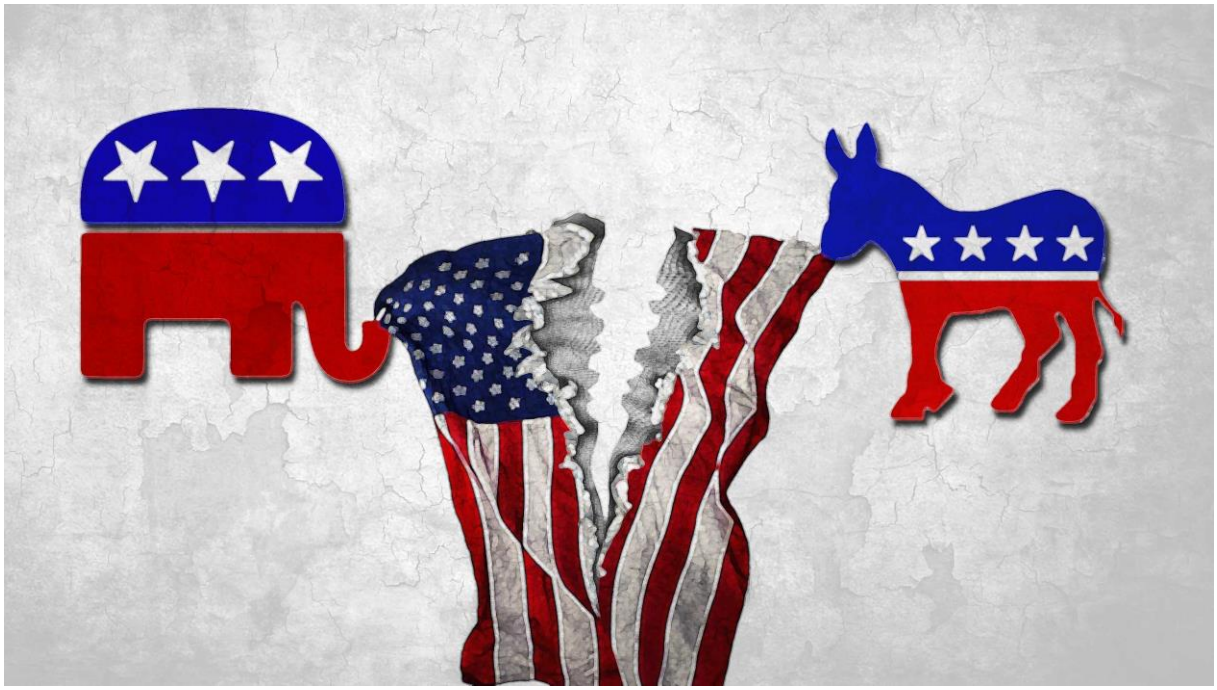
Affective Polarization in America

Antagonistic Tribalism Tearing Democracy Apart



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Abstract

American politics have become highly polarized during Trump's presidential run and administration. One of the contributing factors is affective polarization. This thesis investigates partisan hostility by combining political science with cognitive sociology. Two case studies are compared, namely *Politics of Resentment* by Katherine Cramer and *Strangers in their own Lands* by Arlie Hochschild. They are analyzed using the Groupness-approach of Rogers Brubaker. The analysis revealed that hostility is caused by perceived existential threats, which are subsequently blamed on Others, instead of on structural societal forces. This is the locus of the deep ideological divide between conservative and liberal political philosophy. The mutual exclusivity of worldviews is the root cause of affective polarization. For future research towards potential solutions that might preserve respect for plurality in political discourse, study and implementation of Daniel Shapiro's negotiation framework, Relational Identity Theory and the Tribes Effect, is suggested.

Keywords: *affective polarization, incivility, hostility, existential threat, cognitive sociology, political science*

Dedication

You taught me so much

You showed me what I needed to know

To figure out how to get here

This marvelous moment of maturity

You've seen me struggle so hard for so long

Always trying to help, never knowing why it didn't work

Now I've finally figured it out

After so long, I've finally made it

But you're not here to see the result

You should have been here

We should have shared this ultimate moment of success

I wish you'd have seen me finally cross the finish line

And celebrate it together

We nemen je mee

Table of Contents

Cover

Abstract i

Dedication ii

Table of Contents iii

Introduction 1

Chapter I: Academic Background 8

Agonism 8

Schema Theory 11

Chapter II: Methodology 16

Reliability and Representativeness 16

Case Study – Cramer 20

Case Study – Hochschild 23

Chapter III: Definition 27

Gentzkow 27

Antagonism 36

Chapter IV: Functioning 40

Hochschild 40

Cramer 46

Affective Polarization 50

Conclusion 55

References 59

Introduction

"Lock her up!" the 'Deplorables' chanted while wearing their 'Hillary for Prison'-shirts and their 'Make America Great Again'-hats.[1] Throughout the campaign, Trump kept ratcheting up the emotional fury, for instance by claiming that Mexico sent rapists into the US and by calling for "a total and complete" Muslim ban (Berenson, 2015). In response,[1] Hillary Clinton called half of Trump's supporters racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and Islamophobic (Chozick, 2016). And so, both sides vilified those with different views (Blair, 2017). Candidates are incentivized to actively make voters feel angry (thereby turning politics into combat) because anger increases political engagement, campaign donations, and voter turnout[2] (Van Boven, Sherman, & Ditto, 2016). But it also has negative consequences.

Ratcheting up anger leads to polarization. The difference between the parties gets inflamed by rhetoric, creating an ideological schism that separates them (Berenson, 2016). This has social consequences. Partisans can no longer fathom why their opponents could think like that and stop interacting, separating themselves into polarized groups (Pesce, 2016). This election's polarization was historically unprecedented (Oppenheimer, 2016), divided families (Blanchette, 2017), and ended friendships (Lee, 2016). But there are also political consequences. Polarization discourages bipartisan negotiation and cooperation (Mansbridge & Martin, 2013, p. 68). As the ideological schism increases, the "zone of possible agreement" decreases (p. 2). Additionally, win-wins are replaced with zero-sum outcomes (p. 45), and humiliating or annihilating opponents becomes as rewarding as passing legislation (p. 10).

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1 Figuratively speaking. For a realistic representation, see Chozick (2016) and https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/ 2016/07/lock-her-up-hillary-clinton/492173/

2 "[A]nger causes people to be more polarized, to see more polarization, and, because they see more polarization, to take more political action." (Van Boven, Sherman, & Ditto, 2016)

Meanwhile, moderate politicians are punished while extremists are rewarded[3] (Persily, 2015, p. 62). With cooperation being punished, reelection can only be achieved through partisanship. And so, the cycle of polarization and anger becomes self-reinforcing.

Polarization leads to gridlock and institutional warfare. America's colonial origins led to the Constitution being designed to guard against factional tyranny through checks and balances (Persily, 2015, p. 212 & 202). Its many institutional veto points demand negotiation[4] (p. 212 & 259). When bipartisanship is thwarted by polarization, the veto points can be exploited by a cohesive minority to obstruct the majority's policies (p. 7), making it impossible to "get policy through Congress" (p. 8). Such gridlock leads to institutional warfare. Both parties will use the institutions they control to block other branches of government (Mansbridge & Martin, 2013, p. 6). In response, both sides will also look for ways to circumvent the opposition while pursuing their legislative agenda. For example, "presidents facing strong partisan and ideological opposition from Congress are more likely to take unilateral action," or deliberately decide to not enforce the law (Persily, 2015, p. 50 & 8). Although presidents have gone to the edges of constitutional limits, they never[5] overstepped them (Mickey, Levitsky, & Way, 2017, p. 27). But Trump changed that.

Trump repudiated political institutions, which many saw as cause for alarm. He dismissed the free press as 'fake news' and referred to an independent judiciary as 'so-called judges' (Klaas, 2017). Furthermore, he seemed to break with America's tradition of peaceful power transfer (Graham, 2016), by quipping that, if he was running the country, Clinton would

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3 Especially in electorates that strongly lean one side due to gerrymandering or geography, a representative will be safe from challengers of the opposition but not from primary challengers who brand them "insufficiently loyal" (Persily, 2015, p. 62).

4 Sadly, "[t]he structure of American political institutions requires, but discourages, deliberative negotiation" (Mansbridge & Martin, 2013, p. 11).

5 Although, see Watergate scandal.

be in jail (Kamisar, 2016). That joke[6] was deeply concerning to those familiar with troubled democracies. They noted that Trump's comments aligned with the tactics that autocrats typically pursue (Fisher & Taub, 2016), and warned of democratic breakdown (Cassidy, 2016). They claimed that history provides "a series of warnings" (Cassidy, 2016), and that Trump's "authoritarian tendencies" are signs that should not be ignored[7] (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2016). Democracy, they noted, is under threat.[8]

The danger they saw was "backsliding [into] competitive authoritarianism" (Mickey et al., 2017, p. 20). Also called "democratic erosion" (Cassidy, 2016), it happens when institutional safeguards and filters[9] protecting democracy from extremists fail (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2016). Backsliding occurs through "a series of little-noticed, incremental steps, most of which are legal and many of which appear innocuous" (Mickey et al., 2017, p. 21). However, it is part of the insidious process of "uprooting … the system's foundations" (Cassidy, 2016). The end result is "a system in which meaningful democratic institutions exist, yet the government abuses state power to disadvantage its opponents" (Mickey et al., 2017, p. 20). For example, by deploying state institutions against the opposition or, in other words, by locking up an opponent (Mickey et al., 2017, p. 21).

So what can be done to prevent backsliding? Those studying democratic breakdown have focused on political polarization.[10] Sadly, most have adhered to analyses because suggesting

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6 After he won the election, Trump quickly dropped the issue (Smilowitz, 2016).

7 Some pointed to Trump disrespecting the separation of powers (Liptak, 2016), or advocating the use of state power to attack political enemies (Savage, 2016), while others cautioned that Trump's actions endangered institutions (Fisher & Taub, 2016).

8 But "predictions of a descent into fascism are overblown" " (Mickey et al., 2017, p. 20)

9 Such as "the party nomination system and the news media" (Levtisky & Ziblatt, 2016).

10 "Scholars have long identified political polarization as a central factor behind democratic breakdown." (Mickey, et al., 2017, p. 24)

reforms carries professional risks (Persily, 2015, p. 3). But there are two publications that stand out. The first is the report from the *Task Force on Negotiating Agreement in Politics* (TFNAP). It argued that polarization can be solved by deliberative negotiation[11] (Mansbridge & Martin, 2013, p. ix). Wanting to enhance good governance, it provides concrete suggestions for improving or restarting negotiation, and their reforms focus on infrastructure[12] (p. 45). The de facto successor of the TFNAP-report is the most recent and comprehensive publication on polarization: *Solutions to Political Polarization in America*. It too focused on the potential results from various institutional reforms, and combines the tentative suggestions from different analysts (Persily, 2015, p. 3).

Its editor, Nathaniel Persily, splits polarization into "three separate but interacting phenomena," choosing the terms hyper-partisanship, gridlock, and incivility in order to differentiate them (Persily, 2015, p. 4). He defines hyper-partisanship as "ideological convergence within parties and divergence between parties," gridlock as "the inability of the system to perform basic policy-making functions due to obstructionist tactics," and incivility as "the erosion of norms that historically constrained the discourse and actions of political actors or the mass public" (p. 4). Seeing as how "[s]cholars have long identified political polarization as a central factor behind democratic breakdown" (Mickey et al., 2017, p. 24), it is unsurprising that the proposals discussed in Persily's book deal either with hyper-partisanship or with gridlock (2015, p. 12).

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11 "By deliberative negotiation, we mean negotiation characterized by mutual justification, respect, and the search for fair terms of interaction and outcomes" (Mansbridge & Martin, 2013, p. 3). "In deliberative negotiation, the parties share information, link issues, and engage in joint problem-solving" (p. ix).

12 Conditions for bargaining processes (p. 4), disincentives (p. 12), cognitive biases (p. 3), rules of engagement (p. 6), procedural arrangements (p. 10), governing style of consensus (p. 7), and institutions and rules (p. 9).

But reforming institutions cannot solve hyper-partisanship and gridlock. As the TFNAP-report noted, it is "naive to think that all conflicts may be negotiated," because parties with "strongly opposing beliefs" hold "fundamentally different worldviews," which results in a "zero-sum competition" (Mansbridge & Martin, 2013, p. 2 & 122 & 68). Consequently, reforming political institutions will not lead to bipartisanship as long as polarization incentivizes politicians to exploit or abuse the rules, old or new. Therefore, institutional reform cannot be implemented until incivility is addressed. However, incivility is a euphemistic term.[13]

Others have suggested better terminology. Some have termed it "negative partisanship" (Abramowitz & Webster qtd. in Mickey et al., 2017, p. 26), and defined it as hating the other party[14] (Drutman, 2017). Abramowitz and Webster note that this happens when "the partisan identities of voters are strongly related to other salient social and political characteristics"[15] (2015, p. 5). Other researchers came up with different terminology. Iyengar and Westwood used the term 'affective polarization,' and found that partisans had "hostile feelings for the opposing party [that] are ingrained or automatic in voters' minds" (2015, p. 690). Because hostility and affective polarization are more fitting terms, they are the concepts that this thesis will focus on. Doing so enables the academic debate to continue onwards from Persily's publication.

