

James Downs
Jack Fishel
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**How has political polarization evolved in recent history and
what impact could this have on the 2024 presidential race?**

Abstract:

This paper analyzes the evolution of political polarization in recent history across the diverse electorate of the United States. Using data collected in the Cooperative Election Study (CES), we will measure the extent of political polarization over nearly the last two decades and examine what issues may be driving this polarization. This study, administered by YouGov and run by Harvard has conducted large surveys since 2006. The CES collects data about participants' general political attitudes, voting choices, and viewpoints on national political issues(1). This paper hypothesizes that increased polarization can lead to shifts in voter behavior and party strategy, likely influencing the 2024 presidential election.

Through analysis of the CES data, we seek to identify significant trends of polarization, related to voter behavior and demographic shifts. We will be able to examine how voter ideology and behavior have evolved since 2008, including the possible issues driving the shift. Existing literature has developed a basis showing general trends in the American electorate's ideological and political changes. We also will examine potential correlations between media consumption and measures of polarization. Ultimately, we aim to evaluate how the American electorate has shifted in recent history and the implications of polarization on the political landscape.

Furthermore, by looking at existing polling data on the 2024 presidential election,

our results seek to provide insight into how parties may realign their strategies to appeal to a divided electorate in future American elections. The 2024 election is highly unusual in a variety of ways including having two former presidents run against each other, both candidates having fairly low approval ratings, and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. running as an Independent candidate but is projected to receive a substantial portion of the vote.

Introduction:

America's two-party system has shaped the country's political landscape, with the Republican and Democratic parties dominating the electoral system for the past 150 years. This political structure inherently fosters a degree of division as each party promotes its policies and ideology for the country's largest issues, differentiating itself from the other. While having two main polarized parties is not necessarily negative, the consequences of extensive polarization can induce significant strain on America's Democracy.

Polarization allows voters to have a clear choice in an election, and rivaling opinions and discussion can lead to finding truth(7). Looking further on the spectrum of polarization, when beliefs start to bring negative feelings about people with opposing views, there becomes the possibility of worse consequences. As hostility increases with little resolution to disagreements, political polarization can lead to intolerance of fellow Americans, eroding democratic values, and even violence.

Researching the level of polarization and possible causes driving the political polarization is essential to determining if America has a problem and how to solve it if that is the case. Findings about polarization are important since they can help preserve America's democracy and political system. While the two-party system is not perfect,

political stability is crucial to America's prosperity and significant changes threaten our democracy.

We believe that social issues that have become politicized are some of the main drivers for increased polarization of beliefs, impacting daily life. Different media consumption methods are likely aligned with the increase of polarization, as algorithms from social media platforms segregate people via their interests. The platform experiences are built around showing users content they will interact with, thus creating ideological segregation within political news(9). Understanding trends and some of the issues most pertinent to polarization will allow the promotion of engaging in politics while maintaining civility.

Over the past two decades, we hypothesize there has been a divergence among the population in ideology on partisan matters. Republican and Democrat voters have aligned their ideologies with their political beliefs, devoting themselves to one party. Representatives within Congress embody the preferences of the voters who elected them. With the middle ground seemingly disappearing as Republicans and Democrats shift towards the political extremes, it makes it increasingly difficult to pass legislation within Congress.

It is important to determine what political polarization means in American politics. Throughout this paper, we are attempting to explore the growing ideological gap between Democrats and Republicans within America's political landscape. Increased polarization results in diverging beliefs about the country's values and policies. Polarization also fuels animosity between Republicans and Democrats, where policy compromise becomes challenging with declining ideological overlap. While the extent

and severity of America's polarization are hard to measure, we can use survey data from the past two decades to find significant trends that show polarization trends. In addition to finding trends, we will look at potential causes for the polarization. We will investigate the role of the media, see where people get their news from, and measure where they fall on the political and ideological spectrum.

The ideological overlap between liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats is disappearing (3). While a degree of political divide is healthy for a democracy, excessive polarization can potentially erode America's political framework. Polarization is dangerous to democracy as it can cause each side to vilify the other, in addition to making compromise more difficult. Improving research on the causes of this polarization and its possible impacts will measure to what extent America is polarized and provide insight into the future political landscape.

Growing concerns about American political polarization are not unfounded. According to a 2023 study by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 61% of Americans share the view that political polarization is a critical threat to the United States (2). Political polarization was ranked above climate change and immigration, both mainstream issues. We will attempt to quantify to what extent political polarization is a problem in the current political landscape. To investigate, we will look at whether political polarization is between only politically active Americans or if this is a widespread phenomenon across the population.

Political polarization mostly focuses on the most politically involved groups. We will look at data to see how this shift impacts Americans in the middle of the political spectrum. Investigating the change in how these moderates view the political climate

will lend insight into the future political landscape. Are they turned off to politics due to this polarization or will they become more politically active due to the rise in stakes? The upcoming 2024 presidential election is likely to have one of the most prominent third-party candidates in modern US history. We will look at the role polarization has played in the rise of an independent candidate, as well as the greater impact this has on the 2024 election.

We will attempt to determine the driving forces of American political polarization. By looking at the news and media sources of politically active and partisan Americans, we can develop trends based on their consumption practices. We will also look at if specific issues are causing voters to become more politically active and align their ideologies with one party over the other. Our research wants to find the potential driving causes for this polarization, exploring the impact of news media and important issues the voter faces.

Within the past decade, elections have become seemingly higher stakes each year. While some positives come from this, such as increased voter turnout, tension between sides has also grown. We seek to investigate recent political polarization trends to measure how significant this growing divide is and the impact polarization will have on the upcoming 2024 presidential election.

Literature Review:

The majority of the existing literature investigating the United States' political polarization seeks to determine to what extent the country is polarized and the driving factors further a divide. Additionally, previous research looks at partisan sorting, as people with similar political views have clustered into the same towns and

neighborhoods. We will also examine literature about the influence of news and media, a key factor we hypothesize is driving the political divide. Reviewing existing research will guide our data analysis for finding significant trends in polarization and investigating the main drivers for this evolution.

Creating a foundation for the rise of political polarization, we will look at the growth in the ideological divide over the past 3 decades. According to Pew Research, the percentage of people who held roughly equal conservative and liberal opinions decreased from 49% to 39% in the span of ten years from 2004 to 2014 (4). This shrinkage stems from the percentage of Americans on the extremes doubling from 11% to 21% in the same period (4). Due to this shift away from moderate ideologies, there is less overlap between the two parties. Studying this shift in ideology aids explanation for legislative gridlock and rising political tensions. As of their 2014 data, Pew Research found that 92% of Republicans are on the right of the median Democrat, while in 1994 that number was only 64%. Likewise, 94% of Democrats are on the left of the median Republican, with only 70% being left of the median in 1994 (4). This shift toward the political extremes on the spectrum aligns with research exploring the rise of partisan-ideological consistency. Looking at this data from the literature supports our belief that political polarization has increased in recent decades.

