Elite Polarization, Group Memberships, and Sorting

Abstract

Conventional wisdom suggests that an increase in the correlation between partisanship and ideology within the mass public is a direct response to elite cues in the form of party polarization. This manuscript argues, however, that this logic is flawed in two important ways. First, the type of polarization to which individuals respond matters. Using an original experiment, I show that exposure to policy-based polarization has a negligible effect on the extent to which individuals' political identities converge; instead, symbolic elite cues are the primary antecedent of sorting (Study 1). Second, because perceptions of elite cues are inherently shaped by group memberships, I use ANES Time-Series data to show that sorting is almost wholly a function of perceptions of out-group extremity and dissimilarity rather than perceived polarization (Study 2). These findings support a social identity-informed theory of sorting.

Word count (inclusive tables, figures, and references): 9,480
Key words: Group cues, sorting, polarization, social identities

"A wise man gets more use from his enemies than a fool from his friends."
- Baltasar Gracián, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

1 Introduction

Individuals are not born partisans or ideologues. Political preferences are, to some degree, learned.[1] In particular, the political socialization literature implies that elites play a primary role in shaping citizens' attitudes and orientations (Gilens and Murakawa, 2002). As Downs (1957) notes, the average person simply cannot be an expert in many areas of policy, so "he will seek assistance from men who are experts in those fields, have the same political goals he does, and have good judgment" (pg. 233). This cue-taking underscores the leading explanation for the growth of sorting within the American mass public: as the political parties have polarized, individuals receive clearer cues about the "correct" correspondence between their partisan and ideological preferences (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008, pg. 581; Levendusky, 2009, pg. 39).

While intuitive, this logic requires modification. First, the average citizen is neither politically sophisticated nor logically extrapolates information across many policy domains (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Kahan and Braman, 2006). As a result, individuals struggle to conform to Downs' idealized notion of cue-taking, often relying, instead, upon symbolic or group-based cues to navigate the political landscape (Bullock, 2011)—a tendency that undercuts the depiction of sorting as citizens following policy-based elite cues (e.g. Levendusky, 2009). Second, citizens' spatial perceptions of elites are often biased and asymmetric. Not only does the average American tend to misperceive the extent of policy polarization (Levendusky and Malhotra, 2016), but ideological placements of in-party and out-party elites and copartisans are not uniform (Ahler, 2014). Consequently, these tendencies undermine the linkage between perceptions of party polarization and sorting (e.g. Davis and Dunaway, 2016).

[1] A Lockean epistemology notwithstanding, however, a growing body of work at the intersection of neuro- and political science also demonstrates that such orientations are, at least partially, heritable (Alford, Funk, and Hibbing, 2005; Hatemi and McDermott, 2012).

In this manuscript, I demonstrate that the conventional stylization of the relationship between elite cues and sorting is flawed. I begin by showing that the convergence between Americans' political identities is tenuously related to policy polarization or how individuals understand policy space. Rather, symbolic cues within the polarized political environment are almost wholly responsible for identity-based sorting (Study 1). Linking this finding to a social identity approach to intergroup behavior, I then demonstrate that identity sorting is not driven by *comparative* group assessments, or what is commonly termed "perceived polarization," but by beliefs about out-group dissimilarity and extremity (Study 2).

These findings not only require modifying the prevailing framework that links elite cues to sorting, but point to a sobering conclusion. Effectively, given the social identity foundations of sorting, it may matter little whether or not elites are objectively divided or moderate across many issues and policy domains. Provided that political elites continue to wage symbolic wars of ideological tribalism, this sorting—and its attendant downstream effects like partisan bias (Mason, 2015) and electoral polarization (Davis and Mason, 2016)—show no sign of slowing.

2 Elite cues and sorting

The accumulated wisdom regarding the development of mass opinion points to a general "elite cue theory," which suggests that individuals derive their political opinions in light of elite discourse (e.g. Key, 1966; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1979; Zaller, 1992; Berinsky, 2009; Lenz, 2010; Brader, Tucker, and Duell, 2012). In the aggregate, for example, Carmines and Stimson (1989) demonstrate that changes in party elites' behavior toward racial issues in the 1960s generated subsequent divisions within the mass public's attitudes, while the crystallization of abortion attitudes can be similarly traced to elites taking less ambiguous positions on the issue (Adams, 1997). At the individual level, elite cues serve as information-laden signals that citizens use to infer what to believe and how to act (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Cohen, 2003, Study 1; see also: Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). However, while this literature seems to provide a firm foundation for the relationship between cue-taking

and sorting, in the forthcoming sections, I deconstruct the conventional specification of this cue-taking mechanism and theorize a new social-identity driven framework for understanding why American's political identities have converged.

2.1 The conventional explanation for elite-driven sorting

With the movement of George Wallace's conservative, working class defectors to the Republican Party and John Anderson's liberal Republicans to the Democratic Party, the late 20th Century realignment of the political parties cemented into place two ideologically-coherent parties. Whereas conflict among legislators was once multidimensional, the prevailing cleavage within Congress now resembles a single dimension of conflict, where Republican legislators are uniformly conservative and Democratic legislators, liberal (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, 2006). As these liberal-conservative divisions extended across numerous issues, scholars expected that the coherency of public opinion would respond accordingly. Layman and Carsey (2002, pg. 799) write that

> [i]f Democratic and Republican elites take positions on multiple issue dimensions that are consistently liberal and consistently conservative, respectively, then politically-aware party identifiers will receive cues that their views on different issue agendas should go together and they should move toward polarized stands on each of those dimensions.

While the extent to which these changes have polarized mass opinion is a matter of some debate, the relationship between elite polarization and sorting rests on firmer footing.[2] Indeed, this account underscores Levendusky's (2009, pg. 3) conceptualization of the mechanism that constrains whether an individual's ideological preferences are congruent with their professed partisanship. According to this logic,

[2] Whether or not this has generated any meaningful, compensatory issue *polarization*, is another matter, although substantial evidence suggests not (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2006; Fiorina and Abrams, 2010; Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder, 2006). But increased sorting on issues may occur even as increased extremity may not (Mason, 2015b).

> [a]s elites pull apart to the ideological poles they clarify what it means to be a Democrat or a Republican. Ordinary voters use these clearer cues to align their own partisanship and ideology. Elite polarization, by clarifying where the parties stand on the issues of the day, causes ordinary voters to sort.

However, as it relates to the convergence between partisan and ideological identities, this narrative hinges upon a number of idealized (and problematic) expectations. First, it assumes that individuals are not only able to recognize salient policy differences between political candidates or parties, but that they should be able to extrapolate that information in meaningful ways—an assumption that rests on somewhat awkward empirical grounds given the low levels of political knowledge and sophistication that are characteristic of the mass public (e.g. Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Kahan and Braman, 2006). Further, this account implies that the average citizen will objectively assess the degree to which elites are polarized—that individuals' comparative assessments of the parties are bereft of well-known biases that stem from group memberships. These are not insignificant assumptions, and they generate two questions that the prevailing sorting literature has not sufficiently addressed: 1) Are all cues uniformly related to sorting?; and, 2) If not, then do group memberships shape the informational utility of these cues?

2.2 Different cues, different sorting?

On a basic level, cues are simply information—yet not all information is created equal. As Bullock (2011) notes, cues may be informal and symbolic, for example, "the Democratic Party is liberal," or they may be explicit and particular, say, "the Democratic Party is pro-choice." Both statements provide information about Democrats. In the first case, knowing that the Democratic Party is liberal may conjure up a variety of expectations about the (stereotypical) policy positions of that party; in the latter case, the knowledge of Democrats' position regarding reproductive choice conveys specific information about that single policy domain. The extent to which the above cues might resonate with citizens, and, importantly, the extent to which they will provide the type of information necessary

to navigate the political environment, however, appears contingent upon the *type* of message and whether this information is readily or easily interpretable by the target audience (Bullock, 2011; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, 2013). In particular, this extant research generally distinguishes between symbolic and policy-based cues.[3]

With this in mind, let us briefly return to the Levendusky's (2009) depiction of the linkage between elite cues and mass sorting. In his analysis, cues are operationalized as an index of correctly placing Democrats to the left of Republicans on a variety of items, ranging from perspectives on government spending to the parties' liberal-conservative identities. As a result of aggregating these placements together, both policy and symbolic cues are treated as functionally-equivalent in their relationship to the convergence between partisan and ideological preferences.

On its face, this simple coding decision seems innocent enough.[4] But a great deal of evidence points to serious problems with combining these two very different types of information. Specifically, there is significant scholarly consensus that ideological labels and the particular attitudes that populate belief systems are not interchangeable concepts. In fact, while most contemporary samples of American survey respondents find that ideological self-identification within liberal-conservative space is reliably correlated with a varied range of policy preferences—including preferences for decreased (increased) social welfare spending, progressive (traditional) cultural-moral stances on issues like same-sex marriage and abortion, and decreasing (increasing) the size and strength of the military

[3] While this appears to be a firm distinction, it is true that some policy cues are more or less "symbolic" in the sense that they are intertwined with ideological labels. I return to this point in further detail in Study 1.

