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NOTE

Comparing stereotypes across racial and partisan lines: a study in affective polarisation

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ABSTRACT
The past few decades have witnessed increasing levels of hostility among partisans, a phenomenon labelled affective polarisation. This study examines how partisan affective polarisation compares to the racial divide. We examine these differences by looking at ratings of partisan, ideological and racial outgroups on intelligence, morality, trustworthiness, hard work and patriotism. We find that individuals tend to rate their partisan and ideological ingroups more positively. More importantly, we find that the difference in ratings of ingroups and outgroups is larger for partisanship and ideology compared to racial groups.

KEYWORDS Affective polarisation; racial polarisation; partisanship

Introduction

The past few decades have witnessed increasing levels of antipathy among partisans, a phenomenon labelled affective polarisation. A study conducted by Pew Research Center in 2016 shows that a large percentage of partisans views the other party as more close-minded, immoral, lazy, dishonest and unintelligent than the rest of the American population.[1] This same study shows that when asked to rate Democrats on a thermometer score scale, Republicans gave them an average rating of 29 while Democrats gave Republicans an average of 31, a sharp drop from average ratings of 50 for either party in the 1980s. A large body of research has examined the increasing divide across partisan lines. While affective polarisation is clearly on the rise, it remains unclear how this partisan divide compares to the racial divide, historically the deepest cleavage in American politics.

This paper examines how affective partisan and ideological polarisation compares with racial polarisation. Using a set of stereotype measures embedded in the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), we look at how partisans view racial, ideological, and partisan outgroups

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[1] https://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/.

on five characteristics and how their ratings of outgroups differ from those of ingroup members. We then investigate whether these differences in ingroup-outgroup ratings are significantly larger when looking at partisan and ideological differences compared to racial ones. We find that participants are more likely to rate their ingroup highly on the different characteristics examined. More importantly, we find that these differences in ratings are larger when it comes to partisan and ideological differences than racial ones. These results suggest that partisan and ideological affective polarisation have grown starker than racial polarisation.

While earlier research finds increased levels of partisan polarisation, previous studies do not examine the extent to which such polarisation compares to other large divides in American politics. With the notable exception of Iyengar and Westwood (2015)'s study which examines implicit racial and partisan attitudes, previous research has not looked at how partisan polarisation today compares to racial polarisation. This study aims to fill this void by directly comparing racial and partisan polarisation using a scale designed originally to measure racial stereotypes. Using a different set of measures than Iyengar and Westwood (2015), we find that antipathy among partisans has exceeded racial polarisation. While Iyengar and Westwood (2015)'s study shows differences between partisan and racial polarisation using implicit association tests and behavioural measures, our study looks at more concrete and specific views of outgroups, specifically judgments concerning their personal qualities. In doing so, this study provides a test of "proof of concept" for these differences in partisan and racial stereotyping. Our findings can shine a light on how politicians view the other party and how likely they are to want to work across party lines. With partisans distrusting and disliking each other, it is likely that politicians' attempt to work across party lines will be met with skepticism and contempt.

The racial divide in American politics

Race has long been one of the main cleavages in American politics influencing institutions, public opinion, and behaviour among different groups (Hutchings and Valentino 2004). Racial attitudes play a significant role in determining attitudes towards numerous issues such as welfare, affirmative action, and crime policies (Gilens 1999; Green, Staerkle, and Sears 2006; Rabinowitz et al. 2009; Sears et al. 1997; Sidanius, Pratto, and Bobo 1996). These studies posit that negative affect towards African Americans are behind white Americans' dislike of social welfare policies and their punitive attitudes on crime.

President Obama's election in 2008 launched a debate about the continuing importance of race in American politics. While some argued that the centrality of race has been waning and that the election of the first African

American president ushered an era of reduced racial tensions (Hetherington 2009), others posited that the post-racial future some saw as the natural consequence of Obama's election is yet to be fulfilled (e.g. Hutchings 2009). Rather, while racial attitudes were important predictors of support for Obama and his policies (Piston 2010; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler 2012), old-fashioned racism and polarisation among racially conservative whites increased during the Obama presidency (Tesler 2016). Increased levels of racial anxiety and prejudice paved the way for the rise of the Tea Party (Parker and Barreto 2014) and the acceptance of racially charged campaign rhetoric (Valentino, Neuner, and Vandenbroek 2018) which in turn emboldened prejudiced individuals to express and act upon their prejudices (Crandall, Miller, and White 2018; Newman et al. 2019).

