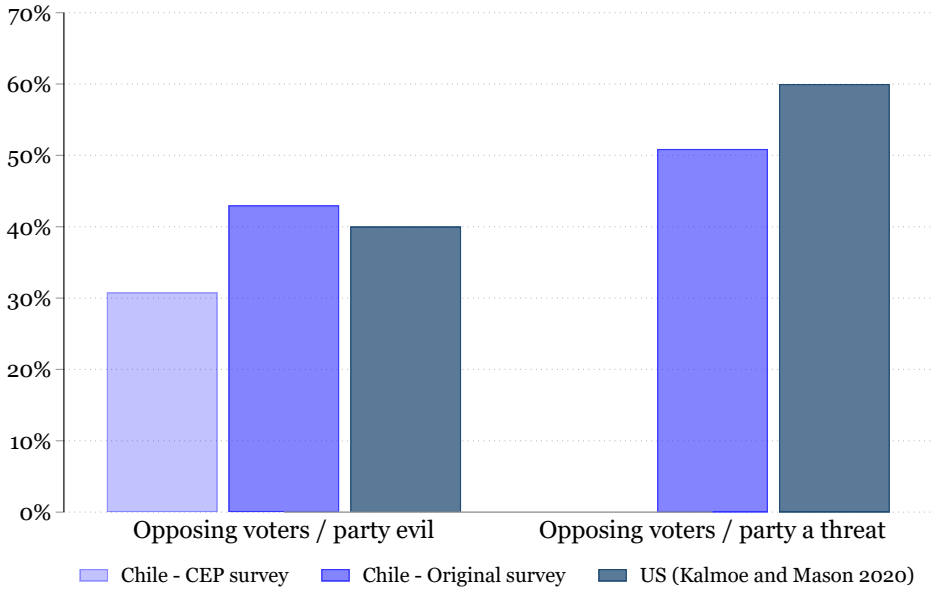
Figure 1: Affective polarization levels by plebiscite choice, runoff vote, and left-right divide among respondents with a plebiscite vote choice



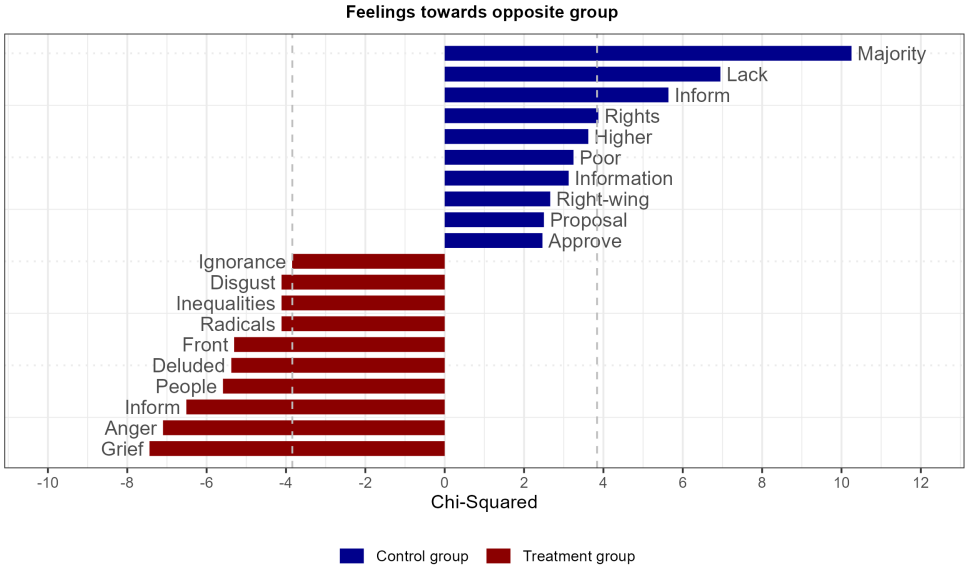
Note: Only for respondents with a plebiscite choice, confidence intervals constructed considering complex design (n=981). Source: Nationally representative CEP survey 2022.

