Keeping Your Enemies Close:
Electoral Rules and Partisan Polarization

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If there is one thing on which scholars of American politics, pundits, and citizens can agree, it is that in the early 21st century, the United States has become an exceptionally polarized society. American parties and their supporters are said to view one another as extremist enemies. They are frequently described as geographically segregated tribes consumed with hostility and disdain for one another. To a lesser extent, the same understanding has taken hold in Britain in the era of Brexit, and Canada in the era of rural populism and the Ford brothers. In Britain and Canada, the polarization between a party of the urban left and a party of the exurban and rural right is leavened somewhat by the presence of a centrist suburban Liberal party, but in each of these majoritarian democracies, urban-rural polarization seems to have become quite potent in recent years.

In the consensus democracies of continental Europe, on the other hand, there is a perception that the mainstream parties of left and right have almost become ideologically indistinguishable in recent decades. It is difficult to find media or academic portrayals of Germany as riven with ideological hatred between tribal adherents of the CDU and SPD, or in Sweden between the Conservative Alliance parties and the red-green coalition. In Germany and Austria, the mainstream parties of left and right enter into Grand coalitions that would be unthinkable in the UK or the United States. In the Netherlands, rather than being consumed

with mutual hostility, most of the parties are quite open to the prospect of forming coalitions with one another, and governing coalitions often contain odd ideological bedfellows.

The Oxford English dictionary defines polarization as "division into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of opinions or beliefs." By that definition, it would appear on first glance that partisan polarization is inevitably more pronounced in majoritarian countries like the United States, with high levels of electoral disproportionality and a small effective number of parties, than in countries like those of Northern Europe, with proportional electoral rules and multi-party systems that allow for cross-cutting ideological cleavages to be expressed in the party system.

Yet the comparative political economy literature makes precisely the opposite claim. A large theory literature with a pedigree starting with Duverger (1954) and Downs (1957) makes the intuitive claim that electoral disproportionality has a centripetal influence, reducing the number of competitors and pushing them to the center, while proportional representation has a centrifugal influence, encouraging a larger number of parties to seek out more ideologically extreme positions. This has spawned an empirical literature claiming that whether one uses party manifestos or survey-based measures of polarization, electoral disproportionality and two-party systems are associated with lower levels of polarization. According to this empirical literature, the UK and the United States are among the least polarized party systems in the industrialized world, while Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, and Norway are among the most polarized.

Perhaps the comparative political economy literature has it right, and casual empiricism based on unstructured comparisons of country-specific studies and media portrayals is

misleading. Perhaps polarization is far more advanced in Northern Europe than it appears—especially in the era of the nationalist radical right—and the breathless rhetoric about civil war, tribes, and affective polarization in the United States is overblown. Alternatively, perhaps the comparative political economy scholars have had it wrong all along, and academic political scientists are clinging to ideas that lack face validity in the general public.

This essay makes the case that the assumptions and empirical constructs of the political economy literature indeed map poorly onto what country experts and pundits mean when they talk about polarization. I advocate a cross-country approach to the measurement of partisan polarization that focuses on voters' perceptions of the ideological locations of parties relative to their own self-described locations. By this measure, majoritarian democracies are at least as polarized as proportional democracies, and the United States is the most polarized democracy in the industrialized world. Relative to German and Swedish voters, American, British, and Canadian voters view the parties—especially those on the other side of the ideological divide—as far away from themselves.

I argue that the main reason for this striking discrepancy in the conceptualization and measurement of polarization is the universal practice whereby theorists and empirical scholars understand ideology as consisting of a single, coherent left-right dimension that is stable over time. Instead, I argue that partisan polarization can be understood as a process through which parties come to take opposing positions on new, previously unpoliticized dimensions of conflict. When there are only two parties, and they take divergent platforms on a salient new issue dimension, the average voter is likely to experience an increase in his or her Euclidean ideological distance from the more distant of the two parties, even if the parties' platforms on

the two dimensions are not especially far apart. For the average voter, the introduction of a new issue dimension makes the enemy seem to move further away. In the United States and other industrialized majoritarian democracies, political polarization has been a process where starting with economic issues, party platforms have diverged over time on new issue dimensions on which voters' preferences are weakly correlated, including civil rights, moral values, and immigration, and voters have come to see the opposite party as moving further away.

In a proportional electoral system, in contrast, parties face incentives to seek votes by locating themselves throughout the multi-dimensional issue space. A well-understood advantage of multi-party systems, pointed out by Lijphart (1999) among others, is the likelihood that the Euclidean distance between the average voter and the platform of her most-preferred party is smaller than in a two-party system. A less appreciated benefit is that in the presence of multiple parties, the average voter is closer to (most of) the other parties as well. In other words, by dispersing the parties throughout the multi-dimensional issue space, proportional representation draws one's enemies closer, and thus assuages partisan polarization.

The Dominant View: The Centripetal Impact of Majoritarian Democracy

The starting point for the political economy literature on electoral rules and polarization is summarized in Gary Cox's seminal paper: "The standard spatial model begins by assuming that electoral competition can fruitfully be modeled as taking place along a single left-right ideological dimension" (Cox 1990: 908). Cox (1990) treats parties as office-maximizers, and demonstrates that equilibria in ordinary plurality systems tend toward a clustering of the

parties in middle of the ideological spectrum, in the same spirit as the Hotelling (1929) and Downs (1957). The equilibria in proportional systems are such that "(1) each party has a fairly well-defined and narrow ideological appeal and (2) parties are dispersed fairly widely over the ideological spectrum" (p. 922). This leads to the hypothesis that declining district magnitude is associated with convergence of party platforms to the center.

