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Friday, July 1, 2016

From left to right

Do Higher Housing Values Make Communities More Conservative? Evidence from the Introduction of E-ZPass

Connor Jerzak & Brian Libgober

Harvard Working Paper, January 2016

Abstract:

A rich corpus exists on the extent to which homeownership is central to American political attitudes. This paper contributes to the literature by using the introduction of E-ZPass in Pennsylvania and New Jersey to identify the effect of traffic-reducing transportation infrastructure on property values and, in turn, political behaviors. First, we develop a model showing that faster travel times results in individuals preferring a lower tax rate, as those who face the lower travel times are made effectively wealthier. Next, we present empirical evidence consistent with this theoretical result. We show that voting precincts near newly introduced E-ZPass toll plazas experienced a sharp increase in property values relative to similar precincts near non-E-ZPass exists, giving us leverage to identify the causal effect of property value changes on voting. After finding that the positive shock in property values is associated with a sizable increase in Republican vote share, we discuss the implications of this finding in light of the literature on homeownership and American politics.

About the Author

Kevin Lewis is a columnist for the Ideas section of the *Boston Globe*. He has degrees in physics and political science from MIT, has studied and taught organizational behavior at UC Berkeley and Duke, and has worked in high-tech business and finance.

The Polarizing Effect of the Stimulus: Partisanship and Voter Responsiveness to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Katherine Levine Einstein, Kris-Stella Trump & Vanessa Williamson

Presidential Studies Quarterly, June 2016, Pages 264-283

Abstract:

We examine the effect of a sudden influx of government spending, the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) on support for the president's party. Using a difference-in-differences design, we find that stimulus spending had a modest positive effect on Democratic vote share but only in counties that were already Democratic leaning. In Republican counties, by contrast, government spending had a small, but significant negative effect on Democratic vote share. That is to say, ARRA polarized already partisan places. These results have important implications for the study of voter responsiveness to government spending and the measurement of the political effects of policy visibility.

Going to extremes: Politics after financial crises, 1870-2014

Manuel Funke, Moritz Schularick & Christoph Trebesch

European Economic Review, forthcoming

Abstract:

Partisan conflict and policy uncertainty are frequently invoked as factors contributing to slow post-crisis recoveries. Recent events in Europe provide ample evidence that the political aftershocks of financial crises can be severe. In this paper we study the political fall-out from systemic financial crises over the past 140 years. We construct a new long-run dataset covering 20 advanced economies and more than 800 general elections. Our key finding is that policy uncertainty rises strongly after financial crises as government majorities shrink and polarization rises. After a crisis, voters seem to be particularly attracted to the political rhetoric of the extreme right, which often attributes blame to minorities or foreigners. On average, far-right parties increase their vote share by 30% after a financial crisis. Importantly, we do not observe similar political dynamics in normal recessions or after severe macroeconomic shocks that are not financial in nature.

The Politics of Beauty: The Effects of Partisan Bias on Physical Attractiveness

Stephen Nicholson et al.

Political Behavior, forthcoming

Abstract:

Does politics cause people to be perceived as more or less attractive? As a type of social identity, party identifiers often exhibit in-group bias, positively evaluating members of their own party and, especially under conditions of competition, negatively evaluating out-party members. The current experiment tests whether political in-party and out-party status affects perceptions of the physical attractiveness of target persons. In a nationally representative internet sample of U.S. adults during the 2012 presidential election, we presented participants with photos of individuals and varied information about their presidential candidate preference. Results indicate that partisans, regardless of gender, rate target individuals as less attractive if they hold a dissimilar candidate preference. Female partisans, however, were more likely to rate target persons as more physically attractive when they held a similar candidate preference whereas no such effect was found for male partisans.

Going to political extremes in response to boredom

Wijnand Van Tilburg & Eric Igou

European Journal of Social Psychology, forthcoming

Abstract:

Boredom makes people attempt to re-establish a sense of meaningfulness. Political ideologies, and in particular the adherence to left- versus right-wing beliefs, can serve as source of meaning. Accordingly, we tested the hypothesis that boredom is associated with the stronger adherence to left- versus right-wing beliefs, resulting in more extreme political orientations. Study 1 demonstrates that experimentally induced boredom leads to more extreme political orientations. Study 2 indicates that people who get easily bored with their environment adhere to more extreme ends of a political spectrum compared with their less easily bored counterparts. Finally, study 3 reveals that the relatively extreme political orientations among those who are easily bored can be attributed to their enhanced search for meaning. Overall, our research suggests that extreme political orientations are, in part, a function of boredom's existential qualities.

