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How partisan affect shapes citizens' perception of the political world*

Dalston G. Ward[a], Margit Tavits[b,*]

[a] ETH Zürich, Switzerland
[b] Washington University in St. Louis, United States

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ABSTRACT

We explore how partisan affect shapes citizens' views of party ideology and political competition. We argue that voters' affective ties to parties (both positive and negative) lead them to perceive the ideological positions of those parties as more extreme. Further, when voters are "affectively polarized," i.e., they strongly like some parties and dislike others, they are more likely to view politics as high stakes competition, where ideological polarization is rampant, participation is crucial, and electoral outcomes are highly consequential. Using cross-national survey data covering 43 elections in 34 countries, we show that partisan affect indeed impacts perceptions of party ideology and that affective polarization alters beliefs about the nature of political competition.

1. Introduction

Political discourse in Western democracies has become increasingly divisive. Voters and pundits accuse their political opponents of having a radical vision, express fear for the future under opposition rule, and find it hard to accept electoral defeat. The highly charged Brexit campaign in the UK and an effort to overturn the result, the divisive Austrian presidential election and its re-run, the rowdy and violent protests against former president Gonzales in Spain, and the increasingly ugly discourse surrounding recent elections in the US together with highly publicized recount efforts are just some examples that reveal perceptions of intense, polarized, and hostile political competition. Such voter perceptions are potentially paralyzing because they preclude the compromise, communication, and cooperation necessary for successful government in any democracy.

Why then do some people perceive opponents as ideologically extreme, party systems as polarized, elections as high stakes, and who governs as existentially consequential? We explore these questions cross-nationally and attribute such perceptions to affect-based partisan identities that influence voters' understanding of party positions as well as the intensity of political competition. Specifically, we argue that citizens who develop a strong affinity for or against a party will come to hold extreme views of that party's ideological position. They are also more likely to perceive of politics as an intense, high-stakes group conflict, which is reflected in increased levels of electoral participation and the perception of party competition as ideologically polarized, vote choice as decisive, and who governs as gravely consequential. These effects occur because partisan affect functions as a group-based identity, generating the psychological need to affirm the distinctiveness of one's party, to protect and advance its status, and to interpret its electoral failures and successes as personal (Brewer, 1999; Huddy et al., 2015; Mason, 2015; Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

We find support for our argument using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES, 2015), which covers a diverse set of parties and voters from 34 countries. Our analysis confirms that affective ties to parties are associated with perceptual biases about party ideology and with beliefs about the nature of political competition. We find that citizens who express strong positive or negative affinity toward a party are more likely to place that party at an extreme ideological position. We further find that affectively polarized individuals (i.e., those who strongly like some parties and dislike others) view democratic competition as intense and high-stakes and that they turn out at higher rates. The breadth of the sample and reliability of our findings give us confidence that the results are not specific to any given country or type of party, but rather, that perceptual biases stemming from partisan affect are a general feature of democratic competition.

Our study makes several important contributions. First, the notions of “partisan affect” and “expressive partisanship” have primarily been

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: dalston.ward@gess.ethz.ch (D.G. Ward), tavits@wustl.edu (M. Tavits).

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studied in the two-party context of the U.S.[1] With evidence from 34 countries, we provide a systematic cross-national analysis of affect-based partisanship, thereby significantly increasing the empirical breadth of this line of research and the generalizability of party affect as a useful concept for understanding political behavior. Focusing on the multi-party context also helps advance our theoretical understanding of partisan affect. In a two-party system, positive affect for one party presumes negative affect for the other, which does not allow for disentangling their independent effects. Multi-party systems allow focusing on each type of affect separately: we show that positive (negative) affect impacts political beliefs and behavior, even in the absence of negative (positive) affect for another party. Further, we also highlight that when both types of affect are present, the consequences of affect-based partisanship are magnified.

Second, our findings are particularly relevant for understanding the sources of voter perceptions of party ideology. Prior work has largely focused on how parties' ideological and policy decisions affect these perceptions (Adams et al., 2014; Adams et al., 2016; Dahlberg, 2009; Fortunato and Adams, 2015; Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013; van der Brug, 1999; Somer-Topcu, 2017; Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu, 2017) or on how voters adjust their perceptions of party ideology to match their own preferences (Calvo et al., 2014; Drummond, 2011; Merrill et al., 2001; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Grand and Tiemann, 2013). Our study expands the theoretical and empirical scope of this literature by considering how partisan affect, a voter-level trait, systematically impacts these perceptions. While much of the literature suggests great potential for party agency in impacting perceptions, our results serve as a counterweight, implying that powerful partisan identities may prevent voters from absorbing and acting on new cues sent by parties. In light of our findings, it is not surprising that voters do not respond to party position changes as a recent prominent study reports (Adams et al., 2011).

Last, but not least, we contribute to the study of partisanship in comparative politics, where partisanship is primarily understood in rational terms: it reflects one's preferences on the ideological scale (e.g., Adams, 2012; Downs, 1957). Furthermore, partisanship is seen as a consequence of various group identities: class, ethnicity, region, religion, etc. (Dalton, 2014; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). By explicitly recognizing that partisanship includes an affective component (see also Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002; Lupu, 2013), our findings imply that rather than being a reflection of some other group identity, partisanship itself can (at least in some cases) become such an identity. And when it does, it increases the intensity of the partisan's engagement with the political world.