Calvo and Hellwig (2011) build on the insights of Adams, Merrill, and Grofman (2005), and in the context of a probabilistic voting model, adopt an assumption that voters care about future seat allocations. This approach also leads to the conclusion that smaller district magnitude, and hence higher levels of electoral disproportionality, place centripetal pressure on the largest parties, but to the extent that they survive, small parties face centrifugal incentives. Iaryczower and Mattozzi (2013) use a citizen-candidate model to establish some equilibria in which proportional electoral systems lead to higher levels of polarization than plurality elections.

The most recent paper in this vein is by Matakos, Troumpounis, and Xefteris (2015), who adopt the assumption that parties are policy-seeking. This approach leads to the same basic claim: disproportionate electoral rules force parties to the center. As an electoral system becomes more disproportionate, it becomes more attractive for a party to offer a moderate platform because the incentives to obtain extra votes are amplified. Disproportionality implies that a small advantage in votes translates to a much larger advantage in seats, which then gives the party a greater prospect for achieving its legislative goals. Like Cox (1990) and Adams and Merrill (2006), Matakos et al (2015) also provide a logic whereby more parties are associated with greater polarization. The presence of an additional party makes competition for centrist

voters more difficult, and thus parties have fewer incentives to moderate the platform in return for a slightly larger share of the moderate vote.

To assess the ideological spread of parties, scholars have used an index devised by Dalton (2008) that sums over deviations of each party j's ideological position, p_j, from the party system average, $\bar{p}$, weighted by the party's vote share, V_j, as follows:

$$DI = \sqrt{\sum_j V_j \left(\frac{p_j - \bar{p}}{.5} \right)^2}$$

In order to estimate p_j, Dalton (2008) recommends using the average assessment of survey respondents in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, each of whom is asked to place each party in their country on an 11-point scale from left to right (0 to 10). Makatos et al (2015) use data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), which relies on text analysis of party manifestos to make assessments about how the parties line up on a single, all-encompassing dimension of conflict.

The advantage of using the CMP data is that one can examine a panel of OECD countries covering a long period starting in 1959. Based on the data assembled by Makatos et al (2015), Figure 1 provides a box plot by country of the Dalton index using CMP data from 1959 to 2007, employing a blunt differentiation between majoritarian and proportional democracies.[1] On average, this measure of partisan polarization is lower in majoritarian democracies. France, with its multi-round elections, and Australia, with its system of ranked-choice voting, look more similar to proportional democracies, but according to this approach, the United States, Canada,

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[1] Japan and Ireland are controversial cases, coded here as proportional.

and the UK have been consistently among the least polarized democracies in the world, and

they remain so today.

Figure 1: Partisan Polarization, Dalton Index Applied to CMP Data, 1959-2007
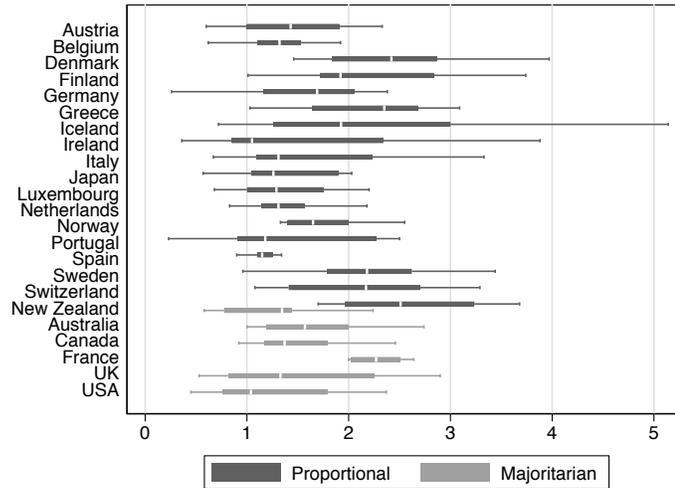

Note the separate observations in Figure 1 for New Zealand, which distinguish between

the period before and after the transition to proportional representation in 1996. With this

measurement approach, New Zealand's parties became much more polarized after adopting

proportional representation. Makatos et al (2015) focus on the relationship between electoral

disproportionality and polarization, which is robust whether one examines cross-section or

time-series variation. This relationship can be visualized in the first panel of Figure 2, which is

based on all of the years and countries in the CMP data.

Although the result is somewhat sensitive to the inclusion of Belgium, which is an

extreme outlier, the second panel of Figure 2 indicates that there is also a positive relationship

between polarization and the effective number of political parties.[2]

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[2] Belgium appears to have a low level of polarization but a large number of effective political parties. The positive relationship between ENP and polarization seems to be driven primarily by the cross-sectional relationship, and does not hold up in a fixed effects model. A cross-sectional relationship between the number of parties and

Figure 2: Partisan Polarization, Electoral Disproportionality, and Effective Political Parties, 1959-2007, CMP-Based Approach
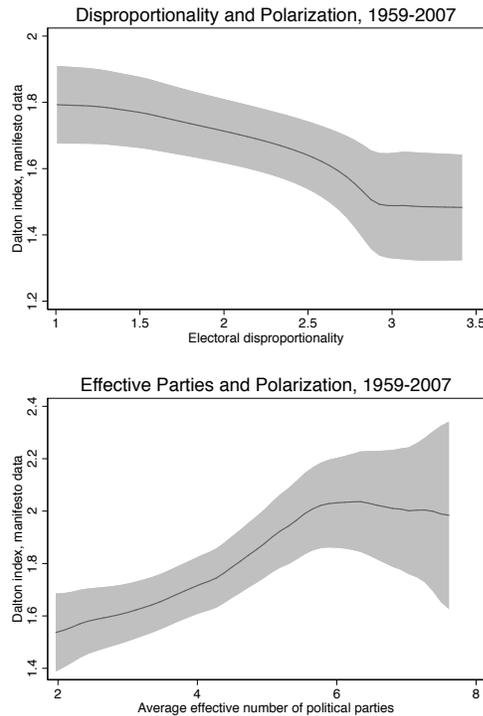

Next, let us examine whether these relationships hold up if we examine the same group

of OECD countries, but use Dalton's survey-based approach for estimating party platforms.