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13 Persily acknowledges this in a variety of ways. Examples include "meanness," "nastier," incivility now being commonplace, nuclear actions becoming conventional, and the "trend of using extraordinary electoral mechanisms for ordinary politics" (pp. 8-9).

14 Consequently, voters are not voting because they like and support one party, but because they are scared of the other party (Klein, 2015).

15 Which leads them to perceive "supporters of the opposing party as very different from themselves in terms of their social characteristics and fundamental values. As a result, voters tend to hold very negative opinions of the opposing party's leaders and supporters," and abstain from social interaction with them (pp. 5-6).

This thesis will contribute to the academic debate in three ways. It will investigate affective polarization, expand the debate to an interdisciplinary effort by incorporating cognitive sociology,[16] and tentatively suggest a method of negotiation that appears promising for future research endeavors.[17] But avenues for potential solutions cannot be identified before affective polarization is understood. Therefore, the main question of this thesis is *what sociological obstacles prevent a political discourse based on civility, trust, and cooperation?*

Answering this question requires the deconstruction of affective polarization. However, it cannot be done without knowing what to look for and where. Therefore, subquestion one first has to define affective polarization. This enables answering subquestion two, which explores how partisan mental processes function. Due to limits of space and time, this thesis unfortunately cannot look at systemic factors incentivizing hostility,[18] and will only look at Republican partisans[19] in two states, namely Wisconsin and Louisiana.

The case studies used are, respectively, *Politics of Resentment* by Katherine J. Cramer, and *Strangers in their own Lands* by Arlie R. Hochschild. Both authors are sociologists and sought to explain why voters continue to support conservative politicians whose policies seem unfavorable to them. Looking for answers, the authors listened to conservative partisans to learn

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16 Rather than just the framework of political science

17 Thereby responding to Mansbridge and Martin; "Given this dreary outlook, it is entirely appropriate that we turn our intellectual energies to exploring ways to negotiate and govern despite growing partisan differences. A new political science of negotiation that can suggest new mechanisms and protocols that help to 'get the deal done,' even in polarized times, would accomplish a great deal of good."(2013, p. 46).

18 Incentives for politicians, the media, and corporations to actively contribute to hostility.

19 Scholars have noted that, although it is seen as "evidence of bias, not to mention bad manners" (Persily, 2015, p. 61), polarization is "really a Republican extremism problem" (p. 10). Because the shift of median Democratic ideology "can be nearly accounted for by the replacement of moderate Southern Democrats" (p. 27), the modern Republican party is identified as the "most corrosive aspect" of polarization (p. 59). Furthermore, they note that "the increasing extremism of the Republican party" is mainly driven by its Tea-Party wing (p. 60 & 73). However, this is becoming more complicated with the recent rising of Antifa.

how they thought, rather than using surveys to see *what* they thought (and how those views are distributed demographically).

The chapters of this thesis address the following topics. Chapter 1 provides the academic background. It explains the two theories that will be used as frameworks to study the subquestions of what affective polarization is and how it functions. What it is (or *not*) will be defined by using Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonism and how it functions will be deconstructed by using Rogers Brubaker's groupness-approach to schema theory. Chapter 2 introduces the case studies. It provides an overview of the books of Cramer and Hochschild, and argues their relevance and representativeness.

Chapters 3 and 4 address the two subquestions. Chapter 3 differentiates incivility from hostility, and locates it in the American electorate.[20] It does so by applying Mouffe's agonistic theory to the data analysis of Matthew Gentzkow. He responded to academics debating whether polarization was actually happening or not. His data provided a granular understanding of what was happening and what was not. Chapter 4 will employ Brubaker's version of schema theory to analyze the two books, thereby revealing how conservative partisans interpret and understand the world. The conclusion will provide an overview of the main challenges that affective polarization poses, and will recommend future research to evaluate whether Daniel L. Shapiro's work[21] could be useful in countering affective polarization.

[20] Since politics rarely is harmonious, the argument could be made that polarization is just normal politics – this argument will be shown wrong.

[21] Specifically, his Relational Identity Theory (2010), the Tribes Effect (2016), and Negotiating the Nonnegotiable (2017).

I. Academic Background

1. Overview

This chapter introduces the two academic frameworks used to analyze the case studies. It highlights their main ideas, and briefly addresses their subtleties and intricacies. The theories are agonism by Chantal Mouffe, and schema theory by Rogers Brubaker.[22] In section 2, agonism's core concepts and premises, origins, and context are discussed. In section 3, an analytic approach is created by explaining the concept of 'groupness' and the analytical tools to study 'identity,' and by then contextualizing them with broader concepts from schema theory.

2. Agonism

A. Premises and Concepts

Agonism is also referred to as agonistics or agonistic pluralism.[23] At the core of agonism is the perspective that politics are an articulation of social relations; it is one way in which differences and commonalities between groups are expressed (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, xiv).

Political identities are collective identities, because an 'us' can only be created by making a 'them' (Mouffe, 2009, p. 550). Part of the difference between 'us' and 'them' is what values one adheres to. When different people hold different views, disagreement is inevitable (Mouffe, 2000, p. 6). Because values include fundamental philosophical principles such as 'justice' (p. 7), moral agreement is impossible (p. 8).

When disagreement is inevitable, politics equates to social conflict (Martin, 2013, p. 6). For a government to function, people have to hold office, which guarantees there will be a

[22] Their respective fields are political philosophy and cognitive sociology.

[23] Pluralism holds that there is a coexistence between diverse groups with different views. As such, it is an acknowledgment of the axiom that not everyone is the same or agrees.

winner and a loser. The winner can steer the country conform their moral principles, and the loser cannot. As such, politics is as hegemonic as social relations (Mouffe, 2000, p. 17).

Two concepts determine the nature of politics: hegemony and antagonism (Mouffe, 2016, para. 1). Hegemony refers to power, and is near-synonymous with dominance, supremacy, authority, and control. Antagonism is hostile conflict between groups (Martin, 2013, p. 3), who become "mortal adversaries [that have] to be eliminated permanently" (Hodgson, 2015, para. 2). This "questioning [of one's] identity and threatening [one's] existence" creates an existential threat (Mouffe, 2009, p. 550).

Agonism aims to keep hegemonies pluralistic. It argues that conflict cannot be eradicated and therefore can only be curtailed (Mouffe, 2009, p. 550). As such, agonism seeks to let parties clash for dominance in a setting that has rules to contain their struggle.[24] This allows for emotional relief through contest without that contest turning destructive,[25] and safeguards repetition of contest at another time, which enables outlawing contestation until that time.[26]

Politics can shift from agonism to antagonism for two reasons. First, "resistances against th[e] hegemonic order" lead to conflicts if they "cannot find legitimate forms of expression" (Mouffe, 2009, p. 552). Second, it happens when one social group perceives a second group to pose an existential threat to the political power of the first group (p. 550). In politics, an existential threat equates to political exclusion; being barred from voting, or when policy-

[24] Derived from the Ancient Greek word ἀγών [ah-goan], meaning 'struggle' or 'contest,' specifically in the setting of races, athletics, or games.

[25] This is seen in contemporary times in sports events, which generally remain civil. Otherwise, they are referred to as hooliganism, which is fundamentally different.

[26] Converted to politics, this means that there is no reason for coups or revolutions because the loser has faith that fair elections are not too far away.

makers no longer take one's values and views into account, which is the same as questioning the legitimacy of one's morality or worldview.

B. Origins and Context

Agonism originated as a post-Marxist theory. Indeed, it can be said to have started post-Marxism (Besse Desmoulières, 2017). It expanded on Marxist theory by explaining social struggles that were not based on class or economic exploitation, which are now referred to as 'identity politics' (Hodgson, 2015).

Agonism is a response to deliberative democracy, which seeks to create rational consensus. In contrast, agonism posits that rational consensus is impossible when it comes to moral values (Mouffe, 2000, p. 7), thereby making "consensus without exclusion" impossible (p. 8). Agonism re-included the passions because exclusion is inescapable when people with different moralities try to engage each other rationally.[27] They will never agree, because their metaphysical concepts of what is 'fair' or 'just' are fundamentally different.

Other versions of agonism exist as well. Perhaps the best-known agonist is Hannah Arendt. She adheres to a rationality reminiscent of Rawls and Habermas (who were the main advocates of deliberative democracy), whereas Mouffe focused on affective-driven antagonism (Mouffe, 2014, p. 149). Influenced by Arendt, Bonnie Honig seeks to keep the process of contestation ongoing, but does not address the potential for hostility to arise (p. 152). Lastly, William Connolly focused on "agonistic respect" (p. 152), but Mouffe doubted the limits of

[27] "where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic" (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 81e qtd. in Mouffe, 2000, p. 12).

respect; she questioned whether all antagonisms can be turned into agonism and whether all positions deserve legitimacy or that some[28] should be excluded (p. 153).

3. Schema theory

A. Brubaker's Concept of Groupness

Brubaker noted that, because "constructivism[29] has become the epitome of academic respectability," it is taken for granted, which leads to "intellectual slackness" and 'groupist' language (2004, p. 3). Groupism is "the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations, and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed," meaning that they become reified as "internally homogeneous … unitary collective actors with common purposes" (p. 8). This loss of granularity obscures the groups' internal differences and functioning (p. 10).

Brubaker's solution was to focus on 'groupness' instead, which sees social conflict as "a variable, not a constant" (2004, p. 4). He noted that groups are "ways of seeing, thinking, talking, and framing [political] claims" (p. 11). Group-making is an event that happens by appropriating, subverting, or transforming categories; it is a conscious and deliberate social, cultural, and political project (pp. 12-13). As such, groups are "not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world; [they are] ways of perceiving, interpreting, and representing social conflict" (p. 17).

Brubaker thus focused not on the outcomes but on the dynamics. This entails looking at agents and what they emphasize or conceal since they "may obscure the interests at stake [or]

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[28] For example, outrageous positions like that the earth is flat, or fundamentally antagonistic positions like those of Islamic terrorists.

[29] Constructivism holds that there is no objective reality; humans experience is a combination of physical objects and intangible ideas such as "social values, norms, and assumptions" (Fierke, 2016, p. 163).

the dynamics involved" (2004, p. 18). He drew attention to intragroup heterogeneity and subsequent "policing" of what group members should think and how they may act (p. 19). This means that group cohesion and solidarity can wax, wane, and peak (p. 12 & 4).

B. Brubaker's Analytical Tools

Closely related to social groups is 'identity.' It is at risk from both groupism and groupness. A groupist (or 'strong') understanding of identity reifies unity and sameness that need not exist, whereas a groupness (or 'weak') conception of identity can become too malleable and fluid for "serious analytical work" (Brubaker, 2004, pp. 37-38). Brubaker addressed this dilemma by splitting the concept of 'identity' into "three clusters of terms," which can be used as "alternative analytical idioms" (p. 41 & 48).

The first cluster that can be used as analytical tool is identification and categorization. These terms signify that a process is being done by an actor (Brubaker, 2004, p. 41). It can either be done by oneself or by others, and it can either be aimed at oneself or at others (p. 42 & 41). The actor doing 'the identifying' is called the identifier, and the object of the identification is called the identified (p. 43). The medium that is used for identification is called a codifier.

The second cluster is self-understanding and social location. Brubaker described self-understanding as "a sense of who one is" and of their social location (2004, p. 44). Thus, he sees it as a dispositional term that refers to the relation between oneself and one's group, or to the relation between one's group and other groups[30] (p. 44).

[30] However, it should be noted that self-understanding is different from self-awareness; self-location concerns social relations whereas self-awareness is meta-cognitive in nature.

The last tool, 'commonality, connectedness, and groupness,' is used to replace and specify that which was previously called group identity. The first component of group identity is commonality, which means that people sharing an attribute belong to the same category; it is used to make sense of the world and delineate ingroups from outgroups[31] (Brubaker, 2004, p. 47). Second, connectedness focuses on the relations and networks between people, which are needed for mobilization and collective action (p. 47). The third and last component of group identity is groupness. Groupness is "the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group; [it is] a feeling of belonging together" (p. 47). The degree of this 'togetherness' is what determines the salience and intensity of group identity. To prevent confusion, this thesis deviates from the naming that Brubaker chose; instead, the three concepts of the last tool are referred to as codifiers, networkedness, and cohesiveness.

C. Schema Theory

Having used Brubaker's concepts to show how to think and write about groups and identities, a system is still needed to analyze the cognitive functioning of partisans. Schema theory (and some related concepts) are useful ways to deconstruct their thinking processes.

Schemata determine "how people perceive and interpret the world" (Brubaker, Loveman, & Stamatov, 2004, p. 41). They are "templates for making sense of the social world, [and] … the mechanisms through which interpretation is constructed" (p. 44). They are "mental structures in which knowledge is represented, … acquired, stored, recalled, activated, and extended to new domains" (p. 41). Furthermore, they "guide perception and [memory], interpret experience, generate inferences and expectations, and organize action" (p. 41). They function

[31] 'us' from 'them'

"automatically [and] outside of conscious awareness" (p. 41), which is to say they are activated involuntarily and can operate unnoticed.

Schemata are divided hierarchically into tiers (Brubaker et al., 2004, p. 42). The top levels are 'fixed' and represent core aspects and concepts (p.42). The lower levels are "slots that need to be filled in by contextual cues" and information (p. 42). This simplified way of representing reality saves energy and time[32] because it excludes "the specific details of a new experience and retain[s] only the generalities that liken the event to other experiences in one's past" (Friedman, 2011, p. 191). Schemata connect psychology and sociology because one's thinking is influenced by the people, customs, and institutions surrounding them.

