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Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship: A Comparative Perspective

Noam Lupu

Abstract   Scholars view polarization with trepidation. But polarization may clarify voters' choices and generate stronger party attachments. The link between party polarization and mass partisanship remains unclear. I look to theories of partisanship to derive implications about the relationships among polarization, citizens' perceptions of polarization, and mass partisanship. I test those implications using cross-national and longitudinal survey data. My results confirm that polarization correlates with individual partisanship across space and time. Citizens in polarized systems also perceive their parties to be more polarized. And perceiving party polarization makes people more likely to be partisan. That relationship appears to be causal: using a long-term panel survey from the United States, I find that citizens become more partisan as they perceive polarization increasing.

Keywords Party polarization · Mass partisanship · CSES · ANES · Panel survey

Party polarization poses serious problems for democracy. Studies link the polarization of the Democratic and Republican Parties in the United States to legislative gridlock, elite incivility, income inequality, and mass disengagement.[1] Across a broader range of countries, polarization also contributes to democratic

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[1] For reviews of this research, see Fiorina and Abrams (2008), Hetherington (2009), and Layman et al. (2006).

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breakdown, corruption, and economic decline (e.g., Brown et al. 2011; Frye 2002; Valenzuela 1978).

But party polarization may also have some desirable effects. Party polarization may strengthen party brands and clarify voters' choices (Lupu 2013). Presented with a clearer set of choices among parties, citizens may also form stronger party attachments.[2] In developing democracies—where democratic competition and party attachments are nascent—clearer choices and stronger party attachments may bolster electoral stability. Mass partisanship institutionalizes party systems, stabilizes elections, and consolidates new democracies (e.g., Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Rose and Mishler 1998). If party polarization indeed strengthens partisan attachments, then some degree of polarization may be welcome in new and developing democracy. Party polarization may thus bring desirable outcomes that countervail its adverse effects.

Yet we still know little about the relationship between party polarization and mass partisanship. Research on the United States observes that the period of party polarization coincides with a resurgence of mass partisanship (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Bartels 2000; Brewer 2005; Hetherington 2001; Levendusky 2009). But these studies focus on the single U.S. case, making it difficult to draw general conclusions. Even the handful of comparative studies on this topic focus on a very small sample of Western European countries (Berglund et al. 2006; Holmberg 1994; Schmitt 2009; Schmitt and Holmberg 1995). We still know little about how general the association between party polarization and mass partisanship really is.

At the individual level, the causal link between party polarization and partisanship also remains both unclear and untested. Both U.S. and comparative studies suggest a macro-level relationship: party polarization intensifies partisan conflict and makes parties more salient to citizens, increasing partisanship. As a result, these studies do not examine how individuals' perceptions of party polarization affect their attachments to parties.

The inattention to perceptions of polarization is particularly surprising given how we think people form party attachments. I argue that both the social-identity conception of partisanship and the competing rationalistic view imply that greater differentiation between parties should make citizens more partisan. From a social-identity perspective, party polarization allows individuals to better distinguish the parties and thus to feel greater affinity toward their party over another. From a rationalistic perspective, polarization implies that the utility-differential between parties increases. The implication is that party polarization should make it more likely for individuals to become partisan.

I test this hypothesis using cross-national, longitudinal, and long-term panel survey data from the comparative study of electoral systems (CSES), American national election studies (ANES), and political socialization study (PSS). My results confirm the causal effect of party polarization on individual partisanship. Party polarization at the country-level correlates with individual partisanship across a far broader range of countries than any previous study has yet considered. And party

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[2] I use the terms *partisanship*, *party attachments*, and *party identification* interchangeably to refer to an individual's self-identification with a political party.

polarization registers with citizens: individuals in polarized systems actually perceive their parties to be more polarized. Finally, perceiving party polarization makes individuals more likely to be partisan. In the first place, people who perceive parties as more polarized identify more strongly with a party. Moreover, that relationship appears to be causal: panel survey data from the United States show that individuals become more partisan as they perceive party polarization increasing.

This paper thus presents the first conceptual effort to derive implications from theories of mass partisanship for the effect of party polarization. Using a variety of data and different measures, it also tests those implications against the alternative that party polarization simply makes parties more salient politically. And it employs panel data to identify the causal direction of that relationship.

Implications of Party Polarization for Mass Partisanship

Parties position themselves in response to strategic incentives. They respond to the incentives that electoral rules and other formal institutions generate (Cox 1990; Sartori 1976). They form around structural contexts like social cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), levels of development (Sigelman and Yough 1978), or degrees of political uncertainty (Lupu and Riedl 2013). Parties shift their positions in response to changes in public opinion (Ezrow et al. 2011), economic conditions or shocks (Ura and Ellis 2012), and shifting international constraints (Haupt 2010). And parties also adjust in response to shifts by their competitors (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009).

The positions parties adopt affect mass partisanship, the degree to which citizens feel attached to a political party.[3] Prominent theories of public opinion emphasize that elite behavior plays a major role in influencing mass attitudes like partisanship (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Zaller 1992). And yet, studies of partisanship pay little attention to the effect of party positions. Parties in some advanced democracies may be fairly stable in the short term (e.g., Baumer and Gold 1995), but they do shift over time (Green et al. 2005: Chapter 5). Those in developing democracies sometimes do so quite rapidly (Lupu 2011). As party positions shift, the polarization of the party system as a whole—how dispersed parties are in the ideological space (Sartori 1976)—may also change.

The polarization of the U.S. parties since the 1970s has raised widespread scholarly concern (e.g. Hetherington 2009; Layman et al. 2006; McCarty et al. 2006). So too comparative scholars worry about party polarization, which they link to the democratic breakdowns that ended Germany's Weimar Republic, France's Fourth Republic, and Chile's pre-1973 democracy (Sani and Sartori 1983; Sartori

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[3] I conceive of partisan attachments as lying on a continuum. Each individual has in mind how attached she feels to a party, and as that attachment increases, she gets closer to an arbitrary threshold above which she is willing to tell an interviewer that she identifies with the party. As a result, any increase in the intensity of attachment will also increase the probability of moving from the non-partisan column to the partisan one. I therefore discuss the conceptual effect of party polarization interchangeably as "strengthening" partisanship or "increasing the likelihood of" partisanship. Due to data limitations, I empirically measure only the latter manifestation.

1976; Valenzuela 1978). More recent comparative studies also relate polarization to corruption, bad economic performance, and smaller government (Brown et al. 2011; Frye 2002; Lindqvist and Östling 2010).

Still, party polarization may also have desirable outcomes. In some contexts, polarization correlates with increased voter turnout and more consistent ideological voting (Dalton 2008; Eijk et al. 2005; Lachat 2008). Moreover, the further apart the political parties, the easier it may be for citizens to distinguish among their electoral options. And if citizens can more clearly distinguish parties, they may find it easier to form a party attachment. That may be desirable in developing democracies that suffer from high electoral volatility, where opportunities abound for unknown outsiders to capture elected office. In such contexts, some electoral stability grounded in widespread partisan attachments may be a desirable result of party polarization.