Surprisingly, the manifesto-based and survey-based measures are correlated at only .19 for the

overlapping country-years. Yet if we use all waves of the CSES from 1996 to the present,

Dalton's (2008) approach leads to a broadly similar conclusion about electoral rules. Figure 3

plots average polarization, as measured by the Dalton Index using CSES data, against average

electoral disproportionality, and then against the average effective number of parties. Again,

we see that the lowest levels of estimated partisan polarization appear to be in the majoritarian

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polarization also can be seen without weighting by vote share, or by using parliamentary representation rather
than votes as the weights.

countries: The United States, Canada, Australia, and the UK are among the least polarized

industrialized democracies, along with Ireland and Japan.[3]

Figure 3: Partisan Polarization, Electoral Disproportionality, and Effective Political Parties, 1996-2017, CSES Survey-Based Approach
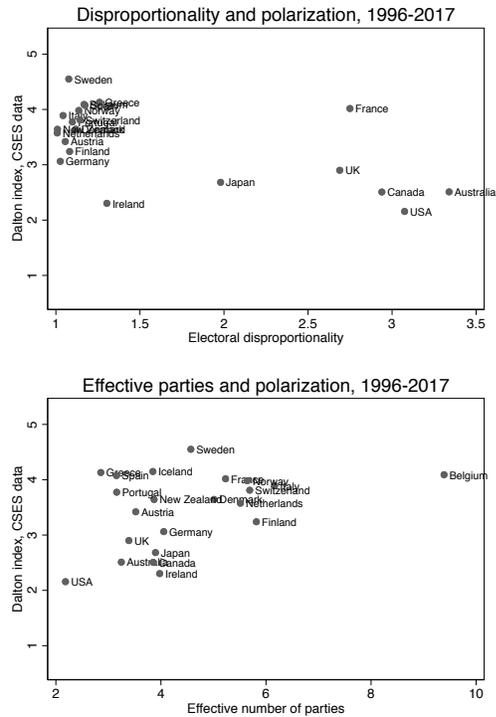

Remarkably, whether one uses the manifesto- or survey-based approach, one draws the

conclusion that Sweden has one of the most polarized party systems, and the United States has

the *least* polarized party system in the industrialized world.

Alternative Metrics: Perceptions of Ideological Distance

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[3] Note that the correlation between ENP and the Dalton survey-based polarization measure does not hold up in the larger sample of non-OECD countries in the CSES.

On its own terms, this basic finding is quite intuitive if we imagine there is a single dimension of electoral conflict. Relative to majoritarian democracies with two or three internally heterogeneous parties, proportional representation can be understood as allowing extremists on the left and right to run under separate party labels. Thus, the extremes of the policy platforms offered by the parties are pulled outward. For instance, let us examine CSES data for Sweden and the United States. The first panel of Figure 4 provides kernel densities of voters' ideological assessments of the main Swedish parties in 2014, and the second panel does the same for the United States in 2012. The vertical lines correspond to the means from which the Dalton Index are calculated.

Figure 4: Voter Assessments of Party Ideology, Sweden 2014 and the United States 2012
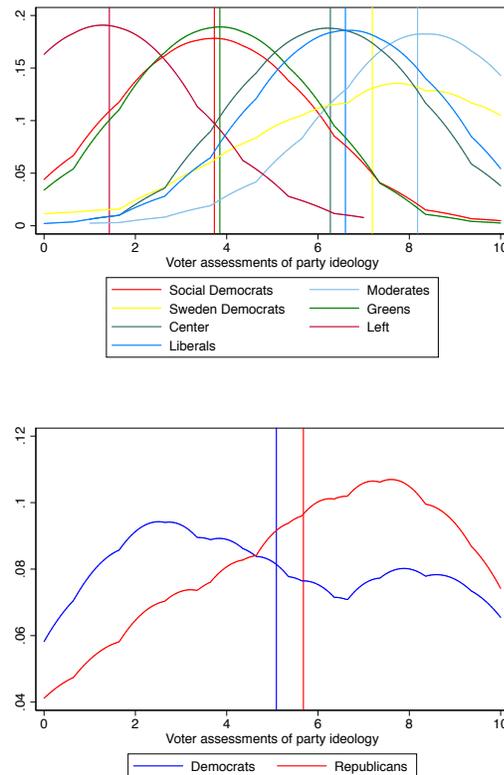
According to the Dalton Index, Sweden is more polarized than the United States because the means for the two American parties are relatively close to the center, while those for the Swedish parties are spread much more widely across the ideological spectrum. The United States simply does not have a separate party that voters, on average, view as having an ideological position that is far from the center, like the Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) or the Sweden Democrats.