Partisan affective polarization

With increased racial tensions came also heightened levels of partisan polarisation. While elite polarisation is considered to be an established fact in American politics, with elites being more polarised now than they were a few decades ago (e.g. Layman et al. 2010; Hare and Poole 2014; Hetherington 2009), the polarisation of the mass public has been widely debated. Much of the debate has centred on the question of whether partisans have polarised or sorted (Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2008; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). Other research has focused on the tendency of individuals to view co-partisans positively while seeing members of the opposing party in a negative light (Campbell et al. 1980; Green and Palmquist 2004; Iyengar and Westwood 2015), a phenomenon labelled affective polarisation. More recent research finds evidence for "social sorting", showing that social identities have become increasingly aligned with partisan identities thus exacerbating polarisation (Mason and Wronski 2018; Mason 2018).

Affective polarisation is rooted in theories of social identity which argue that even trivial distinctions between groups can trigger positive views of the ingroup and negative perceptions of the outgroup (Tajfel et al. 1979). Groups, such as those based on partisanship, which are salient to one's sense of personal identity (Green and Palmquist 2004; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Mason 2015) are more likely to lead to intergroup tensions (Gaertner et al. 1993).

Partisans have increasingly been found to dislike, even loathe, their opponents, and stereotypes based on partisanship have increased exponentially since the 1970s (Haidt and Hetherington 2012; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes (2012) find that partisans were more likely to find the opposing party to be less patriotic, altruistic, and less well-informed compared to their ingroup. Affective partisan polarisation was found to exceed differences on political

issues (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012) and in some cases increased as ideological differences subsided (Levendusky and Malhotra 2016). Members of both parties are increasingly reluctant to socialise with members of the other party (Iyengar et al. 2019), rate their co-partisans as more attractive (Nicholson et al. 2016) and be averse to the idea of their children marrying across party lines (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Evidence for affective partisan polarisation has been also found in hiring (Gift and Gift 2015), dating behaviour (Huber and Malhotra 2017) and online labour markets (McConnell et al. 2018). Others find that partisans were less likely to trust the motivations of the opposing party (Munro, Weih, and Tsai 2010). Looking at perceptions of the other party, Ahler and Sood (2018) find that individuals tend to overestimate the extent to which partisans belong to party-stereotypical groups and argue that these misperceptions are likely to increase negative partisan affect and distance between the parties. Drawing on this literature, we expect individuals to rate their partisan and ideological ingroups more positively than outgroups.

> H_1: Participants are expected to associate partisan and ideological ingroups with more positive characteristics compared to outgroups.

These partisan and ideological cleavages have increased to such an extent that some argue it now rivals the racial divide in the United States. Using a series of experiments ran in 2012, Iyengar and Westwood (2015) show that individuals are more willing to discriminate against partisan outgroups than they are to discriminate based on race. In fact, they find that negative affect toward partisan outgroups is socially acceptable whereas hostility toward racial outgroups is not. Drawing on these results, we expect that partisans will be more likely to endorse negative stereotypes when describing partisan and ideological outgroups, to a greater extent than they would if they were describing racial outgroups.

> H_2: Participants are expected to endorse negative stereotypes for partisan and ideological outgroups to a greater extent than racial outgroups.

Data and methods

Using a series of questions embedded in the Team Content of the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) we examine the extent to which partisan affective polarisation differs from racial polarisation. The 2016 CCES was fielded in two waves between September and December 2016 and included a nationally representative sample of 64,600 American adults. A subset of 1,000 individuals participated in the Team Content survey.

We measure affective polarisation using a series of questions that ask participants to rate racial, partisan and ideological groups on intelligence, morality, trustworthiness, patriotism and laziness. The questions ask: "Thinking

specifically about [Whites/ Blacks/ Republicans/ Democrats/ Conservatives/ Liberals], where would you place them on the following scales?". Each characteristic is measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 to 1 with higher values indicating more positive ratings (e.g. more trustworthy, hardworking etc.). We then calculate the difference in ratings on these characteristics between whites and blacks to assess racial polarisation, Republicans and Democrats to assess partisan polarization, and conservatives and liberals to get at ideological polarization. These differences in ratings are recoded to range between −1 and 1. Ratings close to 0 indicate that differences in ratings between the racial, partisan, or ideological groups are close to null. Positive ratings indicate that Whites/Republicans/Conservatives received higher ratings in the cases of race/party/ideology respectively whereas negative ratings mean that Blacks/Democrats/Liberals received higher ratings on the different characteristics. Descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1 in the Appendix.

