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Party polarization and ideological thinking in Europe[*]

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ABSTRACT: The implications of political polarization for the mass public have been a matter of concern among scholars for more than a decade. In the US, where a process of growing polarization is well documented, the question is to what extent the ideological conflict between political elites is making citizens more partisan. In Europe, several comparative studies show that party polarization fosters ideological voting, operationalized as the effect of voter-party left-right distance on party preferences. This study combines both perspectives to evaluate the ideological implications of polarization. Following a definition of ideology as a *belief system*, we operationalize ideological thinking as the degree of constraint among people's issue positions. Moreover, building on the concept of *partisan sorting* we investigate the party effect on voters' issue preferences. We offer a novel cross-country investigation of the two phenomena using data from 27 EU countries. We find that polarization does not have a clear effect on citizens' ideological coherence, but instead it is associated with a stronger organizing impact of partisan groups. Our results suggest that the normative conclusions regarding the effects of party polarization drawn by many comparative studies should be reconsidered, assigning stronger weight to party identities and their role as basis of ideological thinking in more polarized systems.

Introduction

Ideology plays an important role in the linkage between political elites and the mass public, ultimately guiding normative evaluations of the well-functioning of a democratic system. While partisan identification is generally defined as an affective, almost irrational attachment to a group (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002), ideological considerations are regarded as the core of instrumental voting (Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1982; Hinich and Munger 1992). Ideologies are the base of party policy platforms (Budge and Laver 1986) as well as of elite political behaviors (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Thus, ideological considerations are useful shortcuts for citizens to identify which party or candidate will better represent their will in many distinct policy areas. Although ideology can be thought of as uni- or multi-dimensional concept, overwhelming part of the comparative literature focuses on the left-right dimension as best approximation of individual and party ideology (Kriesi et al. 2008; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005). Scholars of comparative voting behavior have repeatedly shown that left-right party polarization is a strong contextual predictor of ideology's strength in guiding citizens in their vote choice (Dalton 2008; Ensley 2007; Lachat 2008; Kroh 2009; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005), leading to the substantive conclusion that – at least in Western European democracies – polarized elections promote the use of ideological arguments, and make it easier for the voters to choose rationally (Lachat 2011).

A different mechanism emphasizes the connection between party polarization and the relevance of partisan affiliations. In the US, a pattern of growing ideological distance between political elites has been shown to make citizens more partisan (Hetherington 2001), to drive them to align their policy preferences along party lines (Levendusky 2009a), and to make them more likely to follow party endorsements as they form their opinions (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013).[1] According to this mechanism, polarization seems to be more related to an embitterment of partisan conflict, rather than the rise of a rationally-driven electorate. However, while the former mechanism has been tested extensively on comparative data, evidence for the latter is mostly limited to the domain of American politics. Given that the link between polarization and partisanship has been shown to be generalizable to different political contexts (Schmitt and Holmberg 1995; Schmitt 2009b) we argue that this may also be the case for the impact of polarization on other types of mass political behaviors.

With this study we propose a novel approach to evaluate the impact of polar-

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[1]A more controversial topic regards whether polarization has made American citizens' attitudes more extreme (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2008) or whether public opinion polarization happens on all political issues (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003).

ization on citizens' attitudes, with the aim to detect whether it is associated with more ideological thinking or with more partisan cue taking. While Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) integrate these questions for the changing electorate in the United States, comparative studies have yet to offer some discussion on how ideological organization of the party supply reflects upon both of these individual processes.

A common way to define ideologies is as belief systems (Converse 1964), i.e. preference profiles characterized by some degree of internal coherence given by an underlying set of principles. In this view, one expected consequence of ideological thinking is that individuals display a constraint in their issue or policy preferences. Thus, if party left-right polarization triggers ideological reasoning, voters' issue positions should be more constrained in more polarized political systems. A second mechanism regards the "party effect" on people's attitudes. Here, rather than ideological considerations, citizens' preferences are supposed to be influenced by partisan cues, which, in turn, should be more emphasized when polarization is higher (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). Thus, our second test looks at the amount of issue partisanship, i.e. the extent to which partisan affiliations organize citizens' issue preferences. If higher left-right polarization means unrelenting partisan conflict, we should observe stronger association between issue positioning and partisanship in more polarized countries.

Our hypotheses are tested on a cross-country dataset including twenty-seven EU countries in 2009. The coverage of our sample offers a unique opportunity to test the implications of polarization over a wide set of contexts characterized by different levels of politicization of the social divisions and different types of competition. While the left-right is shown to have a similar substantive content in West European countries (Benoit and Laver 2006), patterns of party position-taking and issue salience in Central-Eastern European (CEE) democracies are found to follow substantially different, yet similarly coherent, ideological structures (Marks et al. 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2008; Tavits and Letki 2009). However, the relatively unstable behavior of party elites in CEE political systems (Tavits 2008) and the dramatically different patterns of polarization between West and East Europe (Schmitt and Freire 2012) make the European Union a good case for identifying patterns of association between polarization, ideology and partisanship that can be generalized to a myriad of different political systems.

Our findings have two major implications for understanding the nature of party polarization in a general theoretical perspective. First, we show that the positive association between party left-right polarization and the importance of ideology for the voters is not a general phenomenon, but characterizes systems where political divisions descend from well-established cleavage systems and polarization is still relatively low. This limits the scope of the claim that polarized elections are fought on substantive grounds to a subset of political contexts. Second, our results show

that the association between polarization and issue partisanship is a more general and straightforward phenomenon. Matched with what we observe for issue constraint, the findings suggest that in more polarized political systems it is parties, rather than ideologies, that provide bearings for citizens' political considerations.

Party polarization: ideological and partisan conflict

Several studies have repeatedly shown that party disagreement over issues has a strong saliency effect on the voters: the higher the degree of elite polarization over a certain topic, the more the topic will play a relevant role among citizens' considerations as they make a vote choice. This hypothesis has been first suggested by Key (1966) with the famous metaphor of the "echo chamber". The rationale is that citizens' political choices will move along the lines of what is offered to them. For example, if parties are divided on an issue such as immigration, but take a similar position on nuclear power plants, citizens will more likely concentrate on immigration than on nuclear power when they evaluate the candidates' policy platforms.

This theory implicitly assumes a top-down mechanism describing the impact of the informational environment on the voters (Carmines and Stimson 1986). As parties take diverging or converging positions on different issues, presumably following strategic incentives (Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005), the points of disagreement will be the most advertised in the public debate, as they provide reasons to choose one candidate instead of another. This would increase the availability of information regarding the disputed topic, making it more relevant in the eyes of the voters, and clarifying the differences between parties and candidates (Alvarez and Nagler 2004; Lachat 2011).

This argument has been applied to ideology as well: the more the parties are polarized on left and right arguments, the more ideological considerations will guide citizens in their political decisions (Dalton 2008; Dalton 2011; Ensley 2007; Kroh 2009; Lachat 2008; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005). The theoretical expectations and empirical tests are constructed following two different approaches. The first attributes to ideology a great social cleavage component and looks for an association between the degree of party polarization, class membership, left-right positioning, and the vote (Dalton 2008; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005). The key assumption is that marked left-right differences on the supply side correspond to policy platforms that are tailored for specific social groups with diverging economic and moral preferences on the demand side. Thus, higher party polarization would essentially imply a stronger ideological connection between parties and cleavage groups (see Evans and Tilley 2012).

The second approach relies more directly on a Downsian framework and mod-

els the relevance of ideology as the impact of voter-party left-right proximities on party preferences (Downs 1957; Kroh 2009; Lachat 2008).[2]Here the mechanism is a generalization of the issue saliency effect discussed above: the greater the ideological difference between parties, the easier it should be for the voters to discriminate between them based on ideological considerations (Kroh 2009). The hypothesis implies that voters are driven by instrumental policy considerations, with ideology being a shortcut device to link party labels to issue positions (Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1982; Hinich and Munger 1992). Evidence provided by these studies is based on the observation of a stronger impact of left-right proximity on party preferences in more polarized systems. An electoral competition where parties contend for power by offering alternative bundles of policy options is generally seen as a desirable outcome from a normative point of view (Wessels and Schmitt 2008). In the same way, a rational electorate driven by sole policy considerations is an ideal incentive for parties to actually compete with each other for the same voters (Bartolini 1999). Given these premises, it comes as no surprise that polarized elections are said to be competed on more substantive grounds (Lachat 2011).

However, a second mechanism posits that party ideological polarization could rather emphasize sentiments of partisan identification, leading to almost opposite implications. Some scholars of American politics have noted that more ideological distance between different parties and greater homogeneity among members of the same group have emphasized party identities, leading to sharper partisan divisions on the mass public's side (Hetherington 2001; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). The mechanism hypothesized to regulate the impact of the political environment on the citizens is still based on a "salience" effect. What changes is the *target*, i.e. what polarization makes more relevant to the eyes of the voters. Here, rather than ideological and policy arguments, partisan identities are the ones to be emphasized. This has different implications for the voters. Evidence shows that a greater impact of partisanship leads people to have more negative feelings towards members of competing partisan groups (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012) and and to rely more heavily on party endorsements to form their own opinions (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). Moreover, other findings show that as parties identities become clearer, issue and ideological positions of supporters of the same party become more aligned with each other (Levendusky 2009a). These pieces of evidence suggest a different scenario for polarized elections, where parties, rather than ideologies, are the main organizers of the opinion space.