Figure 2: Affective polarization II



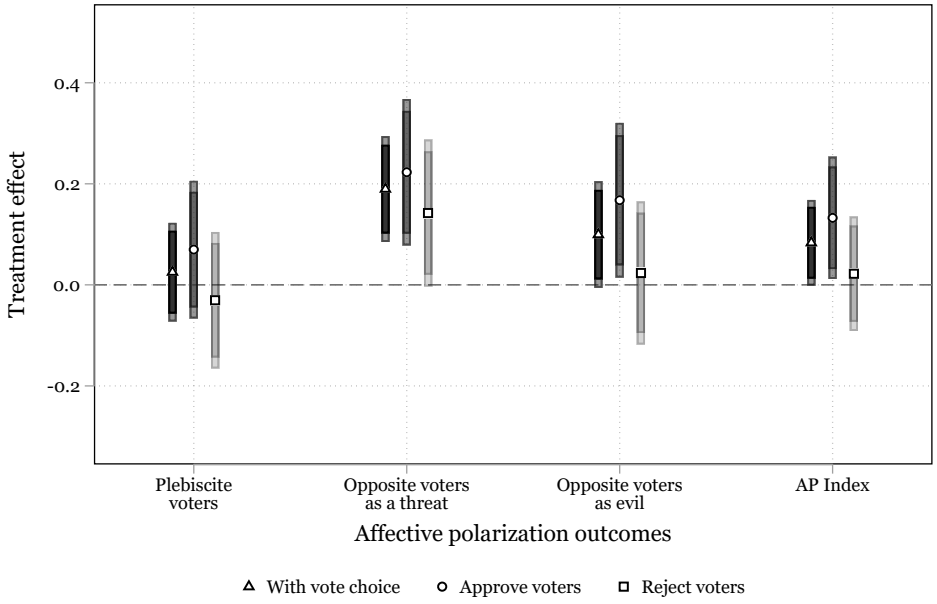
Note: Results for the U.S. come from Kalmoe and Mason (2022), who use binary questions;12 thus, for comparability, we consider responses from 0 to 4 in the CEP survey and over 5 on our 0–10 scales as a "yes," for those with a plebiscite choice.

Figure 3: Keyness analysis: feelings toward the opposite group by treatment condition (only respondents with a plebiscite choice)



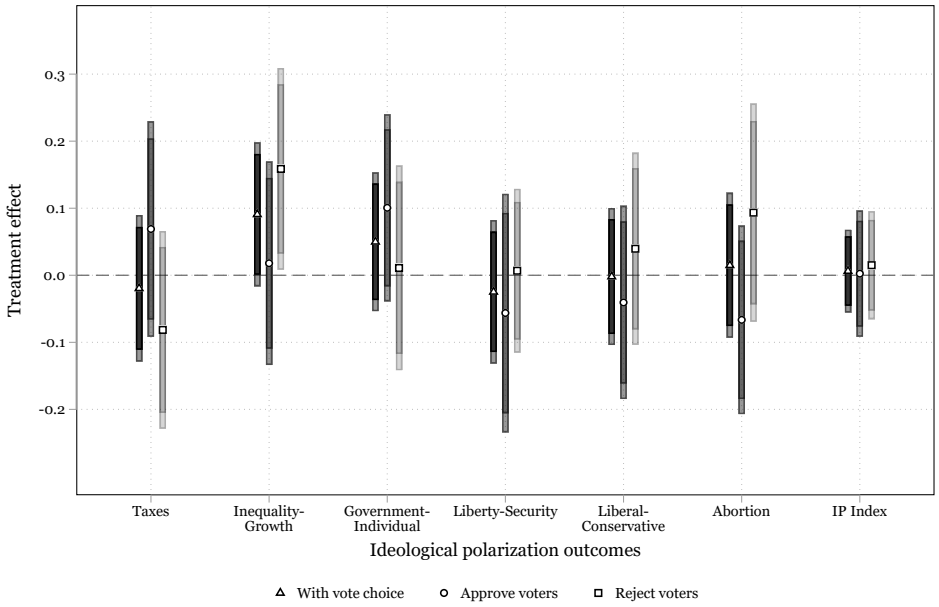
Note: Dashed lines represent 95 percent significance levels $|\chi^2| > 3.84$

Figure 4: Treatment effect on affective polarization (manipulation check)



Note:Graphical depiction of OLS regression presented in Table B.2, Panel A (see Appendix B) with confidence intervals at the 95% and 90% levels. Measures of affective polarization as described in section Data and measurement are all standardized. All regressions control for sociodemographic variables (age, sex, region, education, and socioeconomic status), left–right ideology (in three groups), interest in politics, party ID, and baseline preferences for the past presidential runoff and plebiscite.