2. Party affect as social identity

Prior work identifies two types of partisanship: instrumental and expressive (see, e.g., Bankert et al., 2017, for a review). The former is in line with the classical spatial theory of voting and refers to individual's party preference that is based on careful consideration of party performance and ideological/policy congruence. Expressive partisanship, on the other hand, is an emotional, affect-based attachment to a party, resembling enduring social identity (Huddy and Bankert, 2017; Huddy et al., 2018; Mason, 2015; Petersen et al., 2015). We focus on affective ties, and our goal is to determine whether, and if so to what extent, affect-based attachment to parties colors people's views of political competition.

We start from the premise that partisanship can become the basis for a social identity just as ethnicity, gender, class, or any other group (Campbell et al., 1960; Deaux et al., 1995; Greene, 1999, 2004). Social identity is largely affect-based (Tajfel, 1978) and an emotional connection to a party therefore offers a particularly fertile ground for identity formation.[2] Furthermore, partisanship presents a clear in-group and out-group (Huddy, 2001), and parties are continually in conflict with one another (for control of the government), which is known to increase the salience of identities (Mason, 2015; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). We build on social identity theory to argue that the strength of party affect—this emotional connection to a party—has consequences for partisans' perception of political competition. We first focus on affect (positive or negative) for a *single* party and argue that such affect will impact perceptions of party ideology. This results from a psychological need to positively (negatively) distinguish the ingroup (outgroup) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986). We then consider the consequences of affective polarization (i.e., a situation where positive affect toward some parties combines with negative affect toward others), which is often a natural part of identity formation. In addition to the need to distinguish between groups, social identity theory implies that affective polarization motivates taking action in support of the group (Brewer, 1999; Ethier and Deaux, 1994; Huddy, 2001) and to viewing group success and failure as personal (Huddy et al., 2015; Mason, 2015). Applying this to partisanship, we argue that affective polarization results in viewing politics through the lens of group conflict and thereby raises the perceived stakes of electoral competition. We elaborate on each part of this argument in turn.

2.1. Positive distinction and perceptions of ideology

One of the key findings of social identity theory is that group members form beliefs in a way that affirms the positive distinction of the ingroup (Brewer, 1999; Huddy et al., 2015; Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986; Westfall et al., 2015). In the context of electoral politics, this implies that partisan affect influences individuals' beliefs about their party, including their perceptions of its ideology. One way in which individuals can positively distinguish their party is to exaggerate its ideological purity, which is reflected in perceiving the party as ideologically extreme in the partisan's preferred direction. In line with this view, prior research argues that extreme positions represent "clear, strong stands" (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989, 98), and allow for the maintenance of doctrinal purity and consistency (Hinich and Munger, 1994). Extreme ideological placement of their preferred party, thus, allows the partisan to affirm the value and quality of that party, positively setting it apart.

Social identities also impact perceptions of outgroups, usually in the direction of stereotyping, vilification, and prejudice. In the context of party competition and affect, a way to negatively distinguish the outgroup (i.e., low affect party) is to view it as extreme in the *opposite* direction. This helps make ideological differences with that party more stark, allows denigrating the outgroup (Brewer, 1999) and enables discounting their positions as neither mainstream nor reasonable. The above argument can be summarized into our first hypothesis:

Perceived Extremism Hypothesis (H1). The stronger the positive or negative affect toward a party, the more extreme the perception of its

[1] For exceptions see Bankert et al. (2017), Dinas et al. (2016) and Westwood et al. (2018).

[2] Some of the earlier literature treats party affect and partisan social identity as distinct aspects of partisanship (see, e.g., Bartle and Bellucci, 2009; Greene, 1999, 2004). However, these studies also recognize that the two aspects are correlated. More recent work on expressive partisanship takes a step further and views affect and identity as the essence of such partisanship: expressive partisanship is an enduring identity that is based on emotional and affective ties to the party (Huddy and Bankert, 2017). To further underline their interrelatedness, Petersen et al. (2015) show that the types of biases that partisan social identity produces (e.g., Greene, 1999, 2002) are caused by the affect that partisan identifiers feel toward their partisan in-group (see also Huddy et al., 2018; Mason, 2015). Our approach of treating party affect as a manifestation of partisan identity strength directly borrows from this recent work on expressive partisanship.

ideology.

Note that in a two-party system, positive affect for one party presumes negative affect for the other, which does not allow disentangling their independent effects. We are primarily interested in multi-party contexts, which allow for focusing on each type of affect separately: we can see whether positive (negative) affect impacts political beliefs and behavior, even in the absence of negative (positive) affect for another party. Additionally, citizens in these contexts are known to have strong negative and positive affective ties with *multiple* parties (Garry, 2007). In the case of strong positive affect for multiple parties, we would expect citizens to want to differentiate their preferred parties from the others, but to the extent that the preferred parties are equally adored, they would not be differentiated from one another. A similar mechanism would occur with those parties that are strongly disliked. Finally, in multiparty systems, there may be parties which an individual neither strongly likes nor strongly dislikes. According to our theory, there is no motivation for the individual to differentiate these parties (i.e., form strongly biased beliefs about them), and hence, perceptions of ideology should be relatively moderate.