Figure 4 makes it clear, however, that the party means in the United States mask striking heterogeneity in the assessments of American voters about the ideological locations of their political parties. In fact, a rather large density of Americans perceives the Democratic Party to be extremely liberal, and a very large density of Americans perceives the Republican Party to be extremely conservative. However, the overall mean assessments are moderate because there are also a countervailing number of Americans who view the Democrats as conservative, and the Republicans as liberal. In contrast to the relatively tight distributions seen in Sweden, the American parties are different things to different people. Even though the overall means are close to one another, many American voters view the two parties as far from the center, far from one another, and far from themselves. The same phenomenon can be seen in other majoritarian democracies. While the means of voter assessments of party platforms are closer together than in proportional democracies, the standard deviations are substantially larger.

Thus, the small difference in party means might mask substantial polarization. For the United States, the difference between the mean assessment of the Democrats' ideology and that of the Republicans in the 2012 survey is only .59. However, it we calculate the absolute value of the difference in assessed ideology between the two parties for each individual, we see

something radically different. The modal respondent perceives a 10-point difference between the Democrats and Republicans. If we take the average of those differences across all respondents, the perceived difference is actually 5.4. This is almost as high as the six-point average perceived difference between the far-right Sweden Democrats and the far-left Vänsterpartiet.

Let us take this logic to the larger group of OECD countries. For each individual in each wave of the CSES, we can take the absolute difference between the perceived ideological location of the largest party and the perceived ideological location of every other party, and take a weighted average of these differences, where the weights are the parties' legislative vote shares. This tells us how polarized each individual perceives the party system to be. Figure 5 plots country means of this index against the effective number of political parties, with majoritarian democracies indicated with red markers.

Figure 5: Voter Assessments of Party System Polarization and the Effective Number of Parties, CSES Modules 3 and 4
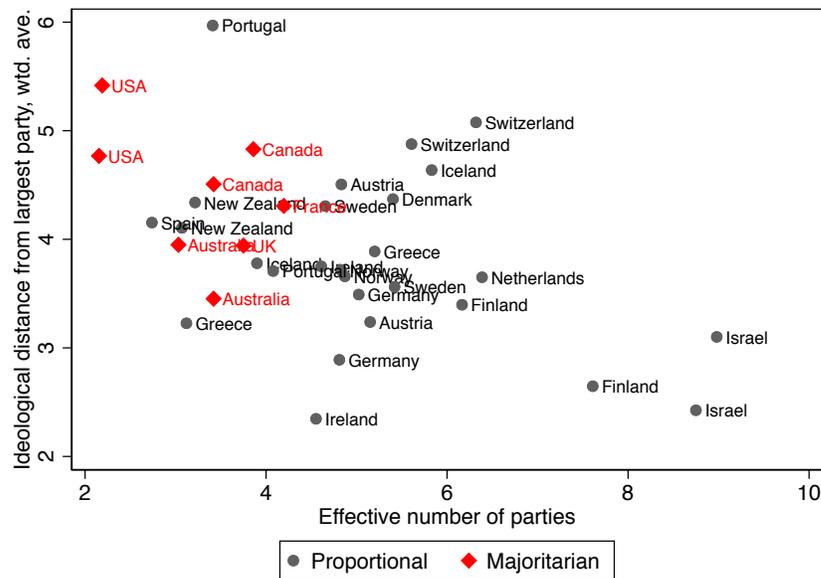
Figure 5 suggests that if anything, voters in countries with fewer political parties perceive the parties' platforms to be *more* polarized, and in contrast to the Dalton index, Americans are among the respondents who perceive their parties to be the most polarized. Part of the reason for the disjuncture between the inferences we might draw from examining differences in party means and individual-level absolute differences between party placements it that respondents are not providing unbiased assessments of the parties' platforms. In addition to assessments of the parties, the CSES also asks voters to place *themselves* on the same unidimensional 11-point scale. In the United States, there is a U-shaped relationship between one's self-assessment and one's perception of difference between the parties. Americans who rate themselves as very conservative, or very liberal, perceive a very large difference between the parties, while those who see themselves as in the ideological middle perceive a smaller (but still substantial) difference.

It is useful to calculate, for each respondent, the distance between their self-placement and their assessment of each party's location. We can then calculate the average perceived ideological distance, within each country, to the most proximate party. Next, we can calculate the average perceived distance of each individual to all of the non-proximate parties, weighting these distances by party vote shares. The first indicator gives us a sense of the extent to which voters believe a party comes close to offering their preferred ideological position. We might think of this as the representativeness of the party system. The second indicator tells us how far away respondents believe the *other* parties to be. Thus, it provides an intuitive alternative measure of party system polarization: the further the ideological distance of the average voter from their non-proximate parties, the more polarized is the party system. We can conclude

that a party system is polarized if a large number of voters view relatively large, non-proximate political parties as ideologically far away. A system is less polarized if voters perceive the non-proximate parties to be closer. Even if an objective measure of party platforms, like the text analysis of the Comparative Manifesto Project, suggests that parties' platforms are close together, voters might perceive the non-proximate party as very far away from themselves.

This approach has a methodological advantage over the Dalton index in that it is unaffected by possible voter misunderstandings of the 11-point scale. A surprisingly large number of Americans who rated themselves as "very conservative" also rated the Democrats as very conservative and the Republicans as very liberal. It is plausible that they either switched the parties, or more likely, believed a higher number on all the scales corresponds to a more leftist position. Such mistakes would not affect a measure based on absolute differences between the self-assessment and the perceived party platform, or between perceived platforms, as long as respondents understand the direction of the scale to be the same for both the respondent and all of the parties.