As the United States electorate evolves, the past two decades have given rise to party and ideological identifications aligning closely with stances on political issues. An Emory University study used data from the American National Election Studies to prove that Americans' beliefs were becoming increasingly aligned with their party affiliation, leaving fewer moderates. Partisan identification and ideological positions have become

increasingly aligned as both parties have shifted away from moderate views. On a 7-point liberal to conservative scale, the mean location difference between the two parties has tripled from 1972 to 2020. The difference in 1972 was 0.6 but more than tripled to 2.1 in the 2020 data(5). The 2.1 point gap is the largest divide throughout the 48 years. Both Republicans and Democrats have shifted farther from the center, abandoning some voters in the middle of the spectrum. Greater ideological consistency within parties creates affective polarization throughout the American electorate.

Partisan ideology and an individual's beliefs have trended together over time, creating straight-ticket voters. Voters with close ideological consistency and party affiliations were found to be correlated closely with strengthening negative opinions about the other party. Using the same ANES data, the Emory study examined the public opinion rating their own party and the opposing party on a scale 0-100. In the last 3 decades of the 20th century, the average difference in ratings was between 20 and 30 points, but that about doubled to between 50 and 60 points in the 2020 survey (5). The leading difference in this significant increase was the respondents decreasing their ratings of the opposing party. Ratings of the opposing party fell from the mid-forties in the same previous period to below 20 in the 2020 data (5). The growing dislike for the other party is a sign of polarization as people align staunchly with their partisanship and negatively view the other side. With rising political polarization, party loyalty increases and ideological overlap decreases between sides. We will continue this investigation by looking at CES survey data to measure how voters view the opposing party.

The result of polarized partisanship and shifting individual beliefs have resulted in partisan sorting in cities and neighborhoods throughout the country. A study from

Natural Human Behavior calculated the local residential segregation of every registered voter in the United States. The largest discrepancy they found was Republicans are more likely to live in rural areas, while Democrats tend to live in urban areas. While that was largely suspected, the extent of the partisan segregation was surprising. Further findings in the study showed, “a majority of Democrats and Republicans live with isolation levels well above the threshold of 0.60 commonly used to describe high isolation in the context of race in municipal areas”(14). With over half of registered voters living with little to no exposure of the people from the other party, there are growing concerns for the impact this may have on our democracy. Not only are particular neighborhoods heavily Democrat or Republican, but even within those neighborhoods is further partisan segregation of clusters of homes that are politically aligned. We seek to explore the drivers causing the partisan segregation and identify emerging trends that show the separation of lifestyle choices based on partisanship.

Lifestyle choices have become significant indicators of political party association, possibly a factor into the partisan segregation seen in American neighborhoods. A Pew Research study surveyed Americans about what they find fulfilling and meaningful in their life. While Democrats and Republicans both equally stated family and friends, there were significant partisan divides among the other top answers. One of the more common answers for Republicans was religion and freedom, while the Democrats cited their health and stability(15).

People aligned with each party having opposing worldviews is not necessarily bad, but can make responses to large problems more challenging. For example, differing partisan opinions were embodied through the response to the Covid-19. As of

June 2020, 86% of Democrats said they were always wearing masks when around another person, while only 48% of Republicans agreed(17). Opposing attitudes stem from differing ways of life, but further polarization may negatively impact the country if policy middleground cannot be met. Legislative gridlock, from political polarization, could potentially put the American public health and economy at risk during a time of emergency.

Examining potential drivers for the increase in political and ideological polarization, we will look at existing research about media and news consumption. Traditional news media outlets have seen a significant partisan alignment, with 75% of conservatives saying they trust Fox News and 70% of liberals trusting CNN. When asked if they distrust particular news sources, 77% of liberals distrust Fox News and 67% of conservatives distrust CNN, as of 2020(16). Both CNN and Fox News are two of the most prominent mainstream news outlets, yet there are significant partisan divides on the opinions surrounding both. Choosing a news source to consume has become heavily aligned with which political party one affiliates with. Partisan news has led to significant distrust between both liberals and conservatives, isolating both parties further.

Social media has been a growing source of news especially among young adults. As of 2022, 51% of adults get their news “sometimes” or “often” from social media(18). That number is likely to grow over the coming years, it is important to look if social media is creating echo chambers for partisan news and opinion. Users are segregated by the content they show interest in, thus creating a cycle of engaging with a certain type of partisan news, then a user will continue to see more of the same. Algorithmic

filtering creates echo chambers for users as it exposes users to information that reinforces their existing beliefs(17). Americans are exposed to news from traditional media and social media, both potentially causing further polarization due to partisan bias and algorithmic segregation.

We hypothesize that Americans have become more polarized politically within the past two decades, as Republicans and Democrats push further away from the middle. Although a growing number of people are aligning staunchly with either of the extremes, this group is likely still relatively small on both sides. While the majority of existing research focuses on the increase in partisanship for left-wing and right-wing Americans, there is a growing group that is in the middle of the political spectrum. According to Gallup survey data, the number of Americans who identify themselves as independent in 2023 is at its highest in the span from 1988 to 2023. Their 2023 data shows that 43% of Americans prefer to identify as independent, rather than Republican or Democrat (6). As of 2023, 27% of Americans said they were Republicans as well as 27% for Democrats. In 1988, 36% identified with Democrats, and 31% were Republican (6). This data presents a decline in party identification over the last 35 years, seemingly going against the political polarization at first glance.

The trend of a growing number of independents we believe supports the idea of political polarization in America. While Republican and Democrat groups have shrunk, this is due to both parties pushing away from the middle of the political spectrum, losing the support of moderate voters. Combining this with the ANES data, which showed both parties trending farther apart, both Republicans and Democrats are leaving voters behind who stand somewhere in the middle. Voters who are staunchly on the left and

right have aligned themselves ideologically with their respective parties as party loyalty has increased. Given the polarization of the two parties, many voters are left to identify as independent as there are fewer moderate Democrats and Republicans.

Voters who are not ideologically consistent with either party now feel left in the middle as partisanship has increased within both sides. An ideologically consistent voter is likely to cast a straight ticket, thus supporting all Republicans or Democrats that are on the ballot (5). Voters are increasingly ideologically consistent with their respective parties. Although a significant portion of voters identify as independent, there has not been a significant third-party candidate in a presidential race in recent history. We will investigate, through polling data, the potential impacts of a prominent independent candidate in the 2024 election. Undoubtedly, this candidate has the potential to sway moderates from both parties, but the polarized political climate makes it challenging for voters to change their allegiance.