Figure 5: Treatment effect on ideological extremeness



Note: Graphical depiction of OLS regressions presented in Appendix Table B.3, Panels A.2, B.2 and C.2. Measures of ideological extremeness correspond to the absolute distance between the respondent's position on the issue and the sample median.

Table 1: Distribution of groups of Plebiscite voters (Approve, Reject, Neither, and All) by vote choice on the 2021 runoff Presidential election and ideology

Panel A: Runoff Presidential Election Vote Choice				
	Approve	Reject	Neither	All
Voted G. Boric	78%	20%	11%	34%
Voted J. A. Kast	4%	44%	7%	21%
Do not report vote choice	18%	36%	82%	45%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Panel B: Political Position				
	Approve	Reject	Neither	All
Left	40%	8%	8%	17%
Center	39%	40%	43%	41%
Right	4%	28%	10%	15%
Do not place themselves	17%	24%	39%	27%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: Nationally representative CEP survey 2022.

Table 2: The effect of plebiscite cues on agreement with ideological statements

	Inequality vs. Growth			Pro-choice vs. Pro-life		
	With vote choice	Approve voters	Reject voters	With vote choice	Approve voters	Reject voters
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.421***	-0.464***	-0.391***	-0.161***	-0.271***	-0.090
	(0.066)	(0.084)	(0.107)	(0.054)	(0.078)	(0.075)
N	653	327	326	655	328	327
R^2	0.339	0.274	0.254	0.552	0.443	0.518
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: Outcomes are standardized, based on the following questions: 1) Inequality vs Growth: Person 1 [2/3 assigned at random], who votes [Reject/Approve, assigned at random], says that economic growth should always be given a higher priority than reducing inequality. To what degree do you agree with Person 1?; 2) Pro-choice vs. Pro-life: Person 1 [2/3 assigned at random], who votes [Reject/Approve, assigned at random], says abortion should always be permitted. To what degree do you agree with Person 1? Only respondents in the control group and with a vote choice for the plebiscite are included. All regressions control for sociodemographic variables (age, sex, metropolitan region, education, and socioeconomic status), left–right ideology (in three groups), interest in politics, party ID, and baseline preferences for the past presidential runoff and plebiscite. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table 3: Affective polarization and the effect of cues on agreement with ideological statements

	Inequality vs. Growth			Pro-choice vs. Pro-life		
	With vote choice	Approve voters	Reject voters	With vote choice	Approve voters	Reject voters
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.422***	-0.467***	-0.358***	-0.164***	-0.267***	-0.089
	(0.066)	(0.083)	(0.102)	(0.054)	(0.079)	(0.075)
Opposite × Treatment	0.005	-0.031	-0.020	-0.162**	-0.194	-0.120
	(0.095)	(0.130)	(0.138)	(0.079)	(0.122)	(0.104)
N	1262	610	652	1263	611	652
R^2	0.345	0.246	0.254	0.552	0.416	0.506
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: All regressions are for respondents who have a plebiscite choice. Controls as in note to Figure 4. Treatment corresponds to the priming treatment. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Online Appendix – Not for Print

Does Affective Polarization Make Citizens More Extreme? Experimental Evidence from Chile

Loreto Cox, Pedro Cubillos, and Carmen Le Foulon

Appendix A: Descriptive evidence and measurement: additional tables and figures

Table A1: Distribution of requested quotas to Netquest

	Target sample distribution
Socioeconomic group	
ABC1	17%
C2	21%
C3	21%
D	25%
E	17%
Age group	
18-29	20%
30-45	28%
46-60	28%
60+	25%
Geographical area	
Capital city	42%
Northern regions	29%
Southern regions	29%
Gender	
Men	50%
Women	50%

Note: Summary of quotas used to construct weights for the descriptive analysis.