Closely related to these hierarchical schemata are filters and frames. Filters "govern what is noticed or [goes] unnoticed" (Brubaker, 2009, p. 34). As such, they are a form of selective attention that "seek out and register those details that are consistent with social expectations, while overlooking other details that are equally perceptible and 'real'" (Friedman, 2011, p. 191). A coherent system of filters is a frame; it is like a pre-made composite lens and no filters can be added or removed from it (p. 191).

Whereas a frame limits perceptions, a master frame also directs them. A master frame is a collective action frame, which consists of "sets of ideas, symbols, and meanings" such as themes like "liberty, freedom, democracy [or] self-determination" (Stanbridge, 2002, pp. 528-529). Sometimes called "the ideas of the age," it is the dominant prism or lens through which political or social conflict is perceived (p. 530).

Two concepts result from master frames, namely resonance and discursive strategy. Resonance is the salience and "cultural potency" of the ideas or symbols that are used to provide

[32] The provided explanation is Darwinism: its biological foundation is that more efficient organisms are more effective survivors, meaning that natural selection drives schemata.

meaning to a historical narrative (Stanbridge, 2002, p. 529). It denotes how applicable schemata are; how easy or difficult it is for them to "interlock with other key cultural representations" (Brubaker, 2009, p. 34). A discursive strategy, on the other hand, is the construction and legitimatization of the claims and goals of actors in social movements (Stanbridge, 2002, p. 528). It is "a way of claiming a … warrant for" any political stance (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1203).

The motivation underlying master frames, resonance, and discursive strategies is right order. Right order denotes an understanding or vision (Brubaker, 2015, p. 5). As such, right order results from morality; the set of values one holds when it comes to metaphysical concepts such as 'right' or 'wrong,' and 'injustice' versus 'fairness.' Closely related to morality and right order is someone's worldview (Brubaker et al., 2004, p. 33). A worldview is "the fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives" (Hiebert, 2008, p. 15).

Right order is the application of one's values. Understandings of right order are normative principles that make claims and try to regulate public life in accordance with philosophical or moral values (Brubaker, 2015, p. 5). Since these values are metaphysical in nature, the claims that are made in their name apply to all levels: "personal, familial, communal, societal, and cosmic" (p. 5). In this way, visions of right order are expansions of political claims, which are about "power, resources, recognition, reproduction, or self-determination," because those political claims are now based on the moral values of one's right order (p. 5).

II. Methodology

1. Overview

This chapter introduces the two books used as case studies in Chapter IV. First, the methodological approach will be discussed, and then an overview of the books' impetuses, methods, and results will be provided.[33] Three issues are discussed in section 2: why these books were chosen as case studies, how reliable and representative their findings are, and how the theory relates to the case studies. Then, *Politics of Resentment* by Cramer is covered in section 3, whereas *Stranger in their own Lands* by Hochschild is reviewed in section 4.

2. Reliability and Representativeness

A. Rationale

This thesis addresses affective polarization because Persily's *Solutions to Polarization in America* did not. That it did not is logical, for how does one study the emotions of a nation? The question leads to profound heuristic and even epistemological concerns.

The primary tension lies between accuracy and practicality. Interviewing millions of people yields the most realistic results but is highly impractical; using case studies is very doable but risks distortion. The challenge, then, is to choose the most representative case studies.

Using the books of Cramer and Hochschild, especially when combined, addresses such tension. Both authors are sociologists and thus focus on views, values, and emotions, but do so on a group-level. Thus, in a sense, they form a bridge between psychology, which studies the

[33] Thereby providing a sense of their books to anyone who has not read them.

emotions of people, and political science, which studies the government.[34] As Mouffe clearly showed, emotions matter in politics; therefore, combining sociology and political science is needed to understand affective polarization. But emotions could be captured by many sociologists.

What sets Cramer and Hochschild apart is how they did their research. They did not take a positivist approach, which measures people's values and views and, via statistical analysis, plots them onto an attitude scale that shows *what* people think (Cramer, 2016, pp. 20-22). Instead, Cramer and Hochschild took an interpretivist approach[35] to understand *why* people arrived at those opinions[36] (Cramer, 2016, pp. 20-22). This is important for affective polarization.

Knowing *what* people feel does not solve affective polarization because emotions and values cannot be changed by debating *them*; rather, the views *leading to* those emotions have to be addressed. Hochschild and Cramer do exactly that.

B. Reliability

That Cramer and Hochschild took the right approach need not guarantee they implemented it correctly. Fortunately, their trustworthiness is indicated in several ways. Cramer is a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and director of its Morgridge Center for Public Service. She teaches at the Department of Political Science, indicating that she is familiar with sociology *in* political issues, and has won multiple awards.[37]

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34 All three fields obviously cover a far wider range of topics, but these are relevant here.

35 Also called "hypothesis generating" (Hochschild, 2016, p. 247).

36 "This kind of work generally shares the goal of trying to provide a coherent account of interpretations or understandings in order to explain why people express the opinions they do" (Cramer, 2016, p. 20).

37 For details on Cramer's career and awards, see https://faculty.polisci.wisc.edu/kwalsh2/

Whereas Cramer can be said to be a 'politics-sociologist,' Hochschild is more of an 'emotions-sociologist.' She has had a long and celebrated career at Berkeley.[38] Although perhaps less specialized in politics, Hochschild is highly familiar with this methodology, having taken the same approach to write previous books[39] (Hochschild, 2016, p. 247).

C. Representativeness

With their approaches and capabilities covered, the last topic that has to be addressed is whether the states of Louisiana and Wisconsin can be taken as representative case studies of more comprehensive developments in the US.

Wisconsin is similar to many Democrat-leaning states in the Northeast. Forming the end of the Rust Belt, it represents its general economy reasonably well. More significantly, Wisconsin is as polarized as the rest of the US (Cramer, 2016, p. 2). In the 2016 presidential election, it was also part of Clinton's unsuccessful 'firewall'[40] (Prokop, 2016). It was one of the four[41] most surprising states to be won by Trump (Campbell, 2016), and one of the three[42] states Clinton lost by about one percentage point (Gilbert, Spangler, & Laitner, 2016).

Wisconsin's voting demographics are also telling. In 2016, Clinton lost 19 points worth of 'voters under 30' compared to Obama in 2012; Trump gained 20 points of votes from non-college Whites compared to Romney in 2012; Trump won rural votes by 29 points versus Clinton, thereby carrying 59 of the 72 counties, while Obama won rural votes by 8 points in 2012 (Gilbert et al., 2016). These numbers align with the national "red state blue city"-trope

38 A well-regarded university in California.

39 Specifically *The Managed Heart*, *The Second Shift*, and *The Time Bind*.

40 It was one of six states, the others being Michigan, Virginia, Colorado. Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire (Prokop, 2016).

41 The others being Pennsylvania, Michigan and Ohio (Campbell, 2016).

42 The other two being Michigan and Pennsylvania (Gilbert et al., 2016).

(Graham, 2017), the general national youth vote (Galston & Hendrickson, 2016), and educational divides (Silver, 2016).

Louisiana, on the other hand, is similar to many Republican-leaning states, and to the South as a whole. Although the "great paradox" (discussed on page 23) between red and blue states holds "[a]cross the country," Louisiana is "an extreme[43] example" (Hochschild, 2016, pp. 8-9). Louisiana is also, like much of the rest of the South, more religious and socially conservative than the nation as a whole. Hochschild noted that "[f]ar from being an oddball state, Louisiana told a nationwide story" (p. 80).

By comparing and contrasting these two states, the analysis provides as good a representation as possible within the limits of space and time. Both the (post)-industrial Rust Belt in the North and the socially conservative Bible Belt in the South are represented, thereby accounting for both economic and social conservatives.[44] Additionally, Cramer contrasted urban industrial workers and rural folks.[45] Thus, both types of conservative leaning areas, namely rural communities and suburbs, are addressed (Graham, 2017). However, whereas support for Trump in Wisconsin mainly came from rural areas and suburbs, it came mostly from White and from middle-class voters in the rest of the country (Henley, 2016). Fittingly, Hochschild also interviewed middle-class conservatives and looked at college-Whites (2016, pp. 11-12). Thus, all key demographics and geographies are accounted for. By combining the two books, the analysis becomes more representative of the US as a whole.

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[43] Compared to the rest of the US, Louisiana ranked 49th on human development, last in overall health, 49th for child well-being, 48th in eight-grade reading, and 49th in eight-grade math. Only 80% has graduated from high school, and only 7% have graduate or professional degrees. It gets 44% of its budget from federal funds. (Hochschild, 2016, p. 9) It also "gives away more taxpayer money than any other state in the nation" (p. 260).

[44] Cramer found that "they were not emphasizing abortion or gay marriage [but that] the values they talked about were intertwined with economic concerns" (2016, p. 70).

[45] Both predominantly blue-collar workers.

D. Application

The primary purpose of this thesis is to deconstruct how affective polarization functions. This can be done by using Brubaker's academic idioms and schema theory. Doing so identifies master frames based on conceptions of right order. As such, the case studies of Hochschild and Cramer will be used to find tangible examples that can be used to 'fill in' the theoretical concepts. In other words, the case studies provide content and context; they show the manifestation of the theory in reality.

3. Cramer

A. Lowest-Income Conservatives

Act 10, a conservative bill introduced in February 2011, targeted public employees' health insurance, retirements, and collective bargaining rights, thereby consuming Wisconsin in a bitter uproar (Cramer, 2016, pp. 1-3). It became so vicious that people "felt personally attacked" and that "the basic act of talking to one another [became] impossible" (p. 210). Shockingly, the politician who introduced the bill was reelected (p. 2). Cramer's question was why.

Why do low-income voters vote against the government redistribution that would benefit them; why do low-income voters support conservatives? (Cramer, 2016, pp. 4-5). Rather than "saying that people are ignorant [and] vote against their interests" (p. 145), Cramer reasoned that "political understanding is not about facts [but] about how [people] see those facts" (p. 210). She argued that perspectives determine how people "encounter facts and conceive of possible solutions" (p. 145). As such, she wrote a constitutive analysis[46] (p. 21),

[46] "That is, it is an examination of what this thing, rural consciousness, consists of, how it works, and how it is part of a broader politics of resentment. The point is not to argue that we see consciousness in rural areas but not in other places, or to estimate how often it appears among rural residents, or to describe what a population of people thinks. Instead, my purpose here is to examine what this particular rural consciousness is and what it does: how it helps

about how people are "actively trying to make sense of their lives" (p. 89). By focusing on "the opinion of a group as people create it together," she illustrated "how [social groups] blame each other" (p. 42 & 7).

B. Methods

Interested in social-class identity, Cramer observed group conversations "among people who got together on their own," rather than having been recruited, from May 2007 to November 2012 (2016, p. 29 & 11 & 5). She focused on group conversations, specifically of "ordinary people … [instead of] political elites … who live and breathe politics" (p. 20 & 18). Since social identity is "hard to measure with surveys," she was not interested in "capturing what a large population of people think" but in "figuring out *why* people think what they do … [and] *how* they do so" [*sic*] (pp. 20-21).

Cramer went to groups of regulars that typically consisted of between four to ten people who met in the morning (2016, p. 37 & 30), and tended to lead community opinion (pp. 41-42). Her interactions were not interviews but conversations that she steered with questions (p. 39). She scored her transcripts by making a data display of categories with frames or perspectives (p. 42). She also asked for feedback about her conclusions[47] (p. 43).

Rather than aiming for a representative sample of all Wisconsinites, Cramer prioritized listening to a wide variety of people, including African Americans, Latino immigrants, and Native Americans (2016, p. 36). As such, she "opted for many occasional visits to many places rather than extended visits to just a few communities" (p. 44).

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organize and integrate thoughts about distribution of resources, decision-making authority, and values into a coherent narrative that people use to make sense of the world." (p. 21)

[47] "No one has disagreed with my conclusions" (Cramer, 2016, p. 43).

With a stratified purposeful approach, Cramer divided Wisconsin's 72 counties into eight distinct regions, and chose 27 communities for her study, which resulted in a total sample of 39 groups[48] (2016, p. 29 & 37). She also helped with fielding "a statewide opinion poll … that measured different aspects of rural consciousness," and with "an extensive search for [feelings of distributive injustice] in local newspapers" (p. 104 & 106).

C. Results

Cramer found that rural folks feel "systematically left out," and "disrespected, ignored, and left to fend for themselves" (2016, p. 120 & 203). Cramer calls this 'rural consciousness' and lists its three major components as:

> a perception that rural areas do not receive their fair share of decision-making power, that they are distinct from urban (and suburban) areas in their culture and lifestyle (and that these differences are not respected), and that rural areas do not receive their fair share of public resources (p. 23).

A second important element, Cramer noted, is that they felt that their taxes were not reinvested in their communities but went to "bloated government programs and overpaid [yet] underworked public employees" (2016, p. 148). This was understandable since "for low and middle ranges of incomes, public workers are making more than private workers" (p. 133). Furthermore, Cramer noted that "gender was not a key component of the way they made sense of public employees," but that "racism underlies much of the opposition to government spending" because support for limited government is mainly driven by "attitudes about a

[48] To cover differences in education, occupation, and status, Cramer included places that "varied by community wealth" (p. 29). She gave a general breakdown of the groups on page 37, and provided more details in appendix B, pages 292-232 (Cramer, 2016, p. 30).

particular program's recipients" (p. 143 & 165). She concluded that rural consciousness "screens out certain considerations and makes others obvious" (p. 22).