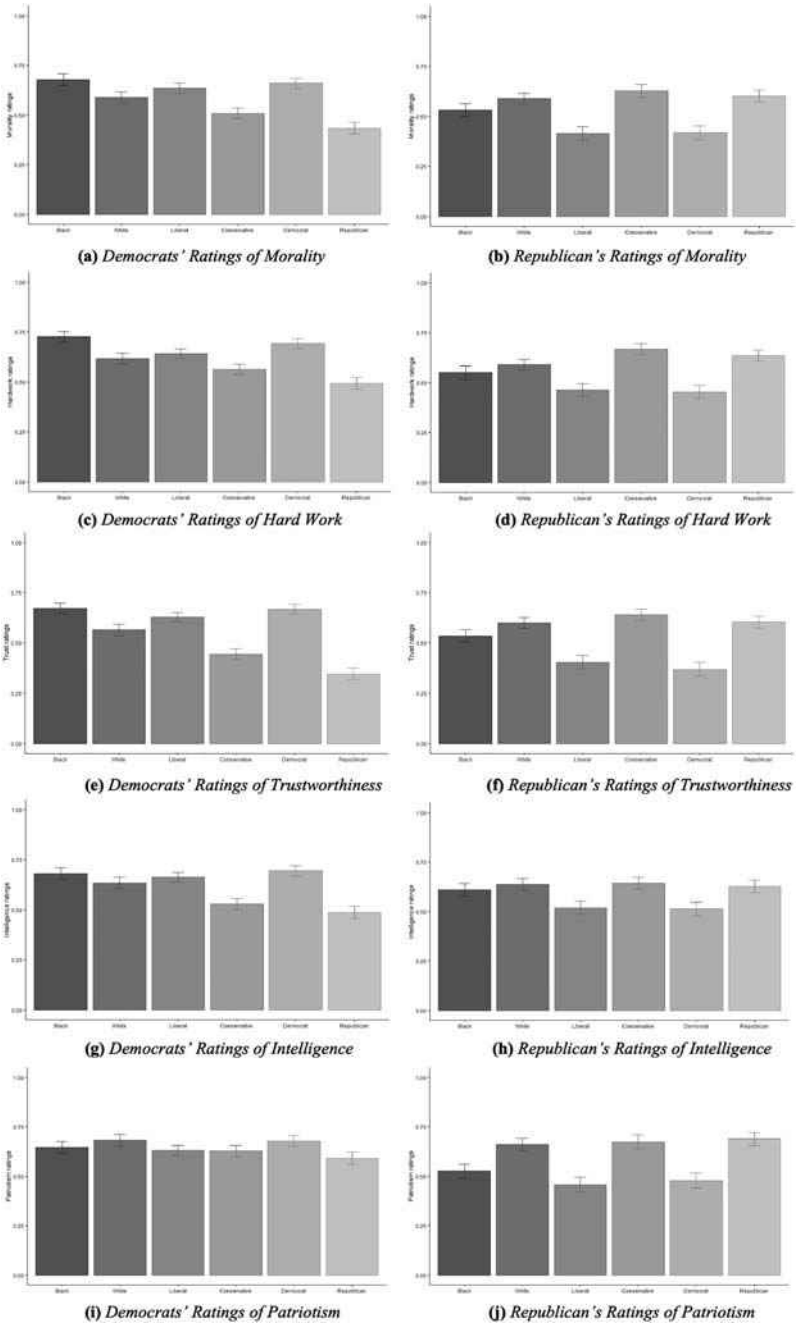
Results

In order to assess whether partisan affective polarisation exceeds racial polarisation, we conduct a series of t-tests examining the differences in ratings on intelligence, morality, trustworthiness, hard work and patriotism by race, party and ideology.

We test whether partisans are more likely to rate their ingroup more highly on positive characteristics. Figure 1 shows how Democrats and Republicans rated parties, ideological and racial groups on a number of characteristics.