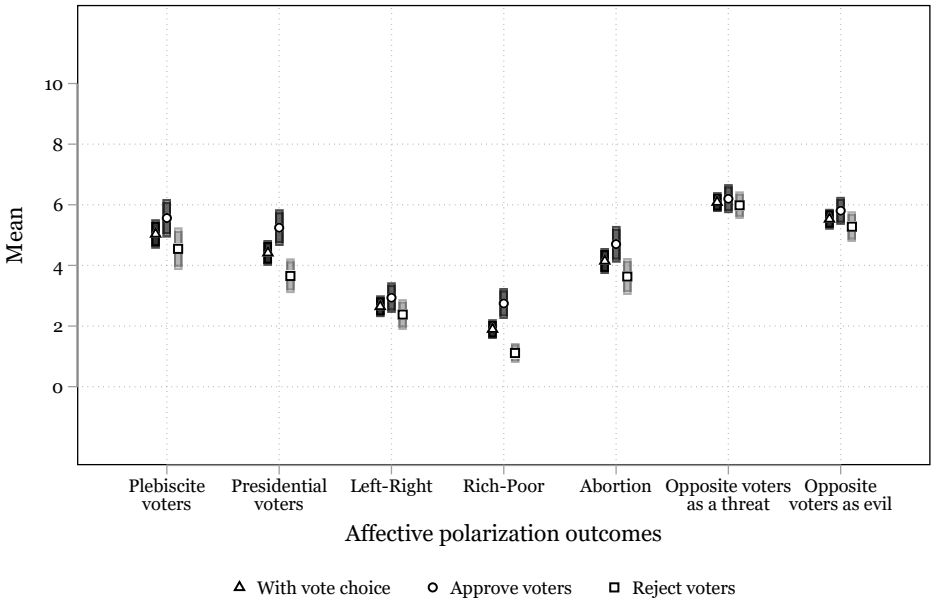
Table A2: Question wording

TYPE OF POLARIZATION	QUESTION	CREATED VARIABLE	SCALE
IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION	Where would you place yourself on the following scale where 0 represents the left and 10 represents the right:	Left–Right	0–10 scale 0: Left 10: Right
	Regarding **taxes**, where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that taxes should be strongly reduced and 10 means that taxes should be strongly increased?	Taxes	0–10 scale 0: Strongly reduced 10: Strongly increased
	Regarding **inequality and economic growth,** where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that the reduction of inequalities should be prioritized, even if economic growth is not generated, and 10 means that economic growth should be prioritized, even if inequality increases?	Inequality vs. Growth	0–10 scale 0: Prioritize the reduction of inequalities 10: Prioritize economic growth
	In democracies, the aspiration is for there to be public and private **freedoms** and for there to be **public order and citizen security**. In your case, which value do you give more relevance to? Where 0 is "Let there be public and private freedom" and 10 is "Let there be public order and citizen security."	Liberty vs. Security	0–10 scale 0: Public and private liberties 10: Public order and security
	Regarding **abortion**, where would you place yourself on the following scale where 0 means that abortion should never be allowed and 10 means that abortion should always be allowed?	Abortion	0–10 scale 0: Abortion never allowed 10: Abortion always allowed
	Where would you place yourself on the following scale in which 0 means that the state must ensure the **jobs** and **standard of living** of the people, and 10 means individuals are responsible for their own jobs and standard of living?	Government vs. Individuals	0–10 scale 0: State responsibility 10: Individual responsibility
AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION	Up next, some groups of people are shown. On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 indicates that you have a very negative opinion of these people, 5 that you have neither a negative nor a positive opinion, and 10 that you have a very positive opinion about these people, what is your opinion about each group of people?		
	People who vote for Approve People who vote for Reject	Plebiscite voters	0–10 scale 0= Very negative 5 Neither positive nor negative 10: Very positive
	People who voted for Gabriel Boric People who voted for José Antonio Kast	Presidential voters	
	Right-wing people Left-wing people	Left–Right	
	The rich The poor	Rich–Poor	
	People in favor of unrestricted abortion People against abortion under any circumstance	Pro-choice vs. Pro-life	

Table A3: Words related to four relevant policy areas and news misinformation (benchmark)

Inequality/Growth	Abortion	Environment	Indigenous	Benchmark
inequality	abortion	environment	indigenous	news
growth	reproductive	green	mapuche	fake
taxes	abort	ecology	race	lie
unequal	right to life	earth	native people	inform
job	women rights	planet	multicultural	Information
employment	life	drought	plurinational	naivety
unemployment	women	climate	mapudungun	liars
economy		weather		deception
equality		environmental		cheat
equal		permissions		ignorance
				read
				true
				false