The perceptual effects we propose differ from voters' known tendency to assimilate perceptions of parties they support toward their own position and to contrast perceptions of parties they oppose away from their own position (see, e.g. Calvo et al., 2014; Merrill et al., 2001; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Grand and Tiemann, 2013). These tendencies—together known as projection effects—help explain the distance between a voter's self-perception and party perceptions. In contrast, our argument explains perceptions of extremism, which do not perfectly align with perceived voter-party distances. Additionally, by focusing on emotional connections between voters and parties, we differentiate our explanation from projection effects, which consider voters to be supporters or opponents of parties based on their vote choice in the most recent election (see, e.g. Merrill et al., 2001). Finally, our argument and projection effects start from different theoretical origins. We found our predictions in social identity theory, whereas projection effects depart from a Downsian spatial-utility maximization framework and bring in cognitive dissonance theory to explain perception formation (see Grand and Tiemann, 2013, p. 499). These differences highlight our argument's value for understanding ideological perceptions. Nevertheless, as projection effects offer an additional explanation of ideological perceptions, we take multiple steps in the empirical analysis to account for them.

2.2. Partisan affect aggregated: affective polarization

While the Perceived Extremism Hypothesis explicitly focused on the consequences of affect (positive or negative) for a *single* party, an individual can simultaneously develop strong *positive* affect for one party and strong *negative* affect for another. As we stated above, this is almost automatically true in two-party systems, such as the U.S., and is referred to as "affective polarization" (Iyengar et al., 2012; Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016). In the context of multi-party systems, affective polarization implies that the individual hates at least one party while he or she loves at least one other, with the hated party serving as both a contrast and a threat to the preferred party.

Building on the arguments that we made above, an affectively polarized individual will have a strong desire to positively differentiate the party with high affect from the one with low affect, leading to perceptions of ideological extremity for both parties. This, in turn, implies that when the perceptions of individual party positions are aggregated, the affectively polarized individual will perceive the resulting party competition as highly ideologically polarized. In systems with multiple parties, where several parties can be both strongly liked and strongly disliked, this effect can be quite large, leading to perceptions of strong ideological polarization, despite the fact that there may actually be little polarization among elites. We can summarize this argument into our second hypothesis:

Perceived Polarization Hypothesis (H2). The more affectively polarized the individual, the more likely he or she is to perceive the party system as ideologically polarized.

2.3. Affective polarization and perceptions of party competition

In addition to perceptions of party positions, social identity theory also provides additional implications about the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of affective polarization. Specifically, according to the theory, strong social identity leads to (1) the desire to protect and advance one's group status (Brewer, 1999; Ethier and Deaux, 1994; Huddy, 2001), and (2) the internalization of group failures and successes as personal (Huddy et al., 2015; Mason, 2015).

In the context of partisanship, this implies that the strong party identity that characterizes affectively polarized individuals motivates people to protect and advance the status of their party.[3] According to social identity theory, this desire is a response to (perceived) threats posed by outgroups, as outgroup success decreases the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup (Huddy, 2001). For affectively polarized voters, a likely marker of group status is electoral success: they desire for their party to win and for the other party to lose. As a result, electoral competition becomes seen through the lens of intense group conflict over group status, and actions which help achieve electoral success are therefore perceived as crucial.

Internalization of identity, in turn, leads group members to view their party's accomplishments and failures as personal (Huddy et al., 2015; Mason, 2015). That is, for affectively polarized voters, their preferred party's electoral victory (and the despised party's loss) becomes their own personal triumph. By the same token, the preferred party's electoral loss becomes seen as a personal failure. This further implies that, for an affectively polarized voter, elections will become more important—there is simply more at stake to them personally.

Both of these beliefs combined will then impact perceptions of the importance of the process and the outcomes of electoral competition. By the process, we refer to partisan political participation, the simplest form of which is the act of voting. Because they see the party as constantly under threat and political action as the best method to defend the party, affectively polarized individuals are likely to view participation as more important and more meaningful than their non-polarized counterparts (cf. Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998). These views should be reflected in both individuals' attitudes and behavior. That is, affectively polarized individuals should not only value electoral participation, but also, they should be more likely to participate themselves (see Greene, 2004), thereby helping their preferred party succeed. These arguments lead to the following testable hypotheses:

Process Importance Hypothesis (H3). The more affectively polarized the individual, the more likely he or she is to place great importance on voting.

Increased Participation Hypothesis (H4). The more affectively polarized the individual, the more likely he or she is to vote in elections.

Finally, the arguments above further suggest that, compared to other voters, affectively polarized individuals are also likely to place heightened importance on the electoral *outcomes*. That is, they are likely to perceive that who wins elections and gains control of the government matters more, because if their party wins then that means the individual has personally succeeded, whereas if their party loses, the individual experiences personal failure (see also Huddy et al., 2015;

[3] Note that affective polarization implies a stronger partisan identity than positive (or negative) affect toward a single party alone. The simultaneous presence of an ingroup and an outgroup means that the positive emotional ties toward the former are added to the negative ties toward the latter.

Mason, 2015).[4] This expectation can be summarized in our final hypothesis:

Outcome Importance Hypothesis (H5). The more affectively polarized the individual, the more likely he or she is to place great importance on election outcomes.

Affectively polarized individuals thus see their political system differently than unpolarized individuals in several important ways, all of them tied to the role of party affect in turning electoral competition into intense group competition. We now turn to analyzing our predictions about the consequences of partisan affect for ideological perceptions and the stakes of political competition.