It is important to notice at this point that all the evidence provided by previ-

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[2]An alternative perspective is taken by Pardos-Prado and Dinas (2010) who find that in more polarized systems people are more likely to vote directionally (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989) than in a classic proximity fashion. For how this effect translates into first party choice where both voting strategies would predict the same outcome see *citation removed to preserve anonymity.*

ous studies to support the connection between party polarization and ideology is based on the use of voters' left-right self-positioning. Moreover, with the exception of van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder (2005) and, in part, Dalton (2008), the salience of ideology is always inferred from the effect of proximity considerations on party preferences. However, this type of operationalization does not allow to tell whether polarization corresponds to an effective increase of ideological thinking among the electorate, or a greater sorting of partisans along party lines. This point becomes crucial if we consider that a number of studies, over the years, have argued that ideological labels ("left" and "right", "liberal" and "conservative") would not necessitate a strong substantive content to work (Conover and Feldman 1981; Levitin and Miller 1979; Malka and Lelkes 2010). In this view ideological labels are rather self-categorizations, i.e. descriptions that people make of themselves as part of a social or political group (Turner et al. 1994). Thus, the use of ideological labels would not necessarily imply understanding the substantive policy content beneath them, although their impact on people evaluations and behaviors will be strong (Levitin and Miller 1979).

This literature makes an important suggestion: observing a strong effect of left-right distances on the vote may indicate that people are using the ideological labels effectively, but not necessarily that they are reasoning in substantive ideological terms. Hence, to observe a stronger impact of left-right proximity voting in more polarized systems may not necessarily mean that party polarization fosters ideological thinking among the citizens, but rather that party supporters are better sorted on the left-right. This suggests that gaging the ideological thinking through the role of voter-party proximity on the left-right for party preference formation can mask two individual processes that are substantively very different. In the next section we propose a strategy to disentangle these two aspects and effectively test each of them separately.

Ideological constraint and issue partisanship

Comparing the extent of ideological voting in cross-country studies is mostly guided by the assumption that the left-right acts as a super-issue (Inglehart 1984), i.e. a general orientation that "encapsulates, impacts upon, and constrains a host of more specific political preferences and orientations" (van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005, p. 167). For example, ideological self-placement of individuals in European countries is linked to the ideological placement of the competing parties in terms of left-right, and researchers evaluate how this distance explains party preferences. The differences in the explanatory power of ideological resemblance is compared across countries, evaluating how system related factors might affect it. The un-

derlying assumption here is that mapping parties and voters in the left-right ideological space is a parsimonious solution of gathering policy related considerations underlying vote choice or party preference.

The link between ideology and policy considerations is made possible by the normative nature of the former. In particular, there are two types of considerations that are regarded by psychologists as the "core" features of people's belief systems: attitudes towards *inequality* and *resistance to change* (Jost et al. 2003; Jost 2006). These general values provide a coherent framework through which people interpret political events and the important policy debates of the day. Here the concept of coherence, or constraint, refers to "the probability that a change in the perceived status (truth, desirability, and so forth) of one idea-element would *psychologically* require, from the point of view of the actor, some compensating change(s) in the status of idea-elements elsewhere in the configuration" (Converse 1964, 208, emphasis original). In other words, when constraint is high a person's ideas are strongly interdependent, and thus to know her orientation towards one object will provide a good ground to predict her orientation towards another. For example, to know that a person opposes wealth redistribution could allow other people to infer that she also opposes same-sex marriages. In Converse's view, issue constraint is driven by a world view, or a "superordinate value" (Converse 1964, p. 211) that grants an amount of internal consistency to a person's considerations. With some refinements, this view is still widely accepted by political scientists (Feldman 1988; Feldman 2003; Jacoby 1995; Peffley and Hurwitz 1985; Sniderman and Bullock 2004). Ideological orientations are thus to be considered abstract value systems that provide internal consistency to a person's positions or preferences.

This conceptualization implies that, when the role played by ideology is stronger, a person's issue preferences will show a systematically higher level of constraint. However, there are two types of criticism that can be coined against this expectation. The first is that ideologically coherent positions can be theoretically observed *by chance*, because of a particular set of self-interest related individual features. For example, a person could be in favor of wealth redistribution because of her own economic situation, and at the same time in favor of same-sex marriages because of her own sexual orientation. In this case, even if ideology has no role in sorting preferences, we would still observe coherence. However, in this case, to observe in the aggregate a high degree of issue constraint would imply that the society is divided along perfectly overlapping group memberships. Such a condition would threaten the integration of the different social groups with each other, undermining the stability of the whole social system (Blau 1974). Given the very low chance to observe in a modern democracy a condition of such deep and finely-cut social divisions to justify constraint among several issue domains, we believe that the assumption that high degrees of issue constraint are symptomatic of ideological

thinking is quite plausible.

A second criticism that can be moved against our conceptualization states that Converse's definition of belief system is too demanding, and thus ideology would translate into issue constraint only for a smaller group of citizens, possibly the most politically informed. This type of criticism is in part motivated by the low share of people that Converse himself found to satisfy the criteria for being ideologues (Converse 1964, p. 218). However, other studies over the years found substantially greater shares of ideologues in the American public, leading to the conclusion that at the time of the 1956 election, on which Converse based his analyses, the American political discourse was much less ideologized than it would become in the following decades (Judd and Milburn 1980; Stimson 1975). We build on the same reasoning and argue that it is not important whether the construct "ideological thinking" is *entirely* captured by the observed amount of issue constraint, but rather whether the relationship between the two is constant across levels of importance of ideology. Thus, in the same way as Stimson (1975) attributes the larger amount of ideologues in 1972 than in 1956 to a greater impact of ideology on the American political discourse, we argue that variation in issue constraint should be interpreted as a variation in the importance of ideological considerations. On the aggregate, this implies that in countries where the debate over issues and policies is more often conducted on ideological grounds, ideology plays a more salient role in structuring people's attitudes. This should happen due to the same salience effect hypothesized by much literature on ideological polarization: the more the political actors appeal to ideology as they argue about policy, the easier it should be for the citizens to recall ideological arguments as they think about issues (Lachat 2008). This leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 *Party polarization understood as stronger appeal to ideological arguments in the political debate is associated with stronger issue constraint among the public.*

A second mechanism regarding the effects of party polarization on the citizens posits that, rather than making individuals more ideologues, it will make people more partisans (Hetherington 2001, e.g.). This should have an impact on their attitudes as well. Recently, Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) showed that, when people are asked to express their opinion about some debated policy issues, they will tend to rely more frequently on partisan cues (i.e. what positions parties take over an issue) when they are said that party positions are polarized. This is driven by the psychological mechanism of "motivated reasoning" (Taber and Lodge 2006): when people form new opinions, they will tend to emphasize information that confirms their prior beliefs and discard, or argue against, those pieces of infor-

mation that go against them. When driven by partisan attachment, people will be more likely to take the positions that is sponsored by their party.

Independent of party polarization, partisans filter information and form opinions that are positively biased in favor of their supported party (see Bartels 2002; Zaller 1992). However, for issues or ideological considerations, polarization plays an additional role. Due to the greater distance between parties in polarized systems, more clarity among party ideological stands make party-ideology links more evident for citizens (Levendusky 2009a). As a consequence, people are more likely to change their attitudes following their party, a process called "conversion" (Carsey and Layman 2006; Levendusky 2009b). The result of the two mechanisms described above is a better sorting of the electorate along party lines, i.e. supporters of the same party hold policy positions that are more similar to each other (Levendusky 2009a). Given the influence of parties in determining citizens issue preferences, this phenomenon can be associated with what Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) define *issue partisanship*[3]. This leads to our second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 *Party polarization understood as partisan policy debate is associated with partisan alignment reflected by issue partisanship.*

The hypotheses stated in this section aim to capture two aspects of the impact that ideological polarization can have on the electorate. The first regards the amount of ideological thinking, that we argue being captured by issue constraint. The second regards the amount of partisan thinking, that we measure through the similarity in issue positions among fellow partisans. These mechanisms have been tested so far in a longitudinal setting on the American electorate only. In their study, Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) employ a similar operationalization for issue constraint, and a different conceptualization, justified by the two-party nature of the American system, for issue partisanship. While issue constraint in the American electorate shows a small, although significant, increase over time, issue partisanship seems to follow a clearer, growing trend.

We test these two processes in a comparative perspective because we believe it is essential for generalizations regarding the implications of party polarization for the citizens. Given the specificity of the American system, these findings might be hard to generalize to the European context. Schmitt (2009a) argues that partisanship in European multi-party systems is not necessarily exclusive and should be thought of in different terms as the one conceptualized in the American politics

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[3]For Baldassarri and Gelman, issue partisanship refers to both the correlation between issues and party identification, and the correlation between issues and liberal-conservative ideological labels (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Given our interest in identifying the party effect on citizens' attitudes, we refer here only to the first type of issue partisanship.

literature. Yet, some comparative pieces of evidence show that the relationship between system polarization and voters' tendency to form partisan loyalties is rather generalizable (Schmitt and Holmberg 1995; Schmitt 2009b). The question whether polarization extends to issue partisanship remains thus still unanswered. Member states of the European Union come with a great source of institutional and political heterogeneity in terms of national histories, levels of industrialization, economic development, and social divisions. In particular, we expect the content of political divisions to vary across countries depending on the strength of the legacy of cleavage politics, and the impact of new political divisions more directly based on values and less mediated by the social structure (Inglehart 1984).