We nevertheless know little about the relationship between party polarization and mass partisanship. Research in the United States highlights the coinciding rise in party polarization and resurgent mass partisanship (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Bartels 2000; Brewer 2005; Hetherington 2001). But these studies primarily describe trends within a single case. They leave unexamined the causal connection between party polarization and individual partisanship. A handful of comparative studies find a similar association between party polarization and rates of partisanship in aggregate terms (Berglund et al. 2006; Holmberg 1994; Schmitt 2009; Schmitt and Holmberg 1995). But these studies rely on simple correlations from a small sample of Western European countries. Do these correlations generalize beyond this limited sample? Do citizens actually register party polarization and change their perceptions of their parties? Most importantly, is there a causal relationship that links party polarization, perceptions of polarization, and partisanship? These are the unanswered questions this paper takes up.

Why might we expect party polarization to strengthen mass partisanship? Studies of the United States and Western Europe emphasize the salience of party competition. Following Carmines and Stimson (1989), they expect partisanship to increase as parties become more and more salient in political discourse. When parties agree on policies, they become irrelevant to citizens. But when they disagree, partisan conflict becomes more heated and parties seem more important. As Hetherington (2001: 623) notes, "More partisan elite behavior caused by polarization should clarify party positions for the public, which in turn should influence the importance and salience of parties." Similarly, Schmitt and Holmberg (1995: 110) posit that, "Declining levels of ideological and issue conflict undercut the relevance of both parties and partisan ties." In other words, party polarization simply makes parties more relevant across the board.

An alternative set of explanations for the effect of party polarization on mass partisanship derive from theories about the origins of partisan attachments. Some of these theories suggest that partisanship is a social identity, an enduring psychological attachment with a party that is inherited like a religious affiliation and tends to persist over the life of an individual (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2005; Miller 1976, 1991; Miller and Shanks 1996). If we think of partisanship as such a social identity, then increased polarization among political parties allows citizens to

better distinguish party categories from one another. Studies in social psychology tell us that people typically hold some image, or prototype, in their minds when they think about a social group. In the case of partisan groups, citizens maintain and regularly update images of the typical Democrat or typical Republican (Green et al. 2005). As with other social attachments, they identify with the party they think they most closely resemble—a concept known as *fit*. But they feel more strongly about that attachment when they also think that other group prototypes are very different from them—a concept known as *comparative fit* (Hogg et al. 2004; Turner 1999). That means that a citizen who thinks she closely resembles the typical Republican will feel most strongly about her identity when she also perceives the typical Democrat to be very different. All else equal, the more different a person perceives these party prototypes to be, the more strongly she will identify with a party (Lupu 2013).

A revisionist perspective of mass partisanship offers a more rationalistic conceptualization. Citizens evaluate parties over time to form a "running tally" and choose the party most likely to benefit them (Achen 1992; Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Jackson 1975; Jennings and Markus 1984; Page and Jones 1979). From this perspective, partisanship is not an identity but rather a product of individuals maximizing their expected utilities. Party polarization still implies greater partisanship under this revisionist view. For citizens to calculate their net utility from supporting a particular party, they must take into account their expected gains from supporting other parties. When parties are close together, the net benefit from supporting one over the other is fairly small. But as the difference between parties grows, that net benefit increases, all else equal. In other words, an individual stands to net much more from her party if she also stands to gain very little (or lose a lot) from other parties.[4]

Both social-identity and rationalist conceptions of mass partisanship imply that greater distances between parties should make citizens more partisan.[5] But citizens must notice party polarization. If parties polarize but citizens hardly take notice, then these theories of partisanship would not imply that we ought to see people becoming more attached to parties. In that case, the issue-salience hypothesis would still predict increasing partisanship: parties are simply becoming more relevant to politics, even if individuals fail to realize that parties are more polarized. But theories of partisanship predict greater attachments only if party polarization

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[4] Both sets of theories of partisanship imagine that citizens evaluate (however subconsciously) parties on some salient political dimension. What dimension that is may vary across individuals, allowing party systems to polarize on one dimension without necessarily polarizing along another. The more concrete implication from these theories, then, is that party polarization along a particular dimension strengthens partisanship among individuals for whom that dimension is most salient. Much of my empirical analysis assumes that for most people, the economic left-right dimension matters most—an empirical regularity that is widely documented—but I also examine survey items that do not impose that particular dimension.

[5] This hypothesis may seem to fly in the face of a conventional wisdom in U.S. politics that Americans prefer bipartisanship (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Ramirez 2009; but see Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). However, it would not be inconsistent for individuals to both prefer bipartisanship or consensus consciously and for such party cooperation to weaken attachments through the more subconscious process of identity formation.

registers with citizens. Then, people who come to perceive the parties as further apart will become partisan, all else equal.

The "all else equal" caveat is critical. In a dynamic sense, party polarization may mean that parties move further away from some citizens and, perhaps, closer to others. Polarization could turn a person off from her party, if it looks too different or too extreme. Or polarization could make her more attached to her party, if other parties look more different or worse by comparison, or if polarization brings her party closer to her values. In other words, a party shift can simultaneously affect both the overall polarization of the party system and its proximity to certain individuals. That means that if we want to generate predictions about the total impact of party polarization in any given place and time, we need to also know something about the distribution of citizens. Only then can we begin to predict whether rates of mass partisanship would increase, decline, or stay the same. Future research should take up these aggregate-level questions. For now, this paper emphasizes the individual-level expectation that party polarization per se matters for mass partisanship, independent of its potential effect on citizens' proximity to the parties.

Empirical Evidence

Theories of mass partisanship imply that if citizens perceive party polarization, they are more likely to become partisan. The more polarized the party system, the easier it will be for citizens to distinguish parties from one another. This will make it more likely that individuals either identify with a particular party over others or stand to gain relatively more from supporting their closest party.

I test this proposition in three stages. First, I ask whether party polarization is associated with mass party attachments using a wider range of countries than previous analyses. I then examine whether party polarization in fact registers with citizens: do people in countries with more polarized parties perceive their party system to be more polarized? Finally, I test whether individuals who perceive polarization in their country are more likely to be partisan.[6]

I begin the analysis with cross-sectional survey data from around the world and over time in the United States. These data allow me to examine whether correlations consistent with each proposition hold up empirically once we account for potential confounds. But cross-sectional data have important limitations. Chief among them is that the causal relationship between perceived polarization and mass partisanship is difficult to identify with these data. A person who identifies with a party may see her party as being very different from other parties as a result of her attachment. I therefore subsequently turn to a long-term panel survey from the United States to see whether people become more partisan as they perceive polarization increasing.

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[6] In theory, this relationship involves mediation: party polarization increases perceived polarization, which in turn increases partisanship. Analyzing mediation effects requires strong modeling assumptions, and better methodologies currently being developed (e.g., Imai et al. 2010) are not yet equipped to handle multilevel data. I therefore conduct what some scholars refer to as *implicit mediation analysis* by demonstrating the three relationships involved in the theorized causal pathway.