3. Research design

Our theoretical argument posits a relationship between partisan affect and an individual's perceptions of electoral competition. We test the key implications of our argument using data from the third module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES, 2015), a collection of cross-sectional national election studies. The CSES is ideal for our analysis for two reasons. First, the sample we extract covers approximately 34,000 respondents and 230 parties across 43 elections in 34 countries between 2005 and 2011.[5] Included in the range of countries are advanced Western democracies and also newer democracies in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe. Such breadth ensures that we test our theoretical argument across a wide range of political, economic, and institutional contexts, maximizing the generalizability of our results and minimizing the possibility that the findings are due to the idiosyncrasies of any single country, party, or election. Second, the CSES includes questions which directly measure several of our most important theoretical concepts, such as respondents' affective and ideological perceptions of parties as well as their beliefs in the stakes and importance of electoral competition, and turnout behavior. This allows us to minimize the gap between theoretical concept and empirical measurement.

From our CSES sample, we construct datasets which allow us to test the implications of our argument at both the respondent-party dyad and the respondent levels. In our respondent-party dyad dataset, respondents enter the data once for every party in a given election, leading to a total of approximately 210,000 observations. We use this dataset to test the Perceived Extremism Hypothesis, which posits a relationship between partisan affect and perceptions of ideological extremity. The individual level dataset includes only one entry per respondent ($N \approx 34{,}000$). We use it to evaluate our other hypotheses about the relationship between affective polarization and beliefs about the stakes of electoral competition.

4. Analysis I: party affect and perceived extremism

The first analysis tests whether strong affect for or against a party is associated with perceiving a party as ideologically extreme. The dependent variable for this analysis is *Perceived Extremism*, i.e., how extreme on the left-right scale a respondent places a party. This measure is based on the following question "In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place [PARTY] on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?" For each respondent-party, we calculate how far the respondent places that party from the midpoint of the scale (i.e., from 5).[6] As such, the variable takes on integer values from 0 to 5, and higher values indicate more extreme placement of the party.

Party Affect, our independent variable, is measured using respondents' ratings of how much they like or dislike each political party in their country on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 representing strongly liking a party. We see this as a direct measure of party affect: it asks respondents solely to consider whether they like or dislike a party.[7] They are not primed to think about a party's competence or ideological stances, which minimizes the possibility that our independent variable is measuring ideology or valence, rather than affect. Further, because respondents rate every party in their system, we can get a complete picture of their affective ties in a way that a question about party identification does not allow. Finally, because respondents place parties on a scale, they are not limited to a binary choice but can express a variety of views, such as adoration, apathy, and hostility.

We account for several alternative explanations of perceptions of party ideology in our analysis. *Respondent Extremism* controls for respondent's personal ideological stance. It is constructed by folding respondents' self-placement on the 0–10 ideological scale around the midpoint of 5, leading to a variable that ranges from 0 to 5 with larger values indicating more extreme beliefs. We control for personal ideological positioning because prior literature has shown that individuals with extreme ideologies are likely to see more ideological polarization (Westfall et al., 2015) and larger affective differences between parties (Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016).

Naturally, parties' actual ideological positions also impact perceptions of their ideology. Further, it is also possible that the ideological positions adopted by a party influence voters' affect towards the party: as an example, parties that take a clear and decisive ideological stance may experience a bump in affect. For these reasons, we control for *Party Extremism*. This is measured by first calculating the median placement of each party in our dataset, and then calculating the distance of these medians from the midpoint of 5. Again, the variable ranges from 0 to 5 and larger values indicate parties that are typically placed at more extreme positions.

Respondent demographics may also affect perceptions of the political world. We control for four of these: *Age* (in years), *Female* (a binary variable for gender), *Education* (in 9 categories according to CSES coding) and *Political Knowledge* (sum of correct answers to three factual questions about the respondent's political system).

Projection effects, as described above, also have an important impact on perceptions of ideology. To control for these, we include four variables that have been identified as important sources of projection effects. The first three measure respondent vote choice, as several authors in the projection effects literature (e.g. Merrill et al., 2001; Drummond, 2011; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Grand and Tiemann, 2013) highlight these variables.[8] *Reported Party Voter* is based on an item asking respondents which party they voted for in the most election covered by the CSES survey. *Potential Party Voter* is based on a set of similar items. For non-voters, it use responses to an item asking which party they would have supported, had they voted. For voters, we use an item asking respondents for which other parties, if any, they considered

[4] Note that this argument relates to the work on electoral winners and losers, which shows that being in a political majority or minority after the election significantly affects individuals' attitudes toward the performance of the political system (Anderson et al., 2005). That research, however, does not consider the role of party affect and focuses on the effect of losing on perceptions of legitimacy, not on the effect of partisan identity on perceptions of electoral competition. Future work may consider combining these two lines of research.

[5] The set of parties included in the CSES surveys obtained, on average, 96.6% of the vote in the covered election.

[6] The full question wording for all CSES items is available in SI.4.

[7] Recent research has developed a multi-item measure of expressive partisan identity and applied it in three countries (Bankert et al., 2017). We cannot use this measure because it is not available in cross-national surveys. Furthermore, our theoretical focus is on party affect specifically, rather than expressive partisanship more generally. This makes party like/dislike an appropriate measure for our purposes.