Finally, Cramer analyzed "whether there is empirical support for the idea that rural areas are the victims of distributive injustice" (2016, p. 22). She noted that less money goes to rural areas and that, despite rural counties receive more public funds per capita and pay less in taxes, they still "experience greater levels of poverty … and unemployment" (p. 90 & 91 & 93). Indeed, they are "fighting a losing battle" (p. 94), and have been "experiencing a long, slow death for decades" (Davidson 1996 qtd. in Cramer, 2016, p. 94 & 135), due to the "rural disadvantage" and economies of scale[49] (Loboa & Kraybill 2015 qtd. in Cramer, 2016, p. 98).

4. Hochschild

A. Empathy Walls and the Great Paradox

Hochschild saw "the deepening divide in [the US]" lead to "empathy walls" (2016, p. 5). She noted how, in periods "of political tumult, [people] grasp for quick certainties," adapt new information to fit into "ways [they] already think," and start to feel "indifferent or even hostile to those who hold different beliefs" (p. 5). Hochschild sought to overcome that by understanding "the emotional draw of right-wing politics" (p. 247).

Hochschild described her misunderstanding as "the great paradox" (2016, p. 8). She noted that "red states are poorer and have more teen mothers, more divorce, worse health, more obesity, more trauma-related deaths, … and lower school enrollment" (p. 8). The paradox is that "one might expect people to welcome federal help" in these cases but instead red states

[49] The disadvantage is having smaller tax bases, and scaling entails higher costs for services, which literally have more ground to cover (p. 98). This snowballs into higher costs for everything, from highways to sewage systems to emergency services to prices for food, mortgages, electricity, and health care (p. 101).

actually want free market dynamics and less government regulation (p. 9). Additionally, many Tea Party advocates run small businesses yet support politicians that seek to deregulate the market, which "consolidate[s] the monopoly power" of large companies that pose a threat to advocates' smaller companies (p. 10). Hochschild wondered: "how can a system both create pain and deflect blame for that pain?" (p. 10).

B. Approach

Hochschild noted that "[n]early all the recent growth of the right has occurred below the Mason-Dixon line," and thus concluded that, in order to understand "the right, [she] would need to get to know the white [*sic*] South" (p. 11 & 12). Whereas Cramer studied her home state of Wisconsin, Hochschild decided to go to Louisiana since, compared to the South as a whole, a smaller proportion of White voters in Louisiana voted for Obama in 2012, and also because Louisiana "held the highest proportion of state representatives in the US House of Representative's [*sic*] Tea Party Caucus" (p. 12).

Hochschild used environmentalism as keyhole issue to "truly enter the hearts and minds of people on the far right" since, she argued, this was not an issue of "well-to-do voters voting down government measures they didn't need," because everyone cares about "the water they drink, the animals they hunt, the lakes they swim in, the streams they fish in, [and] the air they breathe" (2016, p. 21).

Like Cramer, Hochschild also engaged in "exploratory and hypothesis generating" research[50] by immersing herself with local people to hear how they made sense of politics but, unlike Cramer, who focused on how groups rationally made sense of political issues,

[50] "The goal of it is not to see how common or rare something is, or where one does and doesn't find it, or to study how the something comes and goes through time – although I draw on the research of others who address such questions. My goal has been to discover what that something actually is." (Hochschild, 2016, p. 247)

Hochschild (more overtly) focused on the emotions of individuals (2016, p. 247). Like Cramer, Hochschild's interviews more closely resembled visits (p. 17).

Unlike Cramer, Hochschild did not divide the state into groups. Instead, she started with four focus groups[51] and continued with "snowball sampling"-interviews of their "husbands, parents, and neighbors" (2016, p. 247). Following a campaign trail, she got introduced to many people, who sometimes offered to show her around (p. 248). She chose six paragons of "patterns of thinking and feeling" for participant observation.[52] She also used opinion polls from Gallup, the General Social Survey, and Pew to contextualize her respondents, paying special attention to parts of national patterns they reflected, exaggerated, or bucked (p. 249).

Hochschild interviewed people for five years and accumulated 4,690 pages of interview transcripts (2016, p. 18). These were based on interviews with a core of 40 Tea Party advocates[53] and contextualized by interviews with 20 others (p. 18). Lastly, she compared "student activity groups registered at Louisiana State University … with those at the University of California, Berkeley" (p. 19).

C. Findings

Hochschild found that Tea Party adherents "[had] felt on shaky economic ground [since 1980], … felt culturally marginalized,[54] … [a]nd felt part of a demographic decline" (2016, p.

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51 "Two of Tea Party supporters and two of Democrats, all composed of middle-class white [*sic*] women from Lake Charles, Louisiana" (Hochschild, 2016, p. 247).

52 "… visiting places of birth, churches, and burial plots, sharing meals, driving places together, attending events, and more" (Hochschild, 2016, p. 249).

53 Hochschild noted how the Tea Party supporters "varied greatly among themselves" concerning: their views on poverty, their fears, and their suspicion and denigration of then-President Obama (2016, p. 18).

54 "… their views on abortion, gay marriage, gender roles, race, guns, and the Confederate flag all were held up to ridicule in the national media as backward" (Cramer, 2016, p. 221).

221). She typified Tea Party advocates as "a culture, a way of seeing and feeling about a place and its people" (p. 19). She found "victims without a language of victimhood" (p. 131), who are "proud to endure the difficulties they face" and do not want to be "poor me's" (p. 232).

Hochschild noted that the Tea Party advocates main grievance was about deservingness. They felt that tax money was "given away … to non-working, non-deserving people" (2016, p. 61). This is closely related to social status.[55] Indeed, getting "little or nothing from the federal government was an oft-expressed source of honor" (p. 157).

Hochschild looked to history to contextualize the "emotional grooves" (2016, p. 207). She noted that, in the plantation culture of the 1860s, society was divided into the "very rich and very poor, … with very little in between," and that "[t]he very idea of redistribution was anathema to the plantation system" (p. 208 & 209). By outlawing slavery and winning the Civil War, the North had seemed "moralizing," and it still was on issues like healthcare, climate change, gun control, and abortion (p. 209). Although the plantations are gone, "the plantation culture continues" with oil; cotton, sugar, and oil are all single commodities that require huge investment and have "come to dominate the economy"[56] (p. 210). Then, the Civil Rights Movement created "a simmering fire of resentment" by shifting public sympathy away from White men to "a long parade of the underprivileged" (p. 212). The appeal of the Tea Party is that it offers "financial freedom from taxes, and emotional freedom from the strictures of liberal philosophy and its rules of feeling" (p. 219).

[55] There is a "rift between deserving tax payers and undeserving tax money takers, those in a class below them" (p. 61).

[56] "… oil partly crowded out the seafood industry and tourism" (Hochschild, 2016, p. 211).

III. Question 1

What is Affective Polarization?

1. Overview

Saving democracies from backsliding into competitive authoritarianism requires finding solutions to polarization. However, because most scholars have focused on political polarization, affective polarization has to be understood first, before it is possible to evaluate reforms. But affective polarization is impossible to study until it is defined and located in American society. This chapter makes affective polarization academically accessible by using the theory of agonism by Mouffe to analyze the findings from Gentzkow. In section 2, Gentzkow's findings are reviewed. In section 3, they are interpreted using agonism, which differentiates incivility (which is 'normal' in politics) from hostility (which is destructive).

2. Gentzkow

A. Introduction

One of the reasons that affective polarization is less well-studied than gridlock or hyper-partisanship is that scholars disagreed. Some claimed that polarization was increasing, while others dismissed it as "largely a myth" (Gentzkow, 2016, p. 4). The skeptics noted that "most Americans hold moderate views on most issues, that a large share of the electorate does not self-identify with a strong political ideology, and that the distributions of views on issues and self-reported ideology have been largely stable over time" (p. 5). Gentzkow, wondering how scholars "looking at the same data [can] reach such different conclusions," found that the disagreement stemmed from the way they defined the question and how they implemented it empirically (p. 5). He settled the academic debate about whether the American public was as polarized as their politicians (which was undisputed) by looking at the data. He looked at party

identification and self-reported ideology, voting patterns, policy views, and cross-party hostility.

B. Data Analysis – Evidence Against Polarization

When looking at voting patterns, party identification, and self-reported ideology, the data does not show affective polarization. Voting patterns are a logical place to start looking for voter polarization because a decrease in moderates would mean that people more consistently vote for one party exclusively.

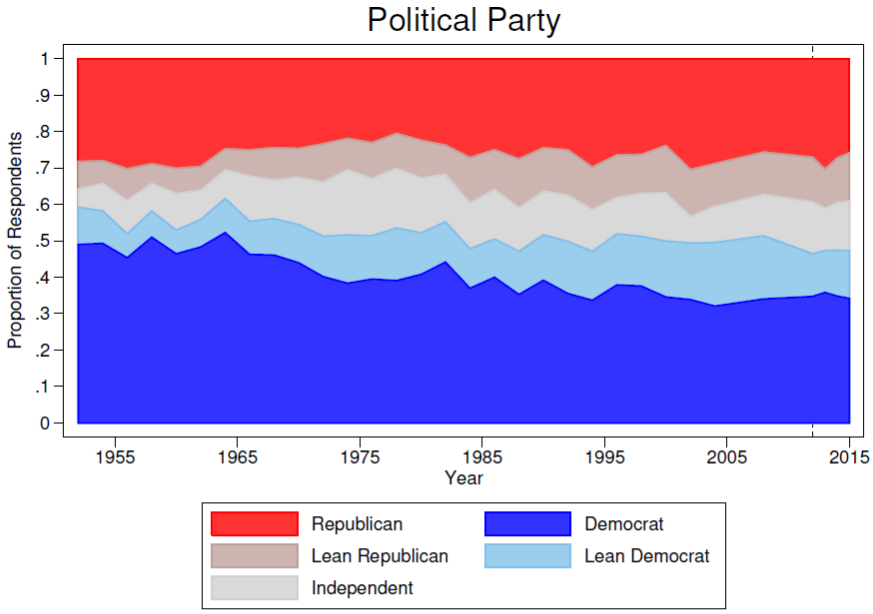
The voting data Gentzkow discussed appear to show polarization but he noted two problems (2016, p. 8). First, vote choices can depend both on personal ideology and on candidate characteristics, so a polarization in voting patterns can be caused either by polarization in the electorate, or by polarization between the politicians running for office[57] (p. 8). As Gentzkow noted: "polarized voting could thus be consistent with a completely unchanged electorate" (p. 9). The second problem Gentzkow noted is that current voting trends do not diverge from the historical norm (2016, p. 9), and thus might not be special at all. If voting patterns are unreliable because of politicians, a logical work-around is to zoom out from individual politicians to their parties, to see if they identify with a specific party.

The data of identification shows "no evidence whatsoever of growing polarization" (Gentzkow, 2016, p. 6), which can be seen in his[58] Figure 2 below. Indeed, if anything, it shows that people have tended away from partisanship towards the moderates in the middle (p. 7). Apart from identification with a political party, polarization can also be expressed in political

[57] or a combination of both, and separating the two causes for the same effect cannot be done Conclusively.

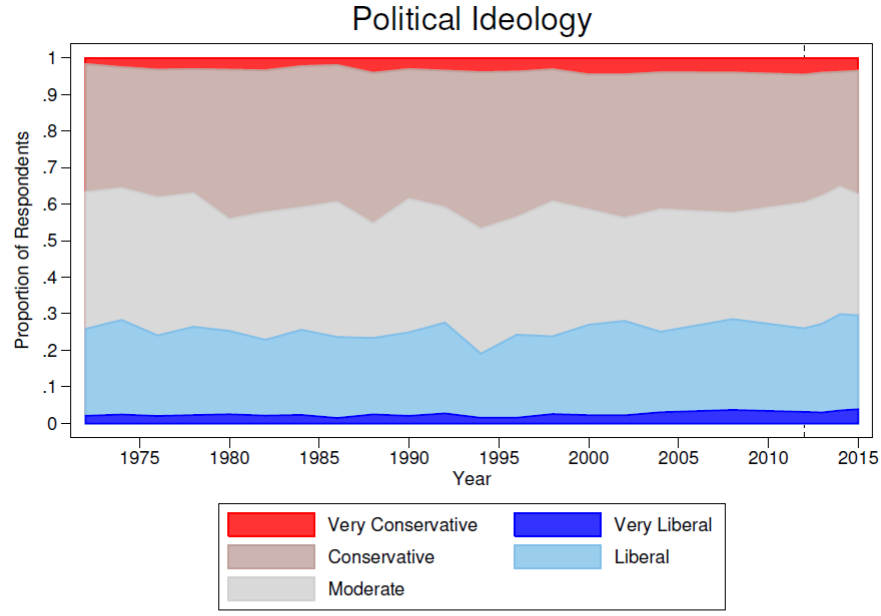
[58] Note: to facilitate looking up Gentzkow's analysis, the numbering that he used is adhered to here as well. Since not all of his figures were included, the numbering skips sometimes.

ideology. It is determined by how voters self-identify their ideological views. This measure, again, shows no polarization, as can be seen in Figure 3:



Notes: Figure shows the proportion of respondents to the American National Election Study survey who identify as Republican, lean Republican, identify as Independent, lean Democrat, or identify as Democrat. The post-2012 data comes from a separate survey conducted by the Pew Research Center and is rescaled in such a way that the overlapping time periods have the same mean.