Data/Methods:

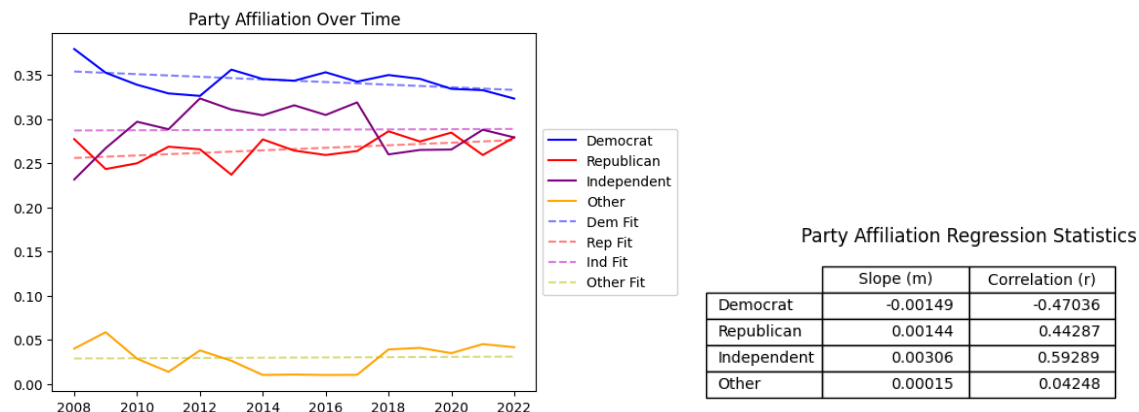
Our data for analyzing the trends in American political polarization in recent history comes from the annual CES survey results from 2008 to 2022. This dataset was chosen because it has consistently rigorous sample sizes ranging from 13,800 to 64,600 with an average of 38,069 participants. Furthermore, the data is representative of the target population of all American adults because sample matching was used to overcome responsiveness issues inherent to a voluntary survey. All results generated below were further normalized to be demographically representative of the US adult population to account for imperfect matches by using weightings for each response. The weights were calculated such that the distributions of the sample's gender, age, race,

Hispanic origin, education level, and voting behaviors were aligned with the population's distributions (1).

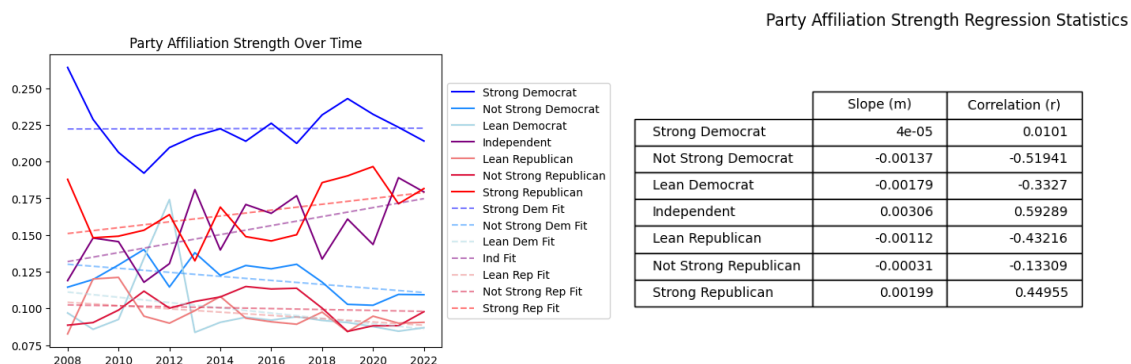
When conducting time series analysis using the CES data, we worked to standardize the storage of the data across years. Differences previously existed due to different data storage practices and an evolving political landscape of issues to survey about. Additionally, survey administration was annual, but the sample size and questions asked also depended on whether the year asked was a non-election year, midterm election year, or presidential election year. Once the time series data was extracted, we would plot it along with a linear regression plot for each of the different categories of interest. We would also generate the slope of the line of best fit and the correlation coefficient in order to get an understanding of the direction and strength of political trends from 2008 to 2022.

Raw polling data for the 2024 presidential election was difficult to access as companies want to keep their proprietary methods confidential. However, we were able to reference poll results from IPSOS, Pew Research, and CNN and draw connections between behavior leading up to the 2024 election and observed trends from the CES data.

Results:



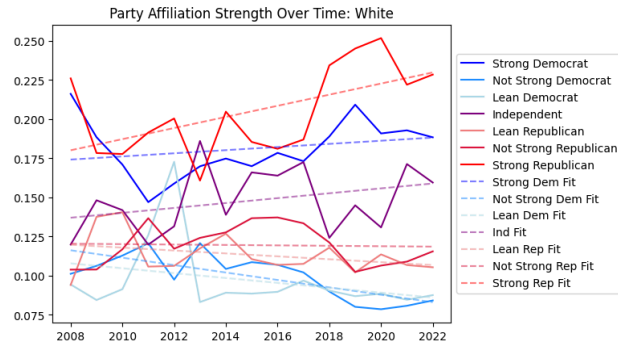
The first category we examined was self-reported party affiliation. We can see from Figure 1 that the proportion of the population that identifies as Democrat is displaying a moderate negative correlation with time whereas the proportion of Republicans and Independents has a moderately positive correlation.



To uncover potential trends in political polarization, we also investigated the more granular party affiliation strength results. What we discovered is that Strong Democrats stay constant on average over time (despite the overall democrat proportion decreasing) and Strong Republicans and Independent proportions increase over time, while the lean and not strong categories for both parties decline over time. This result provides evidence for increased polarization as people tend to gravitate toward the extremes of their party or the dead-center, and are less likely to take moderate positions

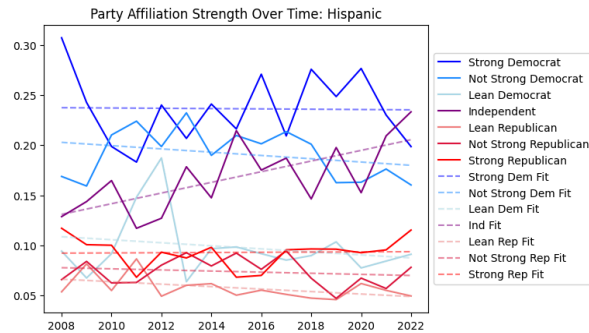
within their party.