This conceptualization of polarization also leads to very different cross-country characterizations than the Dalton Index. The average American respondent in 2012 perceived the most proximate party to be around 1.3 ideological units (on the 11-point scale) away from themselves, and they perceived the non-proximate party to be 4.4 units away. In Sweden, the average voter perceived their most proximate party to be only .3 units away, while the weighted average distance of the non-proximate parties was 2.97. Swedish respondents feel not only closer than American respondents to the party they identify as closest, but they also

feel closer to their non-preferred parties. In other words, the Swedish party system is less

polarized than the American system.

**Figure 6: Voter Assessments of Party Distances from Themselves and the Effective
Number of Parties, CSES Modules 3 and 4**
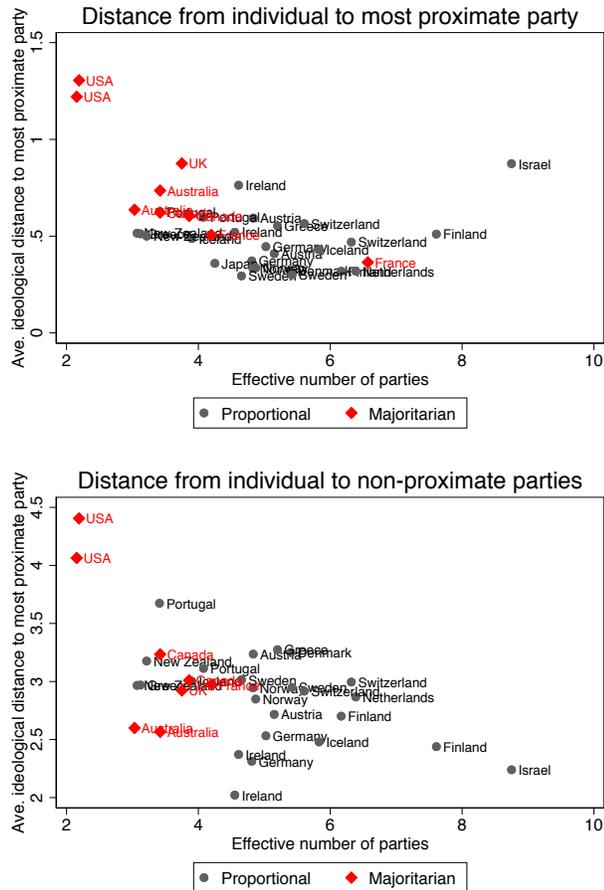
For the larger group of OECD countries in the CSES, the first panel in Figure 6 plots the

average ideological distance of each respondent to the most proximate party against the

effective number of political parties. Relative to other countries, American and British

respondents view themselves as remarkably far from their most proximate party. And there is

a rather strong relationship between the number of political parties and the ideological

proximity of the closest party. Not surprisingly, in multi-party systems, voters are much more

likely to identify a party with a platform that they perceive to be identical to their own.

The second panel in Figure 6 suggests that the United States is remarkably polarized

relative to other countries, in that voters perceive the non-proximate party to be quite far

away. Australia, with its system of compulsory voting and ranked-choice ballot procedure, is an

outlier relative to other majoritarian democracies. But in contrast to received wisdom, if

anything, voters perceive the parties to be further not only from one another, but also from

themselves in countries with majoritarian electoral institutions, higher levels of

disproportionality, and fewer political parties.

Polarization and Multi-Dimensional Politics

This generates an interesting puzzle. Unidimensional models suggest that majoritarian

democracies like the United States should have the least polarized party systems, and analysis

of unidimensional party platforms suggests that this is the case. However, when forced to

perform the task of aligning the parties on a single dimension from 0 to 10, voters *perceive* the

parties to be further from one another, and further from themselves, in the majoritarian

democracies—especially the United States.

The remainder of this essay explores the possibility that majoritarian democracies tend

toward the polarization of perceived platforms because voters have preferences, and parties

take platforms, on multiple issue dimensions. When survey respondents place the parties on a

single numerical scale, they may not all be thinking about a single set of issues on which

preferences are highly correlated. Rather, they are likely thinking about a variety of issues, and

attempting to perform a dimension-reduction exercise. The numerical assessment of the parties' platform is likely based on some combination of issues like taxation, redistribution, cultural and social issues, environmental protection, and immigration policy. The perceived distance between party *A* and party *B* can thus be understood as the Euclidean distance between the two parties in *n*-dimensional space. As new dimensions of conflict are added in a two-party system, the Euclidean distance between the parties increases, and for most voters, the Euclidean distance between themselves and the two parties also increases. Even if the parties' platforms on the initial issue dimension(s) do not change, the addition of a new dimension of conflict causes the Euclidean distances to increase. In other words, the party system becomes more polarized.

In a multi-party system, in contrast, parties are able to occupy a larger part of the multi-dimensional issue space. As a result, the average Euclidian distance between the parties is smaller, and voters are closer to both their most proximate party and the average of the non-proximate parties. A party system like that in Sweden is best understood not as a series of points on a line offering a range of tax rates from 100 percent to zero, but rather, as a set of coordinates in multi-dimensional space. For instance, several parties on the Swedish right push for lower taxation and espouse free market principles, but the Center Party focuses on the needs of agricultural producers and has an environmentalist agenda. The Moderate Party favors gay marriage, European Union membership, and the strengthening of the welfare state. The Liberals have at times espoused more liberal immigration policies than the parties of the left. The Sweden Democrats, on the other hand, support greater investment in the welfare state, especially for the elderly, but restrictions on immigration.