Cross-Sectional Data and Measures

I employ two sets of cross-sectional survey data to study the relationships among party polarization, individual perceptions of party polarization, and partisanship.[7] The first is cross-national, combining modules 1–3 of the CSES. This dataset consists of nationally representative surveys conducted shortly before or after national elections across a wide range of countries. The surveys asked respondents both about their individual partisanship and about the ideological positions of the political parties in their country.[8] That allows me to analyze the relationship among party polarization, individuals' perceptions of party positions, and partisanship around the world. My sample includes 88 election studies across 37 countries from 1996 to 2011.[9]

A second set of survey data comes from the repeated cross-sections of the ANES, which has followed every national election in the United States since 1948. The survey items I use are only available beginning in 1972, and missing in 2002, so my dataset consists of 17 survey-years between 1972 and 2008.

I am interested in measuring two key concepts: partisanship and polarization. With CSES data, I measure partisanship using that project's standard item, "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?" and code the yes/no responses dichotomously. There are well-known debates about the appropriate way to tap party attachment in surveys, and existing cross-national options are not perfect (Johnston 2006). This item is one of few defensible options and one that is used widely in comparative analyses of partisanship (e.g., Dalton and Weldon 2007; Huber et al. 2005).

The ANES uses a slightly different item to capture partisanship. More directly aimed at identities, it asks "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" Respondents who call themselves Independent are then asked whether they are "closer to the Republican or Democratic party." For comparability with the CSES measure, I code as partisan both respondents who identified outright and those who said they were closer to one of the parties.[10] If

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[7] Descriptive statistics and information about survey methodology for these studies are provided in the supplementary appendix.

[8] The items on party positions reference a limited number of parties (six in the first CSES module and nine thereafter), so we might be concerned that they leave out important parties in very fragmented systems. Therefore, I exclude studies in which the parties referenced in the survey together received less than 80 % of the vote in the relevant election. Setting the threshold at 90 % of the vote excludes additional surveys but does not substantively change my results (see supplementary appendix).

[9] I include only those surveys conducted in minimally democratic settings, defined as those receiving a positive Polity score. The countries included are Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, and Uruguay. I omit surveys conducted in Albania, Australia, and Belgium because the items on either partisanship or party placement were not comparable to the rest of the sample.

[10] In U.S. studies, the latter respondents are typically referred to as *leaners*, although they behave more like outright partisans than true independents (Keith et al. 1992; Petrocik 2009). Indeed, Barnes et al. (1988) show that leaners do consider themselves "close" to a political party when asked the CSES-style item. Most analyses of partisanship with ANES data employ an ordinal scale in which leaners are considered weak partisans. My ANES results are substantively equivalent using the ordinal scale (see supplementary appendix), but I report results with the dichotomous measure for comparability with the CSES analysis.

the results using these different measures are substantively similar, then we can be more confident that they are not artifacts of question wording.

I measure polarization both at the country level and in terms of individual perceptions. I want to capture party polarization using party positions on the dimension of politics that is salient to citizens. Across countries, the left-right dimension tends to be the most salient for most electorates (e.g., Huber and Inglehart 1995). But there are multiple ways to identify party positions along this dimension. I use two measures that rely on either survey respondents or country experts. CSES respondents are asked to place the major national parties in their country on a 0–10 left-right scale.[11] Averaging across these individual responses allows me to identify where respondents place that party on a left-right dimension. Of course, respondent party placements are subject to well-known attribution and contrast biases (e.g., Drummond 2010; Granberg and Brown 1992; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Merrill et al. 2001). An alternative is to rely on expert judgements of party positions, which are arguably less prone to these perceptual biases. The CSES asks its coordinators to place their country's parties on the same 0–10 left-right scale. Again, using multiple measures helps increase confidence about the robustness of the results.[12]

These party positions allow me to generate a measure of party polarization. Following previous scholars (e.g., Dalton 2008; Ezrow 2007; Lachat 2008; Sigelman and Yough 1978; Taylor and Herman 1971), I measure polarization by summing how far each party is positioned from the average party position. In systems that are more polarized, parties should be further away from this mean position, the system's ideological center of gravity. When parties are instead clustered together, they will be close to this center. Party polarization, thus, measures how spread out the parties are in the system. I also account for each party's prominence in the system by weighting its contribution to the system's polarization by its share of the popular vote.[13] Of course, vote shares may not fully reflect the prominence of each party, but it serves as a reasonable proxy. Moreover, an unweighted measure of polarization risks generating high values as an artifact of

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[11] The specific wording is, "In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place [party name] on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?"

[12] The correlation between respondent- and expert-based party placement is 0.45. Another set of expert surveys conducted by scholars based in Chapel Hill offers similar measures of party placement (Hooghe et al. 2010). Those surveys were conducted in 1999, 2006, and 2010, but only in the subset of European Union member countries. Their advantage is that they rely on the responses of multiple experts per country, making their measures more reliable. Matching each country-year in my CSES dataset to the temporally closest Chapel Hill survey, my results are substantively equivalent (see supplementary appendix). I also employed a measure of economic left-right placement from the Comparative Manifestos Project, which is available for most of the countries in my sample. These placements are based on the number of times particular keywords appear in the preelection manifesto of each party (Budge et al. 2001). Again, my results are substantively similar using this measure (see supplementary appendix).

[13] These vote shares are the absolute percent of the popular vote received by each party in the national lower house elections, as reported by the CSES. In mixed electoral systems, this is the proportional portion of the vote. If lower house elections were not the subject of the election study, I use presidential vote shares. Dropping the presidential cases from the analysis does not substantively change my results (see supplementary appendix).

small, fringe parties (see Alvarez and Nagler 2004; Dow 2001; Kollman et al. 1992).[14]

The standard measure of party polarization calculates the weighted sum of squared distances between each party's position on a left-right scale and the center of gravity of the system (i.e., the weighted average of all the parties' positions):

$$P = \sum_{j=1}^{n} \omega_j (p_j - \bar{p})^2, \tag{1}$$

where ω_j is the share of the vote received by party j, p_j is the position of party j on the left-right scale, and $\bar{p}$ is the weighted average position of the parties. Using the CSES 11-point scale, this measure of polarization ranges from zero, if all the parties are in the same position, to 25, if the parties are perfectly polarized.

In the United States, measuring party polarization over time is more straightforward. Here, we can use the actual policy positions taken by the two parties in congressional voting records. Like previous scholars, I measure party polarization in the United States as the absolute distance between the average ideological positions of House Democrats and Republicans at each election (Hetherington 2001; McCarty et al. 2006). To determine legislators' positions, I use DW-NOMINATE scores, which measure each legislator's ideology based on her voting record; thus, the DW-NOMINATE distance between the U.S. parties has the advantage of measuring actual party behavior rather than respondents' or experts' perceptions.

In addition to party polarization, I also want to examine individual perceptions of polarization. With the CSES data, I rely on how individual respondents placed each party. I measure a respondents' perception of her country's polarization as the average distance she places between the parties. So, for a respondent who placed five parties on the left-right scale, I take a weighted average of the 20 distances between each pair of parties. Put formally, this means:

$$P_i = \sum_{k=1}^{m-1} \sum_{j=1}^{m} \frac{\omega_j + \omega_k}{m-1} |p_j - p_k|, \tag{2}$$

where j and k are different parties, p_j and p_k are the positions the respondent assigned parties j and k, ω_j and ω_k are their vote shares, and m is the number of parties the respondent placed. I generate a similar distance-based measure of perceived polarization with the ANES data. Beginning in 1972, the ANES asked respondents to place the two U.S. parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, on an ideological liberal-conservative scale. With only two parties, I measure polarization as simply the difference in their perceived positions.[15]

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[14] Since the CSES does not ask respondents/experts to place every party in the system, an unweighted measure using these data will also be highly misleading in cases where a significant number of small parties are omitted.