Party Affiliation Strength Regression Statistics: White



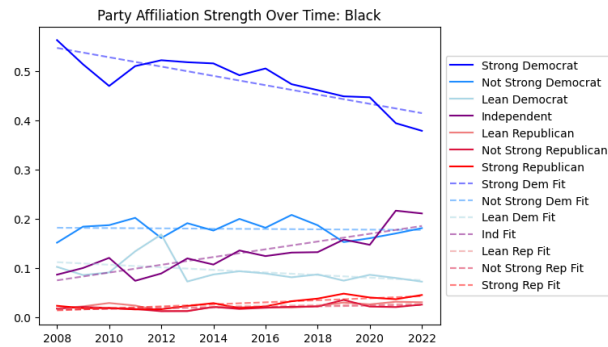
	Slope (m)	Correlation (r)
Strong Democrat	0.001	0.2488
Not Strong Democrat	-0.00237	-0.75005
Lean Democrat	-0.00156	-0.29876
Independent	0.00156	0.33334
Lean Republican	-0.00093	-0.32105
Not Strong Republican	-0.00013	-0.04649
Strong Republican	0.00355	0.57084

Party Affiliation Strength Regression Statistics: Hispanic



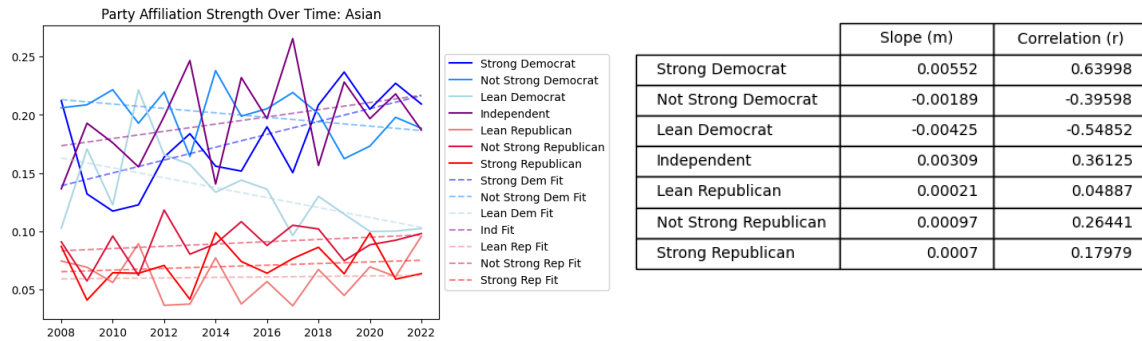
	Slope (m)	Correlation (r)
Strong Democrat	-0.00015	-0.01935
Not Strong Democrat	-0.00164	-0.29655
Lean Democrat	-0.00152	-0.21763
Independent	0.00533	0.68159
Lean Republican	-0.00123	-0.46647
Not Strong Republican	-0.00055	-0.17776
Strong Republican	0.0001	0.03158

Party Affiliation Strength Regression Statistics: Black



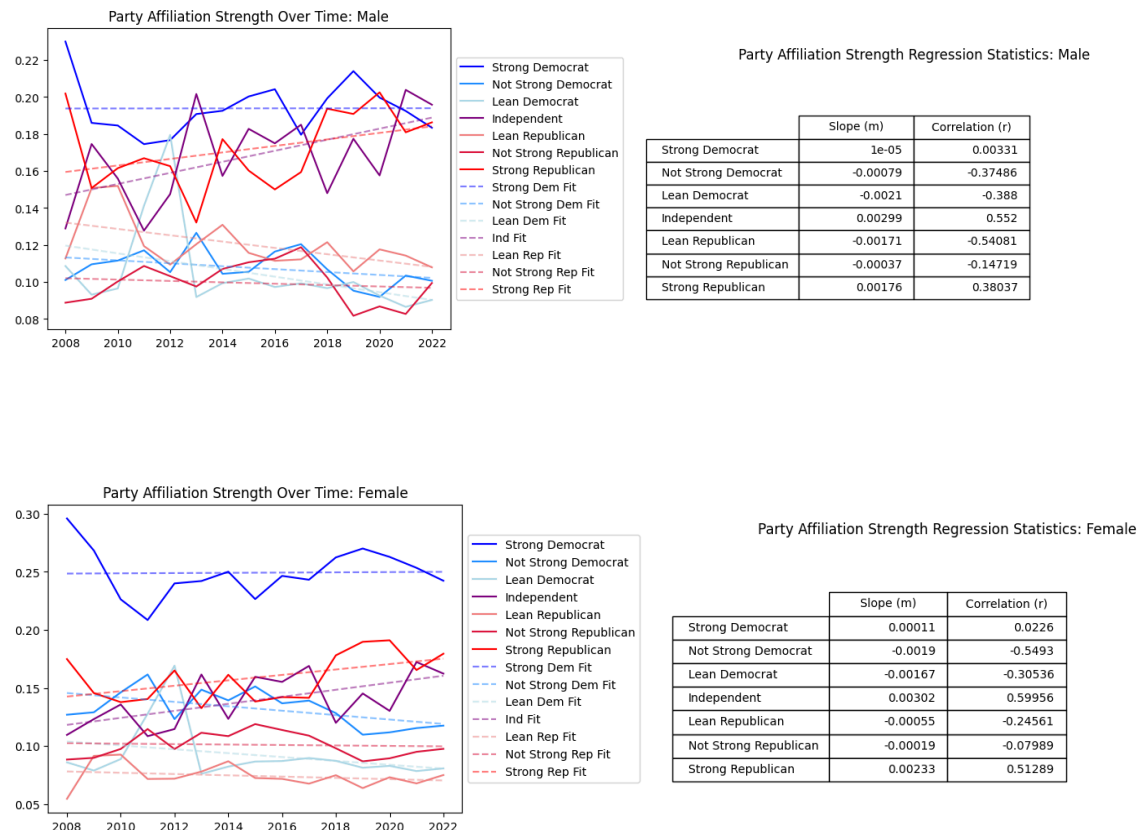
	Slope (m)	Correlation (r)
Strong Democrat	-0.00948	-0.85384
Not Strong Democrat	-0.00032	-0.0811
Lean Democrat	-0.00262	-0.45867
Independent	0.0079	0.8607
Lean Republican	0.00071	0.53699
Not Strong Republican	0.00068	0.55018
Strong Republican	0.00206	0.84311