To understand the impact of changing issue politics in different types of electoral and party systems, let us focus on just two dimensions of conflict: economic and moral. It is useful to draw directly from the structure of preferences in the United States. In joint work with Aina Gallego, using the American National Election Study, I have generated scales of economic and moral issue preferences. The items tap into the core substantive content of the economic and moral dimensions as defined in previous studies (Baldassarri and Goldberg 2014; Feldman and Johnston 2014; Treier and Hillygus 2009). The scales are normalized to have mean zero and a standard deviation of 1. Each panel in Figure 7 displays the moral scale on the horizontal axis and the economic scale on the vertical axis. The scales are only weakly correlated (around .20). Around 58 percent of the population is not cross-pressured: they have preferences to the right or left of the median on both dimensions. The remaining 42 percent of the population has preferences either to the left of the economic median and to the right of the moral median, or to the right of the economic median but to the left of the moral median.

The idea behind Figure 7 is that each voter has a location in the two-dimensional cartesian coordinate system created by these issue scales. The parties then offer platforms at specific locations. By all accounts, in the 1970s, the Democrats and Republicans had distinctive economic platforms, but their platforms on moral issues like abortion and gay rights were indistinguishable. In the 1976 presidential election between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, for instance, it was unclear whether an anti-abortion moral conservative should vote for the Republican or Democratic candidate. This situation is captured by the hypothetical platforms displayed in the top panel of Figure 7 in red, where the parties' platforms are symmetrically arranged, one standard deviation away from the median voter on the economic dimension, but

each party offers an identical platform at the position of the median voter on the moral

dimension.   We can then measure the distance between the parties—2 units in the first

example—as well as the distance between each individual and each of the two parties. The

shading of the dots in the top panel of Figure 7 corresponds to the distance from each

individual to the *least proximate* of the two parties.

Figure 7:
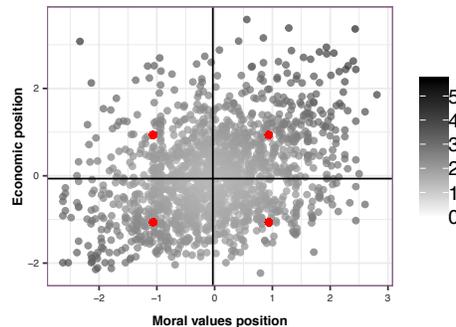**Three Examples of Party Systems: Two Potential Dimensions of Political Conflict**
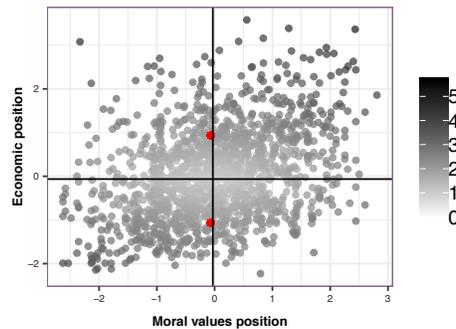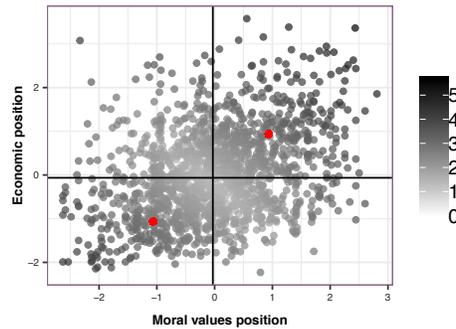
Next, let us consider a situation in which the parties also develop divergent platforms on the moral values issue dimension. In the United States, for example, while maintaining divergent economic platforms, the parties began to also take clearly opposed positions on issues like gender, abortion, and the role of religion in the 1980s. To capture this type of platform shift, in the second panel of Figure 7, the parties' platforms are symmetrically arranged, one standard deviation from the position of the median voter, on *both* dimensions. With this change in platforms, the distance between the parties in the Cartesian plane increases from 2 to 2.8, even though the parties' platforms are unchanged on the economic dimension. Moreover, as indicated by the shading of the dots, the average voter is now further away from her least proximate party. In other words, the party system has become more polarized.

Figure 8:
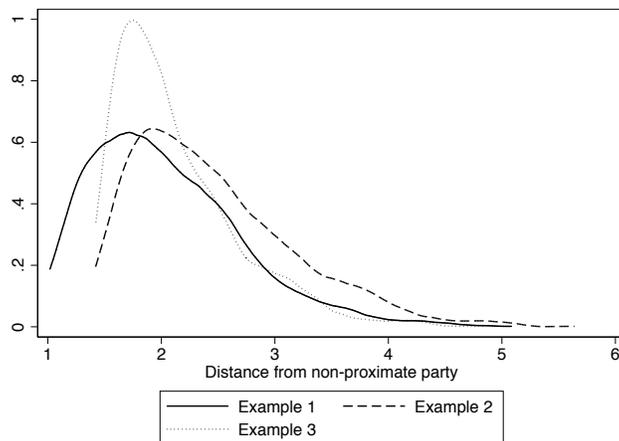**Euclidian Distance from Non-Proximate Parties, Three Examples**

Figure 8 provides kernel densities showing the distribution of individual distances from the non-proximate political party for each example. The solid line corresponds to the first example, where parties take diverging platforms on only a single dimension of conflict, while the dashed line corresponds to the second example, with platform divergence on both

dimensions. After the platform shift, the vast majority of individuals is now further from the non-proximate party, and the average voter experiences an increase in ideological distance from the non-proximate party of around .41 units.

