

Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization

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When defined in terms of social identity and affect toward copartisans and opposing partisans, the polarization of the American electorate has dramatically increased. We document the scope and consequences of affective polarization of partisans using implicit, explicit, and behavioral indicators. Our evidence demonstrates that hostile feelings for the opposing party are ingrained or automatic in voters' minds, and that affective polarization based on party is just as strong as polarization based on race. We further show that party cues exert powerful effects on nonpolitical judgments and behaviors. Partisans discriminate against opposing partisans, doing so to a degree that exceeds discrimination based on race. We note that the willingness of partisans to display open animus for opposing partisans can be attributed to the absence of norms governing the expression of negative sentiment and that increased partisan affect provides an incentive for elites to engage in confrontation rather than cooperation.

More than 50 years after the publication of *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960), debates over the nature of partisanship and the extent of party polarization continue (see Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Hetherington 2009). While early studies viewed partisanship as a manifestation of other group affiliations (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960), more recent work suggests that party is an important form of social identity in its own right (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004; Greene 1999; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2010; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). As anticipated by social identity theorists (e.g., Tajfel 1970; Tajfel and Turner 1979), under conditions of group competition, the sense of group membership inculcates positive evaluations of the ingroup and correspondingly hostile evaluations of outgroups. In the case of partisanship, this divergence in affect toward the in and out parties—*affective polarization*—has increased substantially over the past four decades (Haidt and Hetherington 2012; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012).

Unlike race, gender, and other social divides where group-related attitudes and behaviors are constrained by

social norms (Himmelfarb and Lickteig 1982; Maccoby and Maccoby 1954; Sigall and Page 1971), there are no corresponding pressures to temper disapproval of political opponents. If anything, the rhetoric and actions of political leaders demonstrate that hostility directed at the opposition is acceptable, even appropriate. Partisans therefore feel free to express animus and engage in discriminatory behavior toward opposing partisans.

Scholars have typically treated the sense of partisan identity as a major cue for political choices, most notably, voting behavior. We demonstrate that partisan cues now also influence decisions outside of politics and that partisanship is a political *and* social divide. Using novel measurement techniques, we directly compare implicit, explicit, and behavioral measures of partisan affect with affect based on racial identity. We find that implicit affect and behavioral discrimination based on partisanship are just as significant as affect and discrimination based on race.

Our argument proceeds in two parts. We first scale the magnitude of the ingroup versus outgroup partisan divide against the comparable divide for race. To ensure a

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