Party Affiliation Strength Regression Statistics: Asian



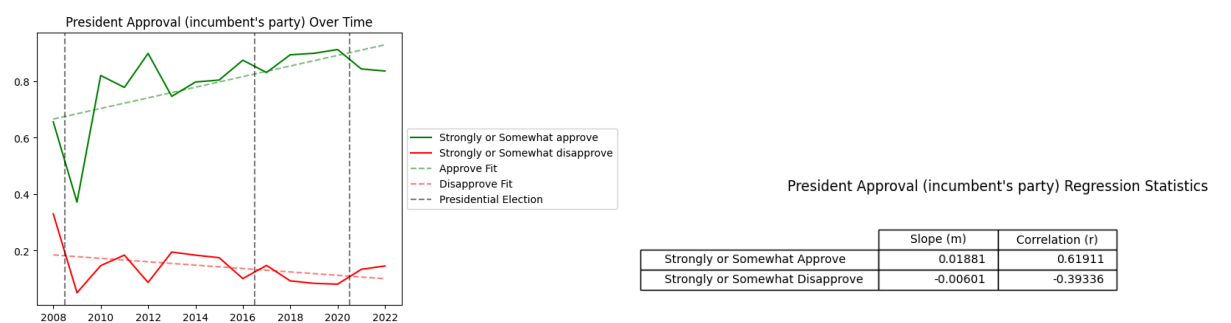
Adding to our analysis on trends in polarization over time, we wanted to see if these trends indicating increased polarization overall varied by racial group. Here, we did independent regressions for four of the main racial groups people reported as describing them best: White, Hispanic, Black, and Asian. For white people, the Strong Democrats stayed constant, Strong Republican and Independents increased, and all of the moderate partisan options decreased, similarly to the overall population. This is intuitive given that White people were the largest demographic group represented in the survey. For Hispanic Americans, they reported a slight decrease in every category except Strong Republicans which stayed constant, and Independents, which increased. This evidence shows that Hispanic people do not exhibit evidence of becoming more polarized since 2008. For Asian Americans, they exhibited an increase in Strong Democrat and Independent percentages, a decrease in the moderate Democrat categories, a slight increase in the moderate Republican categories, and relatively no trend in the Strong Republican percentage. Thus, there is evidence that left-leaning Asian Americans became more polarized, but less so for right-leaning Asian Americans. Also, seeing that no Asian American republican category decreased and Independents increased as well, Asian people tended to become more Republican overall since 2008.

Finally, for Black Americans, they exhibited a decrease in all three Democratic categories, with the sharpest decline in the Strong Democrat category. The Independent and Strong Republican percentages increased and the moderate republican categories stayed fairly constant. As we can see, the evidence of polarization varies among the racial makeup of the American electorate.

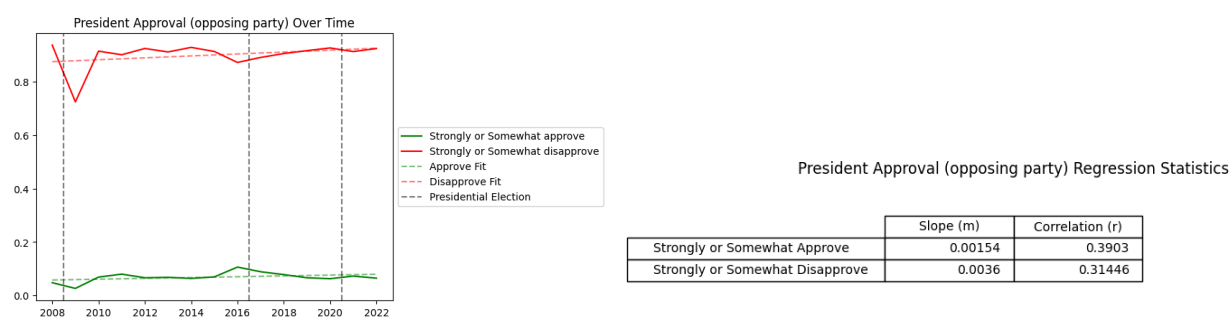


We also broke down the polarization analysis by gender. Note that the gender is self reported so it could include transgender individuals. Non-binary/other responses were not included for these plots because they were not included in the CES survey as options for the entire time and when they were, they tended to have small sample sizes. We can see that both genders were fairly constant for Strong Democrat, increased for Independent and Strong Republican, and decreased for all of the moderate groups.

Thus, there is evidence that regardless of gender, people polarized to the far-right or dead-center, and away from moderate partisan viewpoints.



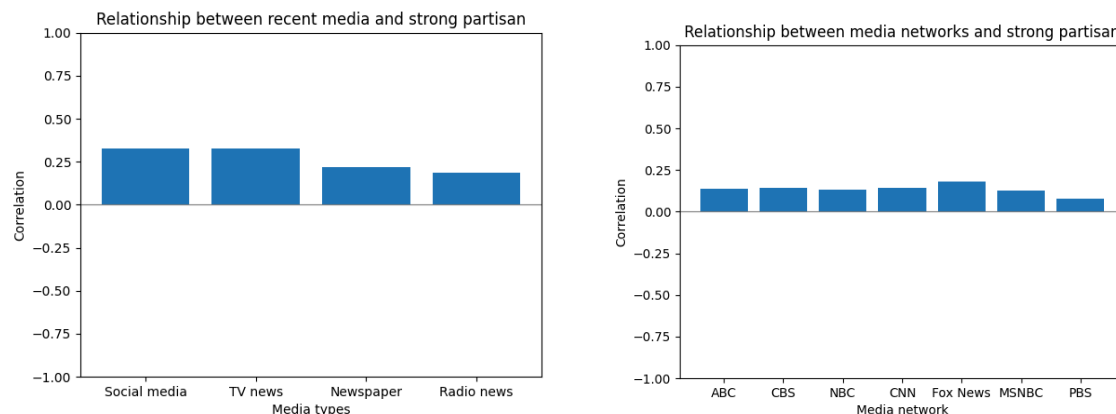
First we examined data on approval ratings for the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government and observed no significant trends. However, we hypothesized that more significant results could be garnered by grouping by political leaning and observing how that impacted approval ratings. Looking at Figure 3, we can see that when we partition the sample to only respondents that identify as members of the incumbent president's party, over time one is more likely to approve of the incumbent and less likely to disapprove. This result also provides evidence of increased polarization and party conformity. This trend is fairly consistent across the Obama and Trump administrations, but the trend does not hold thus far for the Biden administration.



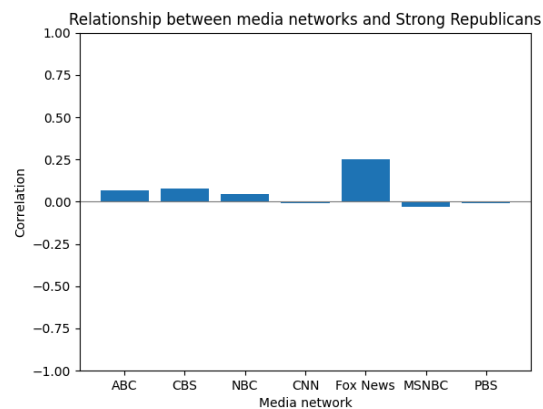
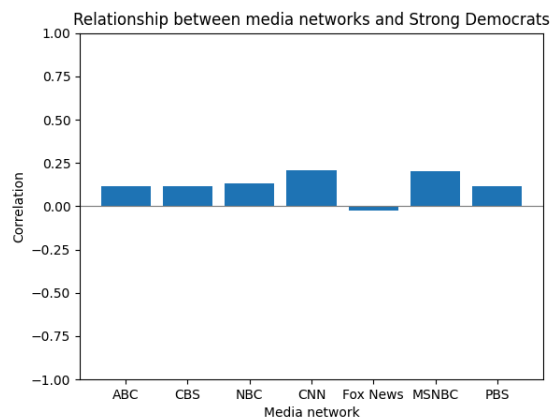
We also investigated presidential approval ratings among the opposing party of the incumbent president. Predictably, there were substantially higher ratings of disapproval than approval. Both values had a weak positive correlation with time,

meaning that people of the opposing party were both more likely to approve and disapprove of the opposing party's president, but with disapproval rising 3 times faster. Combining these results indicates that the members of the opposite party of the president have tended to be more engaged over the 2008 to 2022 timespan, seeing that they are more likely to report their approval or disapproval instead of clicking "not sure". But, the more than twice as steep regression slope for disapproval indicates that as these people tend to engage more, they also tend to exhibit the polarization of disapproving of the opposite party.