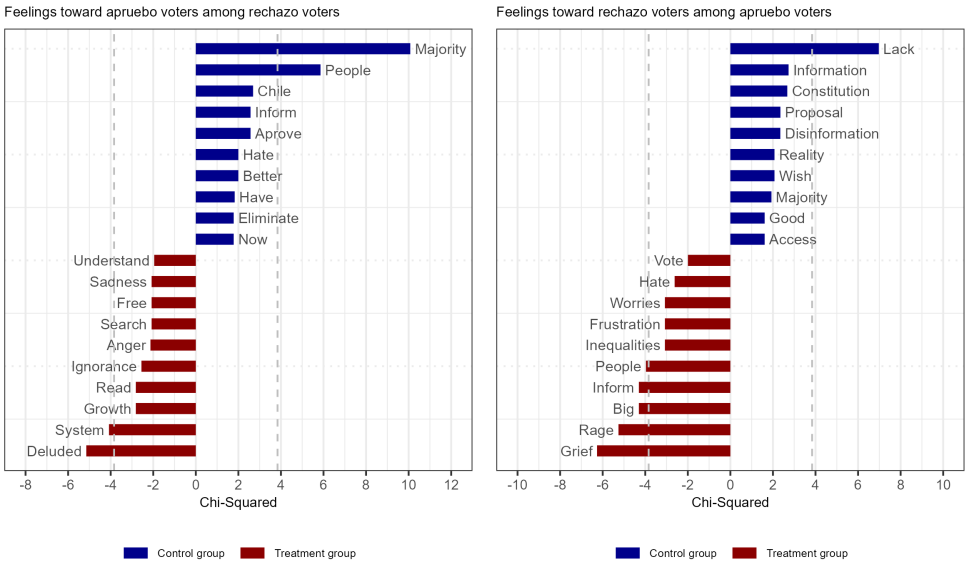
Figure A1: Affective polarization levels by plebiscite choice, runoff vote, left-right divide, rich-poor, and abortion divide by plebiscite choice (Original survey: Placebo group)



Note: Means for the placebo group using weights by population group, only for respondents with a plebiscite choice (n=661). Source: Original online survey

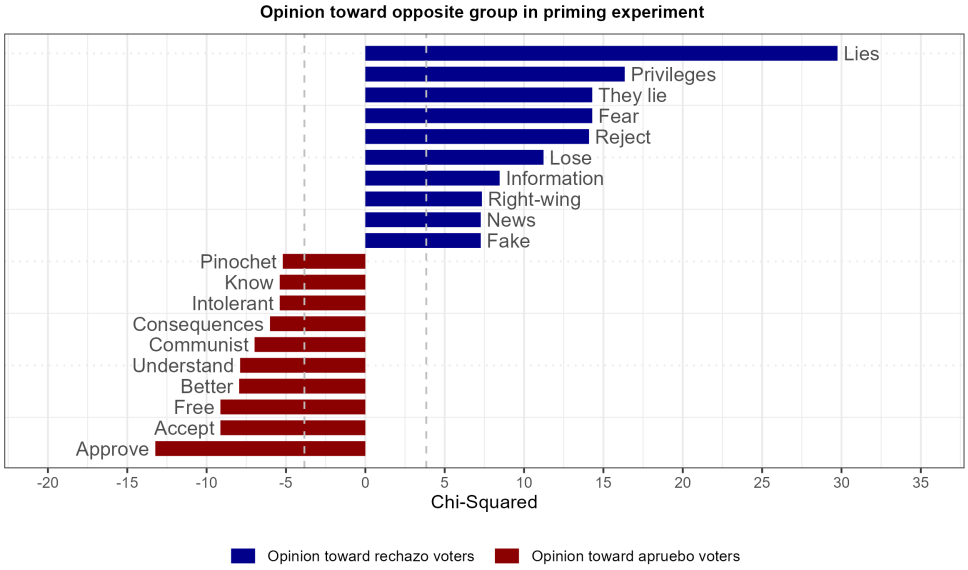
Appendix B: Additional experimental results

Figure B1: Keyness analysis: Differences in feelings toward the opposite group among respondents with a plebiscite choice in the treated and control groups, by plebiscite vote



Note: Dashed lines represent 95 percent significance levels $|\chi^2| > 3.84$

Figure B2: Keyness analysis: Differences in answers to priming question by plebiscite position