Political systems in Central-Eastern Europe display a relatively lower "familiarity" with the electoral process, especially if compared to the typical cleavage countries in Northern-Europe, and this goes together with often sharp political divisions (e.g. Palonen 2009). In spite of different ideological structures, mainly driven by their history of communist systems, political divisions in Central-Eastern European countries are found to follow patterns that are similarly coherent to the ones in Western Europe (Marks et al. 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2008; Tavits and Letki 2009). However, the relatively unstable behavior of their party elites (Tavits 2008) and, most importantly, the peculiar patterns of polarization in respect to Western European party systems (Schmitt and Freire 2012) indicate that we should control for country block specificities, because they could mask or drive some patterns of relationships.

Data and measurement

We use survey data from the 2009 European Election Study (EES 2009) fielded simultaneously in 27 EU countries right after the elections for the European Parliament held in June, 2009. This study comprises representative samples of roughly 1000 respondents from each EU member state. Along the comparative advantage stemming from the item coordination and survey implementation, respondents were asked about their policy preferences and attitudes on 12 political issues from a variety of different domains.

Comparable issue questions are at heart of this analysis. In our case, the EES 2009 serves these purposes perfectly, as all the issue questions in all countries were identical, translated into the country official language. The topics covered by the battery were selected in order to be close to the ideological *core* (Jost 2006) and at the same time concrete enough to be understood by the majority of the respondents. Furthermore, a third layer constraining the issue selection was the cross-country comparability. In this sense, based on input from country experts, issue questions

were selected by making sure that all issues that end up in the final questionnaire do present some relevance for each country in question. There might be varying salience distributions across the 12 issues depending on the country, but in order for this to exert systemic bias in our analysis, there should be a relationship between how the particular selection of 12 issues relates to societal salience and the level of party polarization. Accordingly, even if there are differences in how good of a policy space representation the included issues offer in a given country, this should not influence our broader conclusions more than any other previous comparative study of issue voting.

The answer options to the issue questions consist of identical 5-point Likert scales that we have recoded to range between 0 and 4. Higher values always reflect a more "right-wing" preference, whereas lower scores a "left-from-center" policy position. We determined the direction to be given to the scales based on a bi-dimensional conception, rather widely accepted by psychologists as well as by political scientists, of the normative meaning of left and right ideologies (see Bobbio 1997; Jost 2006). Thus, positions on the *left* are associated with preferences for more economic *equality*, *tolerance* of minorities or dissenters, and social *change*. This view assumes a general preference for a stronger role of the state in regulating the economy, as the "classic" socialist way to reduce market-driven inequalities. On the other hand, positions on the *right* emphasize the importance of maintaining the *traditions*, respecting the *authority*, and establishing or keeping the social *order*. This view goes together with a general justification of the social inequalities, and thus with an aversion towards any economic policy that would limit the scope of individual entrepreneurship. In our analysis we focus on 11 out of 12 issues, excluding the issue of European integration. Our theoretical question addresses aspects of ideological polarization on policy related issues. We do not expect policy alignment in left-right ideological terms for the European issue, as preferences on these might be guided by other considerations (see for example Kriesi et al. 2008). The 11 issues reviewed in Table 1 form the core of the ideological constraint and issue partisan measurement.

— Table 1 around here —

Issue constraint is measured as correlation between each issue pair from the data. Overall, 11 issues result in 55 unique issue $\times$ issue correlations.[4] We calculate the issue pair correlations for each country sample separately based on complete pairs of observations. We treat the issue positions as ordered categorical variables and

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[4]From $issue_a \times issue_b$ and $issue_b \times issue_a$ we only keep one, because we frame our analysis in terms of association between issues without any directional hypothesis. Formula: $\frac{n!}{(n-r)!r!}$.

the estimates discussed throughout this section of the analysis are polychoric correlations. The natural range of these correlations is $[-1, 1]$: -1 indicates that the two issues are strongly interconnected, but in the opposite sense than what is expected by assuming a comparable left-right dimension. Observing such a result would imply that an underlying integrating value system is at work, but it does not follow the conventional meaning attributed to the left-right. Correlations close to 1 indicate alignment between the ideological content of the preferred policies on two issues, and no relationship – with values around 0 – suggests that knowing how one individual thinks of a political issue does not help in predicting her preferences on another issue. Conceptually, as Converse (1964) argued, this latter tallies with the lack of ideology as belief system or structure responsible for converging policy preferences on multiple issues. The correlation distributions broken down for each country are presented in Figure A1, Supplemental material.

Issue partisanship is measured in terms of difference between a person's position on $issue_i$ and the position of her party on the same issue. Individuals were asked to specify which party (if any) they feel close to. Supporters of the same party were grouped and, for each issue, we calculate the average issue position of the aforementioned identifiers, serving as the group position on that particular issue. Some identifiers are closer to their fellow partisans, some are farther away. In our view, this closeness is a measure of issue partisanship: high convergence in issue positions with those propagated of one's party. In theory, given the $[0, 4]$ range of issue positions, one end of the scale would mean a perfect accordance with the party (0 distance), implying the strongest issue partisanship, whereas the other end (distance of 4) suggests a completely opposite view compared to one's party. We reversed these distances so that higher scores would reflect stronger issue partisanship. Overall, we have 11 issues[5] and for each we look at the mean issue partisanship in each country.

Party placement scores used to measure polarization are the average party positions on the left-right as perceived by the respondents in our sample. These estimates of party positions are arguably the most proximate to the voters' perceptions, and therefore they should impact on their attitudes and behaviors more directly than alternative measures, such as expert estimations or content analysis of party manifestos. For this reason, they are widely employed by studies interested in macro-level measures of party polarization (Dalton 2008; Dalton 2011; Pardos-Prado and Dinas 2010; van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2005). The party weights reflect the vote share of each party based on the current elections and aim to capture a party's relative importance at the moment of the interview.[6] More formally,

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[5]Distributions of the scores are presented the Supplemental material, Figure A4.

[6]Country values for party polarization are reported in Table A1, Supplemental material.

party polarization for a party system with K number of parties is defined as:

$$Polarization \quad = \quad \sum_{i=1}^{K} w_i |LR_i - \overline{LR}| \quad\quad\quad (1)$$

where:

$\overline{LR}$ = weighted mean of the parties' placement on the left-right;

LR_i = the position of the party i on the left-right scale;

W_i = the weight attached to party i, given by its relative;

vote share at the time of the election observed.

As discussed above, the level of democratic and institutional consolidation of a political system can influence the role of ideology or the terms in which individuals construct their views on multiple issues. We employ a dichotomous variable differentiating between Western European and Central-Eastern European democracies. The straight forward categorization is displayed in the third column of Table A1, Supplemental material. In our models party polarization and country block will be treated as country level explanatory variables. The nested data structure is discussed before running each model and our analysis accounts for the between-country variation by using hierarchical linear models (Gelman and Hill 2007).

Party polarization and deological constraint

We commence our analysis by mapping the bivariate relationship between party polarization and ideological constraint at the country level. Figure 1 provides three substantively important insights about constraint (ρ) and party polarization: (1) ideological constraint is relatively low in European countries, (2) associations are markedly and significantly different for Western and Central Eastern European countries, and (3) the relationship between party polarization and constraint follows a non-linear pattern for Western European countries.[7]

— Figure 1 around here —

The descriptive results point to several difficulties in modeling these correlations. A possible non-linear effect is paired with differences in associations depending on country block. These difficulties are especially daunting as we have only 27

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[7]These patterns hold even if we exclude from our analysis Cyprus, the country with highest party polarization.

countries (28 political systems) in our sample. The model of variation in issue pair correlations is set up in terms of the following hierarchical specification:

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\begin{aligned}
\rho_i &= \alpha_{j[i]} + \epsilon_i, \text{for } i = 1, ..., K \\
\alpha_j &= \mu_\alpha + \gamma_1 p_j + \gamma_2 c_j + \eta_j, \text{for } j = 1, ..., J
\end{aligned}
\tag{2}
$$

where ρ_i is the ith correlation pair, α is the intercept that varies across countries, ϵ_i is the issue pair level error term — $\epsilon_i \sim \mathrm{N}(0, \sigma_\rho^2)$. On the second level, μ_α is the grand-mean pairwise correlation, p is the party polarization in j^{th} country, c is the country block indicator, γ_1 and γ_2 are the parameters associated with the country level predictors, and η_j are the country errors — $\eta_j \sim \mathrm{N}(0, \sigma_\alpha^2)$. As we have only 28 political systems on the second level, we believe that modeling interaction effects between second-level predictors is not warranted by our data. Table 2 displays the results from a baseline model without any predictors and a model specified according to Equation 2. Model fit comparison indicates that our model including predictors fits the data significantly better than the baseline model ($\chi^2 = 24.498$ with 2 degrees of freedom difference, $p < 0.001$).