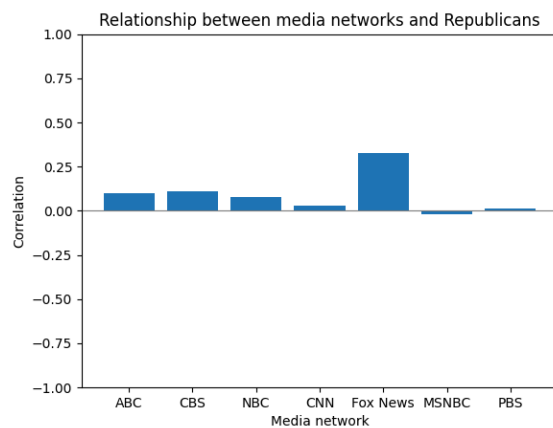
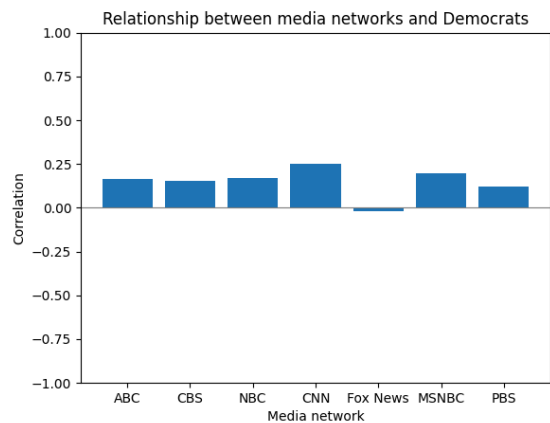
Next, we investigated correlations between Americans' media consumption patterns and self-reported partisanship.



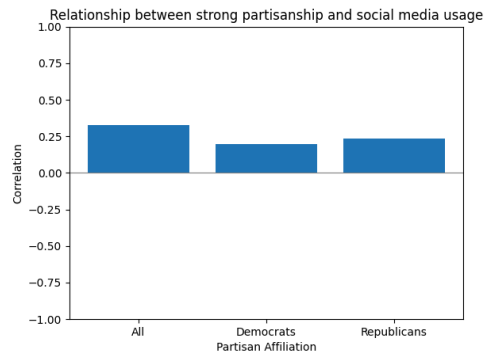
In the first graph, we have a box plot representing the correlations between an indicator variable on whether or not someone consumed one of four categories of media in the last 24 hours and them self-identifying as a strong partisan (Republican or Democrat). All four types exhibit weak positive correlations. On the right, we instead plot the correlations between watching certain media networks and being a strong partisan. All of the seven networks surveyed had weak positive correlations with partisanship. We hypothesized that we would see stronger, more meaningful trends by dividing by party.



We can see from the above plots that six of the seven networks had a larger positive correlation with being a strong Democrat, except for Fox News which had a negligible correlation. On the other hand, only Fox News had a positive correlation with being a strong Republican, while the other six were negligible correlations. These results align with Fox News' reputation of being right-leaning, and the reputations of some other networks, such as MSNBC and CNN to be more left-leaning.



When removing the strong requirement and just plotting correlations with just identifying as a member of either party, very similar distributions hold. Notably, the first three networks jump for both parties, demonstrating that watching ABC, CBS, and NBC is weakly correlated to identifying as a moderate.

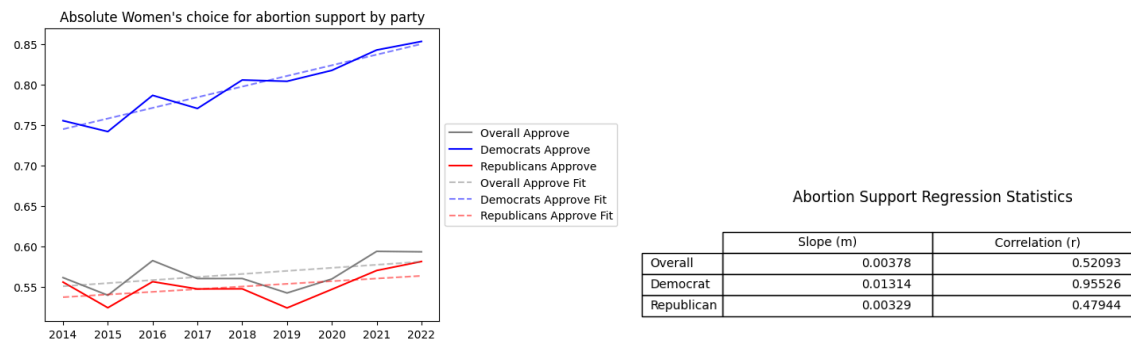


Concerning social media usage, the above figure plots the correlation between interacting with political content within the last 24 hours. We observed that there is a positive correlation between these two variables in the overall population, Democrats, and Republicans.

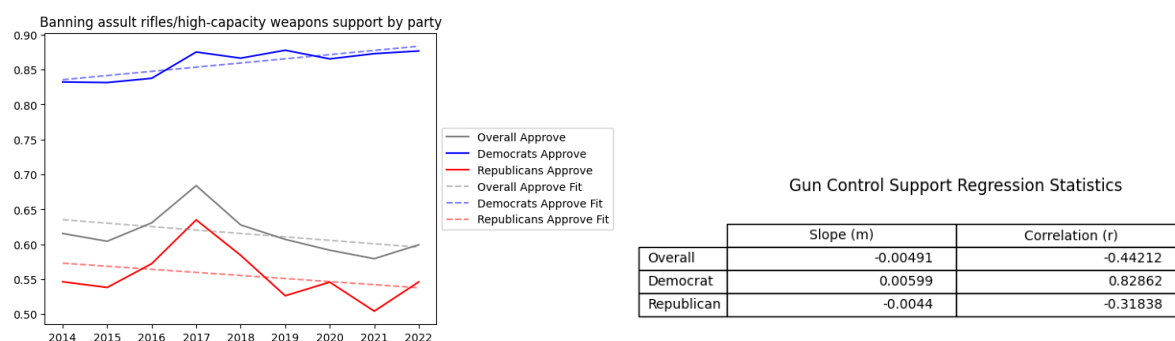
We noticed that all of the correlations in media consumption and partisanship were fairly weak. One hypothesis for this behavior is that when the CES data asks about media intake in the last 24 hours, it introduces more noise into that categorical variable. Alternative phrasing, such as consuming a particular type of media “regularly” may allow the patterns we identified to be demonstrated with stronger correlations in the data. We are also interested in seeing what trends there are to extract about different media networks, such as other right-leaning channels like Newsmax, sources of online media articles, and newer media sources as a whole like podcasts. Unfortunately, none of these were included in the CES data and seeing that some are new, it would be difficult to conduct time series analysis in some of these areas, however it is certainly an area that further work can be done in.