Note: Dashed lines represent 95 percent significance levels $|\chi^2| > 3.84$

Table B1: Effect of plebiscite cues on agreement with ideological statements

	Inequality vs. Growth			Pro-choice vs. Pro-life		
	With vote choice	Approve voters	Reject voters	With vote choice	Approve voters	Reject voters
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Panel A: General form without covariates						
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.307***	-0.430***	-0.361***	-0.117	-0.162	-0.061
	(0.078)	(0.093)	(0.109)	(0.078)	(0.099)	(0.103)
N	659	328	331	661	329	332
R^2	0.023	0.060	0.031	0.003	0.008	0.001
Panel B: General form with covariates + pre-treatment controls						
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.440***	-0.479***	-0.431***	-0.203***	-0.297***	-0.146*
	(0.069)	(0.089)	(0.114)	(0.055)	(0.081)	(0.077)
N	601	305	296	602	305	297
R^2	0.328	0.244	0.236	0.581	0.500	0.550
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Panel C: Lin, Green, and Coppock (2016)'s correction						
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.439***	-0.482***	-0.452***	-0.158***	-0.250***	-0.077
	(0.067)	(0.088)	(0.115)	(0.055)	(0.076)	(0.079)
N	601	305	296	602	305	297
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: Outcomes are standardized. Only respondents from the placebo group with vote preferences for the plebiscite are included. All regressions control for sociodemographic variables (age, sex, metropolitan region, education, and socioeconomic status), left–right ideology (in three groups), interest in politics, party ID, and baseline preferences for the past presidential runoff and plebiscite. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table B2: Effect of treatment on affective polarization (manipulation checks)

	Affective Polarization Outcomes			
	Plebiscite voters	Opposite voters as a threat	Opposite voters as evil	AP Index
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Panel A: With vote choice			
Treatment	0.025	0.190***	0.100*	0.083*
	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.054)	(0.043)
N	1263	1264	1260	1256
R^2	0.190	0.127	0.122	0.197
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Panel B: Approve voters			
Treatment	0.070	0.223***	0.168**	0.133**
	(0.070)	(0.074)	(0.078)	(0.062)
N	612	611	609	608
R^2	0.209	0.180	0.140	0.224
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Panel C: Reject voters			
Treatment	-0.030	0.142*	0.024	0.022
	(0.069)	(0.074)	(0.072)	(0.058)
N	651	653	651	648
R^2	0.222	0.188	0.179	0.258
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: OLS regressions, outcomes are standardized. All regressions control for sociodemographic variables (age, sex, metropolitan region, education, and socioeconomic status), left–right ideology (in three groups), interest in politics, party ID, and baseline preferences for the past presidential runoff and plebiscite. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table B3: Treatment effect on ideological polarization

	Ideological Polarization Outcomes					
	Taxes	Inequality vs Growth	Government vs Individual	Liberty vs Security	Liberal vs Conservative	Pro-choice vs Pro-life
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
			Panel A: With vote choice			
Panel A.1: No covariates						
Treatment	-0.031	0.081	0.027	-0.027	-0.003	0.027
	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.057)
Panel A.2: With covariates						
Treatment	-0.019	0.091*	0.050	-0.025	-0.002	0.015
	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.052)	(0.055)
Panel A.3: Lin et al. (2016) estimation						
Treatment	-0.019	0.090*	0.050	-0.026	-0.002	0.013
	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.052)	(0.055)
N	1265	1265	1263	1264	1265	1265
			Panel B: Approve voters			
Panel B.1: No covariates						
Treatment	0.071	0.032	0.087	-0.058	-0.038	-0.080
	(0.083)	(0.081)	(0.075)	(0.093)	(0.079)	(0.074)
Panel B.2: With covariates						
Treatment	0.069	0.018	0.101	-0.056	-0.041	-0.066
	(0.082)	(0.077)	(0.071)	(0.091)	(0.074)	(0.072)
Panel B.3: Lin et al. (2016)'s correction						
Treatment	0.065	0.007	0.105	-0.056	-0.042	-0.069
	(0.082)	(0.076)	(0.072)	(0.091)	(0.075)	(0.073)
N	612	612	611	612	612	612
			Panel C: Reject voters			
Panel C.1: No covariates						
Treatment	-0.117	0.150*	-0.001	0.011	0.035	0.115
	(0.078)	(0.079)	(0.077)	(0.065)	(0.078)	(0.086)
Panel C.2: With covariates						
Treatment	-0.081	0.159**	0.011	0.007	0.040	0.093
	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.078)	(0.062)	(0.073)	(0.083)
Panel C.3: Lin et al. (2016)'s correction						
Treatment	-0.084	0.156**	0.011	0.005	0.043	0.090
	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.078)	(0.062)	(0.073)	(0.083)
N	653	653	652	652	653	653