— Table 2 around here —

These results reinforce our display of the bivariate relationship, where we find a 0.093 lower average issue correlation in Central-Eastern European countries, but party polarization is not significantly associated with ideological constraint. When looking at the random effects, in the baseline model we find a clear clustering of Western European countries – such as France, Denmark, Austria, Germany, UK, Greece, Spain – with statistically significantly higher averages than the grand mean, whereas countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Romania are blocked significantly lower than the country average. Employing the a country block variable renders the country means statistically indiscernible from the grand mean, and all the effect is taken up by the predictor. We have specified an additional model where we have accounted for the non-linear effect of party polarization, but in that case as well the effect was not distinguishable from 0 using customary thresholds for uncertainty.[8]

In spite of evident issues with modeling our data, there are two relevant findings that emerge from this part of the analyses. The first and most straightforward is the substantially lower level of constraint displayed by citizens of Central-Eastern European countries. As Figure 1 shows, with the exception of Slovenia, each

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[8]Furthermore, in order to pick up on the curvilinear effect in the data, the non-linear model should be specified only on the Western European country sample, but this only further purports power issues on the second level.

country belonging to this category is positioned – on the constraint dimension – well below the least constrained West-European country. Given our assumptions, we interpret this effect as a weaker impact of ideology as a structuring device for citizens' policy preferences in Central-Eastern Europe. The overall degree of constraint among the countries in our sample is generally low, a pattern that resembles to a certain extent what observed by Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) for the American public. However, the presence of two distinct blocks in respect to issue constraint is clear. This observed effect may be also due to a poor fit of the issues asked in the EES 2009 to the competition in Central-Eastern Europe. However, expert surveys conducted by other studies confirm that economic and moral issues should have a relevant role in many CEE countries, at least for what concerns party competition (Marks et al. 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2008).

The second interesting finding is the curvilinear effect of polarization on issue constraint observed in Western European systems. While higher polarization is positively associated with issue constraint for the countries in the lower-half of our polarization measurement, this trend is reversed for the most polarized systems, such as Italy, Spain or Cyprus. This divide seems to cut rather precisely in between North and South-European countries. However, given the clustering of the latter group around higher levels of polarization, and given the lack of a theoretical reason why for these countries polarization should have the opposite effect, a common pattern for South-Europe can not be properly disentangled from the general effect of polarization. All in all, our results show that, in Western European countries, very high levels of party polarization are associated with a weaker importance of ideology for voters' issue positions, rather than stronger.

A possible criticism to the association between ideology and issue constraint states that the latter would be rather demanding for the general public. Along these lines, much of the literature on issue constraint suggests that those who are politically more informed or define themselves as partisans are expected to be ideologically more constrained (see Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Converse 1964; Baldassarri and Goldberg 2012). Furthermore, the logic of elite-public interaction is predicated on the changes in the information environment of voters (Carmines and Stimson 1986). In order to control for a potential moderation of information and partisanship on the impact of polarization, we have computed issue × issue correlation in an identical manner to the one above but for separate subsamples in each country. Those who responded that they feel close to a particular party were treated as the identifier subsample (59%), whereas those who indicated that they do not feel close to any party are the non-identifiers (41%). For political information, we summed up the number of correct answers given to seven political knowledge questions and then split the sample into those with low political information (less than 5 correct answers, 58%), and those with high political information (5 or more

correct answers, 42%).[9] We find that[10], on average, identifiers are ideologically more constrained than non-identifiers, and those more informed similarly appear more constrained than those possessing less politically relevant information. However, this pattern of differences truly holds only for Western European countries. In Central-Eastern European countries there is no clear division in terms of constraint on these covariates, and in many cases non-partisans and less knowledgeable people even appear more constrained. Nevertheless, none of this heterogeneity is associated with party polarization. Knowledge and partisanship related differences in ideological constraint definitely warrant an interesting further study, but they do not enhance our understanding of how party polarization operates when mapped onto voters' ideological constraint or issue partisanship.

Party polarization and issue partisanship

The alternative implication of higher party polarization is a stronger role of party cues in organizing people's issue positions. Issue partisanship taps into this phenomenon by essentially quantifying how close supporters gravitate around their party's policy preferences. In contrast to our findings on issue constraint, party polarization is positively associated with issue partisanship. Figure 2 reveals a quasi-linear positive association that mildly flattens out for very high levels of party polarization.

— Figure 2 around here —

Moreover, the figure shows no significant difference between Western and Central-Eastern European countries, neither in absolute terms (the two groups overlap) nor in their variation as a function of the degree of party polarization. Regarding issue partisanship our country blocks are not significantly different. In multivariate terms our model specification is very similar to the one in Equation 2. Instead of pairwise correlations, we model the variation in the issue partisanship (Δ), with 11 issue partisanship scores in 28 countries. Model fit comparison suggests that including country specific predictors is indeed warranted ($\chi^2 = 10.202$ with 2 degrees of freedom difference, $p < 0.01$), and we list the parameter estimates in Table 3.

— Table 3 around here —

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[9]Our results are robust to changes in threshold to both 4 or 6 correct answers, and results are available upon request.

[10]All descriptive results are displayed in Figures A2 and A3, Supplemental Material.

With added measures of uncertainty, the model results suggest that increasing party polarization is linked to more issue partisanship on the public opinion level. To put the results into context, the empirical range of issue partisanship is 0.857, which means that a one point change in polarization is roughly associated with an eight percent change in issue partisanship. This indicates that, in more polarized countries, groups of party supporters are significantly more homogeneous than in countries where left-right party positions are perceived to be closer to each other, polarization having comparatively the same sorting effect pointed out by American scholars (Levendusky 2009b). Regardless of the relative extremity of people's attitudes, which in fact is not taken into account in this study, the finding portrays a scenario of substantial division of the opinion space among rather uniform partisan groups. To observe the depth of this division grows as a function of party polarization confirms our hypothesis that a greater differentiation between party positions on the left-right corresponds to a greater "party effect" on citizens attitudes.

Issue partisanship is not significantly different in Central-Eastern European countries and the picture we see here raises some concerns about Central-Eastern European systems: ideological differentiation and distancing of political parties will not bring along more cohesive ideological thinking among the electorate, but it will be reflected in stronger partisan conflict over issues. However, when looking at our model results from the previous section where polarization is not significant on the overall sample, these differences need to be interpreted carefully. Still low ideological constraint paired with stronger issue partisanship in polarized CEE countries suggests that a mechanism such as the "salience effect" of polarization is more generalizable when its impact is assessed on the relevance of partisan identities, rather than ideology.

One possible caveat derives from our operationalization: we use all the partisans in our sample, including those identifying with very small parties. Although for smaller partisan groups (5-10 observations) the mean issue position may not be fully representative of the value in the population, the choice of including those cases is justified by the fact that, on the aggregate, they represent a small fraction of our observations, and thus their potentially-biased contribution to the measured country-level issue partisanship will be negligible. To check the robustness of our results we repeated the analysis using values of issue partisanship computed excluding the parties with less than 10 and less than 20 supporters in our sample, producing statistically identical results.[11]

Finally, potential methodological difficulties arise when working with sample based estimates as dependent variables – correlations and means, because the point

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[11]We also looked at issue partisanship separated for high and low information samples and all our findings are robust to this differentiation. All material available upon request.

estimates come with errors, so the analyst should ideally integrate this into the multivariate models. We carried out our analyses accounting for this property of the operationalization and our substantive results are by no means sensitive to possible differences induced by uncertainty in our dependent variables. We detail these steps in a short methodological note in the Supplemental material.

Domain specific effects

Carmines and Stimson (1980) presented a compelling argument that not all issues are the same in terms of linking them to party positions or electoral choices. Next, Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) and Baldassarri and Goldberg (2012) found stronger ideological constraint between issues that are part of the same domain. If there are any cross-pressures between policy preferences or a multidimensional ideological structure defines political competition (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2012; van der Brug and van Spanje 2009; Kriesi et al. 2008), it might well be the case that party polarization is associated with higher ideological constraint, but this manifests itself only on a subset of issues.

Establishing the meaning – or, for that matter, the between country variation of it – of the left-right ideological continuum is far beyond the goals of our contribution. We can envisage a situation in which particular issues are more ideological in terms of left-right and this might vary across country. This can be due to different salience or emphasis on some issues, but research in the United States also marks separate "take-off" issues, the only ones where opinion polarization actually increased (Baldassarri and Bearman 2007; DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003). These contributions suggest that we could have missed important relationships between party polarization and ideological constraint without accounting for the domains the issue pairs come from.

Readers should probably know by now that this section found its place in our paper because that is not necessarily the case, though some important insights arise from this exposition. Figure 3 presents the bivariate relationship similar to those in Figure 1, but plotted separately for each domain. The patterns (with different average values) are similar for all but the authoritarian domain. We find the curvilinear relationship for all other issue domains, though lower party polarization is associated with slightly higher constraint compared to countries with higher polarization (with overlapping confidence intervals). Weaker ideological constraint is still persisting in Central-Eastern European countries, but the differences for three domains – authoritarianism, traditional, and economy – these are statistically not discernible.

— Figures 3 and 4 around here —

In broader terms, we indeed see between-domain variation, and it is somewhat concerning that ideological constraint in economic terms is very low, comparable to the category in which the issues making up the pair come from different domains. Ideological constraint on issues from the authoritarianism and immigration domain is significantly higher, but not a function of party polarization. One limitation of our domain specific check is linked to the number of issues each domain has. The two domains with highest ideological constraint contain only two issues, whereas the other domains have more pairwise correlations. Thus, comparing single correlation estimates in one domain with average correlations for another domain might be misleading. To resolve this possible problem, we selected the highest correlation – for each country – in each domain with more than two issues and displayed them in Figure A5, Supplemental material. Even with this approach, ideological constraint on economic issues is still lower than constraint in other domains. The mixed domain performs better in this case, but we have to consider whether the same issue pair reaches the maximum in each country. Figure A6 in the Supplemental material shows that this is not nearly the case: in 28 political systems eight different issue pairs represent the highest correlations. Certainly, immigration and authoritarianism related issues are most frequent, but we can now be relatively convinced that we are not missing crucial patterns when considering domains through averages.