Measuring Polarization in High-dimensional Data: Method and Application to Congressional Speech

Matthew Gentzkow, Jesse Shapiro & Matt Taddy

University of Chicago Working Paper, June 2015

Abstract:

Standard measures of segregation or polarization are inappropriate for high-dimensional data such as Internet browsing histories, item-level purchase data, or text. We develop a model-based measure of polarization that can be applied to such data. We illustrate the measure with an application to the partisanship of speech in the US Congress from 1872 to the present. We find that speech has become more polarized across party lines over time, with a clear trend break around 1980.

Patronage, Logrolls, and "Polarization": Congressional Parties of the Gilded Age, 1876-1896

Frances Lee

Studies in American Political Development, forthcoming

Abstract:

According to the quantitative indicators scholars use to measure political polarization, the Gilded Age stands out for some of the most party-polarized Congresses of all time. By contrast, historians of the era depict the two major parties as presenting few programmatic alternatives to one another. I argue that a large share of the party-line votes in the Congress of this period

are poorly suited to the standard conceptualization as "polarization," meaning wide divergence on an ideological continuum structuring alternative views on national policy. Specifically, the era's continuous battles over the distribution of particularized benefits, patronage, and control of political office make little sense conceived as stemming from individual members' preferences on an underlying ideological dimension. They are better understood as fights between two long coalitions competing for power and distributive gains. In short, the Gilded Age illustrates that political parties are fully capable of waging ferocious warfare over spoils and office, even despite a relative lack of sharp party differences over national policy.

Ideological Fit Enhances Interpersonal Orientations

William Chopik & Matt Motyl

Social Psychological and Personality Science, forthcoming

Abstract:

Living among politically dissimilar others leads individuals to feel left out and ultimately predicts mobility away from an area. But does living in politically incongruent environment affect how we relate to other people? In two national samples (N = 12,846 and N = 6,316), the congruence between an individual's ideological orientation and their community's ideological orientation were examined. Lack of ideological fit with one's environment was associated with a difficulty to form close relationships and lower perspective taking. Our findings illustrate the psychological effects of living among dissimilar others and possible explanations for how social environments modulate interpersonal relations.

Political Orientation Moderates Worldview Defense in Response to Osama bin Laden's Death

William Chopik & Sara Konrath

Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, forthcoming

Abstract:

This study examined 480 Americans' psychological attitudes following Osama bin Laden's death. We tracked changes in how different participants responded to dissimilar others from the night of bin Laden's death for five weeks. Liberal participants reported lower worldview defense (i.e., a defensive reaction to uphold one's cultural worldview) immediately after bin Laden's death but then increased over time. Conservative participants reported greater worldview defense during each point of the study and did not significantly change over time. These temporal differences between liberals and conservatives were only present in the year of bin Laden's death and not in a comparison sample (N = 329) collected 1 year prior. These findings demonstrate that the attitudes of liberals and conservatives may change in theoretically predictable ways following a major societal event.

Commitment to the Team: Perceived Conflict and Political Polarization

Bryan McLaughlin

Journal of Media Psychology, forthcoming

Abstract:

Scholars have increasingly employed social identity theory to explain how and why political polarization occurs. This study aims to build off of this work by proposing that perception of intergroup conflict serves as a mechanism that mediates the effect of news media coverage on political polarization. Specifically, I argue that the news media's emphasis on political animosity can cultivate partisans' perception that the parties are in conflict, which provides a context that makes partisan identity salient and, ultimately, leads to higher levels of affective and ideological polarization. This hypothesis is tested with an experiment using an American national sample of Democrats and Republicans (N = 300). Participants read a news story in which the public believes the parties are in a state of either high or low conflict (or they did not receive a news story). Using mediation analysis, the results of the study provide evidence that news media coverage of political conflict leads to increased perception of intergroup conflict, which then leads to higher levels of (a) partisan identification, (b) affective polarization, and (c) ideological polarization.