For the third main category of political polarization research, we looked at how opinions on major issues changed over time among the overall population, Democrats and Republicans. These issues generally had a grid of different statements respondents

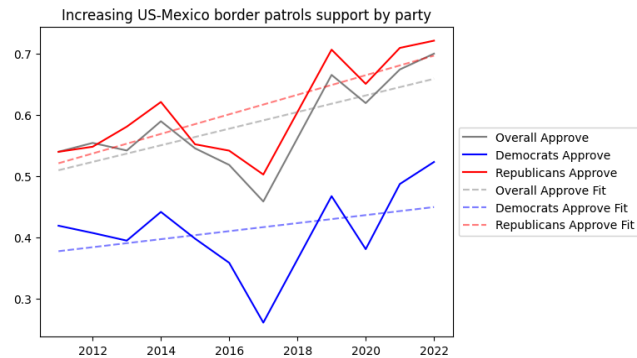
could say they support or oppose, but for clarity we chose one question that was asked consistently for years and adequately summarized the population's evolution of opinions about the issue.



Here, we have a time series plot of the support for women having complete freedom to choose whether or not to have an abortion. We can see that while the overall population and even Republicans' support for absolute freedom of choice has increased on average since 2014, Democrats' support has increased at a roughly 3.5 times higher rate than both other groups. It's worth noting that the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization Supreme Court case came out in June 2022, so a few months before the most recently published CES survey was conducted. Even though this case drastically changed the state of abortion access in the United States by eliminating abortion protections guaranteed since 1973 by Roe v. Wade, there was no drastic deviation from the trends in any group seen in 2022.



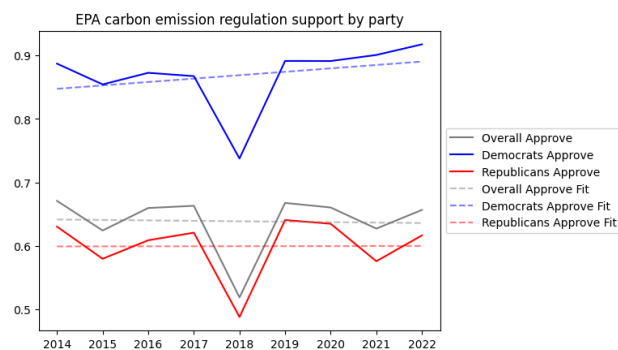
Regarding the issue of gun control, we looked at trends in the response to a question asking support for a ban on “assault rifles” or “high-capacity weapons” (phrasing dependent on the year). Since 2014, we can see that Democratic support for such a ban has increased, while support among the overall population and Republicans has decreased.



Increased Border Patrol Support Regression Statistics

	Slope (m)	Correlation (r)
Overall	0.01357	0.68221
Democrat	0.00655	0.35015
Republican	0.01598	0.75791

Next, we observed trends in support for increasing patrols of the United States’ southern border with Mexico. We can see that since 2011, support for this has tended to increase, but it has increased about 2.5 times faster for Republicans than for Democrats.



EPA Carbon Emission Regulation Support Regression Statistics

	Slope (m)	Correlation (r)
Overall	-0.0007	-0.03971
Democrat	0.00537	0.27912
Republican	9e-05	0.00492

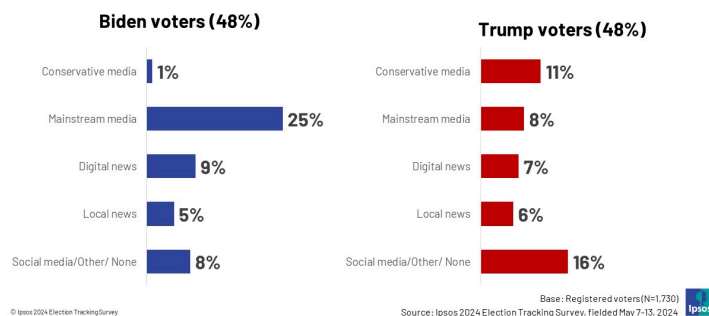
Finally, we looked at support for the EPA regulating carbon emissions. Notably, for all three groups there was no consistent change from 2014 to 2022. So to summarize our analysis of major political issues, for abortion, gun control, and border

security there was evidence of increased polarization, but there was not evidence of increased polarization over environmental issues. However, for every issue the overall population approval was in between the Democrat and Republican approval lines, and there were occasional shifts in all three categories, like in 2018 for carbon emissions. These shifts could be explained by current events at the time, news coverage, survey bias, or a combination of these factors.

After finishing our analysis of the CES historical data, we wanted to tie our results into the upcoming 2024 presidential election. First we looked at results from IPSOS on May 21, 2024(11).

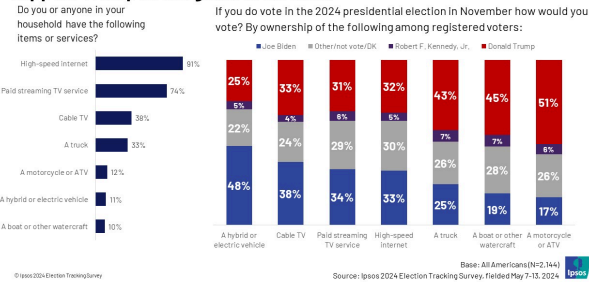
Biden, Trump voters vary widely by news source

Among registered voters, primary news source by combined ballot preference

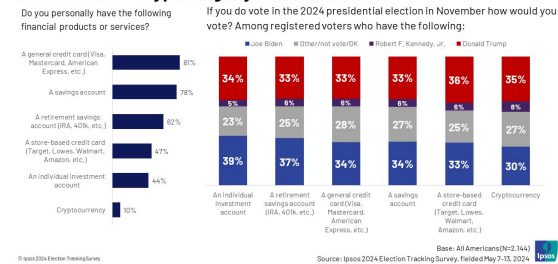


Similarly to our results on media consumption, there are significant differences in how supporters of Biden and Trump access their news. Biden supporters' have a strong tendency to use mainstream media sources, whereas Trump supporters tend to use social media and conservative media sources.