[4] A derivative concern with this strategy, however, is that perceived cues are treated as "discrete" phenomena. That is, individuals either correctly place the parties or they do not. This decision may help to reduce some of the error variance inherent in a response-limited continuum—is the difference between degrees of ideological extremity interpreted as monotonic by respondents?—but it nevertheless loses valuable information about the *extent to which* individuals perceive that the parties are polarized. Further, this strategy is not particularly objective in that a respondent might place Democrats to the left of Republicans, but still select a "conservative" response for Democrats (i.e. a response that falls to the right of the midpoint on the associated response set). This person would be awarded points for correctly placing Democrats to the left of Republicans, even as the assessment is, in a sense, "wrong."

(Malka and Llekes, 2010)—extant research indicates that ideological labels and issue-based indices of ideology are not directly analogous constructs (Conover and Feldman, 1981; Levitin and Miller, 1979; Popp and Rudolph, 2011; Devine, 2015; Mason, 2015b; Broockman, 2016).[5]

Relatedly, while the conventional explanation for sorting implies that all forms of elite conflict ought to generate greater correspondence between partisan and ideological preferences, these discrepancies imply that ordinary citizens may not derive the same informational utility from symbolic and policy-based cues. Given the assessability and power of symbolic cues as heuristic devices (Valentino, Huthcings, and White, 2002; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, 2013), I expect that exposure to symbolic cues—e.g. describing elite polarization in terms of liberal-conservative ideological divisions—ought to generate greater convergence between partisan and ideological identities than policy-based ones—e.g. describing party polarization within the context of the debt ceiling crisis.[6]

> H1: The effect of symbolic elite polarization on sorting should be stronger than the effect of policy-based polarization.

2.3 A social identity framework for understanding elite-driven sorting

The extant evidence for the linkage between elite cues and sorting comprises showing that individuals who perceive many differences between the elites should exhibit higher levels of sorting. The expectation outlined above, however, implies that perceptions of liberal-conservative party differences, perceived *symbolic* polarization, should beget greater sorting than perceiving that the parties are divided on a variety of issues, perceived *issue*

[5] This disconnect is further revealed in both the "symbolic-operational paradox," which implies that Americans' overwhelming favor the conservative ideological label in spite of holding policy preferences that are, on balance, liberal (Ellis and Stimson, 2012), and the observation that individuals' own attitudes don't reliably cohere within a single dimension (e.g. Lupton, Myers, and Thornton, 2015).

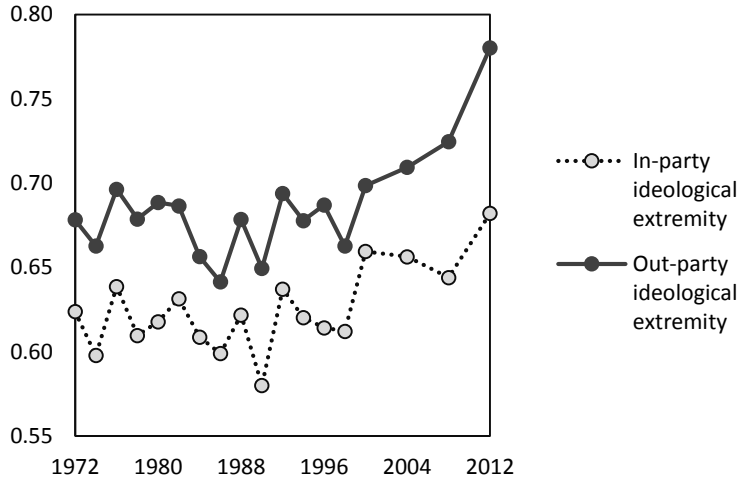
[6] Further bolstering expectation is the finding that individuals generally ignore or discount policy information in their political evaluations when given party labels (Rahn, 1993; Cohen, 2003).

polarization. Yet, a second problem lurks in the specification of the relationship between these "cues" and mass sorting.[7] Given that perceptions of elite polarization are operationalized as the simple distance between placements of the parties in ideological space, scholars have effectively treated these assessments of polarization as *unbiased* appraisals (e.g. Davis and Dunaway, 2016). This decision, however, is questionable given the selective, motivated, and biased nature of information processing. First, partisans do not evenly interact with informational sources (Stroud, 2010). Second, a substantial literature on motivated reasoning indicates that individuals expend a great deal of energy counter-arguing evidence that is incongruent to their political preferences (Taber and Lodge, 2006; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010), which dovetails with the observation that affective biases fundamentally shape perceptions of basic ideological proximity (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes, 2012; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015).

Recent work pays closer attention to how these psychological tendencies shape *misperceptions* of both mass and elite polarization. Ahler (2014) notes, for example, that individuals often wrongly attribute elite polarization to rank-and-file ideologues, while Levendusky and Malhotra (2016) show that individuals exaggerate the extent of mass polarization. Further, consider the curious asymmetry in perceptions of elite ideology. As Figure 1 illustrates, there is roughly a 10 point gap between the extremity of respondents' liberal-conservative placements of the in- and out-group party. In other words, respondents perceive the out-group party to be almost 15 percent more extreme than they perceive the in-group party. If basic ideological placements of the parties are asymmetric, then it logically follows that perceptions of elite polarization, or the Euclidean distance between ideological placements of the parties, are biased downwards in the sense that, while *both* parties have objectively polarized, individuals do not recognize these changes evenly. This finding presents an obvious challenge for the conventional sorting calculus, which treats these assessments as unbiased in their relationship to sorting.

[7] Prior research treats these assessments as more or less indicative of the overall power or salience of elite cues, even as these assessment are not, strictly speaking, cues themselves (c.f. Levendusky, 2009).

Figure 1. Perceived ideological extremity of parties by group membership



Source: 1972-2012 ANES Time-Series
Notes: Individuals are asked to describe whether the parties are liberal or conservative on seven-point scales, which are transformed to range from 0, "incorrect, extreme placement" to 1, "correct, extreme placement." Estimates are weighted means for respective year.

Social identity theory, however, provides an alternative approach to engage these asymmetries in relation to sorting by linking such appraisals to group memberships. If partisanship is a particular form of social identity (Huddy, 2001; Greene, 1999), then prototypic group members (e.g. political elites) provide the archetype to which group members should pattern their preferences. This expectation, however, cuts both ways. Social comparisons also produce contrast effects between groups (Campbell, 1967). Both Turner et al.'s (1987) and Brewer's (1991) work, for example, implies that the categorization processes that distinguish in- from out-group membership motivate individuals to emphasize the distinctive features of out-groups in order to establish intergroup boundaries that separate peers from opponents.

While classic versions of social identity theory emphasize that individuals desire to emulate in-group prototypes (e.g. Tajfel, 1959), thereby prioritizing the role of in-group cues, more recent applications of social identity theory in political science find that out-

group cues are particularly powerful. Goren, Federico, and Kittilson (2009), for example, show that out-group cues increase the salience of individuals' in-group values, while Nicholson (2012) demonstrates that out-group cues polarize individuals' attitudes beyond the effect of exposure to in-group cues. What explains the power of these cues? Consider, first, that social comparisons literally hinge on distinctiveness, necessitating an appreciation for the features that distinguish out-groups (Brewer, 1991). Second, Tversky's (1977) work suggests that the illusion of out-group homogeneity—the perception that an out-group is uniformly undesirable—emphasizes the objectionable features of out-group members relative the attractiveness of in-group characteristics. Finally, Atkinson's (1986, pg. 132) work posits that group *differences* play an important evaluative role; because "similarity and difference are not related by a perfect inverse function, the question arises as to which is the more basic process. Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to consider which is more likely to be noticed. The tentative answer would be difference since the judgment reflects distinctive over common features."

By extension, one productive way of thinking about how group memberships shape perceptions of elite cues is to consider this common focus on out-group distinctiveness. Given that optimizing distinctiveness is a core, if not primary, feature of intergroup relations (Brewer, 1999), combined with the more general finding that negative information is weighted more heavily than positive information (Ito et al., 1998), I expect that sorting is actually a reactionary, identity-driven process contingent on a sensitivity to *out-group differences*. When individuals perceive greater differences between themselves and their political opposition they learn precisely what they do *not* believe or wish to emulate. As Nicholson (2012, pg. 4) writes, "In an environment characterized by intergroup disagreement, the desire to seek difference with the outgrup will likely be strong." Accordingly, I expect that perceived out-group ideological dissimilarity should generate greater sorting than perceived in-group similarity or simple group differences (what is traditionally labelled "perceived polarization").

> H2: Perceived out-group dissimilarity should generate greater sorting than perceived in-group similarity.