Partisan Enclaves or Shared Media Experiences? A Network Approach to Understanding Citizens' Political News Environments

Brian Weeks, Thomas Ksiazek & Lance Holbert

Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, Spring 2016, Pages 248-268

Abstract:

The abundance of political media outlets raises concerns that citizens isolate themselves to likeminded news, leaving the

public with infrequent shared media experiences and little exposure to disagreeable information. Network analysis of 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey data (N = 57,967) indicates these worries are exaggerated, as general interest news outlets like local newspapers and non-partisan television news are central to the public's media environment. Although there is some variation between the media diets of Republicans and Democrats (FOX News and conservative talk radio are central to Republicans' information network), neither group appears to engage in active avoidance of disagreeable information. Individuals across the political spectrum are not creating partisan "echo chambers" but instead have political media repertoires that are remarkably similar.

Polarization and Partisan Divergence in the American Public, 1946-2012

Devin Caughey, James Dunham & Chris Warshaw

MIT Working Paper, April 2016

Abstract:

In this paper, we examine polarization and partisan divergence in the American public on economic issues over the past 70 years. We bring to bear a new dataset that contains over half a million respondents from hundreds of individual polls. This dataset contains the responses to over 150 question series about economic issues. We combine this dataset with a dynamic group-level item response model to measure the ideology of the American public at both the state and national levels between 1946 and 2012. We find that the American public has only become modestly more polarized on economic issues over the past 70 years. However, the two parties are much more clearly sorted on economic issues today than in earlier decades. Moreover, members of the two parties are now further apart than ever before at both the state and federal levels. Our results speak to debates about polarization. They also suggest that partisan divergence in the mass public may have contributed more to elite polarization than scholars have previously thought.

Political Chameleons: An Exploration of Conformity in Political Discussions

Taylor Carlson & Jaime Settle

Political Behavior, forthcoming

Abstract:

Individuals do not always express their private political opinions in front of others who disagree. Neither political scientists nor psychologists have been able to firmly establish why this behavior occurs. Previous research has explored, at length, social influence on political attitudes and persuasion. However, the concept of conformity does not involve attitude change or persuasion; it more accurately involves self-censoring to match a socially desirable norm. In an effort to improve our understanding of this behavior, we conduct two experiments to investigate perceptions and behavioral responses to contentious political interactions. Study 1 asked participants to predict how a hypothetical character would respond to a variety of political interactions among coworkers. In Study 2, participants discussed political issues with confederates who were scripted to disagree with them. The studies reveal that individuals are uncomfortable around political interactions in which they hold an opinion counter to the group. Participants both expected a hypothetical character to conform in Study 1 and actually conformed themselves in the lab session in Study 2.

Elite Cues, News Coverage, and Partisan Support for Compromise

Bryan McLaughlin et al.

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, forthcoming

Abstract:

In accordance with self-categorization theory, this study predicts that because elite cues affect partisans' perceptions of group norms, news coverage of political gridlock should influence partisans' willingness to endorse compromise. Results of two experimental studies, where Republican and Democratic samples read a news story in which group leaders were either willing or unwilling to compromise, largely support our expectations. However, we also find evidence that willingness to compromise can depend on the specific issue context, as well as pre-existing attitudes. These results further our understanding of how media coverage affects the functioning of democracy in the United States.

Tarnishing Opponents, Polarizing Congress: The House Minority Party and the Construction of the Roll-Call Record

William Eggar

Legislative Studies Quarterly, forthcoming

Abstract:

Existing research on congressional parties tends to focus almost exclusively on the majority party. I argue that the inattention to the House minority party hampers our understanding of the construction of the roll-call record and, consequently, our understanding of the sources of polarization in congressional voting. Employing an original data set of House members' requests for recorded votes between 1995 and 2010, I demonstrate that votes demanded by the minority party are disproportionately divisive and partisan and make Congress appear considerably more polarized based on commonly used measures. Moreover, minority-requested votes make vulnerable members of the majority appear more partisan and ideologically extreme.

By KEVIN LEWIS | 09:00:00 AM

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