[8] Note that we only consider vote choice and intentions for the level—lower house, upper house, or presidential—which is the focus of a given CSES election study. When multiple elections were the focus of a study, we code vote choice using vote intention for the lower house of the legislature.

voting. We measure *Never Party Voter* with responses to items asking respondents for which parties, if any, they would never vote. Finally, Calvo et al. (2014) show that perceptions of party competence also produce projection effects. We account for this with *Most Competent Party*, based on an item asking respondents to indicate which, if any, party they think is best able to address the country's most pressing problem. All four variables are coded 1 for mentioned parties and 0 for all others.

4.1. Modeling strategy

Three considerations inform our modeling decisions. First, the hierarchical nature of the respondent-party dyad data, with observations nested within respondents, parties and elections, requires an approach that allows us to account for baseline differences in the outcome across these groups. Therefore, we fit multi-level linear models with random intercepts at the respondent, party, and election levels. These random intercepts mean that for any given respondent, party, or election, the baseline value of the outcome differs. They also separate within-respondent, within-party, and within-election error from residual error, accounting for unobserved heterogeneity between respondents, parties, and elections due to unmeasured factors.

Second, the empirical implication of the Perceived Extremism Hypothesis is non-linear: both strong positive *and* strong negative affect for a party are expected to predict perceptions of extreme ideology.[9] Thus, we require an approach which allows us to model this curvilinear relationship. We opt for including both *Party Affect* and its squared term (i.e., *Party Affect*^{2}) in our model. This allows the effect of increases in *Party Affect* to vary across levels of affect. Our hypothesis predicts a negative effect for *Party Affect* and a positive effect for *Party Affect*^{2}; in other words, a negative relationship between the *Party Affect* and *Perceived Extremism* for low levels of affect, but a positive relationship for larger values of *Party Affect*. The exact specification of our models is

$$Perceived\ Extremism_{ij} = \gamma_i + \gamma_j + \gamma_k + \beta_1 Party\ Affect_{ij} + \beta_2 Party\ Affect_{ij}^2 + [controls]_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk},$$

where i indexes respondents, j indexes parties, and k indexes elections, the γ's represent the random intercepts, across which we will estimate standard deviations σ_i, σ_j, and σ_k, β_1 and β_2 are the main parameters of interest, *controls* is our set of respondent and party level control variables, and ε_{ijk} represents the error term.

Third, the items used in the projection effects controls were excluded from several of the studies comprising the CSES, meaning that their inclusion reduces sample size. Additionally, if *Party Affect* influences vote choice and perceptions of competence—our projection effects controls—including them in our regression risks biasing our estimates. Consequently, we fit two models: one excluding these controls and one including them. To the extent that our estimates do not change when we add these controls, we can be confident that neither bias from case deletion nor from including post-treatment controls impacts our estimates.

4.2. Results

Table 1 shows coefficient estimates and standard errors from our multi-level linear models, where Model 1 excludes the controls for projection effects while Model 2 includes them. The estimates in both models support our argument: regardless of whether projection effect controls are included, the effect of *Party Affect* is negative, the effect of *Party Affect*^{2} is positive, and both estimates are precisely estimated. The estimates of the control variables are also in line with expectations, increasing our confidence in the model specifications and findings. Importantly, the effects of *Party Affect* do not occur simply because of a respondent's personal views, knowledge of the political system, vote choice, or the ideology of the party, as we account for all of these alternative explanations. Further, as both models include over 250 parties and 35 elections, it is unlikely that any particular context or party is heavily influencing the results; rather, a relationship between intensity of affect for or against a party and perceptions of extremism seem to be a general feature of electoral competition.

Fig. 1 visualizes the relationship between *Party Affect* and *Perceived Extremism* estimated by Model 1. We plot expected values of *Perceived Extremism* across the entire range of *Party Affect*, holding all controls constant at their dataset mean (or median for *Female*), with a shaded region representing a 99% confidence interval. Considering these expected values in detail, we see that when *Party Affect* is at its lowest level (0), representing a vehemently disliked party, the expected level of *Perceived Extremism* is more than 3, corresponding to placing a party at either 2 or 8 on the 0–10 left-right scale. At moderate levels of affect, such as 4, the expected level of extremism decreases substantially: it is now approximately 2, corresponding 3 and 7 on the 0–10 scale. However, when affective ties with a party are very strong, i.e. at 9 or 10 on the 0–10 scale, the expected level of *Perceived Extremism* is again above 3. Affect clearly plays an important, yet non-linear, role in perceptions of party ideology. The need to emphasize the positive distinctiveness of high-affect parties and the negative distinctiveness of low-affect parties induce extreme ideological perceptions of both types of parties. In contrast, the parties toward which the voter feels neutral (i.e., neither hates nor loves) are perceived as moderate.[10]

We subjected these results to several robustness checks. Specifically, our results are robust to (1) using ordered logistic regression or linear regression with fixed-effects instead of the multi-level linear model reported above (the latter estimates the effect based solely on within-respondent variation, thereby controlling for all system- and respondent-level variables), (2) using country-level random-intercepts in lieu of election-level random-intercepts, (3) using manifesto (Volkens et al., 2013) or expert survey (Bakker et al., 2015) measures of ideology as the basis of *Party Extremism*, (4) estimating the non-linearity in *Party Affect* by fitting coefficients for each level of *Party Affect* or by calculating the distance of *Party Affect* from 5 and (6) accounting for projection effects by fitting the model only to respondent-party dyads for which all three of our vote-choice measures equal zero, which is the set of respondent-party dyads where projection effects are least likely to occur. Additionally, our results are robust to expanding the set of control variables to include (1) an indicator for new democracies, (2) party-system size, and (3) party size. The results of these robustness tests are presented in detail in Supplementary Information (SI) 1.