3 Study 1: What "type" of cues cause sorting?

To investigate how elite cues shape sorting, I use an experimental design that juxtaposes the type of cues presented to survey subjects in order to measure how different configurations of polarization affect sorting. The data for this experiment are drawn from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (mTurk) workforce during March, 2016. While mTurk utilizes an opt-in sampling frame, which results in a non-random sample, prior research finds that such online convenience samples present modest problems for experimental research (Berinksy, Huber, and Lenz, 2010).[8] The resulting sample of 1,102 American adults is young (the average age is 36 years old with a standard deviation of 12.8), educated (modal educational attainment is a college degree), and white (78 percent of the sample). Aggregating leaners into the partisan categories, 58 percent of subjects identify as Democrats, 28 percent as Republicans, and 14 percent as "pure" Independents.

3.1 Experimental design

Using a multi-condition between-subjects design, participants were either assigned to a "symbolic" or "policy" cue condition; subjects were then randomly presented an illustration / vignette combination that varied only in the pictorial presentation of polarization—the text vignettes accompanying the portrayals of polarization are identical across the respective policy and symbolic cue treatments. In the interest of brevity, I present contrasts between observed sorting in three conditions that utilize a common, spatial depiction of party polarization: (1) average symbolic polarization, (2) average policy polarization, and (3) a control group.[9]

[8] In fact, in this application, the higher levels of education and political interest that are generally associated with this worker pool actually work *against* observing treatment effects insofar as sorting in the baseline control group is likely to be higher than the average levels of sorting in the mass public—thereby decreasing the likelihood of observing significant contrasts.

[9] The remaining treatments depict polarization using different pictorial representations of polarization; the contrasts presented here, however, are a fair representation of how extant literature rolls elite divisions into a single dimension.

Figure 2 illustrates two of the different substantive treatments that individuals could receive. In the *symbolic cue* treatment (N = 194), the labels "liberal" and "conservative" are used to describe divisions between the parties; meanwhile, the *policy cue* treatment uses an agree-disagree format to illustrate where the two parties are divided on the issue of the debt ceiling (N = 182). This particular policy issue was selected purposefully. The debt ceiling has become a fulcrum in Congress in recent years, resulting in multiple "crises" that brought the function of the federal government to a grinding and much-publicized halt (see Jacobson [2013] for an expanded treatment regarding this issue's close relationship with polarization and gridlock). However, even if the debt ceiling is a medium salience-issue among the minds of average citizens, presenting the parties as intractably divided should still trigger sorting *if mere partisan conflict provides the needed material to cause convergence between ideological and partisan preferences.*

To further minimize presentational characteristics that might act as confounds, the "average" location of both the Democratic and Republican Parties on the linear axis that accompanies each vignette are identical across treatments (i.e. the parties are placed at the same location on the axis in both the policy and symbolic conditions). The sole differences between treatments, then, are the content of the vignette and the information displayed upon the associated axis depicting the parties as polarized. If there are observable differences in sorting that result from exposure to these treatments, then we can be confident that it is the *content* (i.e. type) of the cues and not the visual portrayal of party polarization that drives these differences.[10]

[10] That said, it is possible that there are variations even among policy cues as to their symbolic informational qualities. I leave this question, however, to future research.

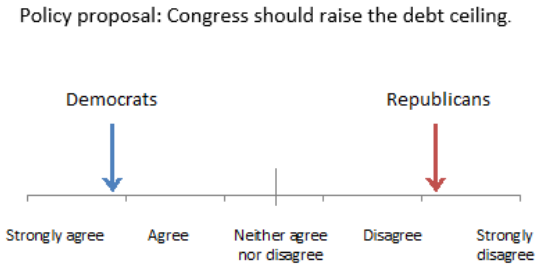
3.2 Measurement

Dependent variable. The outcome of interest is partisan-ideological sorting. Sorting is, ultimately, a process of categorization. In its simplest form, it merely accounts for whether an individual's political preferences are correctly matched: liberal (conservative) preferences correspond to Democratic (Republican) partisanship. In past research, these ideological preferences comprise both symbolic and policy-based preferences (e.g. Levendusky, 2009). Yet while it may be attractive to craft an omnibus measure of sorting, there are serious problems with this approach (see Appendix B for an expanded discussion of this point). Instead, it seems both theoretically and empirically preferable to parcel sorting into separate issue- and identity-based constructs. The forthcoming analyses focus on this latter construct, partisan-ideological sorting, which captures the convergence between political identities (c.f. Mason, 2015a; Davis and Dunaway, 2016).

Following the measurement scheme outlined in Mason (2015a), I first calculate the overlap between partisanship and ideological self-placement, which are both measured using the traditional seven-category response sets that range from Democratic / liberal identification (low values) to Republican / conservative identification (high values). The overlap between the two items is expressed by subtracting a subject's score on the ideological identification item from their score on the partisanship one. Low values on the resulting measure communicate perfect ("correct") overlap between the two items, while high values convey an extreme mismatch between partisanship and ideological identification. Next, I rescale this item so that high values will be associated with greater overlap. This score is then multiplied by the strength of both the partisan and ideological identities (measures that are derived by folding the partisanship and ideological identification items in half). The final index is rescaled to range from 0, incorrectly sorted and weak identities, to 1, perfectly sorted and strong identities.

Figure 2. Elite cues experimental treatments

Policy-based cue (polarization)



A recent study conducted by the Center for Congressional Studies sheds new light on the policy preferences of Congress.

Researchers found for example, that the parties are divided on the issue of public debt. Democrats prefer to increase the debt ceiling; Republicans, on the other hand, do not support raising the debt ceiling.

The figure above depicts the average position that Democrats and Republicans in Congress have taken on this issue. Some legislators take more moderate positions, but, Democrats and Republicans are clearly split on whether or not to increase the debt ceiling.

Symbolic cue (polarization)

A recent study conducted by the Center for Congressional Studies sheds new light on the ideological preferences of Congress.

The figure above depicts the average ideological position of Democrats and Republicans in Congress. As you can see, the parties are divided by ideology: Democrats are liberal, and Republicans are conservative. Although some legislators are more moderate, liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans dominate their respective parties.

This means that Democrats and Republicans rarely agree on the right approach to a number of different issues. Instead, Democrats prefer more liberal solutions to problems facing our country, while Republicans prefer more conservative approaches.

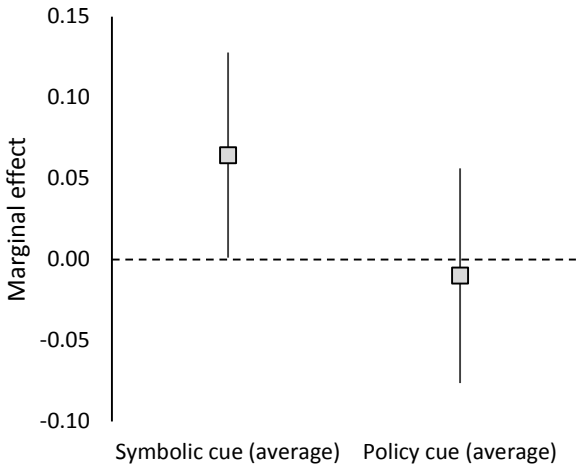
Controls. Participants' race is broken into a series of dichotomous variables where identification as *white* or *black* is coded 1 and otherwise 0. *Age* is a continuous variable corresponding to subjects' actual age in years. *Education* is a five-category item ranging from elementary education, coded 0, to a post-graduate degree, coded 1. *Male* is coded 1 for men and 0 for women. Income is an ordinal variable ranging 1, "less than $10,000," to 12, "more than $150,000)." *Internet* is coded 1 for individuals who consume the majority of their news from online sources. *News consumption* is a seven-category item that captures how many days a week a respondent watches, listens, or reads about the news. Finally, *political knowledge*, is an index of recognition items that includes correctly identifying the Speaker of the House, who nominates Supreme Court Justices, and which party controls the House of Representatives during the time of data collection. This item is rescaled to range from 0, "no correct responses," to 1, "all correct responses."

Table 1. Elite cues and partisan-ideological sorting

	b	s.e.
Symbolic cue	0.067**	(0.039)
Policy cue	-0.004	(0.040)
White	0.096**	(0.040)
Black	0.124	(0.080)
Age	-0.002**	(0.001)
Education	0.033**	(0.019)
Male	0.110**	(0.032)
Income	-0.001	(0.005)
Internet	-0.038	(0.036)
Political knowledge	0.047	(0.058)
News consumption	0.016**	(0.008)
Constatnt	0.219**	(0.097)

Source: Amazon mTurk sample, June, 2016
Notes: *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Figure 3. The effect of elite cues on sorting



Notes: Solid lines represent 90 percent confidence intervals; contrast between conditions is significant (b = .07, t = 1.86).

3.3 Results

To investigate whether different types of cues cause greater convergence between partisan and ideological identities, I regress treatment assignment and a series of covariates on partisan-ideological sorting, thereby providing a strict comparison between the effects of policy and symbolic cues. As the coefficient entry for the policy cue treatment in Table 1 indicates, depicting the parties as polarized on a significant issue of public policy does little to increase the overlap and extremity of partisan and ideological identities. Figure 3 illustrates that the marginal effect of exposure to the policy cue treatment is insignificant given that the estimate's confidence interval closely overlaps with zero.