Figure 2



Notes: Figure shows the proportion of respondents to the American National Election Study survey who identify as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, and very liberal. The post-2012 data comes from a separate survey conducted by the Pew Research Center and is rescaled in such a way that the overlapping time periods have the same mean.

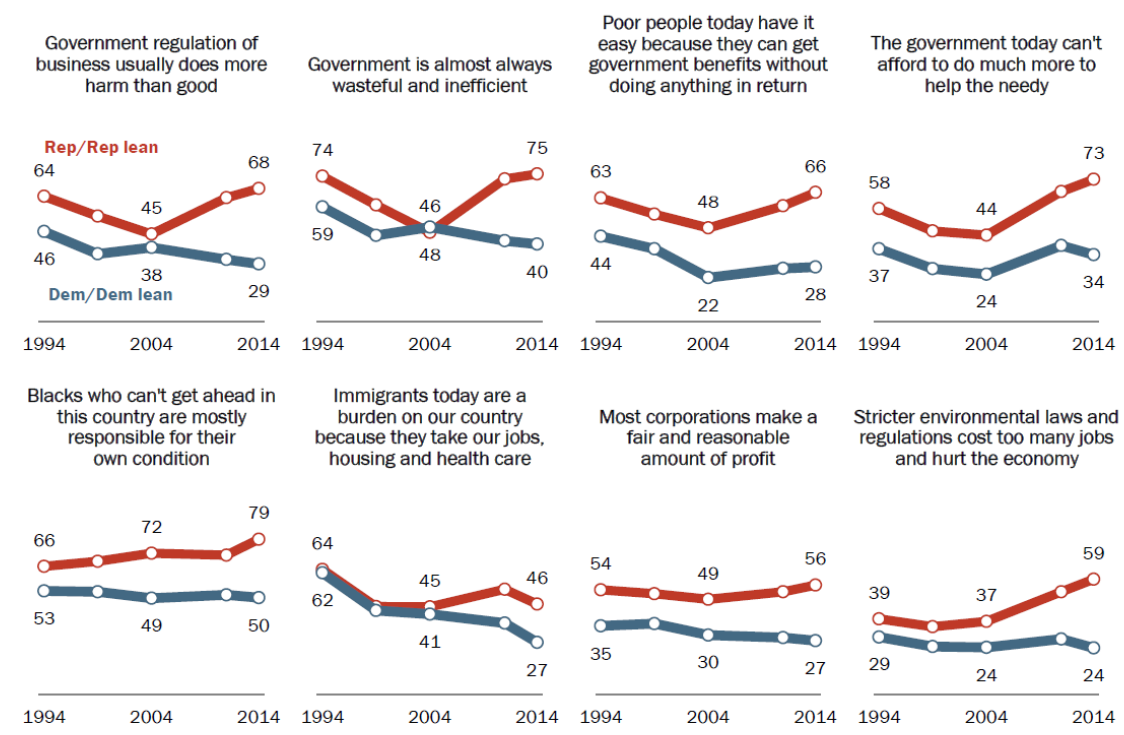
Figure 3

However, at this point some criticism could be levelled against Gentzkow. Since the questions asked are on a "5-point political scale" of "very liberal," "liberal," "moderate," "conservative," and "very conservative" (2016, p. 7), this does capture what Americans call themselves, but it says nothing about the actual views they hold. In other words, the definitions of the categories may have shifted, for example by certain ideas about abortion or gun control becoming mainstream or falling to the fringes. Gentzkow addressed this possibility next.

C. Data Analysis – Evidence for Public Polarization

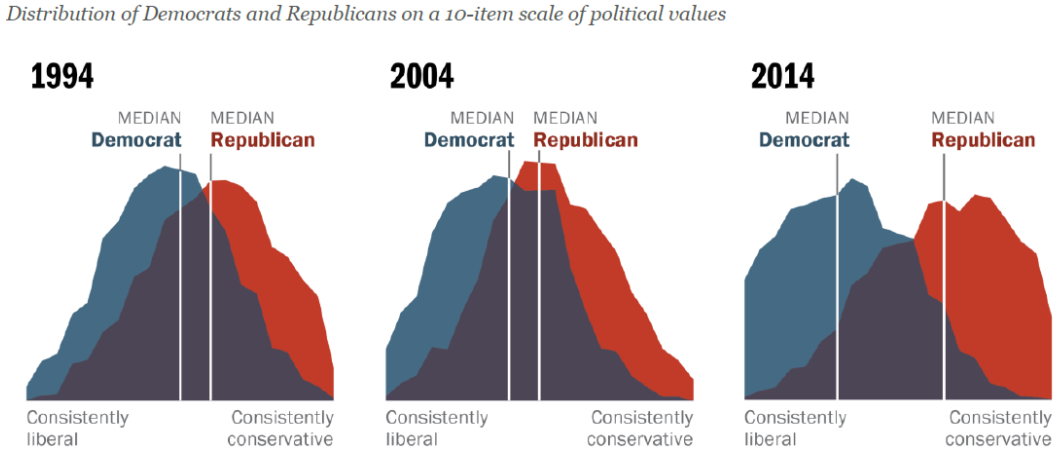
If polarization exists within the definition of "moderate," that means there should now be two versions of what is considered moderate, and thus the distribution should split from a single peak into two (Gentzkow, 2016, pp. 9-10). This is only seen somewhat in national averages (p. 10). Instead, Gentzkow splits these views between those self-identifying as Democrat and as Republican, and suddenly a striking divergence emerges (p. 11). He noted that the lines in Figure 6 have been diverging over the last ten years on every single one of these measures (p. 11):

Gentzkow then aggregates these separate issues into a single index between conservative and liberal views, thereby bridging the gap between self-identified measures and actual views (2016, p. 11). This aggregate index shows that, despite the fact that party identity and political ideology showed no polarization (and people thus do not identify as highly partisan nor highly ideological), their views are in fact very different. This is seen in Figure 7 where, over the course of ten years, the median Democrat has moved slightly left and the median Republican has moved significantly farther to the right:



Source: Pew Research Center (2014).

Figure 6



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Source: Pew Research Center (2014).

Figure 7

As such, it can be concluded that the criticism that could be leveled against Gentzkow's previous approaches was indeed correct; although people's self-identifications have remained constant, the views corresponding to those labels have changed.

D. Data Analysis – Proof of Affective Polarization

Gentzkow noted two historic changes that explain why self-identification remains stable while the party medians are shifting apart. First, the correlation between "people's views [and] their party identification has increased significantly" (2016, p. 12). This means that people have self-sorted into camps; the frequency of holding a view that diverges from the rest of the group has decreased, making the parties more ideologically homogeneous (p. 12). Second, voters have become more ideologically consistent. It has become less common "to hold liberal views on some issues … and conservative views on others … [instead,] people [tend to] hold either liberal- or conservative-leaning views across the board" (p. 12).

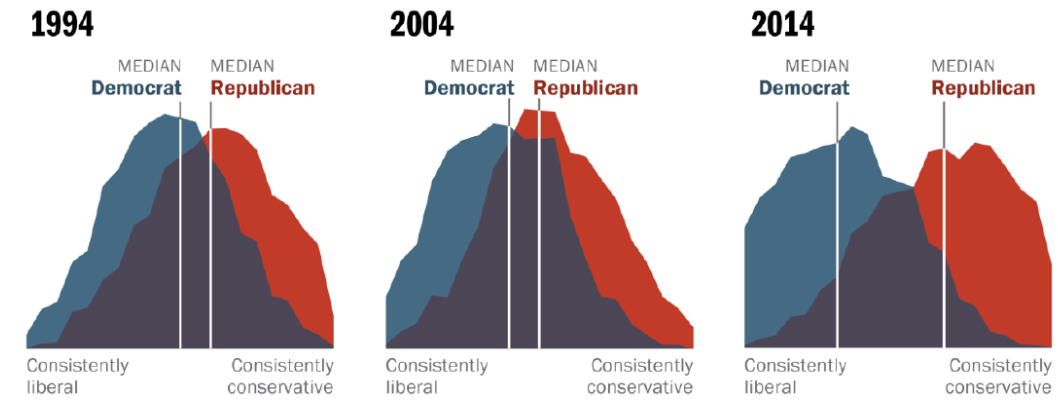
This increase of inter-homogeneity and intra-consistency in voters is obviously correlated. When more people hold conservative or liberal views on all issues, the number of people within a party who have some diverging views diminishes. But increased homogeneity and consistency also means that parties become split along ideological lines into one liberal party and one conservative party.

However, that people have become more ideologically consistent does not mean that all people are now ideologues who hold to either liberal or conservative dogma. This nuance led Gentzkow to isolate those "who say they are politically engaged" (2016, p. 12). Their results, depicted in Figure 8,[59] show a more extreme version of self-identified partisans. Because those who are more politically engaged tend to vote more regularly and follow government affairs more closely, they are more influential in primaries, more loyal target-audiences for commentators, and more likely to become activists (p. 12). In other words, those who 'shout the loudest' also hold the most divergent views, and this incentivizes the parties to move further

[59] Note that Figure 7 is depicted a second time. Placing them on the same page clarifies the contrast.

apart from each other, even though "most Americans [still] hold relatively moderate views" (p. 12).

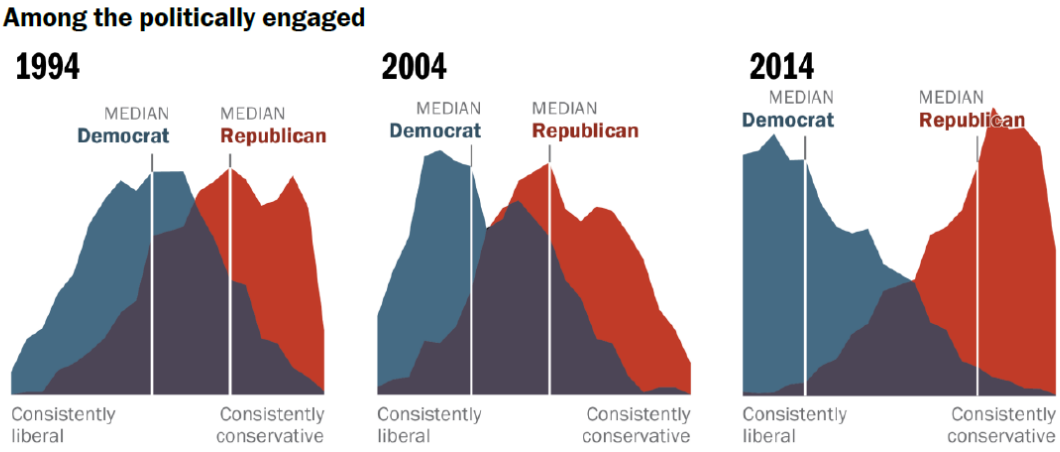
Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Source: Pew Research Center (2014).

Figure 7

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values, by level of political engagement

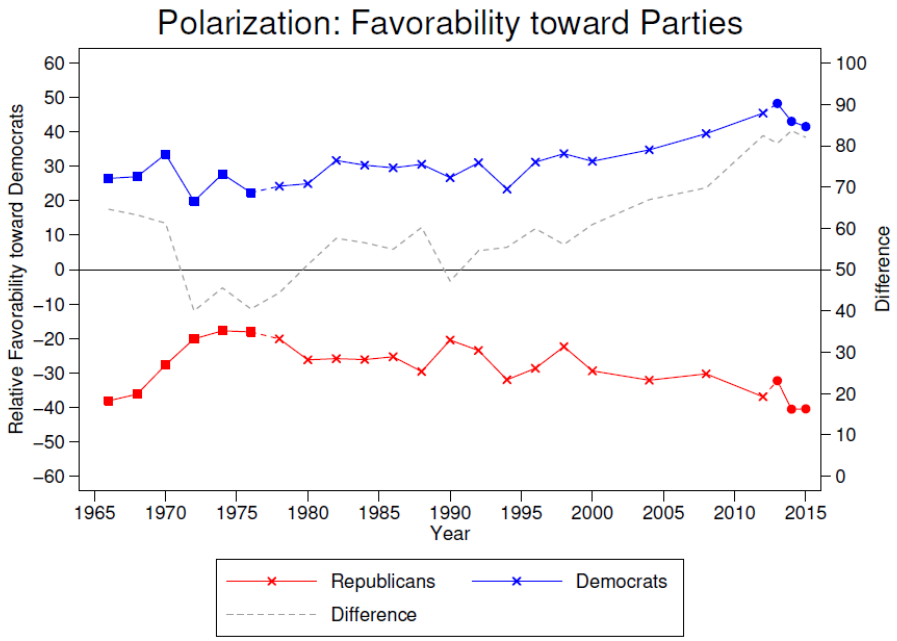


Source: Pew Research Center (2014).