[15] The placement question in the ANES offers respondents only 7 categories, as compared to the 11 in the CSES. The question states, "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you [from 1996 on: Here is] a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place the

This distance-based measure of perceived polarization assumes a left-right ideological dimension. Although this assumption seems reasonable in most modern democracies, some of the survey data allow me to relax it. Module 3 of the CSES included an item that asked respondents whether they saw major differences between the parties during the election under study.[16] Similarly, most ANES surveys also asked respondents whether they, "think there are any important differences in what the Republicans and Democrats stand for."[17] Although these items reduce the sample and limit perceived polarization to a dichotomous variable, they have the advantage of not imposing a left-right dimension. Some respondents may perceive little difference between the parties on the left-right scale, but they may still see important differences between the parties on other dimensions. It is useful, therefore, to corroborate my results from the distance-based measure of perceived polarization with this agnostic one.

My analysis of the relationship between party polarization and partisanship must also account for characteristics that affect an individual's propensity to develop a party attachment. We may expect that individuals who place themselves close to a party on the left-right scale are more likely to be partisan. I measure an individual's proximity to a party as the left-right distance between her position and the position she assigns her nearest party. The further she perceives herself to be a from a party, the lower her proximity. Studies of perceptual bias also highlight that ideological extremists may be more likely to perceive parties as polarized and to hold strong partisan attachments (Granberg and Brown 1992). I therefore also control for how far a respondent places themselves from the center of the left-right scale. In many democracies, unions socialize people into attachments with labor-based parties (e.g., Marks 1993; Zuckerman et al. 2007), so I include a measure of whether or not a respondent is a union member. Some authors suggest that political information allows individuals to better distill the positions of parties; in this case, more knowledgeable individuals are more likely to be partisan (Albright 2009; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). We might alternatively expect that more knowledge-able individuals are less likely to rely on partisanship as a heuristic (Dalton 1984; Shively 1979). To account for these possibilities, I control for the respondent's level of education.[18] Finally, I control for three demographic

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Footnote 15 continued

[Democratic/Republican] Party on this scale?" Respondents who did not place themselves on the ideological scale were not asked to place the parties. Beginning in 1984, a follow-up question was included that asked respondents where they would place themselves ideologically "if you had to choose." This significantly reduced non-response and thereby increased the number of respondents asked to place the parties. Limiting my sample to surveys from 1984 on does not substantively change my results (see supplementary appendix).

[16] The question asked, "During the election campaign, would you say that there were major differences between the [parties/candidates], minor differences, or no differences at all?" My variable distinguishes those who saw "major differences" from the other response categories.

[17] The item was not asked in the 1974, 1978, and 1982 studies.

[18] A preferable measure would more directly capture the respondent's political knowledge, but comparability and reliability across countries and time pose serious challenges. Still, educational attainment and political knowledge are highly correlated (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Highton 2009).

characteristics typically associated with partisanship: an individual's household income, age,[19] and gender.

The CSES models also control for three country-level factors that may confound the relationships among party polarization, perceived polarization, and mass partisanship. The effective number of electoral parties (ENP) measures the amount of choice individuals have when casting ballots. Some systems may be more polarized simply by virtue of having more parties, and a larger number of parties may offer voters a more nuanced set of party choices (Andrews and Money 2009). On the other hand, a larger number of parties may also produce a fragmented legislature. The more fragmented a legislature, the more likely it becomes that forming a government will require a disparate coalition of parties. As a result, citizens may have difficulty attributing policy stances to individual parties or blaming individual parties for bad government performance (Powell 2000).[20] Thus, there are good reasons to expect the ENP would be associated with either greater or lower partisanship. I measure ENP with the standard Laakso and Taagepera (1979) calculation using the vote shares reported in the CSES.[21]

Another potential confound is the degree to which a party system is institutionalized and parties' reputations are widely known. Individuals need to observe party behavior in order to develop party attachments, which may be why older democracies tend to have more partisans (Dalton and Weldon 2007). To account for this possibility, I control for the log of the weighted average of the ages of the parties at each election, a standard proxy for institutionalization (e.g., Roberts and Wibbels 1999).[22] Finally, partisanship may be associated with the salience of other group identities (Huber et al. 2005). If social groups like unions, churches, or ethnic groups are also associated with political parties, then membership in these groups can encourage citizens to identify with parties (Campbell et al. 1960). On the other hand, if multiple membership in these social groups cross-pressures citizens (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), they may not encourage partisanship. I measure social heterogeneity using the commonly-employed index developed by Alesina et al. (2003) that combines ethnic and religious fractionalization within each country.

Both the CSES and ANES data are structured hierarchically (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). In the CSES data, each survey respondent is clustered within that country-year study. In the ANES data, each respondent is clustered within that year's study. To account for this structure and my dichotomous dependent variable, I specify multilevel probit models that allow for country-year random effects in the CSES analyses and year random effects in the ANES analyses. Observations in my

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[19] I include a squared age term to capture a potential quadratic relationship, whereby partisanship levels off after a certain age (see Converse 1969).

[20] Huber et al. (2005) argue that these two effects can be estimated separately by including the effective numbers of electoral and legislative parties. In my dataset, these variables are correlated at 0.92, which precludes including both.

[21] Since the CSES reports the vote shares of only the parties covered in the survey, they do not always sum to 100 %. I count the missing votes as a residual category and employ the correction proposed by (Taagepera 1997).

[22] The data on party age come from Brader et al. (2013a) for modules 1 and 2 of the CSES. For module 3, I collected my own data on party age.

models are weighted using the design and demographic weights provided in each dataset along with a weight to account for different sample sizes across country-years.

Party Polarization and Mass Partisanship

Is party polarization associated with mass partisanship, as studies with more limited samples have suggested? A glimpse at country-year averages from the CSES data suggests so. Figure 1 plots the proportion of respondents who identify with a party against party polarization at each country-year. Here, I use the measure of polarization based on respondent party placements. The scatterplot shows a positive relationship between party polarization and mass partisanship, consistent with expectations: rates of partisanship appear to be higher when parties are more polarized.[23] Although country-level correlations look promising, I want to know whether individuals are more likely to identify with a party where parties are polarized.

Multilevel models of individual-level data point in the same direction as aggregate correlations. Figure 2 plots the predicted probability that a respondent identifies with a party, based on shifting each variable across the interquartile range (i.e., from its sample 25th to 75th percentile), with all other continuous variables held at their sample means and ordered variables held at their sample medians. As the figure shows, individuals are more likely to be partisan in countries with more polarized party systems. Whether I measure polarization using respondents' placement of the parties or experts' judgments, mass partisanship is positively associated with party polarization. This relationship appears both in the cross-national CSES data and over time in the ANES.