However, individuals in the symbolic cue treatment were more sorted than subjects in both the control and policy cue conditions. As Figure 3 illustrates, presenting the parties as being polarized within liberal-conservative ideological space generates greater partisan-ideological sorting. Not only is this the marginal effect associated with assignment to that condition distinguishable from zero, but the paired contrast between policy and symbolic

polarization is also significant (b = 0.07, t = 1.86). Further, the magnitude of this difference is large; the effect of exposure to symbolic polarization, for example, is equivalent to two full units of educational attainment.

3.4 Discussion

The careful reader may ask: Why do these results differ from past research? First, it is important to note that prior experimental research has largely concerned itself with how polarized elites affect attitudinal consistency and simple matching of policy attitudes vis-à-vis partisanship (e.g. Levendusky, 2009, 2010)—not the *strength* of the relationship between partisan and ideological identification, which the metric of identity sorting used here captures. Second, consider the informational nature of policy and symbolic cues. To use the parlance of Ellis and Stimson (2012), policy cues provide information about the instrumental or "operational" nature of the parties. We know, however, that the average citizen's own symbolic liberal-conservative identity is modestly independent of their combined bundle of operational preferences (e.g. Conover and Feldman, 1981; Devine, 2015; Mason, 2016). In this case, merely presenting the parties as intractably polarized does little to grease the convergence between partisanship and ideological identification, ostensibly because 1) this policy information is more tenuously related to how individuals conceive of the relationship between partisanship and ideology, and 2) the symbolic cue condition literally preloads subjects with these connections by establishing the link between liberal-conservative ideology and partisan identity.

As I will show in the next study, this pattern of findings holds using observational data regarding perceptions of the parties. However, the relationship between perceptions of symbolic cues and sorting is more nuanced than prior work shows. In fact, there is nothing particularly unique about polarization as an informational precursor to sorting. Instead, perceptions of symbolic out-group extremity and dissimilarity weigh heavily on the minds of individuals; dovetailing with recent research that illustrates the pervasive nature of the in-group / out-group paradigm (e.g. Nicholson, 2012; Iyengar, Sood, and Llekes, 2012), I find that greater correspondence between partisan and ideological identities has much less

to do with *comparative* party differences—i.e. elite polarization—than it does with perceptions of out-group ideological dissimilarities.

4 Study 2: Group memberships and sorting

In this second study, I seek to establish two novel features of the relationship between elite cues and sorting: 1) perceptions of symbolic cues should again exert greater influence on sorting than policy-based ones, and 2) these assessments should vary in their relationship to sorting according to group membership.

4.1 Data and Measurement

The data for Study 2 are drawn from the 1972-2012 American National Elections Studies (ANES) Time-Series surveys and 1992-1996 ANES Panel Study, respectively. The outcome of interest in these analyses, *partisan-ideological sorting*, is identical to the dependent variable utilized in Study 1. However, in these analyses, I focus not on the effects of exposure to elite cues—what might be considered the "direct effects" of partisan polarization—but rather the indirect effect of *perceptions* of these cues on sorting through the lens of group memberships.

4.1.1 Symbolic group cues

The ANES surveys ask individuals to rate whether and to what extent the Democratic and Republican Parties are either liberal or conservative. Responses to these items range from 1, "extremely liberal," to 7, "extremely conservative." To construct the first type of group assessment, *perceived party polarization,* I subtract a respondent's Democratic Party ideological placement from the Republican one. As used elsewhere by Davis and Dunaway (2016), this operation yields a variable that ranges from -6, which conveys that a respondent perceives that the parties are fully polarized, yet completely opposite of their "correct" ideological character (i.e. Democrats are extremely conservative / Republicans are extremely liberal), to 6, which conveys that the individual correctly identifies the parties'

ideology and views this quality as extreme (i.e. Democrats are extremely liberal / Republicans are extremely conservative). Values of or near zero, then, represent either perceiving the parties to be moderate or perceiving the parties to be effectively indistinguishable from each other. To ease the interpretation of this variable's relationship to sorting, I have rescaled it to range from 0 (perceives parties as fully polarized but wrongly assigns ideological labels) to 1 (correctly perceives parties' ideology and views the two groups as maximally polarized).

Panel A in Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of this variable's scores. Roughly 10 percent of respondents incorrectly perceive the relative nature of party polarization (scores to the left of "no difference." The vast majority of individuals see "correct" differences between the parties, although only about 3 percent of respondents perceive that the parties are maximally polarized (i.e. Democrats extremely liberal and Republicans extremely conservative).

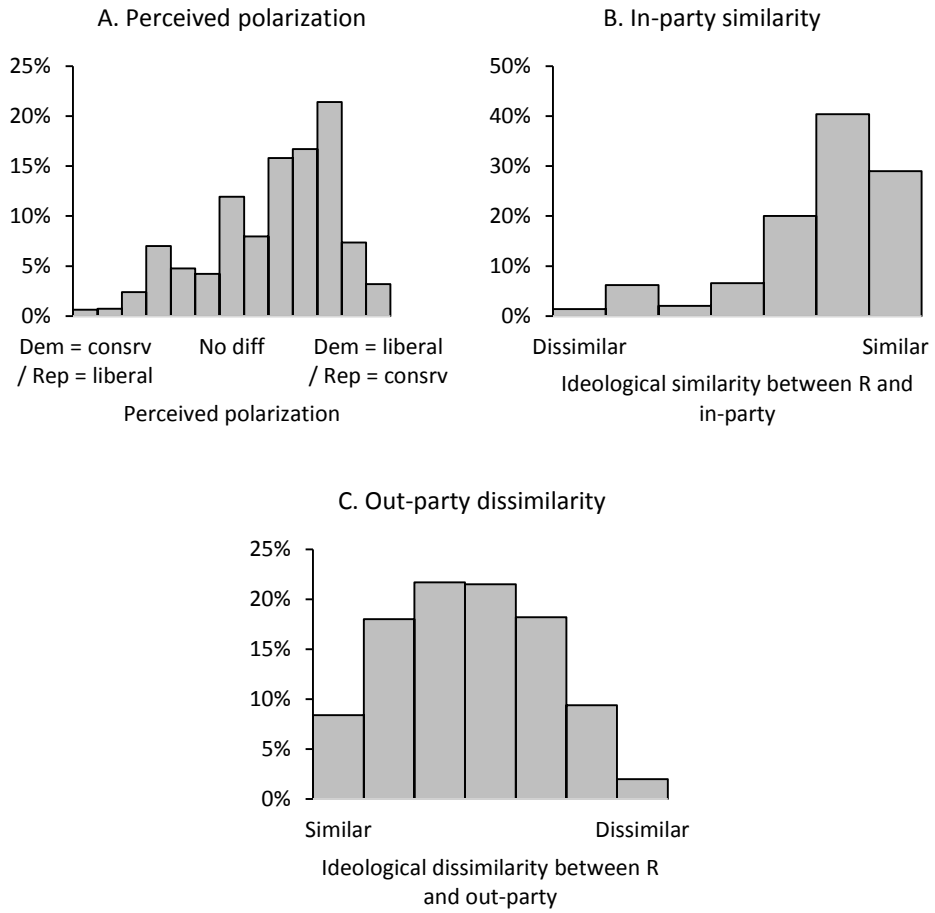
Next, I disaggregate this "comparative" group cue into perceptions of *in-party* and *out-party ideological extremity* according to respondent partisanship. Recalling that individuals are asked to rate the parties on seven-point scales, ranging from liberal to conservative, I reverse-code an individual's Democratic Party ideological placement in order to "match" the assessment of the Republican Party's ideological placement insofar as this recode ensures that higher scores on both party placements convey "correct" perceptions of ideological extremity (i.e. Democrats are perceived to be "extremely liberal," and Republicans "extremely" conservative). These variables are then rescaled to range from 0, (strong, incorrect assessments of a party's ideological nature) to 1 (which conveys that an individual correctly perceives that the respective party is ideologically extreme. Recall that these values were displayed in Figure 1.

The fourth and fifth forms of group cues reflect the perceived distance between an individual's own ideological self-placement and the corresponding placement of the in-party, the party to which the respondent belongs, and out-party, the party with which an individual does not identify. In other words, these variables not only account for the perceived ideological character and extremity of a particular party, but how these qualities

relate to the respondent's own ideological identity. Perceived *in-party similarity* is created by subtracting the ideological placement of an individual's party from her own ideological self-placement and taking the absolute value of the resulting score. I then rescale this item so that larger values will represent greater similarity. Values on this variable range from 0 (maximum ideological differences between the self and in-group) to 1 (which conveys no differences between self and group ideological placements). According to Panel B in Figure 4, most respondents believe that their in-party shares their own sense of ideological self-placement. Almost 70 percent of individuals fall into one of the two highest categories on this item.