Figure 8

However, ideological consistency is not the same as affective polarization because it is possible to be different yet remain civil. To understand affective polarization, Gentzkow investigated how the entire American electorate describe their opponents (2016, p. 13). He noted that "[t]o a dramatic degree, Americans now hold overwhelmingly positive views of their

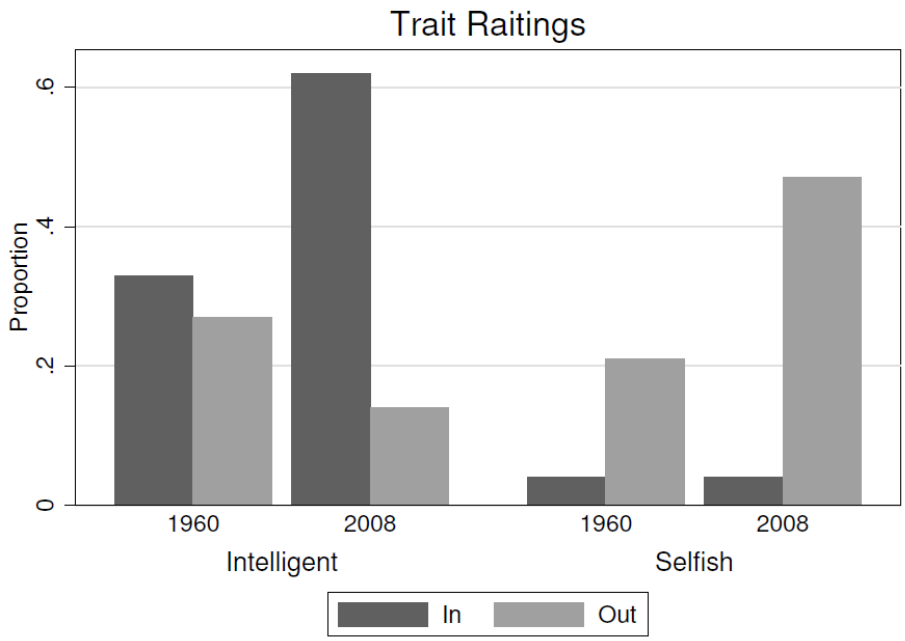
own co-partisans, and highly negative views of those on the other side of the political spectrum" (p. 13), as can be seen in Figure 9:



Notes: Using data from the American National Election Study, the red line shows the average favorability of Republicans towards Democrats minus the average favorabilty of Republicans towards Republicans on a scale from 0-100. The blue line shows an analogous time series for Democrats. The grey line plots the diference between the blue and red lines over time. The National Election Study changed the phrasing of their question over time. The square points represent the original phrasing, the x points represent the revised version of the question, and the circle points represent a similar question used in monthly political surveys by the Pew Research Center. The different time series are then rescaled so that the average values of the overlapping time periods are equivalent.

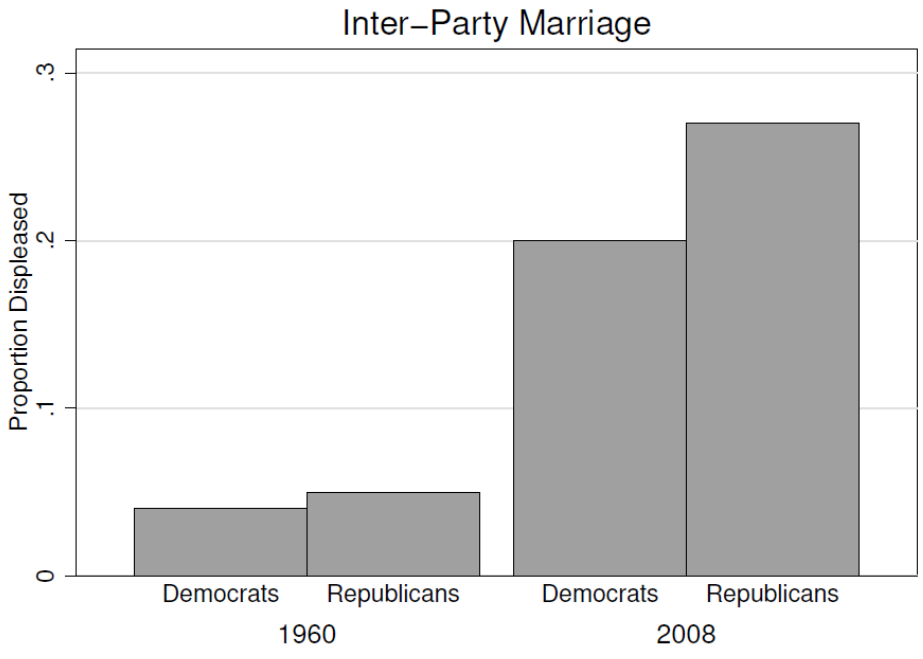
Figure 9

Gentzkow gave two specific examples of how 'favorability' can shape social interactions in the electorate (p. 15). As can be seen in Figure 10, the proportion of respondents who viewed their side as more intelligent and the opposing side as more selfish has increased roughly eight times and two and a half times respectively between 1960 and 2008. A second example, showing how acceptable it is to 'marry across the aisle,' can be seen in Figure 11. Gentzkow also refers to Iyengar and Westwood, who defined affective polarization as hostility, and showed "that the level of partisan animus in the American public [now] exceeds racial hostility" (2015, p. 690 & 691).



Notes: Plot shows the proportion of survey respondents who viewed the members of their own party (In) and their opposing party (Out) as intelligent and selfish. The data for 1960 comes from Almond and Verba (1960), while the data for 2008 comes from YouGov (2008).

Figure 10



Notes: Plot shows the proportion of Republican (Democrat) survey respondents who would be displeased if their child married a Democrat (Republican). The data for 1960 comes from Almond and Verba (1960), while the data for 2008 comes from YouGov (2008).

Figure 11

3. Antagonism

A. From Answers to a Question

The review of Gentzkow's data answers most questions but not all. It shows *where* affective polarization in the American electorate can be found, namely between those who self-identify as Republicans and those who self-identify as Democrats, and especially between politically engaged partisans, who hold liberal-leaning or conservative-leaning views "across the board" (Gentzkow, 2016, p. 12). The analysis also shows *what* polarization is, namely an increase in ideological homogeneity for the parties[60] and in ideological consistency of the public,[61] and dramatic partisan hostility[62] (p. 12 & 14). But, although it does provide the start, the analysis does not fully explain *why* ideological differences leads to hostility.

B. From Ideological Differences to Hostility

When searching for 'the' cause, Gentzkow responded to scholars who have argued that the internet, and especially the echo chambers it creates, are to blame (2016, p. 17). He noted three inconvenient facts,[63] that all indicate that the media[64] certainly plays a role, but is not the cause (p. 19 & 20). Indeed, the media, being in a capitalist environment, can only respond to

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60 "It is true that most Americans hold relatively moderate views on, say, immigration. But the frequency of Republicans holding pro-immigrant views, or Democrats holding anti-immigrant views, has decreased substantially." (Gentzkow, 2016, p. 12)

61 "It used to be more common for people to hold liberal views on some issues (say social policy) and conservative views on others (say economic policy). Today, more people hold either liberal or conservative-leaning views across the board." (p. 12)

62 "To a dramatic degree, Americans now hold overwhelmingly positive views of their own co-partisans, and highly negative views of those on the other side of the political spectrum" (p. 13).

63 Digital information constitutes only 8% of American news diets, "most Americans do not have highly partisan news diets," and the effects may be large at the individual level but not at the aggregate level (pp. 19-20).

64 Gentzkow draws attention to partisan cable news rather than the internet: see p. 20.

(and *further* fuel) a need that is already present. As such, the media is not the cause of polarization but merely a medium through which it spreads – and is perpetuated.

However, Gentzkow actually did identify the cause of partisan hostility. He remarked that a Pew Survey found that 27% of Democrats and 36% of Republicans said that the policies from the opposition are "so misguided that they threaten the nation's well-being" (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 11 qtd. in Gentzkow, 2016, p. 15). Indeed, "[a]mong those with high levels of political engagement, … roughly half of those on each side see the other as a *threat to the nation*" [emphasis added] (p. 15). Second, he suggested that identity politics have now trickled down to the individual level:

> Perhaps the most disturbing fact is that politics has become increasingly personal. We don't see those on the other side as well-meaning people who happen to hold different opinions or to weight conflicting goals differently. We see them as unintelligent and selfish, with views so perverse that they can be explained only by unimaginable cluelessness, or a dark ulterior motive. Either way, they pose a grave threat to our nation. (p. 17)

Last, he stressed the severity of polarization:

> … what divides them politically is increasingly personal, and this in many ways may be worse. We don't just disagree politely about what is the best way to reform the health care system. We believe that those on the other side are trying to destroy America, and that we should spare nothing in trying to stop them. (p. 20)

C. Threats and Agonism

When these comments are interpreted through the prism of agonism, it becomes clear why ideological differences lead to hostility. What Gentzkow noted in these three places is that political opponents are seen as *threats*, who are actively trying to *destroy* the nation, and that *nothing* should be spared to protect it (2016, p. 20).

This aligns perfectly with Mouffe's theory of agonism in two ways. First, as discussed in Chapter I, political identities are derived from social identities, which are created by demarcating an 'us' versus a 'them' (Mouffe, 2016, para. 6), on the basis of values or philosophical principles (2000, p. 6). This relation of "us/them" can be agonistic or antagonistic, the former being 'similar/different' whereas the latter is 'ally/enemy' (2016, para. 6). Second, the shift from respectful agonism to hostile antagonism happens when 'the Others' are "perceived as putting into question [one's] identity and threatening [one's] existence" (para. 6). As can be seen in the three quotes by Gentzkow, *half* of active partisans perceived their opponents as threats to the nation back in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 11 qtd. in. Gentzkow, 2016, p. 15). Considering the manner in which Trump won the election, that percentage has likely risen since.

The consequences of shifting from agonism to antagonism are severe. Whereas political opponents used to see their rivals as competitors "to be defeated temporarily," they are now seen as "mortal adversaries to be eliminated permanently" (Hodgson, 2015, para. 2). This is the central difference between 'incivility' and 'hostility' – the shift from contender to foe means that partisans now "put into question the legitimacy of their opponent's right to fight for … victory" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 7). In other words, a perceived existential threat leads to questioning of the *legitimacy* of one's political opponent. This leads them to "spare nothing in trying to stop them" (Gentzkow, 2016, p. 20).

D. Hostility and Affective Polarization

Only one question remains: *why* are ideological partisans perceived as threats by their opponents? Mouffe already noted that philosophical differences can be used for ingroup-outgroup demarcation along philosophical lines (Mouffe, 2000, p. 6). Arguably the most powerful aspect of philosophy, morality is based on emotions and therefore non-negotiable (Mouffe, 2016, para. 11).

Indeed, scholars have found that America's "culture war … is a clash of visions about fundamental moral issues," such as the "proper response to social inequalities" (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009, p. 1029). Therefore, when it comes to clashing partisan ideology, the 'threat' to the nation is that America might be remade according to the 'wrong' "vision of a good society" (p. 1029). Whereas liberals "have historically taken an optimistic view of human nature and of human perfectibility," conservatives by contrast have "taken a more pessimistic view of human nature, believing that people are inherently selfish and imperfectible" (pp. 1029-1030). Conservatives are typified as showing "a stronger emotional sensitivity to threats to the social order, which motivates them to limit liberties in defense of that order" and accept inequality (p. 1030).

As such, the political hostility between active Republican and active Democratic partisans can be described as a battle for the future of America; either towards what might be more unstable but is (at least intended as) more egalitarian, or towards what is more stable – although it may be less egalitarian (Graham et al., p. 1030). It is not so much a culture war as it is a war between visions for the future.

IV. Question 2

How does Affective Polarization function?

1. Overview

Now that the difference between incivility and hostility is established, and having determined that the latter exists between ideological partisans, it is possible to analyze how they think. This chapter analyzes and compares the conservative understandings and narratives of politics and society as described by Cramer and Hochschild. In section 2, schema theory will be used to analyze the 'deep story' that Hochschild uncovered. The same approach is taken to analyze Cramer's findings in section 3. Lastly, in section 4, the deconstructions will be synthesized to explain how affective polarization functions.

2. Strangers in their own lands

A. Deep Story

Hochschild went to Louisiana to understand "the emotional draw of right-wing politics," and found that a deep story functioned as subjective prism to make sense of the world (2016, p. 247 & 135). She depicts the deep story as follows:[65]

> You are in a field, standing in the middle of a long line leading up a hill that is at the edge of the horizon (p. 136). Just over the brow of the hill lies the American Dream of progress and continual improvement compared to your forebears (p. 136). The line is endless and it is scary to look behind you, although you wish them well

[65] Hochschild lets the deep story "unfold in scenes, like a play" (p. 135), on pages 136-145 and then discusses it on pages 145-151. She narrates it from a second-person perspective to increase empathy and bring the story to life. Although heavily edited due to the limits of space and time, I opted to prioritize understanding over strict adherence to academic format here. As such, her second-person point of view is retained, and both quotation marks and square brackets have been discarded (which minimizes distractions and allows readers to focus on the story itself). Nevertheless, page numbers are included for reference.

(p. 136). It's been *hard* to get this far (p. 136). You have held up your end of the deal by working hard and showing moral character, but the reward that was promised has not been delivered (p. 136). The line is not moving; rather, it seems to be moving backwards – you feel stuck (p. 137).

Then you see people cutting in line, helped by those ahead of you (p. 137). Blacks, women, immigrants, refugees, even endangered species have all been cut in line in front of you, while it is *your* suffering and hard work that made this country great; they complained while you suffered but endured (p. 139). Indeed, you are asked to feel sympathy for these line cutters (p. 139). If you object to the unfairness of them not earning it like you did, you are *chastised* for being racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic (p. 139). *You* get blamed while those who did nothing to contribute to your America get cut in line ahead of you (p. 140).