Regardless of the measure of party polarization, the correlations between individual characteristics and partisanship are consistent with many previous studies of partisanship. The closer an individual thinks she is to a party, the more likely she is to be partisan. More ideologically extreme, educated, more affluent, and older individuals are also more likely to identify with a party. On average, union members are more likely than those not in unions to be partisan across countries, but within the United States, union membership seems unrelated to partisanship.[24] Interestingly, women appear to be less partisan than men in comparative perspective, but more partisan in the United States.

The relationships between partisanship and other country-level variables also largely confirm expectations. Systems with older, presumably more institutionalized, parties consistently appear to be associated with a greater propensity for partisanship. And those with more fragmented party systems appear to have fewer partisans, consistent with the idea that fragmented party system, where coalitions

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[23] As already noted, fuller consideration of aggregate variation must also account for the ideological distribution of citizens. But my interest is in the individual-level relationship. I include this figure merely to illustrate the cross-national variation in these data.

[24] In some models, fewer than 25 % of respondents were union respondents, so rather than representing the effect of the interquartile range (which would be zero), the figures simply show the effect of becoming a union member.
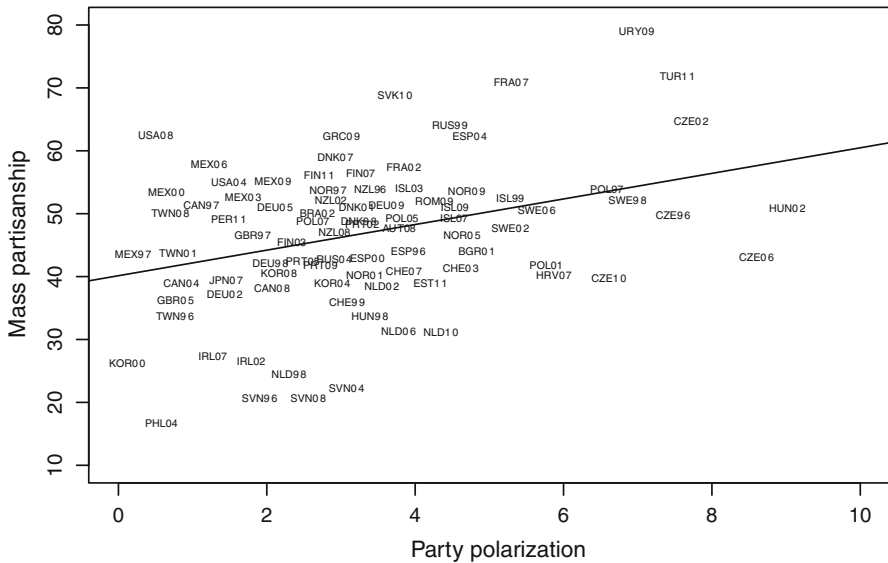
Fig. 1 Party polarization and mass partisanship around the world. *Note* Country-year values are the proportion of partisans in each survey sample and party polarization measured from respondent party placements (see text). Values have been jittered slightly to make labels legible. The *solid line* represents the best-fit line between the two variables. *Source*: CSES

are more likely, make it more difficult for voters to distinguish parties. On the other hand, I find no evidence that heterogeneous societies engender more partisanship, perhaps because of its potentially countervailing effects.

Recall that this analysis sets aside the dynamic effect that party polarization may have on citizens' proximity to a party. We might expect that parties that move further apart also move away from some citizens. And if an individual is more likely to identify with a party because she thinks she resembles its prototype, then her attachment may weaken as the party moves further away from her. As this analysis accounts for proximity, we are essentially comparing two citizens equally close to a party but in more or less polarized systems. These results suggests that, holding constant an individual's proximity to a party, as other parties move away from her own, her attachment to her party will intensify.

How substantive are these effects? Partisanship is fairly strong and stable, particularly in the advanced democracies that make up the bulk of my samples. As a result, none of the variables in my analysis increase an individual's probability of identifying with a party by more than a few percentage points. But while these effects are modest, they are not trivial. Indeed, the effect of party polarization is comparable to some of the institutional and individual variables most widely associated with partisanship. Spanning the interquartile range of party polarization using CSES respondent placements increases an individual's probability of being partisan by as much as aging 13 years. The continual polarization of parties such as the U.S. Democrats and Republicans over two decades will increase partisanship as
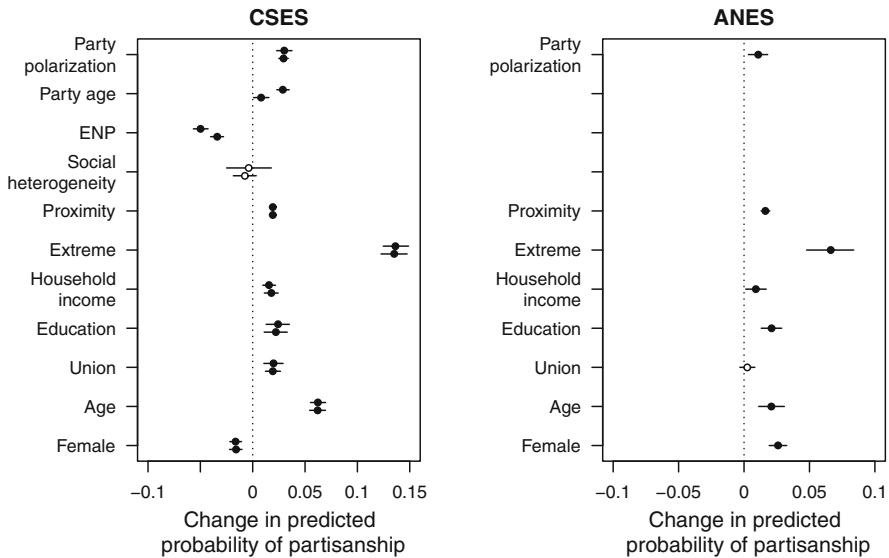
Fig. 2 Party polarization and mass partisanship. *Note Values* represent changes in the predicted probability that a respondent identifies with a party, based on shifting each variable from its sample 25th to 75th percentile, with all other continuous variables held at their sample means and ordered variables held at their sample medians. In the CSES panel, the *top value* represents estimates with respondent-based party placements, the *bottom value* estimates with expert-based placements. *Solid lines* show the simulated 95 % confidence interval. *Black dots* represent values that are significant at 95 % confidence, *white dots* those that fall short of that threshold. These predicted values are based on the estimates from multilevel probit models presented in the supplementary appendix. The CSES model with respondent-based party placements utilizes 88 surveys ($N = 92,605$; $BIC = 113175$; $ePCP = 0.51$); the CSES model with expert-based party placements utilizes 84 surveys ($N = 88,168$; $BIC = 107530$; $ePCP = 0.51$); the ANES model utilizes 17 surveys ($N = 18,905$; $BIC = 11152$; $ePCP = 0.92$). *Sources*: CSES and ANES

much as aging 25 years does.[25] Moreover, in other settings, parties often shift positions more rapidly and dramatically (Lupu 2011; Stokes 2001). Those changes may both magnify these effects and move partisanship much more rapidly than aging.

Party Polarization and Perceived Polarization

Party polarization is associated with mass partisanship across a wide range of countries and over a long span of time within the United States. But do citizens actually register this party polarization? Are individuals in more polarized systems more likely to perceive party polarization? Or are they instead mostly oblivious to the machinations of political parties, as some studies suggest (e.g., Adams et al. 2011)?