Perceived *out-party dissimilarity* is constructed by subtracting the ideological placement of an individual's out-party from their own self-placement and taking the absolute value of the resulting score. This transformation is necessary to ensure that Republican and Democrat identifiers' scores exist within common space and yields a variable that, after rescaling, ranges from 0 (no differences between self and out-group ideology) to 1 (maximum differences between self and group ideology). Panel C in Figure 4 illustrates that the spread of values on this item is approximately normal, with fewer than five percent of all partisans perceiving maximum ideological differences between their and the out-party's liberal-conservative placement.

Figure 4. Perceptions of the parties



Source: 1984-2012 ANES

Notes: Estimates weighted by population weights.

4.1.2 Policy-based cues

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the ANES began asking respondents about their perceptions of the parties' issue positions on a number of policy items. Upon being given seven-category continua that juxtapose a "liberal" and "conservative" solution to these particular policy issues, individuals are asked to place where they think the parties' approaches to these issues fit within these bivalent response sets. I first average together individuals' Democratic Party policy placements across the five items that are routinely included on Time-Series surveys (health insurance, provision of jobs, aid to minorities, spending on government services, and spending on defense). I then do the same for the Republican Party policy placements, and, finally, for each respondent. In effect, the resulting variables represent a "latent" approximation of the perceived "liberal" or "conservative" nature of the policy preferences of both the parties and the respondent, which resemble, at least in their underlying measurement structure, the symbolic assessments outlined above.[11]

Following the approach outlined in the previous section, I then create a number of different cues based off of these indices. Because the perceived policy placements fit within the same seven-category scale as liberal-conservative ideology, the actual construction of these variables follows the exact same template detailed in the preceding section. Thus, the five items derived from the policy placements include: 1) *perceived policy polarization*, 2) *in-party policy extremity*, 3) *out-party policy extremity*, 4) *perceived in-party policy similarity*, and 5) *perceived out-party policy dissimilarity.*[12]

[11] Although prior research is not bullish about the limited dimensionality of individual-level preferences (Johnston and Feldman, 2014; Lupton, Meyers, and Thornton, 2015), I am not strictly interested in whether this latent score is "ideological," in the usual sense (i.e. whether a respondent's ideology is necessarily structured within a liberal-conservative dimension). Instead, I'm only interested in the relative distance between this score and the scores given to the parties, allowing me to remain agnostic about the underlying constraint observed across attitudes. If there is multidimensionality within these preferences, then we should observe great fluctuations in the relative in-group / out-group (dis)similarity scores.

[12] For brevity, the depiction of the distribution of these items is available in the Appendix (Figure B2).

4.1.3 Controls

A number of control variables are employed. In light of the legacy of the Southern realignment, I include a dichotomous variable, *Old South,* for persons who reside in states that were originally included in the Confederacy. A respondent's *age* is measured in years, ranging from 17 to 99. *Educational attainment* conveys the highest level of schooling a respondent has undertaken and takes the form of a seven-part ordinal scale ranging from 0, "grade school," to 1, "graduate degree." The degree to which persons are *interested in politics* is coded 0 for "not much," 1 for "some," and 2 for "a lot." Because religion is deeply intertwined with political convictions (Patrikios, 2008), I provide two variables that differentiate between religious identification and religiosity: 1) *Protestant* is coded 1 for individuals who identify as members of that group and otherwise 0, and 2) frequency of *church attendance* is coded as an ordinal scale ranging from 0, "never," to 1 "attends multiple times a week."[13] Racial identification as *white* or *black* is coded 1 for identifying oneself as a member of that group and 0 for otherwise. Finally, although it is virtually impossible to find acceptable "political knowledge" items that are common across both early and recent ANES surveys, I utilize *knowledge of House majority party* as a proxy for this concept.

4.2 Results

Table 2 reports the results of a series of analyses that model identity sorting as a function of different configurations of the group assessments specified above. Model 1 employs the standard predictor of sorting, perceived party polarization (prior works often uses the terms "differences," "polarization," and "cues" interchangeably), with one caveat—these assessments have been broken down into symbolic- and issue-based components. The difference in the magnitude of the coefficients produced by these two items is startling. Correctly perceiving that the Democrats are very liberal and Republicans are very conservative—that the parties are, in effect, maximally polarized—exerts almost triple the effect on sorting relative perceiving the parties are fully polarized across a series of policy

[13] While it would be ideal to employ a better measure of religious conservatism, unfortunately, the data do not provide any common metric by which to measure this consideration over the time frame utilized.

issues. These results handsomely match the findings uncovered in Study 1; the information derived from elite cues is not uniformly related to the convergence between political identities.[14]

How do group memberships mediate the relationship between assessments (cues) and sorting? Turning to Model 2, I disaggregate perceptions of both symbolic and policy-based polarization by a respondent's group membership. Two conclusions are apparent. First, the effect of symbolic group assessments on sorting is again comparatively larger than the associated effects of policy-based assessments. Second, I uncover modest evidence that indicates that the relationship of these perceptions to sorting is differentiated by group membership. Consider a Democratic-identifier who perceives that Republicans are "extremely conservative" and Democrats are "extremely liberal," numerically the most "extreme" perceptions associated with each party. Perceiving that an out-group is maximally-extreme results in a change in sorting that is roughly 30 percent larger than concomitant assessments regarding perceived in-party extremity.

However, the true power of group memberships is further revealed when we account for how these memberships mediate perceived party (dis)similarities. In Model 3, I convert the simple measures of ideological extremity into items that account for ideological group placements vis-à-vis the respondent's own ideological moorings—variables that instead reflect how ideologically (dis)similar a group is compared to the respondent. As expected, the effect of perceived out-group dissimilarity on sorting far surpasses the magnitude of perceived in-group similarity. In other words, it's not so much that individuals observe their preferred in-group archetypes and sort accordingly, but that out-group information provides a particularly stark and powerful cue. When individuals recognize that the opposing party is ideologically different from their own identity, they are much more likely exhibit robust levels of sorting than even when they perceive that their own party is a perfect ideological fit.

[14] One potential criticism that readers familiar with this research may raise is that these effects are a function of a different choice of dependent variable than the one used in prior research (e.g. Levendusky, 2009). I address this concern in Appendix A5. Essentially, policy cues predict issue-based sorting, while symbolic cues predict identity-based sorting. Lumping these forms of sorting and cues together obscures these important differences.

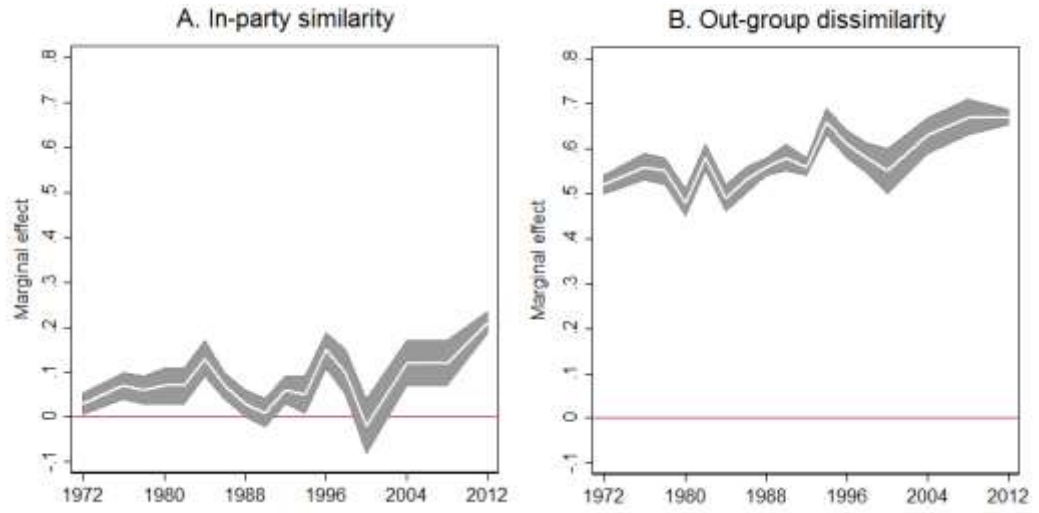
Table 2. Elite cues and Partisan-Ideological Sorting

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Symbolic assessments			
Perceived polarization	0.17**	-----	-----
	(0.01)		
In-party extremity	-----	0.17**	-----
		(0.02)	
Out-party extremity	-----	0.22**	-----
		(0.04)	
In-party similarity	-----	-----	0.17**
			(0.03)
Out-party dissimilarity	-----	-----	0.65**
			(0.03)
Policy assessments			
Perceived polarization	0.06*	-----	-----
	(0.02)		
In-party extremity	-----	0.05*	-----
		(0.02)	
Out-party extremity	-----	0.07*	-----
		(0.03)	
In-party similarity	-----	-----	-0.04
			(0.02)
Out-party dissimilarity	-----	-----	0.02
			(0.02)
Controls			
Political interest	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.02)
Political knowledge	0.04**	0.03**	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)
protestant	0.02**	0.05**	0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Constant	-2.21*	-4.11**	0.62
	(1.02)	(1.23)	(1.29)
R2	0.13	0.14	0.50
N	20,458	8,393	8,330

Source: 1972-2012 ANES Time-Series Surveys

Notes: † Additional controls include race, age, gender, household income, and year counter (full models are available in the Appendix. Analyses employ robust standard errors, clustered by year. *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Figure 5. The effect of liberal-conservative party placements on sorting, conditional on group membership



Source: 1972-2012 ANES Time-Series

Notes: Originating regressions can be obtained in Appendix, but modeling conforms to the analyses presented in Table 2. Shaded bands convey 95 percent confidence intervals. Point estimates for *in-group similarity* correspond to moving from minimul to maximum overlap between in-group and respondent self-placement in liberal-conservative space. Point estimates for *out-group dissimilarity* convey moving from maximum to minium overlap between out-group and respondent self-placement in liberal-conservative space.