5. Analysis II: consequences of affective polarization

In addition to hypothesizing about perceptions of party ideology, we also posited relationships between an individual's level of affective polarization and perceptions of the stakes of electoral competition. Specifically, our argument leads to four testable hypotheses. First, the Perceived Polarization Hypothesis (H2) predicts that more affectively

[9] As we use extreme values of *Party Affect* to predict extreme perceptions, respondents who use an extreme response style (ERS; Greenleaf, 1992)—using the extreme ends of scales even when their opinions are not extreme—could potentially bias our estimates. We control for ERS in two ways. First, we control for respondent demographics, which have been shown to predict ERS (e.g., Greenleaf, 1992), as well as the extremity of ideological self-placements. Similarly, our inclusion of election-level random effects accounts for baseline differences in ERS across countries, which have been shown to be substantial (e.g., Johnson et al., 2005). Second, our fixed-effects regressions in SI.1 estimate the effect of *Party Affect* on within-respondent variation, where ERS is held constant.

[10] Our theory also predicts that high affect for a party leads to a perception of extreme ideology in the direction preferred by the partisan, while negative affect will lead to a perception of extremity in the opposite direction of the partisan. In SI.1, we test and find support for this directional prediction.

Table 1
Predictors of perceived extremism.

	Model 1	Model 2
Party Affect	−0.495***	−0.468***
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Party Affect^2	0.047***	0.046***
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Respondent Extremism	0.166***	0.157***
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Party Extremism	0.495***	0.496***
	(0.013)	(0.014)
Age	0.001*	0.001**
	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Female	0.050***	0.051***
	(0.009)	(0.010)
Education	−0.002	−0.007*
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Political Knowledge	0.014*	0.005
	(0.005)	(0.006)
Reported Party Voter		−0.048***
		(0.013)
Potential Party Voter		0.030*
		(0.013)
Never Party Voter		0.227***
		(0.010)
Most Competent Party		0.007
		(0.013)
Intercept	2.023***	1.935***
	(0.051)	(0.056)
$N_{Observations}$	209,195	167,770
$N_{Respondents}$	33,593	25,694
$N_{Parties}$	288	251
$N_{Elections}$	43	36
$\hat{\sigma}_y$	1.235	1.233
$\hat{\sigma}_{Respondents}$	0.592	0.589
$\hat{\sigma}_{Parties}$	0.280	0.278
$\hat{\sigma}_{Elections}$	0.223	0.228

Note: The dependent variable is *Perceived Extremism*. Cell entries represent unstandardized coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.

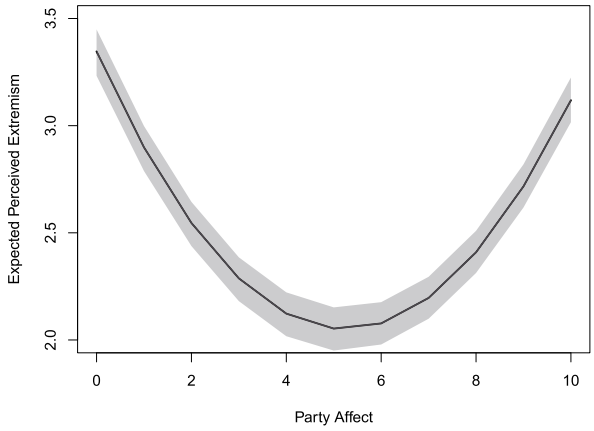

Fig. 1. Expected Perceived Extremism.
Note: Solid line represents expected values of *Perceived Extremism* based on Model 1 in Table 1 with all control variables held constant at their mean. The shaded area represents a 99% confidence interval around the expected values.

polarized individuals will perceive that the party system is more ideologically polarized. Second, the Process Importance Hypothesis (H3) implies that they will also view the act of voting as more important, while the Increased Participation Hypothesis (H4) suggests that these views are reflected in their behavior, i.e., that affectively polarized individuals will turnout at higher rates. Finally, the Outcome Importance Hypothesis (H5) states that they will also view the outcome of elections as more consequential. Using our respondent-level CSES dataset, we now test these four hypotheses.

5.1. Variables

The analyses use four different outcome variables. First, *Perceived Ideological Polarization* measures the extent to which a respondent views parties' ideological positions as polarized. Following Ezrow et al. (2014), we measure polarization as the standard deviation of a respondent's placement of parties. Thus, respondents who see large ideological differences between parties—placing some parties at 0 and others at 10 on the left-right scale—are those that receive the highest scores; respondents placing parties close together receive lower scores.

Our next two outcomes capture the value placed on the process of electoral competition. First, *Vote Difference* gauges belief in the efficacy of voting. We create it using a CSES item that asks respondents to place themselves on a five-point scale, where 1 = "who people vote for won't make any difference" and 5 = "who people vote for can make a big difference." Second, we consider self-reported *Turnout* in the most recent national election. In contrast to *Vote Difference*, which measure attitudes towards electoral competition, *Turnout* allows us to test whether affective polarization influences behavior. Finally, *Power Difference* measures views on the consequences of who wins elections using another CSES item, which asks respondents to place themselves on a five-point scale from 1 = "it doesn't make any difference who is in power" to 5 = "it makes a big difference who is in power."