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[25] Among the countries with more than one survey in the CSES sample, the average change in party polarization is 1.04, roughly half the interquartile range. The average span of time between surveys is 4.5 years, so two decades of continual polarization would roughly double the effect in Fig. 2.

My analysis suggests that citizens do register party polarization in their perceptions. The results in Fig. 3 indicate that individuals in more polarized systems are significantly more likely to perceive polarization in their party system. This relationship holds across the measures of party polarization and both cross-nationally and over time within the United States.[26] The more polarized the party system, the more distance people perceive between the parties.

Country-level characteristics also correlate with citizens' perceptions of polarization. The older, more institutionalized the party system, the more individuals see polarization. This might be because individuals simply know very little about younger parties; as parties age and institutionalize, people are better able to perceive the differences between them (see Brader et al. 2013b). A larger number of parties dampens perceptions of polarization in both models. This may be because party fragmentation means that more parties join governing coalitions and that may blur the distinctions between these parties, reducing citizens' perceptions of polarization (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013). Social heterogeneity, on the other hand, does not correlate with perceptions of polarization.

At the individual level, proximity to a party appears unrelated to perceived party polarization. On the other hand, ideological extremism seems to strongly bias respondents toward perceiving more party polarization, consistent with prior studies (Granberg and Brown 1992). More affluent, more educated, and older respondents perceive more party polarization, perhaps for reasons having to do with access to information. Cross-nationally, union members and men also do so, though that pattern does not hold in the United States.

Party polarization substantially changes citizens' perceptions of their party system. Cross-nationally, actual party polarization is the variable that most influences perceived polarization after ideological extremism. Shifting across the interquartile range of party polarization moves people's perceptions of polarization by about 0.3, roughly a quarter of a standard deviation. In the United States, the effect of party polarization on perceptions of it is more modest, but some citizens do register party polarization.

Perceived Polarization and Partisanship

Citizens notice when parties polarize. But does noticing party polarization make them more likely to form a party attachment? Theories of partisanship suggest that individuals are more likely to identify with a party the more they think it differs from other parties. Perceiving more polarization among the parties should, therefore, make individuals more likely to be partisan. This contrasts with the issue-salience view, which posits that party polarization makes parties more salient to people, regardless of whether they perceive that polarization.

My analysis of CSES and ANES data confirms the expectations of partisanship theories. As Fig. 4 shows, respondents who perceive greater polarization among their country's political parties are more likely to identify with a party. This result appears both cross-nationally in CSES data and over time within the United States.

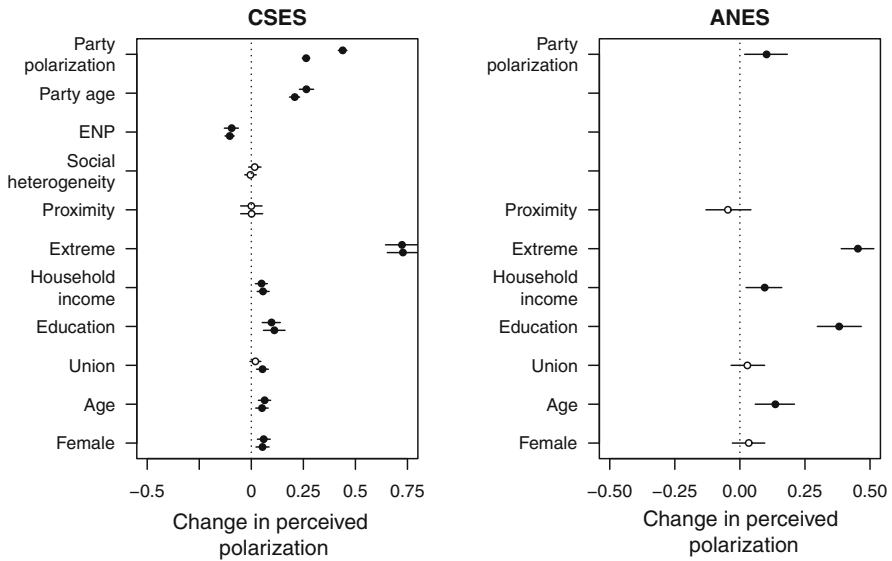[26] This finding is consistent with Hetherington's (2001: 627) results from a more limited ANES sample.

Fig. 3 Party polarization and perceived polarization. *Note Values* represent predicted changes in the perceived level of polarization, based on shifting each variable from its sample 25th to 75th percentile, with all other continuous variables held at their sample means and ordered variables held at their sample medians. In the CSES panel, the *top value* represents estimates with respondent-based party placements, the *bottom value* estimates with expert-based placements. *Solid lines* show the simulated 95 % confidence interval. *Black dots* represent values that are significant at 95 % confidence, *white dots* those that fall short of that threshold. These predicted values are based on the estimates from multilevel linear models presented in the supplementary appendix. The CSES model with respondent-based party placements utilizes 89 surveys ($N = 96,013$; $BIC = 293692$); the CSES model with expert-based party placements utilizes 84 surveys ($N = 90,421$; $BIC = 277073$); the ANES model utilizes 17 surveys ($N = 18,616$; $BIC = 69280$). *Sources*: CSES and ANES

It also holds whether we measure polarization in terms of ideological distances or, more flexibly, in terms of perceived differences between the major parties. As before, proximity to a party, ideological extremism, and age continue to correlate with partisanship at the individual level, as does education in one model. Household income and union membership also correlate with partisanship cross-nationally in some models, although they do not in the United States.

These results are also substantively impressive, relative to other factors. As before, the shifts are modest in percentage terms since partisanship is fairly stable in much of my sample. Still, shifting the degree of polarization an individual perceives has a greater effect on her partisanship than even her proximity to the party. In most of my models, shifting these perceptions even has a stronger effect than aging two decades. This suggests that an important link between party polarization and mass partisanship is citizens' perceptions of polarization.