Democrats tend to rate African Americans as more intelligent ($t = 2.23$, $p < 0.05$), moral ($t = 4.35$, $p < 0.01$) and trustworthy ($t = 4.09$, $p < 0.01$) than whites but this finding no longer holds when non-whites are excluded from the sample. Republicans do not report a significant difference in their ratings of whites and blacks on intelligence but tend to rate whites as more moral ($t = -2.62$, $p < 0.05$) and trustworthy than blacks ($t = -3.14$, $p < 0.05$). Democrats also rated African Americans as more hardworking than whites ($t = 5.66$, $p < 0.01$) and these differences remained significant when non-whites were excluded from the sample ($t = 2.97$, $p < 0.05$). Republicans reported no significant differences in their ratings of Whites and African Americans on hard work. Finally, Democrats did not rate Whites and Blacks differently on patriotism, but Republicans rated Whites as significantly more patriotic than blacks ($t = -5.64$, $p < 0.01$).

When we look at these differences in ratings by partisanship and ideology rather than race, different patterns emerge. As Figure 1 shows, on all 5 characteristics, Democrats and Republicans rated their co-partisans significantly more positively. Similarly, Democrats rated liberals more positively while Republicans gave conservatives higher ratings.



(a) *Democrats' Ratings of Morality*

(b) *Republican's Ratings of Morality*

(c) *Democrats' Ratings of Hard Work*

(d) *Republican's Ratings of Hard Work*

(e) *Democrats' Ratings of Trustworthiness*

(f) *Republican's Ratings of Trustworthiness*

(g) *Democrats' Ratings of Intelligence*

(h) *Republican's Ratings of Intelligence*

(i) *Democrats' Ratings of Patriotism*

(j) *Republican's Ratings of Patriotism*

Figure 1. Partisans' ratings.

Overall, we find that partisan affective polarisation is larger than racial polarization on most of these stereotype measures. Participants tend to rate their partisan and ideological ingroups more highly and the differences in the ratings of partisan and ideological groups are larger than the differences in the ratings of racial groups. In other words, consistent with H_2, we find higher levels of partisan and ideological polarisation than racial polarisation. With a few exceptions, the levels of racial, partisan and ideological polarisation are not significantly different for moderates and independents.

These results are in line with Iyengar and Westwood (2015)'s findings when looking at implicit attitude measures of race and party. Consistent with their results, we find that partisan affective polarisation is now greater than racial polarisation.

Tables 7–10 in the Appendix show the results of multivariate models examining the impact of various variables on partisan and racial affective polarisation using the five stereotype measures. The models control for partisanship, ideology, gender, age, education, income, and racial resentment. Racial resentment is measured as the mean of three measures which ask about participants' levels of agreement with the following statements on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree: "White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.", "Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations, and "I am angry that racism exists" (alpha = 0.68). These variables were recoded so that higher values indicate higher levels of racial resentment. All the control variables are recoded to range between 0 and 1. Following Masuoka and Junn (2013), we split the sample and analyze whites and people of color separately to avoid using white public opinion patterns as the default and to facilitate direct group comparisons.[2]

Tables 7–10 in the Appendix show the regression results for whites and non-whites separately. We find that ideology, racial resentment, and partisanship are significant predictors of partisan affective polarisation among whites across all stereotype measures, but racial resentment is the only significant predictor of racial affective polarisation. Among non-whites, racial resentment is the only variable that consistently predicts partisan and racial polarisation measures.

Figure 2 shows how partisan and racial polarisation vary with ideology while holding the other variables at their means. Across four out of the five stereotype measures (trustworthiness, intelligence, morality, and patriotism), we find that racial polarisation hovers around 0 regardless of differences in ideology. In other words, the difference in ratings of whites and blacks on the different stereotype measures is close to null. Conversely, partisan affective polarisation significantly varies with ideology, with liberals rating