Figure 5 illustrates the contours of these findings by plotting the coefficient estimates associated with in-party similarity and out-party dissimilarity over time. Unlike the pooled coefficient estimates presented in Table 2, each point estimate is derived from fitting a model to the data from the respective year in which it was collected. Aside from the observation that in-group assessments are a much weaker correlate of sorting than out-group ones (in fact, the confidence intervals of the estimates associated with perceived in-group similarity are insignificant more often than not), I find that the magnitude of the effect depicted in the second panel increase significantly over time. This observation tracks the real change in Dw-Nominate estimates that indicate that the objective level of elite polarization has dramatically increased during this window of time. Thus, not only is a sensitivity to out-group cues associated with a higher propensity to exhibit sorted political identities, but the magnitude of this effect has appreciably evolved over time. As elites

have become objectively divided, so too has the strength of the relationship between subjective assessments and sorting increased.

4.3 Discussion

These analyses indicate that perceptions of between-group differences, what is commonly termed "perceived polarization," reveal only a partial portrait of how "elite cues" influence the convergence between ideological and partisan identities. Although a growing body of work reveals that individuals' assessments of political groups are biased (Ahler, 2014; Levendusky and Mahlhotra, 2016) and that group memberships shape political attitudes (Nicholson, 2012), this study is the first to explore the consequences of how group memberships filter information through the ubiquitous "perceptual screen" of partisan memberships in the context of sorting. While the observation that perceived out-group ideological dissimilarities drive sorting is novel, this finding fits within the expectations of self-categorization and social comparison theories of intergroup behavior (Shaw and Costanzo, 1982; Park and Rothbart, 1982), which suggest that comparisons between the self and reference groups shape conformity among preferences whereas the recognition of between-group differences may not (e.g. Hogg, 1996; Turner et al., 1987). Individuals do not assess partisan (social) groups in a vacuum; instead, the judgments they make about ideological extremity are a partial function of their awareness of their own ideological identity.

These results produce an important revision to extant work on sorting, and one that has far-reaching consequences for models of behavior that employ spatial analysis of ideology: perceived symbolic—*not policy*—cues facilitate the convergence between political identities. This distinction is a vital one. Prior research treats the recognition of party differences within liberal-conservative and policy space as if these domains share such commonalities that these cues can be aggregated together. Yet, descriptively, this assumption is tenuous. Recalling that dissimilarity scores range from 0 (no differences) to 1 (maximum differences), individuals perceive far greater out-group *symbolic* ideological differences ($x = 0.47$) than they do concomitant *policy* differences ($x = 0.29$). Thus, not only are party placements within ideological space biased by group membership, but individuals are either not as well-equipped to navigate policy relative symbolic ideological

space or else they derive fundamentally different types of actionable information from these cues (or, perhaps both). These results imply that, even as the parties have become objectively divided across a wide variety of issues, awareness of those divisions matters comparatively little in the calculus of sorting. Provided that individuals perceive stark symbolic differences between the parties, partisan-ideological sorting may occur independent of these policy-based cues.

5 Conclusion

Top-down theories of cue-taking dominant the behavior literature (e.g. Zaller, 2009; Lenz, 2012). The two studies presented in this manuscript contribute to this body of work by demonstrating the conditions under which cues shape sorting. In Study 1, I show that the prevailing linkage between elites and sorting rests critically on the type of elite cues (information) presented to subjects. Merely communicating that the parties are polarized does little to improve the extent to which political identities are sorted. Instead, symbolic polarization is a necessary and sufficient cause of partisan-ideological sorting.

Study 2 builds on this finding, showing how perceptions of these cues are then shaped by group memberships, offering a social identity-driven theory of sorting. Here, I demonstrated that perceptions of between-party differences—what scholars commonly call "perceived polarization"—exert much less impact on sorting than do perceived out-group dissimilarities. Specifically, the absolute perceived policy gap between the parties does not drive identity-based sorting nearly as much as symbolic ideological differences between an individual and an out-group party. Why are individuals more likely to conform to the political characteristics of their in-group when they perceive that their political opponents deviate from their own group's preferences? Self-categorization theory conveys that contextual comparisons between reference groups and the individual are efficient means for processing information quickly (Atkinson, 1986). Given the desire for positive social distinction (Turner et al., 1987) and the evaluative importance of group differences (Taylor, 1981), Gracián's admonition in the epigraph to heed one's enemies proves prescient: sorting is the distilled endpoint of social pressures from out-group sources.

Normatively, these findings are not a cause for optimism. In fact, Studies 1 and 2 imply that policy moderation by party elites would do little to curb partisan-ideological

sorting within the mass public. Even if cross-cutting issues perturbed the uni-dimensional policy space that currently characterizes Congressional polarization, the symbolic nature of partisan conflict has become such an ingrained feature of the political landscape that identity-based sorting may be orthogonal to most policy debate. Future work on sorting, then, would do well to consider whether certain types of issues have the power to inhibit or exacerbate the convergence of these identities.

At any rate, these findings suggest that spatial models of politics, which rely heavily on the assumption that individuals understand policy space and connect this information to their own preferences, must wrestle with the relatively weak relationship between policy information and the convergence between political identities demonstrated here. Although political commentators lament that candidates ought to focus on the issue facing ordinary Americans, these findings indicate that some divisive issues like federal spending and affirmative action generate little identity-based sorting (Study 2). This, in turn, implies that political elites should concentrate on highly stylized approaches to campaigning, which may undercut the substantive discourse that elections should encourage. However, as long as party elites have an incentive to employ symbolic rhetoric—and the public buys the demand that symbolic ideological purity is the litmus test for electoral acceptability—the ongoing convergence between partisan and ideological identities within the mass public will only accelerate.

References

Abramowitz, Alan I. and Kyle L. Saunders. 2006. "Exploring the Bases of Partisanship in the American Electorate: Social Identity vs. Ideology." *Political Research Quarterly*, 59(2): 175-187.

Abramowtiz, Alan I. and Steven W. Webster. 2015. "All Politics is National: The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of US House and Senate Elections in the 21st Century." Prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, April 16-19, 2015. url: http://www.stevenwwebster.com/research/all_politics_is_national.pdf

Ahler, Douglas J. 2014. "Self-Fulfilling Misperceptions of Public Polarization." *The Journal of Politics*, 76(3): 607-620.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder. 2006. "Purple America." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20(2), 97-118.

Atkinson, Michael L. 1986. "The Perception of Social Categories: Implications for the Social Comparison Process." In James M. Olson, C.P. Herman, and Mark P. Zanna, (Eds.), *Relative Deprivation and Social Comparison: The Ontario Symposium*, 117-133. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Berinsky, Adam J. 2009. *In Time of War: Understanding American Opinion from World War II to Iraq*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Binder, Sarah. 2014. May 27, 2014. "Polarized We Govern?" *Brookings Institute*. http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/05/27-polarized-we-govern-congress-legislative-gridlock-polarized-binder

Brader, Ted, Joshua A. Tucker, and Dominik Duell. 2012. "Which Parties Can Lead Opinion? Experimental Evidence on Partisan Cue Taking in Multiparty Democracies.

Brewer, Mark D. 2005. "The Rise of Partisanship and the Expansion of Partisan Conflict within the American Electorate." *Political Research Quareterly*, 58(2), 219-229.

Ahler, Douglas J. and David E. Broockman. N.d. "Does Polarization Imply Poor Representation? A New Perspective on the "Disconnect Between Politicians and Voters."
https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~broockma/ahler_broockman_ideological_innocence.pdf

Bullock, John G. "Elite Influence on Public Opinion in an Informed Electorate." *American Political Science Review*, 105(3), 496-515.

Campbell, Donald T. "Stereotypes and the Perceptions of Group Differences." *American Psychologist,* 22(10), 817-829.

Carmines, Edward. And James Stimson. 1989. Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cohen, Geoffrey L. 2003. "Party Over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Political Beliefs." *Journal of Personality and Social Pscyhology*, 85(5), 808-822.