These results stand in marked contrast to the argument that party polarization intensifies mass partisanship solely by making parties more salient. My analysis does not rule out the possibility that this macro-level phenomenon also occurs. But my results are consistent with the overlooked micro-level theories of partisanship
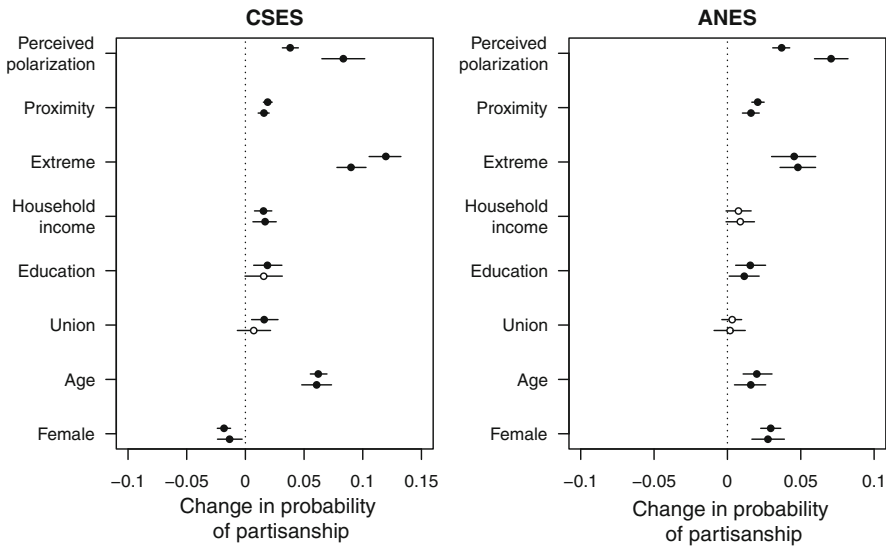
Fig. 4 Perceived polarization and partisanship. *Note Values* represent changes in the predicted probability that a respondent identifies with a party, based on shifting each variable from its sample 25th to 75th percentile, with all other continuous variables held at their sample means and ordered variables held at their sample medians. In both panels, the *top value* represents estimates with the distance-based measure of perceived polarization, the *bottom value* estimates with the differences measure. *Solid lines* show the simulated 95 % confidence interval. *Black dots* represent values that are significant at 95 % confidence, *white dots* those that fall short of that threshold. These predicted values are based on the estimates from multilevel probit models presented in the supplementary appendix. The CSES model with distance-based perceived polarization utilizes 88 surveys ($N = 92,605$; $BIC = 112576$; $ePCP = 0.51$); the CSES model with the differences measure of perceived polarization utilizes 35 surveys ($N = 35,476$; $BIC = 42160$; $ePCP = 0.54$); the ANES model with distance-based perceived polarization utilizes 17 surveys ($N = 18,543$; $BIC = 10636$; $ePCP = 0.92$); the ANES model with the differences measure of perceived polarization utilizes 14 surveys ($N = 11,745$; $BIC = 6248$; $ePCP = 0.92$). *Sources*: CSES and ANES

that suggest that party polarization will strengthen party attachments among those who observe it.

And yet, my analysis so far highlights correlations in these data. It cannot determine whether perceptions of party polarization provoke individuals to become more partisan. It may be that once people identify with a party, they come to see other parties as increasingly different. There is no direct way to rule out that potential endogeneity with cross-sectional survey data. I therefore turn to panel data to better identify a causal, rather than correlational, relationship.

Identifying Causal Effects Using Panel Data

Across both time and space, party polarization is associated with mass partisanship. More polarized systems and times are associated with greater partisanship, both cross-nationally and over time in the United States. Citizens appear to register party polarization in their own perceptions, and those who perceive polarization are more

likely to be partisan. Yet, these associations fail to identify the causal relationship between party polarization and mass partisanship. The survey data from the CSES and ANES measure both perceived polarization and partisanship in the context of the same interview. These association may indicate the reverse causal direction, or perhaps a feedback loop between perceived polarization and partisanship.

One way to address this problem and identify the causal relationship between perceived polarization and partisanship is through repeated interviews of the same survey respondents.[27] Indeed, part of the definition of a cause is that it occurs prior to an outcome (Finkel 1995). Panel surveys allow us to test whether perceptions of party polarization affect changes in partisanship within the same individuals over time, helping to identify the causal link (Bartels 2006). Such surveys necessarily imply focusing on a specific country and therefore limit generalizability. But we gain confidence in the causal interpretation of the correlational analysis if we can identify that causal relationship in the same context with panel survey data. Another limitation of most panel surveys is their short time-frames of one or two years, if not mere months. Since perceptions of party positions and partisan attachments are fairly slow to change, we need to cover a much longer span of time if we expect to identify the effect of perceived polarization on partisanship.

Fortunately, a long-term panel study is available for the United States. The PSS is a nationally representative sample of high school seniors from the class of 1965 who were reinterviewed in 1973, 1982, and 1997. The long spans of time between the survey waves, and the fact that the four waves cover over 30 years, makes these data particularly useful for examining slow changes in perceptions and attitudes.[28] The major disadvantage of the PSS lies in its limited generalizability. Since the initial sample of high-school seniors necessarily excluded dropouts, results may not generalize to the least educated individuals in the U.S. population (Highton and Kam 2011: 208). Even the U.S. population in 1965 may not be representative of the broader, comparative set of democratic electorates. Nevertheless, the PSS offers a uniquely long time-span that offers at least an initial opportunity to identify causality in the relationship between perceived polarization and partisanship.[29]

To analyze the causal effect of perceptions of polarization on partisanship, I specify a cross-lagged structural equation model used by other scholars working with this dataset (e.g., Highton and Kam 2011; Layman and Carsey 2002). This approach uses simultaneous equations to model current partisanship and current perceived polarization as functions of prior partisanship and prior perceived polarization. The logic behind cross-lagged causality is that a variable X is said to cause another variable Y if prior observations of X are associated with current

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[27] The gold standard for identifying a causal relationship is through an experimental manipulation, although experiments often also entail costs to generalizability. I report elsewhere on a survey experiment I conducted (Lupu 2013) and focus here on employing panel survey data to improve causal inference.

[28] Indeed, there is quite a bit of variation on both partisanship and perceived polarization over the course of the panel. The polychoric correlation of partisanship across waves is, on average, 0.55; that of perceived polarization is, on average, 0.45.

[29] Another potential problem with panel survey data is attrition. Across the three reinterviews, the average retention rate was a remarkably high 82 %. Jennings et al. (2009: 783) also note that, "panel status never accounts for over 2 % of the variation in the scores of explicitly political measures."

observations of Y, holding constant prior observations of Y (Finkel 1995: 25-6). In this application, we want to know whether prior perceptions of polarization affect current partisanship while taking account of preexisting partisan commitments. This means simultaneously estimating the equations:

$$\text{Partisanship}_{i,t} = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 \text{Partisanship}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_1 \text{Perceivedpolar}_{i,t-1} + \epsilon_1 \qquad (3)$$

$$\text{Perceivedpolar}_{i,t} = \alpha_2 + \beta_2 \text{Partisanship}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_2 \text{Perceivedpolar}_{i,t-1} + \epsilon_2 \qquad (4)$$

I measure perceived polarization in terms of whether the respondent affirmed "important differences" between the U.S. parties, as in the ANES analysis,[30] and control for two individual characteristics: political knowledge and gender. I construct a standard five-question index of political knowledge based on answers to factual questions about the length of a U.S. Senate term, the number of members of the Supreme Court, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's party affiliation, the country that Marshall Tito headed, and the country that had concentration camps for Jews during World War II. The index is simply the sum of correct answers, so that it ranges from 0 to 5.[31] I do not control for age since the age of all respondents is roughly the same within each wave. In both models, since there are multiple waves in the PSS, I pool observations of respondents in each two-wave dyad and cluster standard errors by respondent.

The results reveal a causal effect of perceived polarization on partisanship. Figure 5 reports the predicted probabilities of perceiving party differences and identifying with a party based on estimates from the cross-lagged model. The left panel shows that both prior perceived partisanship and prior partisanship positively affect current partisanship. Both effects are again modest, but it is notable that the effect of prior perceived polarization is one-third that of prior partisanship. Since partisanship in the United States is fairly stable, it is not surprising that prior partisanship would increase the likelihood of current partisanship (cf. Green et al. 2005). But the fact that prior perceptions of polarization affect current partisanship is evidence that people become more partisan as they perceive more polarization in the United States.

