

Social Media, Digital News Consumption and Polarization

└─ Headline Findings

Headline Findings

- ▶ Partial evidence for polarization by social media and online news consumption.
- ▶ heavy social media use → slight increase in affective polarization
- ▶ online news media consumption → slight increase in policy polarization
- ▶ Caution: self-reported, observational, cross-sectional data from Ontario 2018
- ▶ Polarization by social media use and digital news consumption mostly occurs amongst low interest voters
- ▶ Contra Dubois and Blank (2018) political interest is directly, positively correlated with affective and policy polarization.

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└ Methods

Methods

- ▶ Ontario Provincial Election Study, produced by LISPOP
- ▶ Available for public use at <https://doi.org/10.5683/SF3/VFGL0E>
- ▶ Online consumer sample from SSI, weighted by gender, age and education
- ▶ Campaign survey fielded between May 28-June 07, 2018
- ▶ Rich set of questions on news consumption and social media usage
 - ▶ observational, cross-sectional and self-reports but interesting nonetheless.

These questions include those that ask what sources respondents received election news from, a political knowledge test, political interest, etc.

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└ Ontario 2018

- ▶ End of the Liberal regime
 - ▶ Kathleen Wynne and the party were deeply unpopular
- ▶ Doug Ford became PC leader at the last minute
- ▶ Ripe grounds for strong feelings about out-partisans

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Sample Validation

Table 1: Vote intention of all respondents compared with actual vote results

Party	OPES	Election
Liberal Party of Ontario	14%	20%
Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario	29%	40%
New Democratic Party of Ontario	36%	34%
Green Party of Ontario	5%	5%
Undecided	16%	NA

We compared the vote intentions from our sample to the final election results:

- The NDP was over-represented and the PC party under represented.
- When survey was in the field NDP was leading.

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└─ Key Independent Variables

Key Independent Variables

- ▶ **Primary media source:** respondents were asked how they primarily received news about the 2018 Ontario election
 - ▶ Respondents grouped into **legacy** (TV, radio, print newspapers), **online** (news aggregators, blogs, online newspaper) and **social media** (facebook or twitter feeds); otherwise **mixed**.
- ▶ **Social media usage:** How often respondents use social media from **never to multiple times a day**
 - ▶ No reference to news consumption

Due to the small proportion of our sample that only used social media for election news we wanted to include an additional measure of social use to validate our results.

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└ Key Dependent Variables

Affective polarization - Increasing dislike of out-partisans - Problem with multi-party democracies; weight by vote share (Wagner 2021). - Calculates the average weighted difference between a respondent's average like score and their like score for each party, weighted by party vote share

Traditional methods of measuring affective polarization only work in two party systems (e.g. USA) or do not take into account that individuals have similar feelings towards related parties. New measures needed for multiparty systems.

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└─ Key Dependent Variables

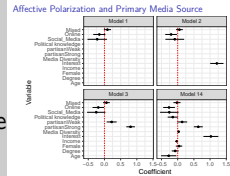
Policy polarization

- ▶ Index of 11 policy items (see Appendix in the paper)
- ▶ Two measures of policy polarization (See (Lefevre 2016; Levendusky and Pope 2011) - bimodality coefficient to examine bimodality of a distribution of policy preferences (Pfister et al. 2013). - the overlap coefficient to examine overlap between two distributions of policy preferences (Pastore and Calcagni 2019).

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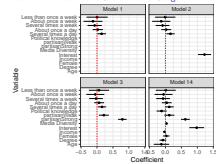
Affective Polarization and Primary Media Source



- Small significant negative coefficient online media and affective polarization.***MORE INTERESTING*** Positive coefficient on interest. Those who are more interested are more polarization.

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Affective Polarization and Social Media Usage



- Online news consumption is associated with lower levels of affective polarization than legacy media consumption.
- ****But**** using social media several times a day is associated with higher levels of affective polarization than never using social media.
- Interest is positively related to levels of affective polarization, ***contra***

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└ Policy Polarization and Primary Media Source - Bimodality Coefficient

Primary_media	Bimodality
Legacy	0.31
Mixed	0.35
Online	0.39
Social_Media	0.31

Here we can see that those who use online media sources have the highest bimodality coefficients. However, differences are small.

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└ Policy Polarization and Primary Media Source - Bimodality Coefficient

Primary_media	Bimodality
Low	
Legacy	0.28
Mixed	0.39
Online	0.56
Social_Media	0.29
High	
Legacy	0.58
Mixed	0.40
Online	0.60
Social_Media	NaN

Low 1 SD below the mean or lower on interest, High 1 SD or higher on interest. A low levels of interest only online news users have a bimodal distribution. Legacy and online have bimodal distributions at high levels of interest. Sample size problems no high interest social media only users.

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└ Policy Polarization and Social Media Usage - Bimodality Coefficient

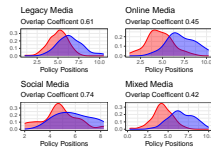
Social_Usa2	Bimodality
Never	0.33
Less than once a week	0.33
About once a week	0.29
Several times a week	0.27
About once a day	0.35
Several times a day	0.33

We can observe the *slight curvilinear relationship again*

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Policy Polarization - Overlap Coefficient

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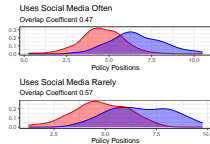


Here we also observe that the same pattern as using the BC, that those who use only use online media sources are the most polarized and those who only use social media are less polarized.

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└ Policy Polarization - Overlap Coefficient

Policy Polarization - Overlap Coefficient



However, those who rarely use social media are more polarized in their policy positions than those who do not use social media