Instead of seeing the honor in your suffering, you are portrayed as moronic (p. 144). It is offensive, and you become angry (p. 144). As you are kept in place, *your* taxes are used to cut the listless and idle in line ahead of you (p. 149). Your anger turns into resentment (p. 139).

You, and your hopeful and energetic version of America, are being squeezed by the giveaways that liberals and *their* government call for (p. 140 & 143). Instead of promoting a culture of personal morality, they promote a culture of victimization (p. 158 & 214). Rather than rewarding honest hard work, they help cut in line a long parade of the underprivileged, and "poor me's" (p. 158 & 212 & 145). *They* get extra sympathy while you get less (p. 139). The liberal version of fairness stops before it reaches you, and so you become cautious and want to protect what you do have (p. 214 & 141). (Hochschild, 2016, pp. 136-145)

B. Contextual Cues

Whereas Hochschild's deep story reveals the emotional story, schema theory can be used to deconstruct the thinking it inspires. The deep story starts with the cues that elicit a response. There are two cues: feeling stuck and people cutting in line (2016, p. 137). This corresponds with Brubaker's tool of identification and categorization. The line cutters are identified by the identifiers who are stuck in line, and the codifier is getting cut in line. In this case, that is done by government programs such as affirmative action and redistribution. Thus, people are categorized into taxpayers and takers (p. 61).

C. Core Values

These contextual cues activate a schema because they 'fit into the slots' of core values. Being cut in line, instead of suffering yet enduring like the others, is seen as undeserving (Hochschild, 2016, p. 61). This corresponds with Brubaker's third tool: codifiers and cohesiveness. Not working hard[66] is used as codifier for being undeserving (p. 158). The idea of deservingness is salient. The degree of group cohesiveness is, therefore, strong. Those who feel the deep story is true are highly solidary because the undeserving line cutters are perceived as "violating rules of fairness" (p. 139).

Fairness is a moral value. The deep story creates emotional tension by defying moral values. This becomes clear when applying Brubaker's second tool: social location and self-understanding. The self is located farther back in line despite being understood as (hard-working and therefore) more deserving; the combination of being more deserving yet less

[66] "'Hard' is the important idea. More than aptitude, reward, or consequence, *hard* [*sic*] work confers honor" (p. 158).

rewarded violates the morality of fairness. By violating the moral value of fairness, line cutters (and those who help them) are seen as immoral[67] (Hochschild, 2016, p. 158).

D. Right order, Ideology, Frames and Filters

Closely related to morality are right order, worldview, and frames and filters.[68] Right order is a vision about the norms that individuals, families, communities, the polity, and a society should adhere to (Brubaker, 2015, p. 5). Willfully cutting undeserving people in line goes against the vision of right order. In other words, there is a dissonance between perceptions of how the world should be (right order) and perceptions of how the world is (worldview).

However, conceptions of right order are determined not only by morality but also by ideology (Brubaker, 2015, p. 12). Ideology is part of someone's worldview because it consists of ideas or, in Hiebert's words, "presuppositions [made by] a group of people" (2008, p. 15). In other words, ideology can function as a frame that filters reality.

This is important because consensus need not be unattainable. Helping those whom some deem 'undeserving' is caused by using a different filter for deservingness (rather than morally wanting to help 'undeservers'). Whereas morality is emotional and irreconcilable, a filter of who is deserving can be debated rationally; thus, the former has zero possibility of ever achieving consensus while the latter might. The liberal government of the deep story uses a filter that sees the underprivileged as victims of systemic discrimination while Tea Party partisans see them as listless, idle, and undeserving (Hochschild, 2016, p. 147 & 149).

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67 "Liberals *don't give personal morality itself its full due*, probably because they aren't churched." [*sic*] (Hochschild, 2016, p. 158)

68 Morality informs "understandings of right order" (Brubaker, 2015, p. 6).

E. Master frame, Resonance, and Discursive Strategies

Because the deep story combines core values of morality and ideological frames (which constitute a worldview) with the theme of fairness, the deep story is a master frame; it both determines "how people perceive and interpret the world" (Brubaker et al., 2004, p. 41), and legitimizes "their claims and goals" (Stanbridge, 2002, p. 528). It argues that something is so deeply wrong with society that something has to be done.

It can do so because it resonates strongly with the cultural, political, and historical context (Stanbridge, 2002, p. 529). It "interlocks with other key cultural representations" (Brubaker, 2009, p. 34), such as race, gender, and social class. Hochschild noted that those whom the deep story resonates with do not see their neighbors or colleagues as Black[69] (2016, p. 147). They have only three conceptions of Blacks[70] and do not see them as someone "standing patiently in line next to them waiting for a well-deserved reward" (p. 147).

The deep also story resonates with gender stereotypes because Tea Party advocates see "being a homemaker" as a desirable luxury to be enjoyed, rather than an oppressive gender limitation (p. 147). Indeed, this is "an era of numerous subtle challenges to masculinity (p. 202).

Lastly, class is resonant because public sector employees are seen as jumping the line; "a majority of them are women and minorities … they work shorter hours in more secure and overpaid jobs, [and enjoy] larger pensions" (Hochschild, 2016, p. 138). Meanwhile, "work [became] less and less secure, … wages … remained flat," and government handouts undercut

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[69] Additionally, their definition of racism is distinctly different; they do not consider themselves racist because they do not hate Blacks, rather than defining racism, like Hochschild, as "the belief in a natural hierarchy that places blacks [*sic*] at the bottom, and the tendency of whites [*sic*] to judge their own worth by distance from that bottom" (pp. 146-147).

[70] The images they had of Blacks came through television screens; "rich mega-stars [such as] Beyoncé," criminals glorifying rap lyrics about violence and 'bitches,' and those living on welfare (p. 147).

"the honor accorded [to] work" (p. 216). Consequently, a "blue-collar way of life was going out of fashion" (p. 218).

Apart from these cultural representations, the deep story also resonates with political and historical developments. Hochschild noted how "the scene had been set for Trump's rise" because three elements had come together (2016, p. 221). One, economics; decreases in the number of high school-educated jobs and stagnant wages "made them brace at the very idea of 'redistribution'" (p. 221). Second, cultural marginalization; "their views about abortion, gay marriage, gender roles, race, guns, and the Confederate flag all were held up to ridicule in the national media as backward" (p. 221). Lastly, demographics; the number of Whites identifying as Christians is decreasing, making them feel like "a besieged minority" (p. 221).

Finally, a master frame calls for action to revert the damage done to society. It legitimizes discursive strategies that claim warrants for political stances (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1203). The deep story of the Tea Party advocates in Louisiana calls for less government because of three reasons, namely "taxes, faith, and honor" (Hochschild, 2016, p. 47). Taxes stifle their progress towards the American Dream, while funding the "listless and idle," or "government workers in cushy jobs" (p. 149 & 35). Multiculturalism diminished "the importance of God, … who had enabled them to survive" despite their hardships (p. 53). Lastly, honor was misdirected towards the undeserving by affirmative action, or by spending taxes on taking in refugees instead of helping 'American-born' people (p. 214 & 219). The deep story proclaims freedom from the imposition of "liberal feeling rules of whom to feel sorry for" (p. 128).

3. Politics of Resentment

A. Schema Cues

Rather than capturing emotional understandings in a play, Cramer instead described rural consciousness as a frame – it is a set of filters that highlights some and disregards other elements[71] (Cramer, 2016, p. 22).

There are three cues present in the frame of rural consciousness. The most salient one is distributive injustice, which has three parts, namely the perceptions that rural areas do not get their fair share of power, of respect, and of resources (Cramer, 2016, p. 209). The second cue is that "rural communities are dying"[72] (p. 158). The last cue is that "for low and middle ranges of incomes, public workers are making more than private workers" (p. 133).

Whereas, in Hochschild's deep story, the recipients of government programs are seen as the outgroup, government employees are seen as such through Cramer's frame. Using Brubaker's first tool shows that public employees are identified by private employees, who are therefore the identifiers. They categorize government employees as undeserving.

B. Schema Core and Right Order

The contextual cues activate a schema of perceived injustice because the cues are seen as unfair. All three cues are deemed unfair: receiving less power and respect and fewer

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[71] "… a particular *perspective* is influential for the way people think about politics. … rural consciousness *structures* how the people I spent time with think about politics – that is, that their use of rural consciousness *screens out* certain considerations and makes other obvious and commonplace" (emphasis added) (Cramer, 2016, p. 22).

[72] As discussed in the final paragraph of Chapter II, section 2, segment 3:
The rural disadvantage of having smaller tax bases combined with economies of scale, which raise prices because more miles of infrastructure are needed to connect separate homes (in contrast to city blocks), means that rural economies are fighting a losing battle; they have been experiencing a long, slow death for decades.

resources, that rural economies are struggling, and seeing taxes be used to compensate public employees better than taxpayers are themselves. But the step between unfair and undeserving is more complex. Rural counties being in a permanent recession has little to do with deservingness and is mostly unfair on geographic grounds instead of due to social differences (Cramer, 2016, p. 135). Thus, the distributive injustice cue has to be split. Receiving power and respect are fundamental (human and constitutional) rights, and need no further justification; because they cannot be earned, they ought to be extended to all Americans, rural and urban alike, by default. The right to claim (additional) resources, however, requires justification.

Using Brubaker's third tool shows how the claim of deservingness is justified. Like Hochschild's deep story, deservingness is earned by hard work. However, Cramer found a difference between rural and urban blue-collar conservatives; while manual labor is "central to the notions of deservingness" for the frame she found used by urban workers,[73] the frame used by rural workers defined hard work through the sense of living in rural communities (2016, p. 189). In other words, the codifier of the urban conservatives' frame was their profession, whereas the codifier employed in the rural frame was geography. The validity of using geography as a codifier us the logic that, since rural areas are "by definition a place that is economically disadvantaged," rural folks *have* to work hard, and thus develop a "rural hard work ethic" by necessity (p. 75 & 77).

The frame's unfairness of public employees doing less yet earning more than harder-working private employees leads to resentment. Public employees are seen as "enjoying high salaries and great benefits," which were paid for by "rural folks' hard-earned taxpayers' dollars" (Cramer, 2016, p. 212).

[73] Such as construction workers (p. 188), or loggers (p. 102).

How this injustice violates conceptions of right order becomes evident when employing Brubaker's second tool. The social location of rural folks using the frame of rural consciousness is 'worse off' than urbanites due to living in a "tiny dying town" (Cramer, 2016, p. 197). The social location of conservative urban private employees using the frame of resentment is earning less than public workers. However, both categories of frame-employing conservatives view themselves as harder-working. Thus, their self-understanding as working harder and therefore deserving more creates discord with their social location of earning less (p. 72).

C. Frames, Filters, and Worldview

Because rural consciousness is a frame, its selective attention disattends some equally perceptible details (Friedman, 2011, p. 191). The most significant filter is that people employing it "understand their circumstances as the fault of guilty and less deserving social groups, [rather than] as the product of broad social, economic, and political forces" (Cramer, 2016, p. 9).

Cramer noted that the frame of rural folks "screen[s] out the possibility that public workers are people like themselves" (2016, p. 192). Indeed, even public employees "who were actually residents of a rural community" were seen as "being controlled by urban concerns and values" (p. 131).

Furthermore, having a rural identity "makes support for limited government the logical choice" in three ways (Cramer, 2016, p. 154). First, government services were required but the higher taxes needed to fund them are deemed outright unaffordable (p. 154). Second, since decision makers write regulations in the cities, they "often displayed a lack of understanding" of rural life (p. 155). Lastly, taxes were seen as too high and not coming back to small towns; because taxes were being paid *yet still* "rural communities are dying," those taxes must be being

mishandled (p. 146). In other words, government is framed as "not functioning on behalf of people like" them (p. 160).

This logic is part of the worldview that accompanies the frame of rural consciousness. Another view is feeling "systematically left out" of the centers of power (Cramer, 2016, p. 120). Additionally, government programs are perceived as doing two things: help the undeserving, and increasing taxes (p. 223). Furthermore, both urban and rural blue-collar workers using the frame Cramer discovered thought that "state employees have extravagant health care and pension benefits, are inefficient, and do not work very hard" (p. 186).

D. Master frame, Resonance, and Discursive Strategies

The combination between the existential threat of feeling "that their way of life is under attack," and the injustice of feeling ignored, disrespected, and "left on their own," feels deeply wrong (Cramer, 2016, p. 104 & 77). As such, Cramer's frame of rural consciousness is a master frame, which assigns blame, legitimates goals, and calls for action (Stanbridge, 2002, p. 528).

The resonance of rural consciousness is strong because it aligns with pre-existing economic, cultural, and social themes. The "economic anxiety and dread" is an existential threat (Cramer, 2016, p. 207). Culturally speaking, public employees have been a popular target as early as 1936, when they were called 'tax eaters' (p. 141). Lastly, Cramer noted that, socially speaking, "attitudes about redistribution rest on a long history of racial discrimination" based on "beliefs that some racial groups are lazier than others" (p. 87 & 166). However, she found that there was ample overt racism in urban and suburban Wisconsin, but little in rural areas, which led her to conclude that "racism today is not simple"[74] (p. 166). Furthermore, in stark

[74] "When rural folks did make openly racist comments, they did so about Native Americans an overwhelmingly rural population in Wisconsin" (Cramer, 2016, p. 86).

contrast to Hochschild's deep story, social values such as abortion or gay marriage were not central conversation topics amongst Cramer's groups of rural or urban Wisconsinites; they disagreed only with the economic values of urbanites (p. 70).