Davis, Nicholas T. and Johanna Dunaway. 2016. "Party Polarization, Media Choice, and Mass Partisan-Ideological Sorting." *Public Opinion Quarterly,* 80(S1), 272-297

Davis, Nicholas T. and Lilliana Mason. 2016. "Sorting and the Split-Ticket: Evidence from Presidential and Subpresidential Election." *Political Behavior*, 38(2), 3337-354.

Druckman, James N., Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus. "How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation." *American Political Science Review*, 107(1), 57-79.

Ellis, Christopher, and James A. Stimson. 2012. Ideology in America. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press.

Fiorina, Morris and Samuel Abrams. 2008. Polarization and the American Public. Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 2008. 11:563–588.

Fiorina, Morris, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2010. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized American*. London, England: Longman.

Greene, Steven. "Understanding Party Identification: A Social Identity Approach." *Political Psychology*, 20(2), 393-403.

Hogg, Michael A. 1996. "Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and the Small Group." In E.H Witte and J.H. Davis (Eds.), *Understanding Group Behavior. Volume 2: Small Group Processes and Interpersonal relations*, 227-253. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Huddy, Leonie. 2001. "From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory." *Political Psychology*, 22, 127-156.

Huddy, Leonie. 2013. "From Group Identity to Political Cohesion and Commitment." In Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack Levy," *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ito, Tiffany A., Jeff T. Larsen, N. Kyle Smith, and John T. Cacioppo. 1998. "Negative Information Weighs More Heavily on the Brain: The Negativity Bias in Evaluative Categorizations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(4), 887-900.

Iyengar, Shanto and Gaurav Sood. N.d. "All in the Eye of the Beholder: Partisan Affect and ideological Accountability." url: http://gsood.com/research/papers/inNout.pdf

Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect, Not Ideology A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, September.

Iyengar, Shanto, and Sean J. Westwood. 2015. "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(3), 690-707.

Jacobson, Gary. 2013.

Key, V.O. 1966. *The Responsible Electorate*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lau, Richard R. and David P. Redlawsk. 2001. "Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision-Making." *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(4), 951-971.

Layman Geoffrey C., Carsey Thomas. 2002 "Party Polarization and 'Conflict Extension' in the American Electorate." American Journal of Political Science 46786–802.

Lenz, Gabriel. 2010. *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians' Policies and Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Levendusky, Matthew. 2009. The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

Levendusky, Matthew. 2010. "Clear Cues, More Consistent Voters: A Benefit of Elite Polarization." *Political Behavior*, 32(1), 111-131.

Levendusky, Matthew and Neil Malhotra. 2016. (Mis)Perceptions of Partisan Polarization in the American Public. *Public Opinion Quarterly.*

Lupia, Arthur and Matthew D. McCubbins. 1998. *The Democratic Dilemma.* Cambridge University Press.

Mason, Lilliana. 2015a. "'I Disrespectfully Agree': The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59 (1): 128–45.

Mason, Lilliana. 2015b. "Distinguishing the Polarizing Effects of Ideology as Identity, Issue Positions, and Issue-Based Identity." A paper presented at the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics Conference on Political Polarization: Media and Communication Influences. Princeton University. May 1, 2015.

Mason, Lilliana. 2016. "A Cross-cutting Calm: How Social Sorting Drives Affective Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 351-377.

McCarty, Nolan, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches.* Cambridge: MIT University Press.

Nicholson, Stephen P. 2012. "Polarizing Cues." *American Journal of Political Science,* 56(1), 52-66.

Nie, Norman H., Sidney Verba, and John r. Petrocik. 1979. *The Changing American Voter.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Nyhan, Brendan and Jason Reifler. 2010. "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions." *Political Behavior*, 32(2), 303-330.

Park, Bernadette and Myron Rothbart. 1982. "Perception of Out-group Homogeneity and Level of Social Categorization." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61(3), 366-379.

Patrikios, Stratos. 2008. "American Republican Religion? Disentangling the Causal Link between Religion and Politics in the US." *Political Behavior,* 30(3), 367-389.

Pronin, Emily, Daniel Y. Lin, and Lee Ross. 2002. "The Bias Blind Spot: Perceptions of Bias in Self Versus Others." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(3), 369-381.

Taber, Charles S. and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs." *American Journal of Political Science,* 50(3), 755-769 .

Tajfel, Henri and John C. Turner. 1979. "An integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W G Austin and S Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 33-47. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole

Taylor, Shelley E. 1981. "A Categorization Approach to Stereotyping." In D L Hamilton (Ed.), *Cognitive Processes in Stereotyping and Intergroup Behavior*, 88-114. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Theriault, Sean M. 2008. *Party Polarization in Congress.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Turner, John C., Michael A. Hogg, P J Oakes, S D Reicher, M S Wetherell. 1987. *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Tversky, Amos. 1977. "Features of Similarity." *Psychological Review*, 84(4), 327-352.

Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion.* Cambridge England ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix A: Study 1 measurement details

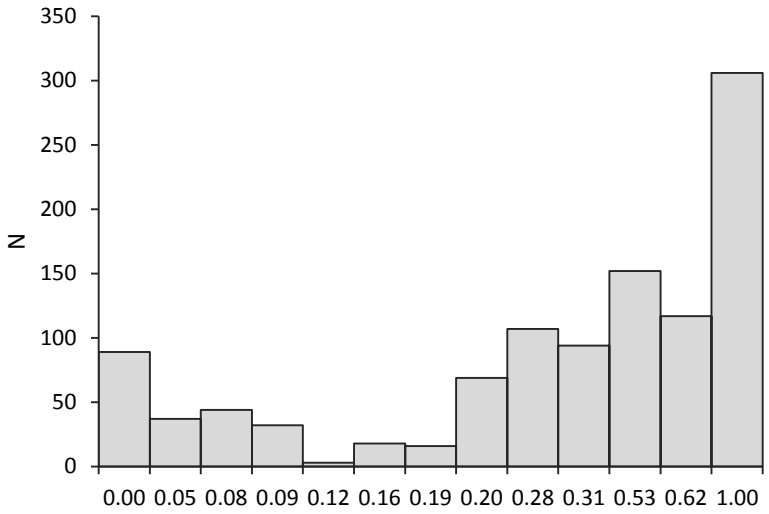
I Descriptive data

Table A1. Descriptive statistics for Study 1

Variable	# of Obs	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min value	Max value
Conditions					
Symbolic – avg polarization	194	-----	-----	0	1
Policy – avg polarization	182	-----	-----	0	1
Symbolic – distribution polarization	178	-----	-----	0	1
Policy – distribution polarization	202	-----	-----	0	1
Symbolic – text polar (no graphic)	190	-----	-----	0	1
Control condition	156	-----	-----	0	1
Controls					
White	1102	0.784029	0.411681	0	1
Black	1102	0.048094	0.214063	0	1
Age	1099	36.71156	12.83805	18	100
Education	1100	3.549091	0.875482	1	5
Male	1078	0.512987	0.500063	0	1
Income					
Internet	1100	5.607273	3.040572	1	12
Knowledge	1102	0.647913	0.477838	0	1
News consumption (frequency)	1102	0.533424	0.235632	0	1

Source: 2016 Amazon.com mTurk sample

Figure A1. Distribution of sorting scores in Study 1



Notes: Higher rates of sorting are observed in the mTurk sample relative what we would expect in a more demographically-representative sample (the sample here is disproportionately young, educated, and politically knowledgeable, all of which are related to increased propensities of sorting). Still, this does not present a problem for the task at hand, per se, because we are only interested in relative sorting rates across conditions and whether exposure to elite cues affects sorting. That we actually observe more sorting, in general, makes observing treatment effects slightly more difficult given the higher baseline rate of sorting.