The question of domain specific effects is less problematic for issue partisanship. However, along the lines of Carmines and Stimson (1980) and, more general, of the literature focused on single issue alignments (Carmines and Stimson 1986, e.g.), we consider it imperative to check whether some domains face more issue partisanship than others. As Figure 4 shows, the effect of polarization on issue partisanship is essentially driven by two classes of issues, i.e. those regarding immigration and those aiming to capture authoritarian attitudes among the citizens. While the party effect on economic issues does not seem to vary across different degrees of polarization, the one on issues related to traditional morality drops in more polarized countries.

But analyses do not come without limitations, and in this case we have to rely on the descriptive analyses, as unfortunately we cannot estimate multivariate models. As two domains have only a single issue pair correlation, including these into the models following Equation 2 is problematic, because in some cases we would be drawing inferences about one observation. When analyzing issue partisanship, inclusion of a four category variables (essentially three dichotomous variables) with a sample of 11 issues for each country is again problematic. However, it was not the aim of this section to test domain specific hypotheses, but to get more detailed information on issue domain specific pattern in order to check the robustness of our previous analysis.

Conclusions

We started this study claiming that ideologies play an important role in the linkage between political elites and the mass public. Such a linkage is necessary because ideology "simplifies a reality too huge and complicated to be comprehended, evaluated, and dealt with in any purely factual scientific, or other disinterested way" (Higgs 1987, pp. 37-38). Based on this definition, political scientists view ideological considerations as a straightforward expression of instrumentality, opposed to the affective and visceral attachment to a party implied by partisanship. But how complicated or accessible is the political discourse and the competition of many alternative proposals is an inherently systemic question, and so are how individuals relate to parties they feel close or how strong of a structuring role ideology can have.

Our results suggest that the normative conclusions regarding the effects of party polarization drawn by many comparative studies should be reconsidered. Previous research has shown in many ways that, in political systems where parties are more polarized on the ideological (left-right or liberal-conservative) dimension, voters are more likely to be driven by ideological considerations in their vote choice. The mechanism posited by these studies is based on the increased availability and relevance of ideological arguments. However, what we find in our study is that higher party polarization does not help voters being more consistent in their policy attitudes, a feature that, according to the most widely employed conceptualization (Converse 1964) should indicate ideological thinking at work. Rather, we find that polarization helps partisans being more aligned to their own party's position, a feature that indicates a stronger party influence on people's policy considerations (Carsey and Layman 2006; Levendusky 2009a).

Based on these findings, we argue that party polarization does not make it easier for the citizens to organize the policy space according to a coherent ideological structure, but rather it helps them to identify party positions and to adjust their own preferences accordingly. In other words, what gets emphasized in more polarized political discourses is not the value root of an argument, but how the different groups involved in the dispute position themselves in respect to it. The irony of this finding is that as the disagreement between the actors becomes *clearer* due to the increased polarization, it is still the most simple heuristic, i.e. the partisan group, that proves to be the most effective one in help people organizing their attitudes. This argument is in line with what recent experimental evidence shows regarding the role of party endorsements for opinion formation, and how this becomes more important as party positions diverge (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). However, the design of our study allows us to observe the implications of this phenomenon at the aggregate level, and the comparative scope allows

us to generalize these implications to a wide range of different political systems, where the substantive content of political divisions can not be reasonably assumed to be the same, and where the tones of the debate can vary tremendously from one election to another.

Certainly, the richness of our sample could be the same reason why we do not find any systematic positive association between polarization and ideological constraint. To put it bluntly, the issues chosen by the EES investigators may not be able to capture the substantive content of ideology in all the systems we consider. In fact, the group of countries where we find a positive correlation between polarization and constraint is the same set that some of the studies – van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder (2005); and, with the exception of Italy, Portugal and Spain, Lachat (2008) – claiming an effect of polarization on ideology based their evidence on. Thus, the curvilinear effect that we found may be led by the fact that in the most polarized countries in our sample the issues that we used are simply not salient enough. But we consider this highly unlikely. If that was the case, then the difference in issue saliency should affect also our measure of issue partisanship. After all, to be able to recall their group's position on a given issue, people should have at least a vague idea of what the issue is about. In essence, the irrelevance of an issue is expected to influence within-individual consistency and within-party group consistency in the same manner.

To conclude, in a rather simplified manner we can decompose party polarization on the left-right into three constitutive elements: parties as actors, ideology as the platform of competition, and the relationship between the actors on this platform. Would a clearer relationship between parties benefit more the parties themselves or the appeal of ideology as a sorting mechanism of policies? When the alternatives are polarized, party supporters seem to be more willing to be guided by the actors they like in terms of preferences than to rely on a strict ideological belief system, laying the fertile ground for a partisan rather than ideological conflict. Ultimately, this nature of how the electorate sorts itself on policy related considerations define on what grounds and with what appeals elections are won or lost.

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Tables

Table 1: Item wording and descriptive statistics, EES 2009.

Issue	Domain	Mean	SD
Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of [the country where the survey is conducted].	Immigration	2.93	1.09
Private enterprise is the best way to solve [the country]'s economic problems.	Economy	2.32	1.16
Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law.	Traditional values	1.92	1.48
Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership.	Economy	1.76	1.31
Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion.	Traditional values	0.92	1.10
Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy.	Economy	1.94	1.30
People who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days.	Authoritarianism	3.08	1.08
Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people.	Economy	1.45	1.21
Schools must teach children to obey authority.	Authoritarianism	2.95	1.12
A woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family.	Traditional values	2.02	1.35
Immigration to [country] should be decreased significantly.	Immigration	2.54	1.24

Note: Descriptive statistics are reported on the already reversed coding (all issues left-to-right) and for the sample with responses to all issues. All valid answers range from 0 to 4. Don't know answers are treated as missing.

Table 2: Issue constraint in Europe, EES 2009.

	ρ	ρ
μ_α: Intercept	0.088 (0.009)	0.121 (0.009)
γ_1: Party polarization (grand-mean centered)	-	-0.001 (0.013)
γ_2: Country block (Central-Eastern Europe = 1)	-	-0.093 (0.015)
Residual SD:		
$\quad \sigma_\alpha$: Intercepts	0.053	0.029
$\quad \sigma_\rho$: Data	0.194	0.194

Standard errors in parenthesis.

Table 3: Issue partisanship in Europe, EES 2009.

	Δ	Δ
μ_α: Intercept	3.106 (0.016)	3.090 (0.016)
γ_1: Party polarization (grand-mean centered)	-	0.072 (0.024)
γ_2: Country block (Central-Eastern Europe = 1)	-	0.042 (0.028)
Residual SD:		
$\quad\sigma_\alpha$: Intercepts	0.069	0.050
$\quad\sigma_\rho$: Data	0.165	0.165

Standard errors in parenthesis.

Figures

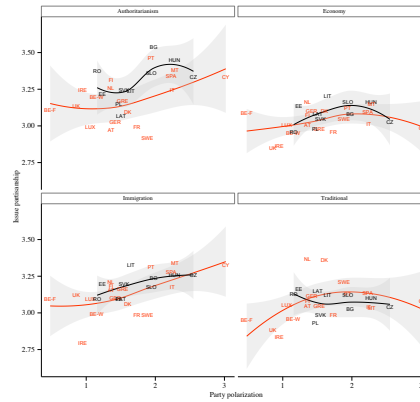Figure 1: Party polarization and ideological constraint in Europe, EES 2009.
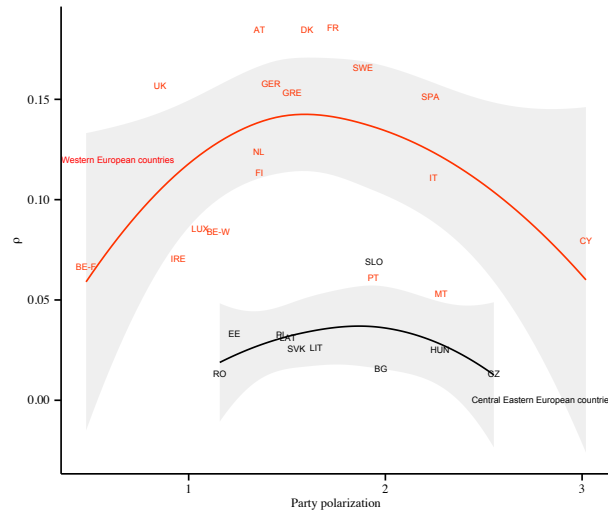
This figure displays the bivariate relationship between party polarization ($x - axis$) and ideological constraint ($y - axis$) defined as the average of the issue $\times$ issue correlations in each EU country. Lines are LOESS curves and shaded areas are 95% confidence bands. The figure conveys the different relationships for the Western and Central Eastern country blocks.