Our main predictor for these analyses is *Affective Polarization*, which we measure as the standard deviation of a respondent's affect towards parties. Hence, it captures the degree to which a respondent passionately likes some parties and hates others as opposed to feeling neutral toward most of them. *Affective Polarization* will be highest when all parties are viewed as part of either the in-group or out-group.

Fig. 2 displays a histogram of *Affective Polarization* in the respondent-level CSES dataset. As the figure shows, affective polarization is clearly not exclusive to the American case. To investigate this further, three dashed lines on Fig. 2 indicate the elections with the highest and lowest average levels of affective polarization, as well as the overall sample average. The three most affectively polarized elections in the data are the 2005 German, 2006 Czech, and 2008 United States' elections. At the other end of the scale, *Affective Polarization* is lowest in the 2006 Brazilian, 2010 Filipino, and 2007 Japanese elections. In sum,

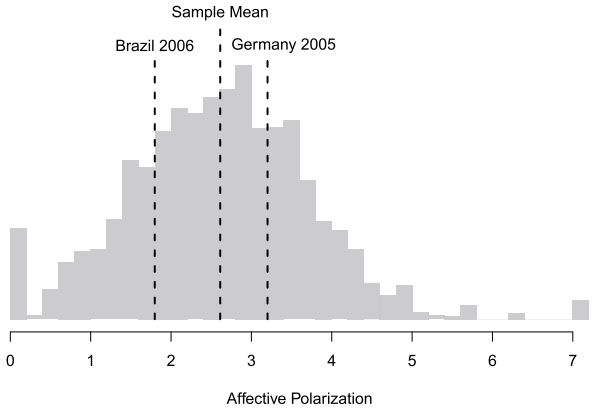

Fig. 2. Individual Level Variation in *Affective Polarization*.
Note: Gray shaded area is a histogram of *Affective Polarization* in the CSES respondent level dataset ($N = 34,173$). Dashed vertical lines represent the overall average and the average in the countries with the highest and lowest country-level average for *Affective Polarization*.

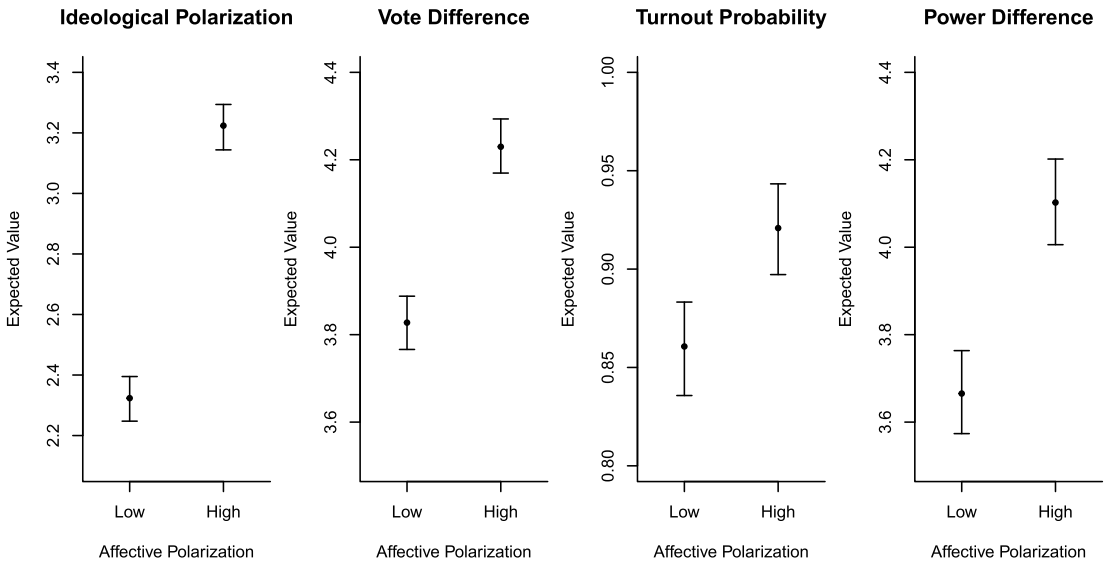

Fig. 3. Expected Values for Four Measures of Perceived Stakes of Elections.
Note: Points represent expected values from multi-level models of the respondent level CSES data (N = 33,312, N = 30,987, N = 33,668, and N = 32,072 going from left to right across the figure) with bars representing simulation based 95% confidence intervals. *Affective Polarization* is set at a standard deviation above and below its mean for high and low, respectively.

there is substantial variation in *Affective Polarization* across countries, which implies that studying it beyond the United States has the potential of deepening our understanding of this phenomenon.

Our analyses in this section control for all of the respondent characteristics included in the earlier models: *Age*, *Female*, *Education*, *Knowledge*, and *Respondent Extremism*. For the analysis of *Perceived Ideological Extremism*, we include one additional covariate: *System Ideological Polarization*. This measure is constructed by first calculating the median left-right placement of each party in a given election and then using these values in our polarization formula. This accounts for the actual level of ideological differences in an election, which can influence the amount of divisive rhetoric used in campaigns, and hence *Affective polarization* while simultaneously increasing *Perceived Ideological Polarization*. Descriptive statistics for the respondent-level dataset can be found in SI.2.