There is no evidence of reverse causation in the PSS data. The right panel in Fig. 5 reports the estimated effects of prior perceptions of polarization and prior partisanship on current perceptions of polarization. Prior perceptions of polarization increase the likelihood of perceiving polarization currently, confirming the intuition that perceptions of polarization, like partisanship, are stable over time. The concern that partisanship affects perceptions of polarization, on the other hand, finds no support. Prior partisanship does not have a statistically significant effect on current perceptions of polarization. This suggests that there may be little cause for concern that perceived polarization is endogenous to partisanship, at least in this context.

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[30] Respondents in the PSS were asked to place the two U.S. parties on an ideological dimension only in 1965, so I am unable to use the distance-based measure of perceived polarization.

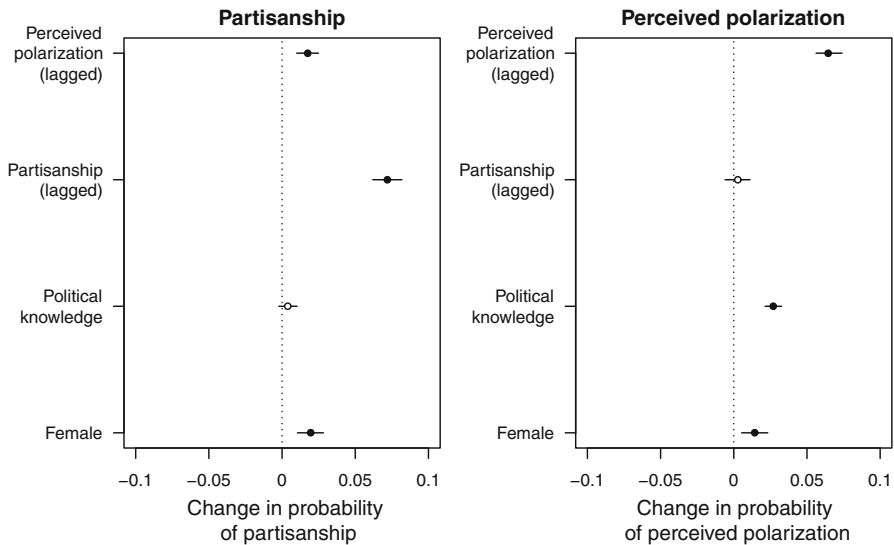[31] The same index is used by Highton (2009).

Fig. 5 Perceived polarization and partisanship, panel analysis. *Note Values* represent changes in the predicted probability that a respondent identifies with a party or perceives polarization, based on shifting each variable from its sample 25th to 75th percentile, with all other continuous variables held at their sample means and ordered variables held at their sample medians. *Solid lines* show the simulated 95 % confidence interval. *Black dots* represent values that are significant at 95 % confidence, *white dots* those that fall short of that threshold. These predicted values are based on the estimates from a structural equation model presented in the supplementary appendix. The model includes 2,669 observations of 1,178 respondents. *Source*: PSS

Party Polarization, Mass Partisanship, and Democracy

Scholars view party polarization with trepidation. In the United States and cross-nationally, polarization is associated with gridlock, instability, incivility, and disengagement. Yet I have argued that there are good theoretical reasons to suspect that party polarization could also produce desirable outcomes. If theories of partisanship are right, then polarization promotes clearer choices that lead to stronger mass attachments with parties.

Cross-national and U.S. cross-sectional surveys bear out this proposition. Party polarization correlates with mass partisanship across time and space regardless of whether I measure polarization with party positions from survey respondents, experts, or legislative behavior. This polarization does not go unnoticed by citizens, again regardless of which measure we employ. And as theories of partisanship would predict, those individuals who perceive that parties are more polarized become more partisan as a consequence.

Party polarization may thus generate stronger party attachments, a desirable outcome in certain settings. Mass partisanship institutionalizes party systems, stabilizes elections, and consolidates new democracies (e.g., Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Rose and Mishler 1998). As a result, voters are presented with a recurring set of party options, making it easier to hold parties to account for bad performance and

reducing the electoral prospects of unknown outsiders. Stable party competition also makes campaign promises more credible, giving citizens greater confidence in predicting what each party would do if elected. All are desirable outcomes for new and developing democracies.

In other settings, these outcomes may be less important. In established democracies, or in specific institutional settings where deliberation is important, stronger party attachments may instead be detrimental. Too strong attachments could rule out compromise and embolden extremists. Party polarization may, in these contexts, weaken democratic institutions. Yet even in advanced democracies, the ills of polarization should not be overstated. After all, it was only six decades ago that the American Political Science Association encouraged American politicians to be more partisan (APSA 1950). Scholars should recognize that the effects of party polarization may be cause for concern in some instances even as they are cause for celebration in others.

This study demonstrates that party polarization affects mass partisanship. Scholars have typically assumed either that partisanship is unrelated to party behavior (Campbell et al. 1960), or that the direction of causality flows from mass partisanship to polarization (Adams et al. 2005; Curini and Hino 2012). As this study shows, there are good theoretical reasons to expect causality to run the other way, and there is evidence to support those theories.

Still, this study leaves open the question of how party polarization affects mass partisanship in the aggregate. I have shown that party polarization increases individual partisanship, all else equal. But in the aggregate, party polarization may not hold all else equal. Parties moving apart also shift away from some citizens, closer to others. The aggregate implications of these effects are not obvious in advance. Some forms of polarization may reduce overall mass partisanship; others may net no discernible effect. The relationship illustrated in Fig. 1 suggests a positive average effect, at least for this sample of countries and years. But future studies should consider how different distributions of citizens and types of polarizing party shifts explain this relationship.

The relationship between party polarization and mass partisanship depends on citizens perceiving a polarized party system. Recent studies of perceptual biases find that political institutions—such as district magnitude (Drummond 2010)—affect the extent to which people perceive polarization. If that, in turn, affects their propensity to form partisan attachments, then this provides an unexplored causal pathway for the effect of institutions on levels of partisanship.

If party polarization strengthens mass partisanship, it would also follow that party convergence erodes party attachments. Scholars are increasingly concerned about the erosion of partisanship in both advanced democracies and some developing democracies (e.g., Dalton 1984; Lupu 2011; Wattenberg 1990). This study suggests that party convergence may help to explain this phenomenon.[32] Cross-nationally, differences in party polarization may help to explain why rates of mass partisanship

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[32] Katz and Mair (1995) offer an explanation of partisan erosion in Western Europe that relies in part on policy convergence, although the micro-level foundations of their theory are quite different from those suggested here.

are significantly lower in some countries than in others (see Dalton and Weldon 2007).

Comparative studies of mass partisanship rarely consider variables such as party polarization. Instead, they often focus on how either institutions or individual characteristics condition party attachments (e.g., Huber et al. 2005; Richardson 1991). This study suggests that a different set of contextual variables, ones that are more dynamic than institutions, also affect mass attachments to parties. If we want to understand how mass partisanship varies across space and time, scholars must consider characteristics of the objects of identification—the parties themselves—and how they relate to one another.

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