Figure 2: Party polarization and issue partisanship in Europe, EES 2009.
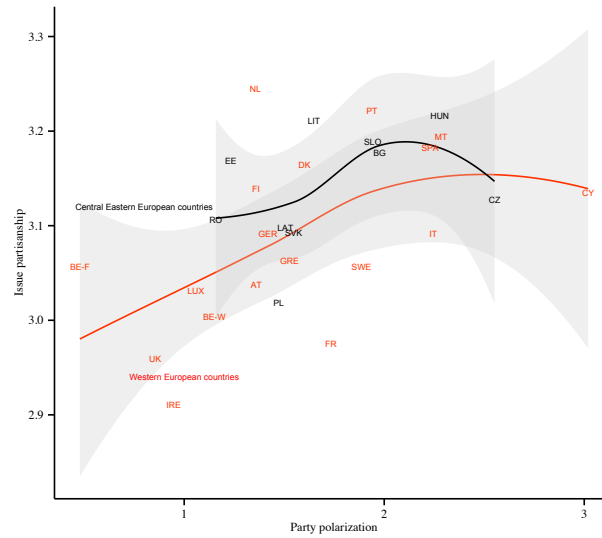
This figure displays the bivariate relationship between party polarization ($x-axis$) and issue partisanship ($y-axis$) defined as the average differences from party mean issue positions and its supporters on each issue in each EU country. Lines are LOESS curves and shaded areas are 95% confidence bands. The figure indicates a positive association between these two quantities and no difference in association between country blocks.

Figure 3: Party polarization and ideological constraint for issue domains in Europe, EES 2009.
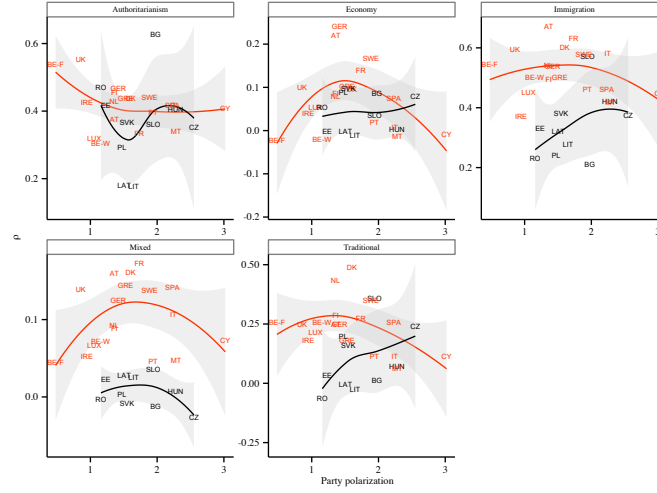
This figure displays the bivariate relationship between party polarization ($x-axis$) and ideological constraint ($y-axis$) defined as the domain average of the issue $\times$ issue correlations in each EU country. Lines are LOESS curves and shaded areas are 95% confidence bands. The authoritarian and immigration domains have a single issue pair correlation in each country and that value is plotted. The figure conveys differences in constraint between domains and specifically the cases in which issues stem from different domains.

Figure 4: Party polarization and issue partisanship for issue domains in Europe, EES 2009.

This figure displays the bivariate relationship between party polarization ($x - axis$) and issue partisanship ($y - axis$) defined as the average differences from party mean issue positions and its supporters on each issue in each EU country, aggregated per domain. For example, we have two immigration related issues and thus each country value will be the average of the issue partisanship on these two issues. Lines are LOESS curves and shaded areas are 95% confidence bands. The figure indicates between domain differences, suggesting that the strongest association between party polarization and issue partisanship is in the immigration and authoritarian domain. However, it also displays that, even for separate domains, this relationship in invariant across country blocks.

Supplemental material

Figure A1: Issue × issue polychoric correlations in 27 EU countries, EES 2009.
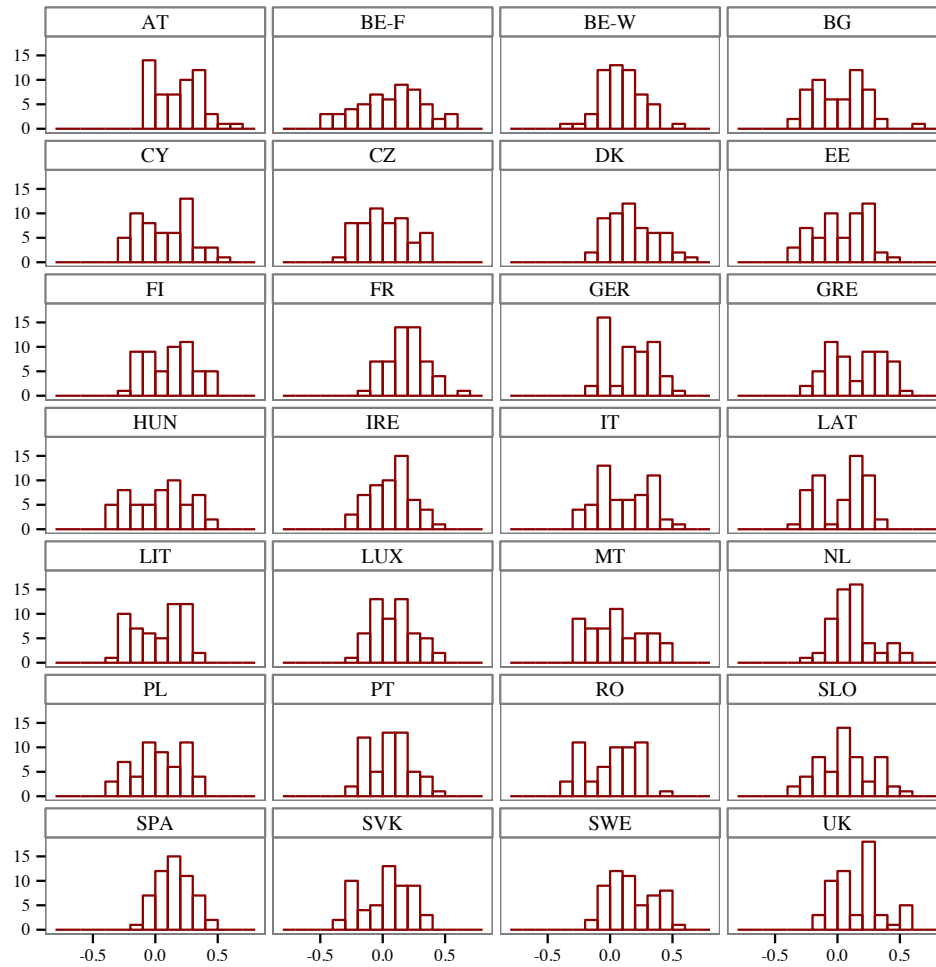

This figure displays the distribution of 55 issue × issue correlation calculated for each EU country separately. We treat the Walloon and Flanders regions separately.

Table A1: Party polarization and country block, EES 2009.

Country	Party polarization	Country block
AT	1.36	Western Europe
BE-F	0.48	Western Europe
BE-W	1.15	Western Europe
BG	1.98	Central-Eastern Europe
CY	3.02	Western Europe
CZ	2.55	Central-Eastern Europe
DK	1.60	Western Europe
EE	1.23	Central-Eastern Europe
FI	1.36	Western Europe
FR	1.73	Western Europe
GER	1.42	Western Europe
GRE	1.53	Western Europe
HUN	2.28	Central-Eastern Europe
IRE	0.95	Western Europe
IT	2.25	Western Europe
LAT	1.51	Central-Eastern Europe
LIT	1.65	Central-Eastern Europe
LUX	1.06	Western Europe
MT	2.28	Western Europe
NL	1.36	Western Europe
PL	1.47	Central-Eastern Europe
PT	1.94	Western Europe
RO	1.16	Central-Eastern Europe
SLO	1.94	Central-Eastern Europe
SPA	2.23	Western Europe
SVK	1.55	Central-Eastern Europe
SWE	1.89	Western Europe
UK	0.86	Western Europe