This is a very simple representation of the impact of multi-dimensional politics on political polarization in a two-party system. The story is quite different, however, if multiple political parties in a European-style system of proportional representation are able to occupy a wider diversity of coordinates in the two-dimensional space (see Laver and Schofield 1990). To capture this, the third example in Figure 7 is a four-party system, where parties are located symmetrically around the median in both directions. The first thing to notice about this arrangement is that voters are much closer to their most proximate party. The average distance to the most proximate party is 1.04 in the first example, and 1.08 in the second example, but 0.82 in the third example. This is a simple way to comprehend what is perhaps the most intuitive advantage of a multi-party system: voters can find a party that comes closer to their ideal point.

There is an additional advantage. In example three, in terms of Euclidean proximity, the average voter is also closer to her second-ranked party than in either example 1 or example 2. Even the third-ranked party is closer to the average voter than the less proximate of the two parties in example 2. Clearly, averaging over the three non-proximate parties, voters are substantially closer to their partisan "enemies" in the four-party case. This is captured by the dotted kernel density in Figure 8, which displays the distribution of the average distance from the three non-proximate parties across individuals. By this measure, the multi-party system is

less polarized than the two-party examples—even less so than the two-party case with only one dimension of political conflict (example 1).

These stylized examples provide a logic whereby voters in majoritarian systems with relatively few political parties might come to see the parties as increasingly polarized over time as parties take divergent platforms on new issues, even if the parties' platforms on the initial dimension of conflict, and the voters' political views on both dimensions, remain the same. And in contrast to the unidimensional perspective, this logic also sheds light on the possible role of proportional representation as an antidote to polarization.

Geography, Issue Evolution, and Polarization

Much of what Americans refer to as partisan polarization is the result of two parties adopting divergent platforms on new dimensions of political conflict. This argument has much in common with Layman and Carsey's (2002) notion of "conflict extension," the portrayal of multi-dimensional politics in the United States by Miller and Schofield (2003, 2008), and the multi-dimensional approach to issue politics taken by Ahler and Broockman (2018). These scholars recognize that many voters maintain heterogeneous mixtures of preferences that do not fit neatly into the bundles offered by the two parties. This comports with the observation made above, using ANES data, that the correlation between the economic and moral issue scales is not especially high. Influential elites and activists, however, push the parties to make moves like the transition from example 1 to example 2 above. Opponents of abortion, for example, push the Republicans to take anti-abortion positions, and supporters of abortion rights push the Democrats to adopt pro-choice positions. Immigration opponents enlist the

Republicans to their cause, and advocates enlist the Democrats. This pushes the parties further apart in Euclidian space, and causes voters to view their non-proximate party as further away.

But why do the parties in majoritarian democracies end up with the specific bundles of positions that have emerged in the early 21st century? The bundles of platforms offered by the mainstream parties of left and right in the UK, Canada, Australia, and the United States are quite similar. There is remarkable since there is no good philosophical or intellectual reason why gay rights and high taxes, for instance, "go together." Indeed, they are not bundled together in most European multi-party systems, each of which features one or more party, often with roots in classical Liberalism, that promotes freedom in both the economic and social realm. And as demonstrated by the welfare chauvinism of European radical right parties, there is no particular reason to bundle anti-welfare state and anti-immigration positions. And it is even less clear why defense of the welfare state and global free trade should be bundled together by parties of the left.

Why exactly have elites pushed parties of the "left" in majoritarian democracies to advocate for redistribution and the welfare state, cosmopolitan social values, freer immigration, environmental protection, support for the knowledge economy, and global free trade? And why has the "right" come to support lower taxes, traditional social values, nativism, the natural resource industry, traditional manufacturing, and most recently, protectionism? It is difficult to understand the evolution of these bundles in the 20th century without understanding the political geography of industrialized societies (Rodden 2019).

The story starts with the mobilization of the urban industrial working class in the era of heavy industrialization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Labor parties in Europe, the UK,

and Australasia became advocates of urban workers around the turn of the century. The Democrats transformed themselves into such a party a few decades later under FDR, as did the CCF and then the NDP in Canada. By the 1950s, these parties of the left were predominantly urban parties.

Later in the 20th century, as described by Dalton (1996) and Inglehart (1990), a host of new issues emerged. Above all, activists in the environmental and women's movements demanded changes to the status quo, and traditionalists pushed back. In the proportional democracies of Europe, new parties like the Greens emerged, and existing parties repositioned themselves in the multi-dimensional issue space. Preferences on these new issues were correlated with population density, with urban activists and voters taking more progressive positions, while exurban and rural activists and voters took more traditionalist positions. In majoritarian democracies, the parties of the left had already become dominant in urban districts during the era of heavy industry, and exurban and rural districts had become the core support bastions of the right. Thus, it was Labor and Democratic incumbents who were pressured by activists to promote progressive social and environmental positions, and incumbent legislators of the right who felt pressure to adopt traditionalist views.

The correlation between population density and "cosmopolitan" social views is quite pronounced in many societies. The social upheavals that started in the 1960s led to greater differentiation of the parties in the multi-dimensional issue space in the proportional electoral systems of Europe in the subsequent decades. For instance, Socialists and Social Democrats often maintained their emphasis on workers, while Greens and other parties courted urban youth and educated cosmopolitans. But in the majoritarian democracies, existing parties of the

left took on both roles, slowly becoming parties not just of urban workers, but also parties of urban cosmopolitans and environmentalists.

In addition to the rise of social and environmental issues that Ronald Inglehart (1990) has referred to as "post-material," issue politics have also been affected by an important economic transformation: the rise of the globalized knowledge economy. While many urban centers have entered into a long decline during the era of globalization and deindustrialization, others have emerged as wealthy centers of knowledge-based industries. In addition to socially progressive attitudes, knowledge economy workers have developed sector-based interests in global free trade and relatively easy movement of people across borders. In Europe's multi-party systems, the interests of highly educated urban knowledge economy employees have been taken up by various parties of the left, right, and center. But in majoritarian democracies, as with cosmopolitan social issues, activists looking for political allies have turned to the parties that had already gained dominance in cities. Thus, parties of the "left" have become rather incongruous advocates for poor service workers as well as for investments in universities and scientific research, immigration, and free trade.