Registered voters who own a motorcycle, boat, truck more likely to support Trump in the general election



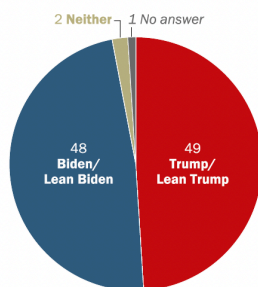
Registered voters with investment, retirement accounts more likely to vote Biden – Crypto slightly more for RFK Jr.



Interestingly enough, there are also observable correlations between vehicle choice and investment decisions versus which presidential candidate one is supporting. Trump support is correlated to owning a motorcycle, boat, and truck, whereas Biden supporters correlate with owning a hybrid or electric vehicle. Further, Biden supporters tend to more commonly have investment and retirement accounts while Trump supporters tend to have store-based credit cards and cryptocurrency. Obviously there are a lot of confounding variables with these correlations such as education level and where these people tend to live, but it is interesting to see how political preferences correlate with other life decisions.

In 2020 rematch, nearly identical shares of voters favor Trump and Biden

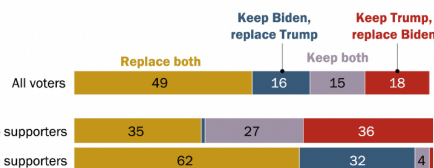
% of registered voters who would vote for ___ if the 2024 presidential election were held today



Note: Based on registered voters.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 8-14, 2024.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

About half of voters would like to see both Biden and Trump replaced on the 2024 ballot

% of voters who say that, if they had the ability to decide the major party candidates for the 2024 presidential election, they would ...



Note: Based on registered voters. No answer responses are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 8-14, 2024.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Next, we looked at results from Pew Research Center on voter's opinions of the 2024 presidential race from April 24, 2024(11). In a matchup between Biden and Trump,

97% of the candidates were confident enough to pick between the two. However, there was a striking proportion of respondents that supported replacing both party candidates. While it is unsurprising that supporters of one candidate would not support the opposing side, the willingness of 49% of voters to say they want to remove both candidates shows that despite the rise in partisanship, it is not causing the electorate to blindly support their party's candidate.

Finally, we were interested in seeing how division in each party was manifesting in the 2024 race and what the impact of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. running as an independent was in the race. According to polling data from CNN published on April 28, 2024, "Kennedy draws 13% each from supporters of Biden and Trump," so his presence does not seem to be having a disproportionate impact on either party(12). Rather, he is just serving as an outlet for those that indicated their dissatisfaction with the main two candidates, or who think Kennedy's views more closely align with theirs. Also, the data reveals that the Republican electorate is more quickly coalescing behind Trump than the Democratic electorate is behind Biden, seeing that " 92% of Republicans call Trump's time in office a success, while just 73% of Democrats say Biden's has been a success so far"(12). While it is common for approval of a presidency to increase as time passes from its conclusion, and for Democrats to take longer to back their candidate over the course of the election, garnering as much support and turnout from their own party as possible will be crucial for both candidates in their campaigns to win a second term.

Discussion:

Consistent with other research and public opinion, our analysis revealed evidence that the US electorate has grown more polarized from 2008 from 2022. By

working with the large representative sample of the Cooperative Election Study, the trends we observed in the sample can be generalized to the American public.

To summarize our observations, in the general population there was evidence of increased polarization based on the changes in self-identified partisan alignment over the time frame, with moderate identifications trending downward and identifying as a Strong Republican or Independent trending upward. We broke up the participants by race and gender, and observed some variance in the trends. White Americans generally followed the trend for the overall population, whereas Hispanic, Black, and Asian Americans exhibited unique behavior. However, breaking apart by gender did not cause a significant difference in the trends of political identification.

Next, we looked at presidential approval ratings. We observed evidence of polarization here too, seeing that since 2008, Americans of the same party as the president have become more likely to approve and less likely to disapprove of their performance. Furthermore, looking at the approval ratings of the opposing party, we saw evidence of increased political engagement with less people being uncertain about the President's performance, and evidence of polarization with the disapproval rate rising higher than the approval rate.

It is commonly understood that there is a relationship between media consumption and political views, so we wanted to detail correlations between types of media consumption and partisanship as well. We identified positive correlations between consuming different types of media, as well as all seven major networks, with being a strong partisan. Furthermore, when breaking up by party, there were distinct differences in the distributions of which network people engaged with, regardless of

whether they were a strong partisan or not. Finally, using social media for political purposes also proved to have a positive correlation with being a strong partisan.

Our third category of analysis was looking at the relationship between major political issues and party identities. We plotted regressions for Democrat, Republican, and Overall opinions on abortion, gun control, border security, and environmental issues. All four issues had noticeable gaps in opinion in Democrats versus Republicans. Abortion, gun control, and border security all showed that there was an increasing gap between Democrat and Republican opinions in recent history, while environmental opinions did not have significant changes in trends.

Finally, to tie in our research with the 2024 presidential election, we looked at publicized results from IPSOS, Pew Research Center and CNN. We observed similar evidence of polarization in terms of the financial behaviors of Trump and Biden supporters and their media consumption patterns. However, strong dissatisfaction with both candidates running again dampens our estimate of the polarization of the electorate, indicating citizen's ability to think critically and decline to support a candidate of the same political ideology.

By using limited survey data, our analysis was limited to discovering correlations between different variables instead of drawing any set of causal conclusions. For example, when seeing evidence of polarization on three of four main political issues, we cannot track if people are changing their opinions based on their party's beliefs, are changing their party identification based on their opinions on the issues, or a mixture of factors. Furthermore, the CES questionnaire was limited in the nuance of some of the questions it asked, due to the sheer volume of other questions asked about in the

survey. Therefore, further research could definitely be done, potentially using treatments and other experimental methods, to gain a more rigorous understanding of the causes and effects of polarization.

It is important to understand trends in political polarization to promote engagement while maintaining civility in society. Especially as divisive social and policy issues continue to impact daily life, Americans need to strike the proper balance of advocating for their views while maintaining national unity. We believe that with polarization becoming more extreme, we are moving in the wrong direction as a nation. This is evidenced by increasing gridlock in Congress hindering governance, as well as mounting hostilities at the local level. Seeing the correlation between media consumption and polarization, one way to combat this issue is to consume balanced media to understand multiple perspectives on issues. Doing this requires a conscious effort be made by individuals. Furthermore, being open minded to interacting with those on the other side of the aisle will foster productive debate and humanize those that disagree with you. In conclusion, we have seen a rise in political polarization since 2008, and it is related to media consumption and our views on major issues. To maintain the strength of the United States, it is important to understand this trend and limit its ability to disrupt our political area.

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Appendix:

GitHub Repository: <https://github.com/jdowns4317/PS120>