Figure A2: Differences in average constraint between subsamples, EES 2009.
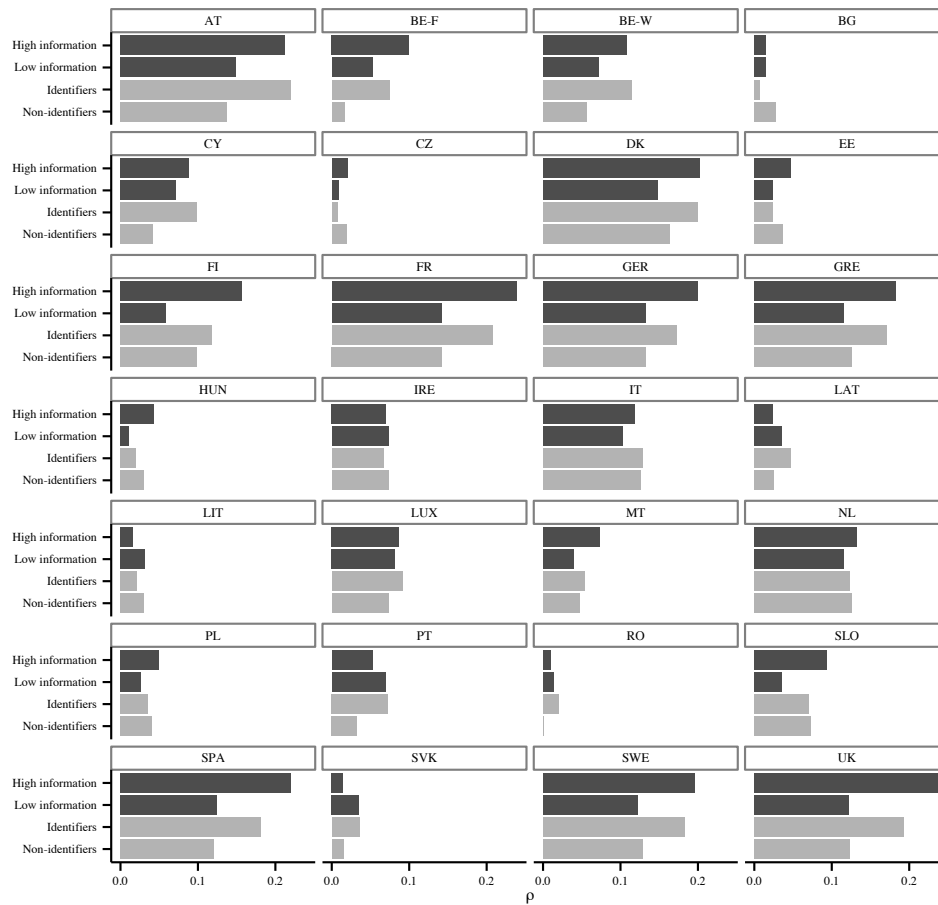
This figure displays in each European country the average ideological constraint for party identifiers, non-identifiers, politically informed, and less informed individuals. On average, it is apparent from this figure that partisans and those more informed are also ideologically more constrained. However, there is significant cross-country heterogeneity, most of it along the Western vs. Central-Eastern European divide. Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Portugal are exceptions, whereas we can see no clear patterns among Central-Eastern European countries. In some cases non-identifiers are more constrained than identifiers; in some cases less informed individuals appear to be ideological more constrained than their more informed counterparts; and in some cases we find no meaningful differences between subsamples.
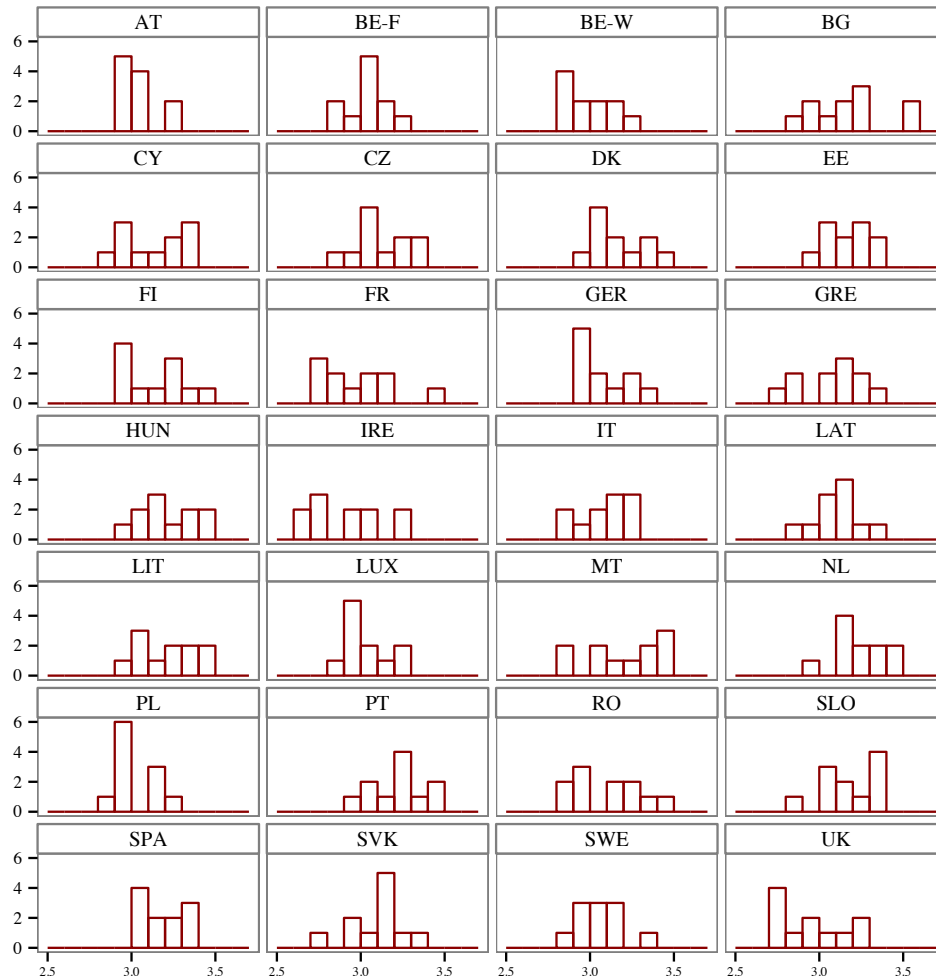
Figure A3: Party polarization and ideological constraint on different subsamples, EES 2009.
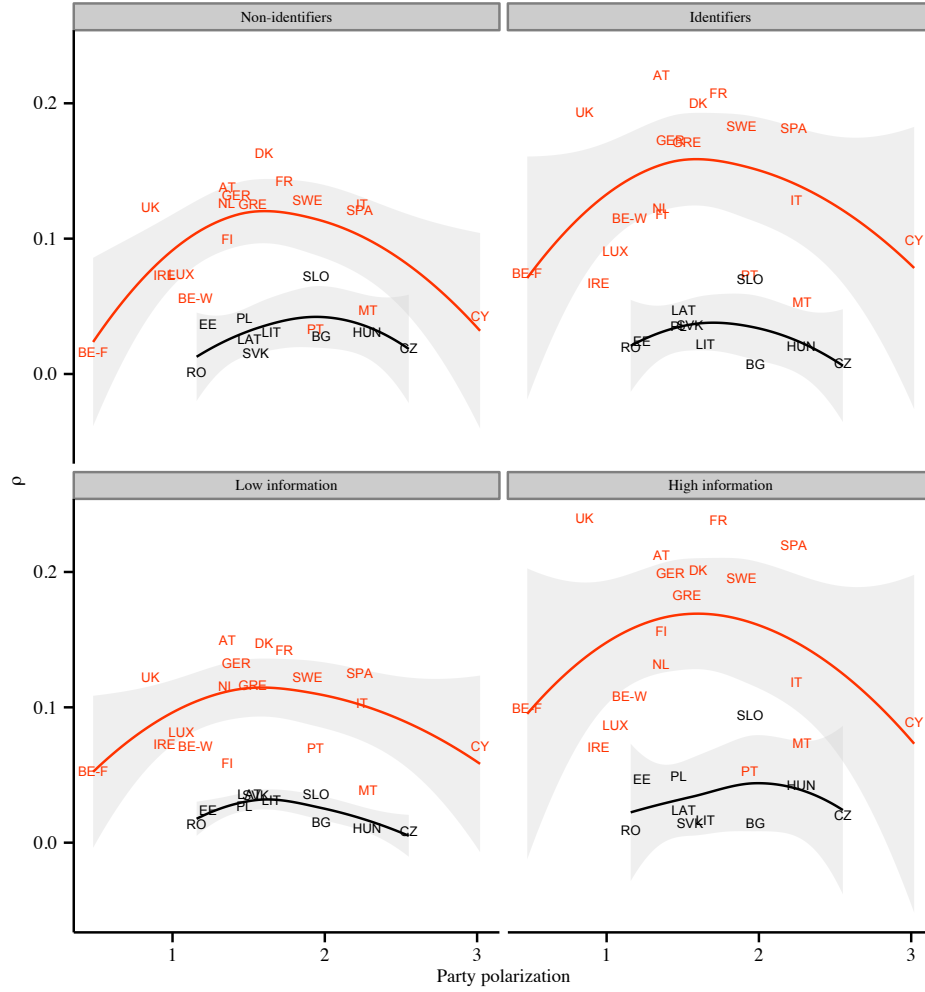
This figure displays the bivariate relationship between party polarization ($x - axis$) and ideological constraint ($y - axis$) defined as the average of the issue $\times$ issue correlations in each EU country, but decomposed for four subsamples: party identifiers, non-identifiers, lower political information, higher political information. Lines are LOESS curves and shaded areas are 95% confidence bands. The figure conveys the different relationships for the Western and Central Eastern country blocks. We can see that although there are differences in average constraint between these subsamples, the associations with party polarization do not change. The multivariate models that we specified indicated that indeed there are significant differences between how partisans differ from non-identifiers in Western and Central-Eastern European countries, party polarization has no statistically or substantively significant effect on these specific differences. The results obtained for the information covariate were almost identical.

Figure A4: Issue partisanship distribution in EU countries, EES 2009.

This figure displays the distribution of issue partisanship – as average deviation from the position of one's party – on 11 issue in each EU country separately. We treat the Walloon and Flanders regions separately. Only partisans included.

