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Party Competition in Western Europe
Polarization

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Universität Münster
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30 April 2025

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What we did last week...

- introduce the concept of cleavages
- discuss how conflict structures have changed in Western Europe
- making data accessible for analyses on voters

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Plan for today

Today, we talk about polarization

- which types of polarization exist?
- are there recent changes in the levels of polarization?

Moreover, we also access data on voters in the final third of the session.

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What is polarization?

According to the Oxford Dictionary of the Social Sciences, polarization in politics denotes "an increasingly stark and antagonistic division between political parties, groups, or viewpoints, and the accompanying decline of moderate"

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Types of Polarization

Literature commonly distinguishes two types of polarization...

1. **Policy polarization**
   - Focus on structural differences in preferences within or between groups (Schedler 2023)
   - Example: construction of wind turbines in Germany led to growing party polarization (Otteni and Weisskircher 2021)

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Types of Polarization

2. **Affective polarization**
   - Sympathy towards in-group (often partisans), hostility directed to outgroup (political opponents) (Tajfel and Turner 2004)
   - Consequence: motivated reasoning, attribution of more negative traits, aversion towards intergroup contacts (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010)

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Measuring Affective Polarization

In a survey, how could we measure affective polarization?

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Measuring Affective Polarization

Different measures have been used to operationalize affective polarization (Gidron, Adams, and Horne 2023; Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley 2021; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Wagner 2021)

- **group identity**: not a direct measure
- **thermometer rating**: how "warm" respondents feel toward the out-group; alternative: like/dislike scores
- **social distance**: feeling if offspring marries someone from out-group; alternative: happy to talk to out-group
- **prejudice/stereotype**: how respondents perceive characteristics of out-group
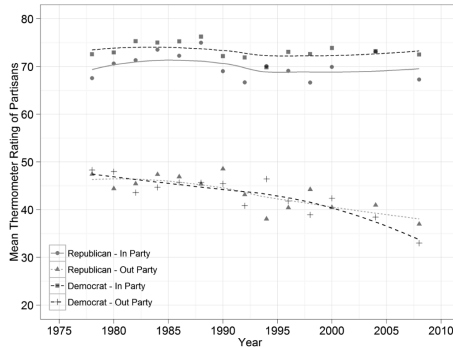
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Empirics on Affective Polarization

Figure: In- and outgroup sympathy in the US (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012, p. 413)
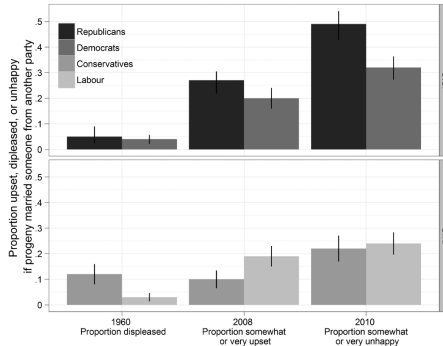
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Empirics on Affective Polarization

Figure: Feeling towards Interpartisan Marriage in the US and UK (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012, p. 417)

How much, do you think, do the results travel to other countries?
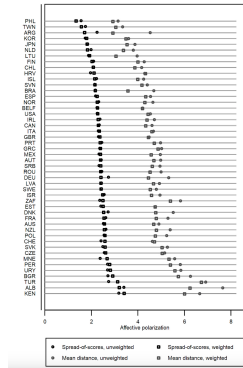
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Empirics on Affective Polarization

Figure: Affective Polarization in multi-party contexts (Wagner 2021)

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Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament?

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Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament?

Before we discuss the content of the text, let's go through each paragraph in the introduction and identify its function in the text.

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Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament?

Albeit in different order, usually the introduction of an empirical article in political science is organized in the following paragraphs:

1. **Relevance/puzzle**: Why should I continue reading?
2. **Literature**: Which literature is out there and what's missing?
3. **Own research question/argument**:
4. **Empirical strategy**: Which methods and data are used? Which cases are considered?
5. **Contribution**: How the article advances existing literature; which implications it has
6. **Structure** [optional]: Description of meta-structure of the article

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Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament?

There are four groups (on the *argument*, *design*, *results* and *implications*), please convene in groups and complete the scheme.

- **Research Question**:
- **Main Argument**:
- **Data and Method**:
- **Results**:
- **Implications**:

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Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament?

- **Research Question**: Does voter polarization increase when the far-right enters parliament?

- **Main Argument**: Far-right appearance bolsters polarization due to legitimitation (in-group) and backlash (out-group)

- **Data and Method**: (1) In-depth panel study in the Netherlands, (2) cross-country studies with synthetic controls

- **Results**: The first-time entry of the far-right increases voter polarization

- **Implications**: Single, disruptive events can foster stark political reactions

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Social norms and the presence of the far-right

- entry of the far-right in parliament as a shock to existing
  social norms → far-right is normalized right
- two reactions for supporters and opponents of far-right
  1. supporters: erosion of stigmatization, legitimation of political
     views
  2. opponents: fear of status quo change sparks backlash and
     stronger affirmation of opposition towards far-right
- short <u>and</u> long-term effects expected

Is there any assumption to the argument? What would weaken it?

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Social norms and the presence of the far-right

Before far-right enters national parliament, it has been active
already:

- often entrance in the national parliament has been preceded
  by presence in local/regional parliaments

- if voters anticipated the effect (e.g. due to polls), polarization
  may occur beforehand

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Data and Measures

Two/three studies using different data sources.

- Dutch Panel Election Study (2002)
- Eurobarometer Survey
    1. two-way fixed effects study
    2. synthetic control study

Which measure do Bischof and Wagner (2019) use for both studies? Is it appropriate?