[2]Due to sample size, we cannot divide non-whites into further subgroups

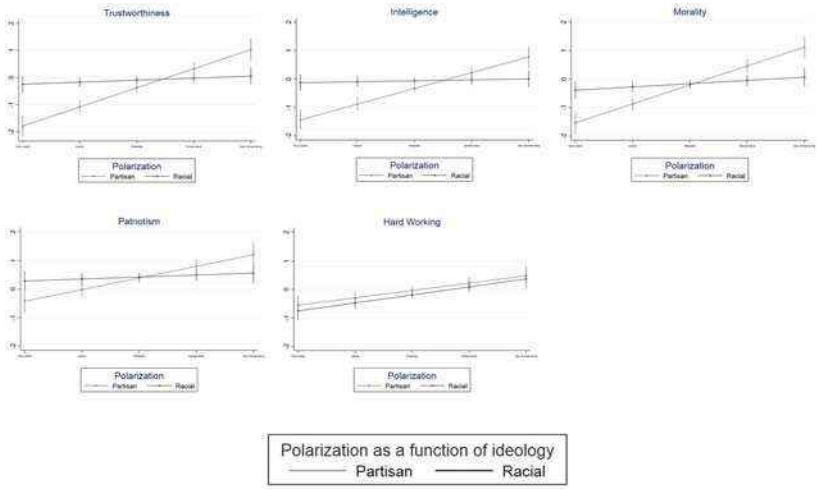


Figure 2.

conservatives significantly lower on all stereotype measures and conservatives doing the same. It is worth noting that when looking at moderates, both racial and partisan polarisation are almost null. In other words, ideologically moderate respondents rated Democrats and Republicans similarly on the different personal traits. Similarly, moderates did not display differences in their ratings of whites and blacks. These results are in line with Klar, Krupnikov and Ryan (2018)'s finding that affective polarisation is mainly found among stronger partisans.

Robustness checks

Given that we look at direct rather than implicit measures of prejudice, social desirability concerns can arise. For instance, individuals might feel more comfortable expressing negative views of people across the party divide but not of racial outgroups. As a way of addressing potential social desirability concerns, we control for racial resentment in the regressions and examine differences across education levels and between individuals who live in Southern vs. non-southern states (Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix).

Figure 1 in the Appendix show that individuals with and without a college education do not differ in their ratings of different groups. Similarly, those who live in the South (Figure 2 in the Appendix), where social desirability concerns might be lower than in other states, do not show significant differences in their ratings of different groups compared to those who live in other areas of the country. These results suggest that the differences between racial and partisan polarisation are not due to group differences between those with or

without a college education or between those who live in the South and those who do not. These different groups are likely to have different levels of social desirability concerns when it comes to attitudes toward racial minorities. The fact that they behave similarly suggests that the differences between partisan and racial polarisation levels are not due to individuals hiding their views of racial outgroups but not partisan outgroups. Figure 3 in the Appendix shows partisan and racial polarisation as a function of racial resentment while holding other variables at their means. Across all five measures, we find that both racial and partisan polarisation increase to the same extent as a function of racial resentment. This further suggests that the differences in racial and partisan polarisation are not due to racial resentment.

As an additional robustness check, we use multiple imputation to address potential issues that may arise from observations missing not at random, especially when it comes to racial resentment (Mustillo and Kwon 2015). The results with imputed data are comparable (tables available upon request).

Conclusion

This study shows that the magnitude of partisan affective polarisation currently rivals – and in most cases exceeds – the racial divide in American politics. While Americans tend to rate blacks and whites similarly on the different characteristics we examined, they are much more willing to rate partisan and ideological outgroups as less intelligent, patriotic, moral, trustworthy and hardworking than ingroups. The consistency of these results underscores the extent to which affective polarisation has increased among the American public. Taken together, these results suggest that social desirability concerns do not account for the differences we find between partisan and ideological affective polarisation and racial polarisation, though further research on this issue is clearly warranted.

What underlies this difference in racial polarisation and partisan/ideological polarisation? We suspect it derives from their difference in social acceptance: namely, that disparaging racial groups is no longer considered socially acceptable while expressing negative attitudes toward the opposition party and the ideological opposition is not only acceptable but expected in our hyper-polarised environment.

Increasing partisan hostility can have damaging consequences for democracy as partisans become increasingly tolerant of illiberal policy when they perceive the other party as evil or harmful (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; Thurber and Yoshinaka 2015). Political scientists are already voicing concerns about possible democratic backsliding, resulting from increased levels of polarisation (Miller 2018). Early warning signs in the Trump era

include partisans' increased tolerance of democratic norm violations including the denigration of political opponents, tacit acceptance of violent behaviour, attacks on the media and unfounded accusations of election fraud (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2016). Democratic backsliding seems to be a fundamental consequence of heightened affective polarisation.

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