Figure A5: Party polarization and ideological constraint for issue domains in Europe, EES 2009.
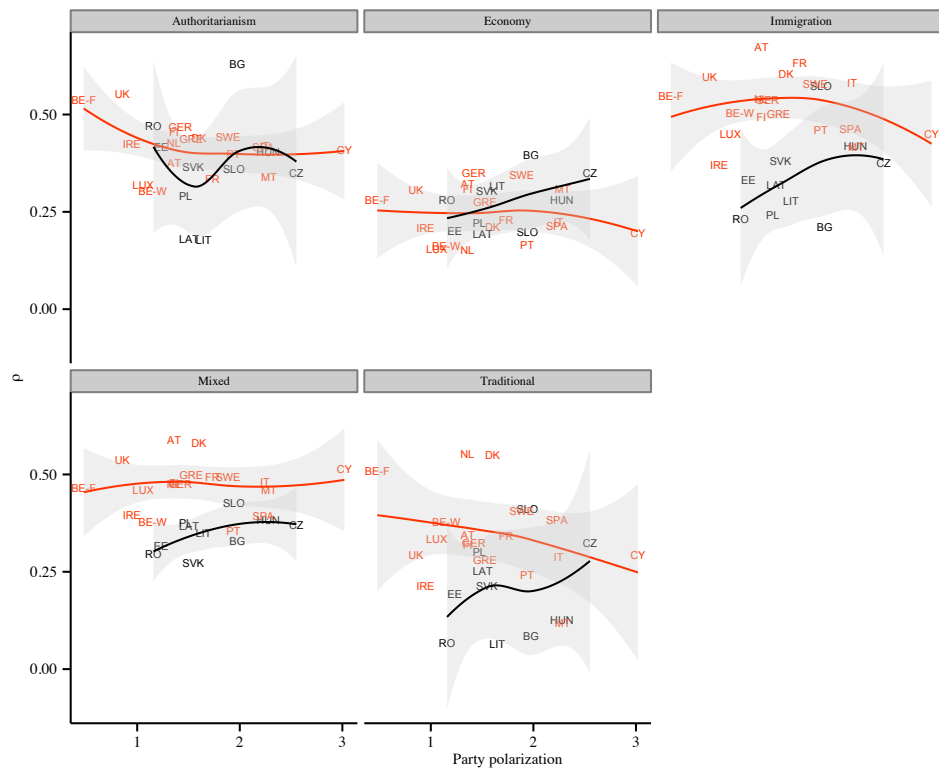
This figure displays the bivariate relationship between party polarization ($x-axis$) and ideological constraint ($y-axis$) defined as the domain **maximum** of the issue × issue correlations in each EU country. Lines are LOESS curves and shaded areas are 95% confidence bands. The authoritarian and immigration domains have a single issue pair correlation in each country and that value is by definition the maximum.

Figure A6: Domain specific issue pairs with maximum correlations in Europe, EES 2009.
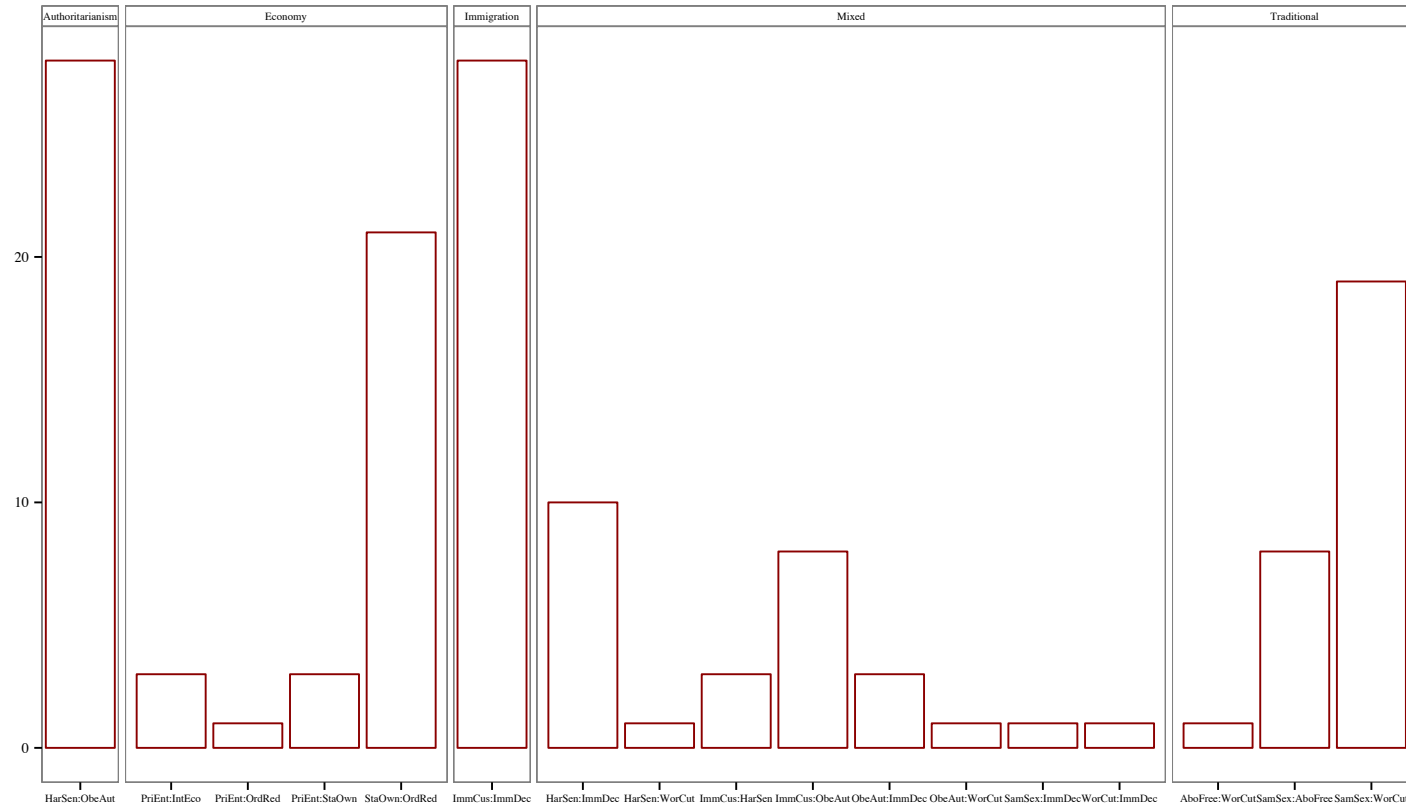
This figure displays the distribution of the issue pairs that have the highest correlations within each domain and in each EU country. The authoritarian and immigration domains have a single issue pair correlation in each country and that value is by definition the maximum and thus this are the "maximum" for the domain in each country (count 28).

Methodological note: Dealing with estimates

We address here a potential methodological aspect of working with sample based estimates as dependent variables.[12] In our case, both measures of interest are sample based estimates that come sample based uncertainty.

Table A2: Incorporating uncertainty: issue constraint example

	Point estimate	Standard error	Sample 1	Sample 2	...	Sample k
Pair 1	0.219	0.002	0.216	0.220	...	0.221
Pair 2	0.070	0.003	0.075	0.071	...	0.065
...	...	...	...	...	...	
	...					
Pair n	0.152	0.002	0.151	0.154	...	0.152

Note: We present rounded values for better display. We used values with 8 decimal places.

For ideological constraint, when estimating the issue pair correlations, along the point estimate we retrieved the 95% confidence interval of the estimate.[13] For each issue pair correlation (independently) we randomly selected a value from this range, with an example described in Table A2. We have carried out this step 1000 times, resulting in 1000 samples of different issue pair correlations. We respecified the hierarchical models on each of these samples and displayed the coefficients in Figure A7.

Figure A7: Coefficient distribution for party polarization and country block: issue constraint.
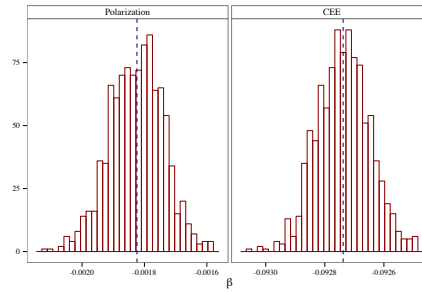
This figure displays the distribution of the party polarization (left panel) and country block (right panel) coefficients based on 1000 independent samples drawn from each correlation estimates 95% interval. Dashed line for the coefficient reported previously in the table.

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[12]For other applications see Lewis and Linzer (2005).

[13]These are sample based estimates, not empirical confidence intervals.

It is important to note these coefficient values should not be benchmarked to 0 as in the framework of bootstrapping to infer anything about "statistical significance". The sole purpose of this exposition is to grasp the variability in the *magnitude* of the coefficients by acknowledging that the correlations – as dependent variable – stem from a range of possible values.

For issue partisanship, there are several instances where estimates are used to compute scores of interest. Similar to the issue constraint, we will focus on the final step of computing the dependent variable. Each issue in each country is characterized by an average score of issue partisanship, and we use the $[-1.96 \times$ standard error, $1.96 \times$ standard error$]$ range of possible values to sample from, where the standard error of the mean is the standard deviation divided by the square root of the sample size. All other steps are identical to the ones described above for issue constraint. Coefficient distributions are displayed in Figure A8.

Figure A8: Coefficient distribution for party polarization and country block: issue partisanship.
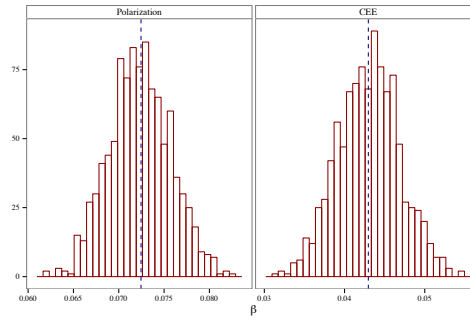
This figure displays the distribution of the party polarization (left panel) and country block (right panel) coefficients based on 1000 independent samples drawn from each mean issue partisanship's 95% interval. Dashed line for the coefficient reported previously in the results table.

As in the case of issue constraint, the results reported using the point estimate of issue partisanship hold under scrutiny of further analysis incorporating uncertainty. Even when modeling the worst combinations of issue partisanship scores the effect of polarization will be above 0.06, a magnitude that is reasonably close to the one reported in the main text.