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Data and Measures

- left-right scale might be too general
- particularly radical right parties compete on cultural dimension of politics
- arguments in the text:
    1. left-right serves as super-dimension; it captures other changes
    2. rather a conservative estimate

What's the advantage of the panel design in the Dutch case?
Yoan: *What's special about the Dutch election and why might it cause a problem?*

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Data and Measures

- Panel design surveys respondents directly before and after the elections → assumption: only thing that changed were the elections → our treatment

- Pim Fortuyn, leader of the LPF, was murdered shortly before the elections

- it could be that not the event itself but the murder causes polarization

- solution: comparison of people who were interviewed before the election but after Fortuyn's dead with those who were interviewed before his death → no significant difference

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Results

FIGURE 1 **Descriptives: Did Polarization Increase after the LPF Entrance?** (Netherlands 2002)
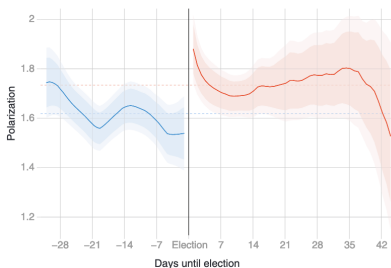
Figure: Polarization after the LPF entered parliament

What's the main result?

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Results

FIGURE 4 Generalized synthetic control estimates: Effects of the entrance of the radical right into parliament on polarization
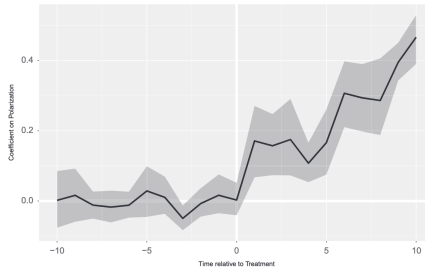
Figure: Polarization after radical right parties entered parliament (GSCE)

What does the graph show? What's the idea of the synthetic control approach?

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Types of data

What kind of data could we use to analyse voters?

- macro-data (voting records, socio-economic composition from administrative data)
- micro-data (survey data, textual data, experimental data)

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Survey data

Which information would be interesting in surveys?

- socio-demographic background

- political attitudes

- voting behaviour

- voters' evaluations of parties

- ...

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Data to use…

- macro-data: OECD data (e.g. on migration or labour), national administrative offices, poll of polls
- textual data from social networks (difficult to access)
- survey data:
  - European Social Survey (ESS)
  - European Election Survey
  - Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)
  - national election studies (e.g. German Longitudinal Electional Study (GLES))
  - national panel studies (German Socio Economic Panel, Understanding Society (UK), etc.

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European Social Survey

We are using the European Social Survey (ESS) today.

- the data can be downloaded here (requires free login)
- data can also be visualized online

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European Social Survey

The ESS offers...

- cross-sectional study of 39 countries in 11 waves

- wide-range of repeated socio-political survey items (e.g. voting consideration, trust in politicians)

- changing special modules (e.g. Wave 11 on health and gender)

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In R...

Let's switch to R

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Data pipeline in R

A typical pipeline to process and analyse data include...

1. download and import of the data

2. data wrangling, among others...
   - filtering missing values
   - transforming variables (e.g. from numeric to character; creating indices)
   - renaming factor labels
   - aggregating data (e.g. calculating mean/median of variable)
   - joining data with other data sources

3. modelling in regression frameworks

4. visualization

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What we've done today...

- introduce a definition and different types of polarization
- discuss their measurement
- talk about affective polarization in the US and Europe
- identify a potential cause of (policy) polarization: the far-right
- introducing the ESS and how to process it in R

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To prepare for next week…

- Next session on technologization and other transformations
- Readings:
  - **Main readings**
    1. **Gallego A, Kurer T, and Schöll N** (2022) Neither Left Behind nor Superstar: Ordinary Winners of Digitalization at the Ballot Box. *The Journal of Politics* **84** (1), 418–436. ISSN: 0022-3816, 1468-2508. DOI: 10.1086/714920
    2. **Abou-Chadi T and Kurer T** (2021) Economic Risk within the Household and Voting for the Radical Right. *World Politics* **73** (3), 482–511. ISSN: 0043-8871, 1086-3338. DOI: 10.1017/S0043887121000046
  - **Complementary readings**

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To prepare for next week...

1. **Kriesi H** (2008) *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-0-521-89557-6
2. **Fetzer T** (2019) Did Austerity Cause Brexit? *American Economic Review* **109** (11), 3849–3886. ISSN: 0002-8282. DOI: 10.1257/aer.20181164

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

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📄 **Iyengar S, Sood G, and Lelkes Y** (2012) Affect, Not
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📄 **Otteni C and Weisskircher M** (2021) Global Warming and Polarization. Wind Turbines and the Electoral Success of the Greens and the Populist Radical Right. *European Journal of Political Research*, 1475–6765.12487.

📄 **Schedler A** (2023) Rethinking Political Polarization. *Political Science Quarterly* **138** (3), 335–359.

📄 **Slothuus R and de Vreese CH** (2010) Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Issue Framing Effects. *The Journal of Politics* **72** (3), 630–645.

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Tajfel H and Turner JC (2004) The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. *Political Psychology*. Ed. by JT Jost and J Sidanius. Psychology Press, 2004, 276–293.

Wagner M (2021) Affective Polarization in Multiparty Systems. *Electoral Studies* **69**, 102199.

Wagner M (2024) Affective Polarization in Europe. *European Political Science Review* **16** (3), 378–392.