5.2. Results

In order to test the four hypotheses about the effects of affective polarization, we use Fig. 3 to plot a series of expected values for the four outcome measures at high and low levels of *Affective Polarization*. These expectations are based on multi-level linear models that were estimated with the respondent-level CSES dataset and that include random intercepts for elections and our full set of controls. For these expected values, all controls are set at their mean or median values and *Affective Polarization* is set at a standard deviation below and above the mean for the low and high expectations, respectively. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals based on simulated draws from the estimated coefficient distribution. The corresponding regression table and a series of robustness tests can be found in SI.2.[11]

The evidence in Fig. 3 supports our hypotheses. In all four panels, the relationship between *Affective Polarization* and the outcome is significant and positive. While we cannot directly compare across the different variables, as they are measured on different scales, the magnitude of the effect size for each variable is quite substantial. Considering *Perceived Ideological Polarization*, the difference in expectations is approximately 0.9. To put such an effect size into context, consider a hypothetical three-party system. An increase in ideological polarization of 0.9 is approximately equivalent to going from placing the parties at 3, 5, and 6 to placing them at 2, 5, and 8.[12] This suggests that affective polarization has a meaningful impact on ideological perceptions, leading voters to perceive substantial differences between parties when there may, in fact, be little.

Turning to our measures of the perceived importance of the process of electoral competition, we see meaningful differences across levels of *Affective Polarization*. The expectations for *Vote Difference* are 3.83 at low affective polarization and 4.23 at high affective polarization on a scale that ranges from 1 to 5. In fact, the estimated effects of *Affective Polarization* on *Vote Difference* is the same as the differences between countries with some of the highest and lowest averages for the dependent variable, i.e., between Canada (3.83, 28th out of 34 countries in our data) and Denmark (4.23, 8th out of 34 countries in our data).

Similarly, the expected values for *Turnout*, which measures the probability of a respondent voting under low and high affective polarization, show a large and substantively meaningful effect. Respondents with higher levels of *Affective Polarization* are expected to turnout at a rate of 92%, a full six percentage points higher than respondents with lower levels of affective polarization.

Finally, the expectations for *Power Difference* are 3.66 and 4.10 for low and high affective polarization, respectively. This corresponds to a 12% increase in *Power Difference*.[13] Using a similar cross-country comparison as for *Vote Difference*, this effect size is equivalent to the differences between average *Power Difference* in Portugal (3.69, 26th out of 34 countries) and Finland (4.10, 6th out of 34 countries).

These findings further reinforce the importance of voters' affective ties to parties. When politics is viewed through the lens of group

[11] SI.2 shows robustness to (1) using ordered logit regressions to model *Vote Difference* and *Power Difference*, (2) using a logistic regression to model *Turnout*, (3) using fixed effects instead of random intercepts, (4) calculating our polarization measures using alternative formulas that weight parties by their vote share (specifically, we consider formulas proposed by Lachat (2008) and Lupu (2015)), (5) excluding elections in which the parties included in the CSES received less than 95% of the total vote, (6) focusing only on cases where projection effects are unlikely to influence *Perceived Ideological Polarization* and (7) dropping respondents who use extreme categories on survey items at high rates.

[12] For these two scenarios, the levels of ideological polarization are 1.52 and 2.52.

[13] $\frac{0.44}{3.66} \approx 0.12$.

competition, the stakes of politics become higher: voting is seen as more important, electoral participation increases, and election outcomes are perceived as more consequential. Given that disdain for political opponents seems to be on the rise, our results here serve as an indication of what the future may hold: perceptions of wide ideological divides, high levels of electoral participation, and an obsession with winning.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have explored the consequences of partisan affect on voters' understanding of politics. We argued that affective ties to parties color people's perceptions of party ideology, which they start to see as more extreme, and the nature of the party competition, which they start to perceive as having higher stakes. We find robust support for this argument across 43 elections in 34 countries. Based on this evidence, we conclude that voters' emotional attachment to parties and its effect on their perception of political reality are a general feature of democracy. Given this, the adversarial brand of politics currently practiced in Europe and the U.S. may not be an aberration but rather a consequence of the influence of affectively polarized voters.

Our research provides interesting implications for the study of polarization, partisanship, and political behavior. For example, we find that affective polarization leads voters to perceive that there is ideological polarization. That is, regardless of whether ideological polarization actually exists, some people may believe that it does. This implies that when affective polarization is high, many voters may behave as they would in a polarized context, even when parties are not polarized.

Regarding partisanship, we show that it functions as an identity and can have powerful effects on voters' orientation toward the political system. Typically, partisanship is viewed as a means to an end for both individuals and groups: individuals prefer parties that will implement their preferred policies once in office; and class, ethnicity, and religious groups support parties that champion their causes. In contrast, affect-based partisanship does not operate for instrumental reasons, but instead, partisans are motivated to further the cause and value of the party itself. Parties beholden to this sort of non-instrumental partisans may behave differently in government than programmatic or clientelistic parties.

In terms of political behavior, our findings point towards affective politics as characterized by both high levels of participation and investment in the outcome. From a normative perspective, the first of these is desirable in democratic competition: citizens who place great value on voting help keep parties responsible by ensuring that there is a check at the ballot box. However, because affective partisans are at the same time also motivated to advance their party's status and care deeply about who wins elections and holds power, they may undermine rather than promote responsible government. That is, because of their affective ties, such voters may be less willing to hold their party accountable for policy performance, and they may also be less willing to accept electoral losses. Future research could test these implications of our findings more directly.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.04.009.

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