Meanwhile, parties of the right—having built up a dominant position in exurbs and rural areas—have been mobilized as advocates for economic activities that take place outside of city centers. This includes not only agriculture and natural resource extraction, but in recent decades, manufacturing. In several majoritarian countries, globalization skeptics in areas that are struggling to maintain a manufacturing base have turned to mainstream parties of the right. In the United States, the mainstream party of the right has turned to protectionism, and the Tories in the UK have embraced Brexit. In the UK and Australia, the urban party advocates for

the rights of immigrants, and the rural party feels pressure to adopt nativist positions due to electoral competition from smaller nativist parties, UKIP and One Nation.

As a result of all this, growing polarization associated with the activation of new issue dimensions has had a pronounced geographic expression. In industrialized majoritarian democracies, including the United States, Britain, France, Australia, and Canada, there is a strong—and in some cases rapidly growing—correlation between population density and the vote shares of left parties (Rodden 2019). In many cases, this urban-rural cleavage seems to move beyond mere bundles of urban and rural policy preferences. Lilliana Mason (2014) argues that as individuals with the same issue preferences sort into the same political party, they experience an increasing sense of the party as a social identity. This, in turn, can provoke the type of anger, mistrust, and "affective polarization" reported by Iyengar et al. (2018). Kathy Cramer (2016) reports a related sense of rural identity. She argues that recent support for conservative candidates in rural Wisconsin has been motivated in part by resentment toward urban elites that has rather little in the way of explicit policy content. A similar resentment of educated downtown Toronto elites seems to be part of the electoral appeal of Rob Ford in exurban and rural Ontario.

In short, urban-rural polarization in majoritarian democracies has congealed as parties— pushed by activists—have bundled together a set of issues on which preferences are quite correlated with urbanization. As parties of the left have become champions of cities, and parties of the right have become champions of exurbs and rural areas, these parties have also come to be more closely linked with distinct social and geographic identities. Legislative elections have come to feel like high-stakes battles between distinctive urban and rural policy

agendas, and different identities and ways of life, with the winner determined by a handful of pivotal districts in the middle-ring suburbs.

For the most part, this pattern of polarized geographic political competition has not emerged in the proportional democracies of Northern Europe. As described above, when new issue dimensions arise in multi-party proportional democracies without small winner-take-all districts, new parties enter and old parties adapt. There is no logic pushing a single mainstream party of the left to bundle all "urban" issue positions and identities into one package. Likewise, there is no logic pushing a single party of the right to bundle together the interests of high-income fiscal conservatives and those of rural traditionalists. High-income, educated, cosmopolitan professional in the knowledge economy cities of North America and Australia vote overwhelmingly for parties of the "left," but their counterparts in European cities can choose from a far more diverse menu of choices. Some choose Green parties that coalesce with the left, and many choose Liberal or center-right parties with progressive social platforms.

As a result, European governments of the right typically contain substantial representation from the urban core of the major cities. Parliamentary elections are much less likely to take shape as winner-take-all geographic battles pitting the urban core against the countryside. In contrast, the legislative coalitions supporting Conservative governments in the UK and Canada contain virtually no urban MPs. The same is true of Republican U.S. House majorities in the United States.

Conclusion

In sum, proportional representation can inoculate against urban-rural polarization by preventing the two-party bundling of issue platforms and social identities that give rise to it. The United States, which has the purest two-party system in the industrialized world, is rather striking in the extent to which its voters view the parties as ideologically distinctive from one another, and far from themselves. Each of the other industrialized majoritarian democracies has some version of the same pattern of polarization, but each also has some mitigating features. The Canadian party system is more diverse, with its division between the more urban NDP and the suburban-friendly Liberals, and its diversity of provincial-level party systems. The UK also has the Liberal Democrats as ballast between the two major parties. The two-round French system of elections creates a greater diversity of parties as well, as does the Australian system of ranked-choice voting and the proportional upper chamber. But as in the United States, urban-rural polarization is a basic organizing principle of politics in these countries.

In the era of backlash to globalization, wage stagnation, and inter-regional and inter-personal inequality, the anxieties of democracy are not limited to majoritarian democracies. The rise of rural and post-industrial xenophobic and nativist parties, for instance, has led to considerable anxiety in the proportional democracies of Northern Europe. Yet these parties, while sometimes extreme in their rhetoric, will be forced to moderate in order to make themselves into palatable coalition partners. Moreover, in spite of its centripetal reputation, proportional representation brings a powerful advantage: it can allow the political system to absorb the rise of new issue dimensions, from environmentalism to women's rights to nativism, without the issue-bundling that facilitates all-encompassing American-style polarization.

At the heart of political polarization in the United States is a paradox. The parties

appear to be moving further and further apart precisely because they are offering ever-more

heterogeneous and incoherent bundles of platforms over time in response to their geographic

bases. At the same moment that they appear to be implacable tribes on the cusp of civil war,

they also appear to be obstreperous coalitions on the verge of collapse. While many Americans

feel strong antipathy towards the more distant of the two parties, in comparison with citizens

of other countries, they do not feel especially close to the most proximate party either.

Perhaps one of the crucial anxieties of democracy in the United States is the question of

whether, in such a diverse country, two shambolic but polarized parties are enough.