Note: OLS regressions, all control for sociodemographic variables (age, sex, region, education, and socioeconomic status), left–right ideology (in three groups), interest in politics, party ID, and baseline preferences for the past presidential runoff and plebiscite. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table B4: Affective polarization and the effect of cues on agreement with ideological statements (different specifications)

	Inequality vs. Growth			Pro-choice vs. Pro-life		
	With vote choice	Approve voters	Reject voters	With vote choice	Approve voters	Reject voters
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Panel A: General form without covariates						
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.339***	-0.437***	-0.377***	-0.159**	-0.255***	-0.062
	(0.069)	(0.082)	(0.095)	(0.067)	(0.084)	(0.088)
Opposite × Treatment	0.024	-0.061	0.089	-0.122	-0.089	-0.074
	(0.082)	(0.095)	(0.109)	(0.080)	(0.108)	(0.101)
N	1273	614	659	1276	616	660
R^2	0.026	0.069	0.029	0.013	0.027	0.004
Panel B: General form with covariates + pre-treatment controls						
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.433***	-0.476***	-0.372***	-0.198***	-0.281***	-0.128*
	(0.069)	(0.088)	(0.108)	(0.055)	(0.079)	(0.076)
Opposite × Treatment	0.025	-0.035	0.027	-0.135*	-0.182	-0.092
	(0.099)	(0.135)	(0.144)	(0.081)	(0.125)	(0.107)
N	1166	572	594	1164	571	593
R^2	0.351	0.232	0.257	0.578	0.455	0.535
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment democracy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Panel C: Lin, Green, and Coppock (2016)'s correction						
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.419***	-0.484***	-0.361***	-0.242***	-0.352***	-0.149***
	(0.047)	(0.063)	(0.069)	(0.039)	(0.059)	(0.052)
Opposite × Treatment	0.004	-0.011	-0.014	-0.185**	-0.177	-0.130
	(0.096)	(0.132)	(0.141)	(0.079)	(0.124)	(0.104)
N	1262	610	652	1263	611	652
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Panel D: Lin, Green, and Coppock (2016)'s correction + pre-treatment controls						
Opposite plebiscite preference	-0.418***	-0.495***	-0.348***	-0.240***	-0.346***	-0.140**
	(0.048)	(0.065)	(0.073)	(0.040)	(0.060)	(0.056)
Opposite × Treatment	0.032	-0.018	0.070	-0.179**	-0.203	-0.104
	(0.099)	(0.137)	(0.148)	(0.082)	(0.126)	(0.112)
N	1166	572	594	1164	571	593
Individual controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-treatment democracy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: Outcomes are standardized. All regressions control for sociodemographic variables (age, sex, metropolitan region, education, and socioeconomic status), left–right ideology (in three groups), interest in politics, party ID, and baseline preferences for the past presidential runoff and plebiscite. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Appendix C: Construction of population weights

Post-survey weights were constructed based on the population distribution obtained from the 2017 Chilean Census. Each stratum corresponds to a subgroup given by the combination of education level, age group, and gender. We identify three education categories: "less than complete secondary education," "complete secondary education," and "more than complete secondary education"; three age groups: "18-35 years old," "36-55 years old," and "over 55 years old," and two gender categories. The combination of all three variables resulted in 18 strata. For each stratum, weights were calculated as:

$$w_i = (n \times \frac{N_i}{\sum_i Ni})/n_i$$

where:

- N_i= population size in stratum i
- n_i= final sample size in stratum i
- n= total sample size

Table C1 presents the population distribution and unweighted distribution (by construction, the weighted distribution corresponds to the population distribution).

Table C1: Population and unweighted sample distributions

Variable	Division	Census	Survey
Education	<Secondary complete	36.3%	8.9%
	Secondary complete	34.0%	32.9%
	>Secondary complete	29.8%	58.3%
Age	18–35	37.0%	22.4%
	36–54	35.4%	41.7%
	>54	27.6%	35.9%
Sex	Male	48.3%	49.0%
	Female	51.7%	51.0%
	N	13,314,848	1,499