Finally, the master frame of rural consciousness yields two discursive strategies. Both have less government as goal. First, keeping "their small towns alive" appears attainable if 'unaffordable taxes' and "unfair regulations" are reduced (Cramer, 2016, p. 193 & 213 & 203). Second, the master frame calls for correcting the unfairness of public employees who get "exorbitant benefits and salaries paid [for] with hard-earned taxpayer money" despite being inefficient, lazy, and undeserving (p. 143). Both causes were addressed by Act 10, which was introduced by Scott Walker in February 2011 (p. 24). However, Cramer astutely noted that "what gets sold as support for small government is often something quite different" because "pro-small-government arguments are often not based in libertarian principles but are instead rooted in a sense of injustice" (p. 220).

4. Affective polarization

A. Recapitulation

This thesis responded to Persily's book not addressing affective polarization. As discussed in the introduction, Iyengar and Westwood found that affective polarization is partisan hostility and "exceeds racial hostility" (2015, p. 691). Next, Mouffe's theory of agonism was used in Chapter I to define 'hostility' as prompted by perceiving "an existential threat" (2016, para. 6), thereby creating the desire to eliminate the mortal adversary permanently (Hodgson, 2015, para. 2). In Chapter III, Gentzkow's data analysis showed that the categories of people that can be expected to think and behave 'hostilely' are ideological partisans of both parties (2016, pp. 13-17), and that the reason they do so is because their opponents' policies "are [perceived as] so

misguided that they threaten the nation's well-being" (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 11 qtd. in Gentzkow, 2016, p. 15).

The question this raises is *why?* Why is the opposing ideology a threat to the nation? This chapter sought to answer that by understanding how conservative partisans see themselves, see the world, and make sense of politics.

B. Clueless Policies

The commonalities between the two master frames show that there are three types of reasons why liberal policies are a threat to conservative partisans. First, liberal policies tend to increase taxes and expand the government, thereby placing additional financial burdens on those who already struggle financially (Hochschild, 2016, p. 179). Second, those taxes are used to help those who are deemed to be undeserving. This is closely related to the final reason; by helping those who were not "pulling themselves up by the bootstraps," liberal policies took away the incentive to work hard (Cramer, 2016, p. 153). In other words, they did not "*give personal morality its full due*" [*sic*] (Hochschild, 2016, p. 158). Therefore, conservative partisans have, respectively, an economic, a socio-economic, and a social objection to these three types of liberal policies. However, these answers do not align with the question; they indicate why liberal policies are a nuisance rather than a threat.

C. Nation-Threatening Policies

The answer lies in Mouffe's theory of agonism; such policies are seen as existential threats. Increased taxes is perhaps the most obvious, for they can literally be the back-breaking straw for rural communities that have "been experiencing a long, slow death for decades" due to the rural disadvantage and economies of scale (Cramer, 2016, p. 94 & 98). Indeed, Cramer

even noted that rural residents, fearing their children would not be able to afford buying their own house later in life, perceived that "their way of life is under attack" (p. 81 & 104).

Additionally, Mouffe defined the concept of existential threat not merely as a matter of biological life and death but also as "putting into question [one's] identity" (2016, para. 6). Fittingly, Hochschild remarked that:

> along with blue-collar jobs, a blue-collar way of life was going out of fashion, and with it, the honor attached to a rooted self and pride in endurance – the deep story self. The liberal upper-middle class saw community as insularity and close-mindedness rather than as a source of belonging and honor. (p. 218)

So although the conservative blue-collar way of life need not disappear, its social status will dwindle. Furthermore, as their status decreases, that of others increases; "[l]iberals were asking them to feel compassion for the downtrodden in the back of the line, the 'slaves' of society. They didn't want to; they felt downtrodden themselves and wanted only to look 'up' to the elite" [*sic*] (p. 219). However, when they attempted to retain their social status by "aim[ing] their indignation down at the poor slackers, some of whom were jumping the line," they were chastised for being racist (p. 219). Thus, in Hochschild's deep story, blue-collar conservatives are powerless to prevent themselves being continually pushed farther back in line.[75]

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[75] Having discussed existential threats in the economic and social domain, it seems tempting to also include an ideological example. However, since neither Cramer nor Hochschild discussed appropriate examples, doing so would be a slippery slope into what Brubaker would deem groupist slackness, namely reifying a conservative straw man. Therefore, the following example should merely be taken as an illustration of the possibilities instead of as a serious argument:
When the US signed the Paris Agreement, it pledged $3B to the Green Climate Fund. This could be perceived as a policy so misguided that it threatens the nation, if one were to question the existence of climate change, its consequences, its possible amelioration, or consider the deal 'unfair.' (nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/02/climate/trump-paris-green-climate-fund.html)

D. Nation-Threatening Ideology

Understanding the reasons for blue-collar conservative partisans to consider liberal policies a threat to their economic and social ways of life is crucial to understand why liberal ideology seems a threat to the nation to them. Liberal ideology is the worldview that *inspires* pursuing such policies. It is the liberal master frame which designates poor people and minorities as deserving, and justifies helping them with funds acquired by taxing the rest of society. Thus, liberal ideology is the frame that creates the existential threats; a social threat by defining deservingness in a way that questions the identity of blue-collar conservative lifestyles through policies such as affirmative action, and an economic threat by taxing those who are struggling to remain in the middle class without reinvesting it in *their* communities.

E. Insights and Complexity

Understanding how ideology is connected to a worldview that is created by frames leads to some insights but also further questions.

The most notable consequence is that partisanship is arguably determined by one's master frame. A master frame results from the interaction between one's conception of right order and their worldview. A worldview is comprised of filters and frames, which determine what goes unseen versus what is highlighted in one's perception of politics and social life. Right order is one's conception of what the world should be, and is based on the interaction between moral values and meta-physical views on how the world works (e.g. whether human nature is cooperative or competitive). Based on these definitions, ideology can arguably be defined as 'a means to an end;' specifically, what tools one should employ to regulate public life, and the right order that ought to be achieved by using them (Brubaker, 2015, p. 5).

Thus, affective polarization is the clash between two ideologies that are mutually exclusive because they have conflicting conceptions of the 'right' path to take and the

destination to reach. By taking the incorrect path in the wrong direction, one's right order is threatened and delegitimized, and because morality and philosophy are deeply-held, it causes a fierce emotional response. However, this raises questions too.

Emotions, frames, and values are clearly interwoven, but their causal relations are unclear. Which comes first; do the frames determine what is perceived and thereby influence what is seen as right? Or do moral values determine what is seen? And are emotions caused by frames and values, or do emotions express themselves through frames and values? Agonism, which states that politics has "the status of an *ontology of the social* [*sic*]," arguably posits that emotions come first, and frames and worldviews are adapted to justify resentment towards other racial or economic groups (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, xiv). However, schema theory holds that values are part of the top tier and that the lower-level cues are contextual events. Since emotions are caused by events and not perpetually present, schema theory arguably posits that morality and frames come first. In other words, the theories disagree (and do not neatly align with reality either).

Conclusion

Polarization has been tearing America apart. Increasing hyper-partisanship has led to gridlock, and hostility has made talking to one another impossible (Cramer, 2016, p. 210). It can become a direct threat to American democracy if it incentivizes the government to abuse state power to disadvantage its opponents, which leads to backsliding into competitive authoritarianism (Mickey et al., 2017, p. 20). But the government gets its incentives from voters, so democracy is protected if partisans respect each other. Thus, affective polarization must be countered.

The theory of agonism shows that affective polarization begins with perceiving an existential threat. Consequently, political or social conflict is pivoted from an agonistic approach, which respects plurality, to an antagonistic approach, which does not.[76] Instead, since 'all is fair in … war,' neither side holds back when criticizing or demonizing their opponent, nor are they incentivized to rein in more extreme partisans. As such, partisan hostility is created which, in turn, poses an existential threat to the opposing side. And thus, affective polarization ensues and endures.

Existential threat can be economic or social. Rural communities have been enduring a permanent recession for decades. Real wages for high school-educated men have fallen by 40% since 1970 (Hochschild, 2016, p. 125). The conservative way of life seemed to be going out of fashion (p. 218). No – worse – it was under attack (Cramer, 2016, p. 104). Conservative partisans feel afraid, insulted, betrayed, resentful, and mad (Hochschild, 2016, p. 222). Feeling shame when they yearned to feel pride, they have been mourning a lost way of life (p. 225).

[76] Doing so provides a target that is easily eliminated permanently by one's mortal adversary (walking up to a terrorist wearing an explosive belt to have a discussion is unlikely to end well)

Trump brought change. He promised to lift them up from bitterness and despair (Hochschild, 2016, p. 226). He inspired an emotional transformation – instead of feeling downtrodden, he gave them a feeling of ascendance (p. 222). His speeches evoked dominance, bravado, and pride (p. 225). He released them from *liberal feeling rules* (p. 227). He was the identity politics candidate for White men – a great antidepressant (p. 230). Conservative partisans arguably did not vote in their economic interests, but they certainly did vote in their emotional self-interest (p. 228).

The emotions Trump thrived on were anger and resentment. With their way of life in decline and the government helping other social groups, it was easy for conservative partisans to assign blame. Trump not only promised to 'Make America Great Again,' he also promised to take revenge. The anger people felt was not directed at changing the conditions of their lives; it was aimed at American institutions and other social groups. Trump's voters had felt disenfranchised, neglected, and ignored by American democracy; what good were institutions if they worked for somebody else? (Cramer, 2016, p. 180). But "when we turn away from politics because it brings resentment rather than hope to the surface, democracy ceases to exist" (p. 220).

Many scholars looked at saving democracy and stopping polarization, but none found a magic bullet (Persily, 2015, p. 10). However, they addressed hyper-partisanship and gridlock. This thesis contributes to their efforts by studying affective polarization in the books of Cramer and Hochschild.

The results are two-fold; not only did conservatives turn against government programs and their recipients, but also against the ideology that promoted them. Economic and social declines that had been present for decades had reached a tipping point. Government programs helped the poor and minorities, but the taxes required to do so only burdened the middle class more. Thus, rural and middle class conservative partisans turned against minorities and against

the government. But they also attacked the ideology that claimed those groups deserved help. As such, conservative hostility has three main strands of actions: repealing liberal policies, attacking its recipients, and discrediting liberal ideology.

An ideological battle is raging between two visions of what America is and what it should be. Cramer noted that there is "a national debate between two visions of government: government as an essential safety net and guarantor of a healthy society versus government as an obstacle and bloated resource suck" (2016, p. 210). Furthermore, she noted that Americans now "treat differences in [their] political points of view as fundamental differences in who [they] are as human beings" (p. 211). Hochschild added that the "left and right are focused on different conflicts and the respective ideas of unfairness linked to them" (2016, p. 236). The left, looking at the private sector, sees a 1% over-class versus a 99% under-class (p. 236). The right focuses on personal morality and sees a class of hard-working 'makers' versus a class of idle 'takers' (p. 236). With ideologies that identify such different issues as America's problems, it might seem that understanding affective polarization can bring little change.

However, there is one thing that both ideologies seem to agree on: the need for more jobs. The economic existential threats are caused by the loss of livelihood. Hochschild identified globalization as the core problem, since it promotes automation and corporate offshoring, which leads to the loss of many manufacturing jobs (2016, p. 125). As a result, "the multinational companies that roam the globe become more powerful than the political states vying for their favor" (p. 230).

If these are indeed the economic causes for existential threats,[77] affective polarization appears difficult to reverse. Manufacturing jobs are unlikely to return, let alone quickly and

[77] Due to limits of time and space, this thesis could not show that globalization is the root cause of economic existential threats. A preliminary assessment of the incentives for politicians and the media, which can be studied by using the Selectorate Theory to analyze the books of

plentiful enough to stop the former middle class from expanding. It is doubtful whether American democracy can be saved by reforms to its economy or institutions.

But the consensus that new jobs are needed may provide an opening to restore dialogue. There is one glaring problem: if ideological partisans are already hostile towards each other, already disagree about what the causes are and which solutions should be pursued, and even blame their opponent *as* the cause, would an 'opening to restore dialogue' not simply exacerbate things? Clearly, both sides need to be able to talk to each other first, before attempting to address divisive problems. Mansbridge and Martin noted what is needed to do so: "[a] new political science of negotiation that can suggest new mechanisms and protocols that help to 'get the deal done,' even in polarized times, [because that] would accomplish a great deal of good" (2013, p. 46).

The challenge is to talk about existential threats while disagreeing ideologically about their causes and potential solutions. It is a daunting prospect. But there might be a way. Daniel L. Shapiro developed the Relational Identity Theory, which is based on what he calls the Tribes Effect. His method is specifically aimed at countering the emotional forces in conflict that has become centered around identities. Affective polarization might be reduced or even solved if his approach became ingrained in American institutions. Whether that is possible, and how it could be achieved, are topics that future research could explore.

Polarization cannot be captured in a few pages, but this thesis has shown how important emotions are, and that agonism and schema theory are useful approaches to study them. Perhaps an emotional negotiation method like that of Shapiro can counter polarization and prevent backsliding.

Cramer and Hochschild, seems to indicate that Hochschild's claim is justified. However, it is a complex topic, and substantiating Hochschild's argument falls beyond the scope of this thesis.

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