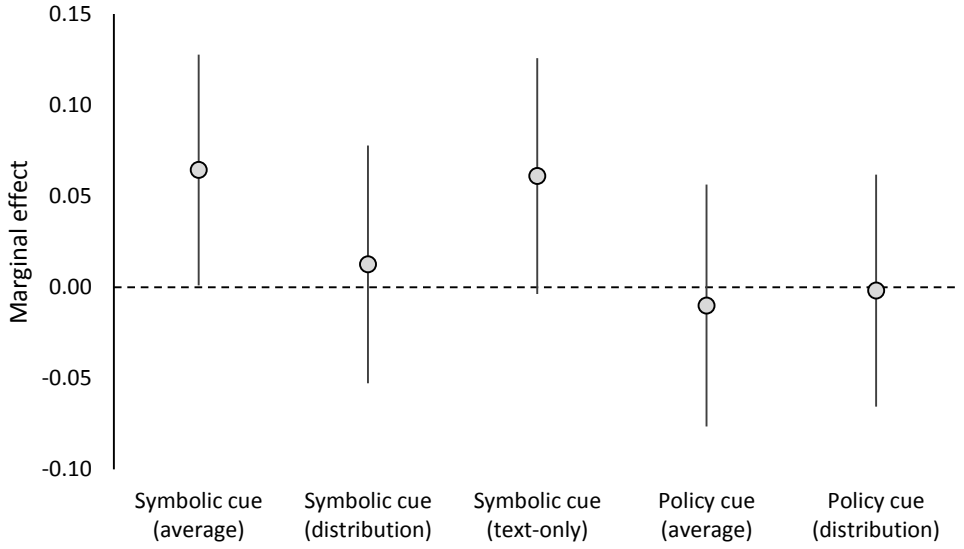
II Full modeling results from mTurk experiment

Table A2. Partisan-ideological sorting as a function of elite cues (Study 1)

Conditions	b	*s.e.*
Symbolic – avg polarization	*0.064*	*0.038*
Policy – avg polarization	-0.010	0.040
Symbolic – distribution polarization	0.013	0.040
Policy – distribution polarization	-0.002	0.039
Symbolic – text polar (no graphic)	0.061	0.039
Controls		
White	0.065	0.029
Black	0.095	0.061
Age	-0.001	0.001
Education	0.018	0.013
Male	0.086	0.022
Income	0.001	0.004
Internet	-0.038	0.024
Knowledge	*0.072*	*0.040*
News consumption (frequency)	0.013	0.005
Constant	0.223	0.072

Notes: Analyses use robust standard errors; italicized coefficients / standard errors represent $p<0.05$, bolded coefficients $p<0.01$

Figure A2. Partisan-ideological sorting across elite polarization conditions



Notes: Marginal effect estimates correspond to Table A2.

Appendix B: Study 2 measurement details

I Descriptive data

Table B1. Summary statistics for Study 2

Variable	# of Obs	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min value	Max value
Dependent variable					
Partisan-ideological sorting	28892	0.248506	0.230018	0	1
Symbolic placements					
Perceived party differences	29621	0.660152	0.207602	0	1
In-party ideological extremity	27127	0.632396	0.233434	0	1
Out-party ideological extremity	26758	0.698697	0.253707	0	1
In-party ideological similarity	23382	0.811806	0.172437	0	1
Out-party ideological dissimilarity	23123	0.435124	0.254177	0	1
Policy-based placements					
Perceived policy differences	31627	0.563603	0.139762	0	1
In-party policy extremity	28643	0.54956	0.181085	0	1
Out-party policy extremity	11922	0.583276	0.19185	0	1
In-party policy similarities	28544	0.812512	0.166	0	1
Out-party policy dissimilarities	14369	0.292866	0.220631	0	1
Controls					
White ID	55674	0.818157	0.385719	0	1
Black ID	55674	0.112198	0.315612	0	1
Hh Income	50338	0.472474	0.286912	0	1
Male	55674	0.448051	0.497299	0	1
Age	53455	45.40993	17.25246	17	99
Old South	55674	0.276162	0.447102	0	1
Political interest	50815	0.503093	0.377545	0	1
Knowledge of House majority	55674	0.424292	0.494239	0	1
Protestant ID	55674	0.60989	0.487779	0	1
Year counter	55674	1982.409	18.07997	1948	2012

Source: CANES Time-Series

Notes: Data weighted by sample weights provided by ANES

II Coding information and Distribution of sorting scores

Identity-based sorting comprises the overlap between partisan and ideological self-placements, in addition to the strength of those identities. Specifically, we might pursue the following operationalization:

Generate "Overlap of IDs" = | PID – IDEO| + 1 [1]

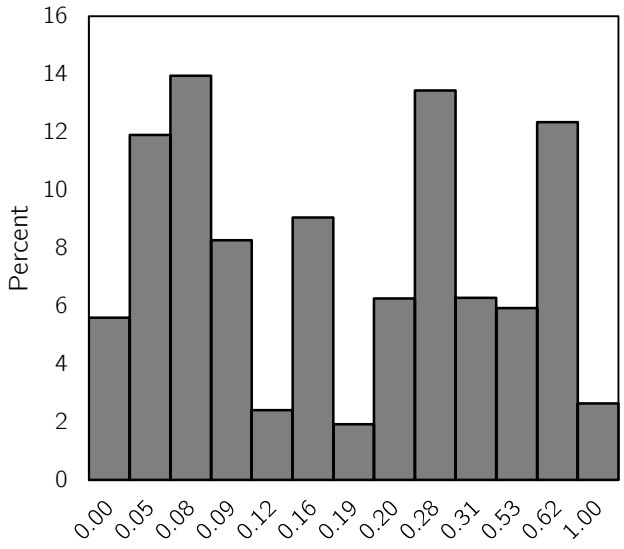
Reverse code "Overlap" so that high values convey more overlap [2]

Fold PID and IDEO to create measures of "strength" [3]

Multiply three items together: Overlap × PID strength × IDEO strength [4]

Resulting scores rescaled to range from 0 "no overlap, weak IDs" to 1, "perfect overlap, strong IDs"

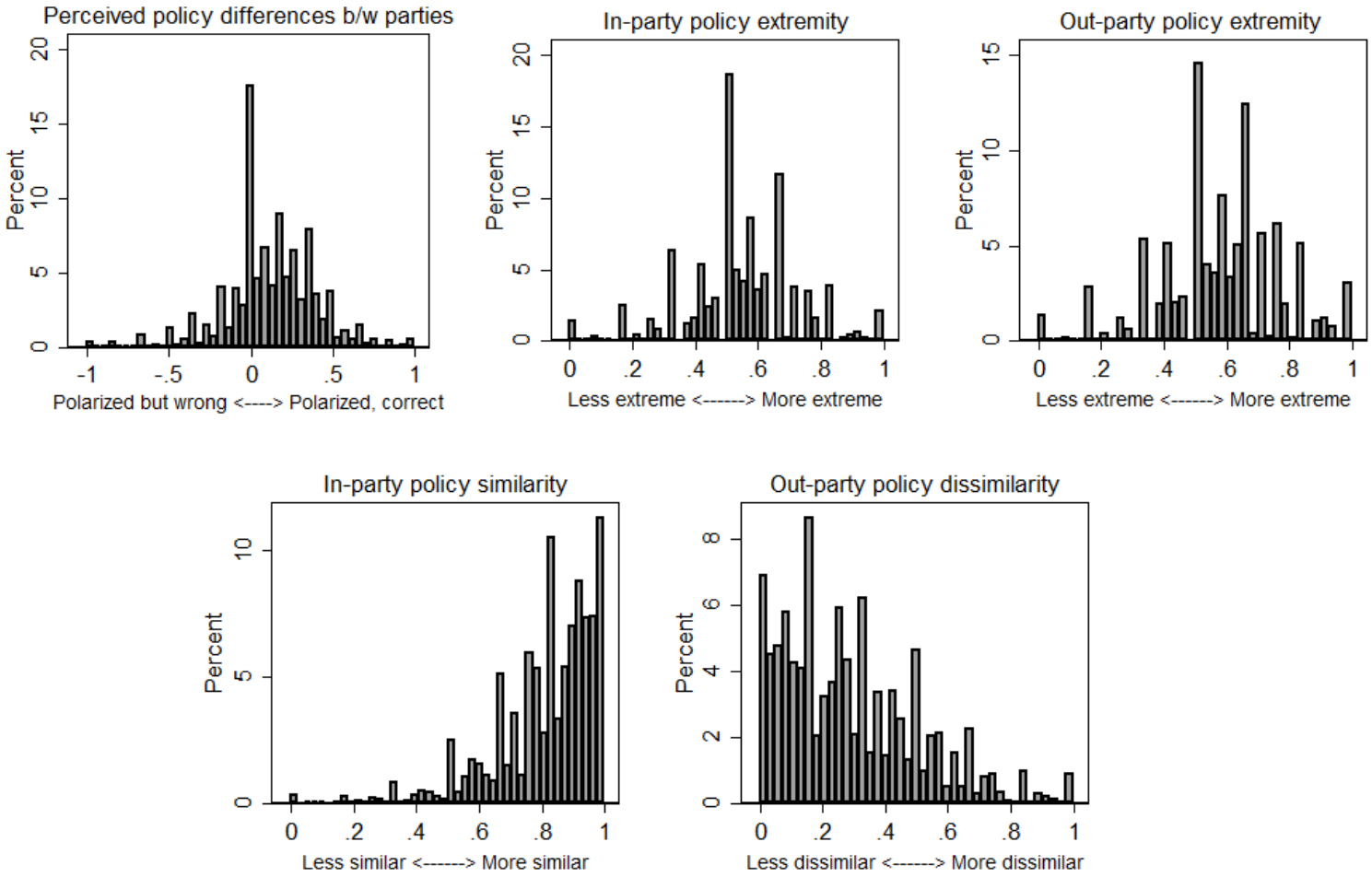
Figure B1. Identity-based sorting in the CANES Time-Series



Source: CANES Time-Series, 1972-2012

Notes: Data weighted by sample weights provided by ANES

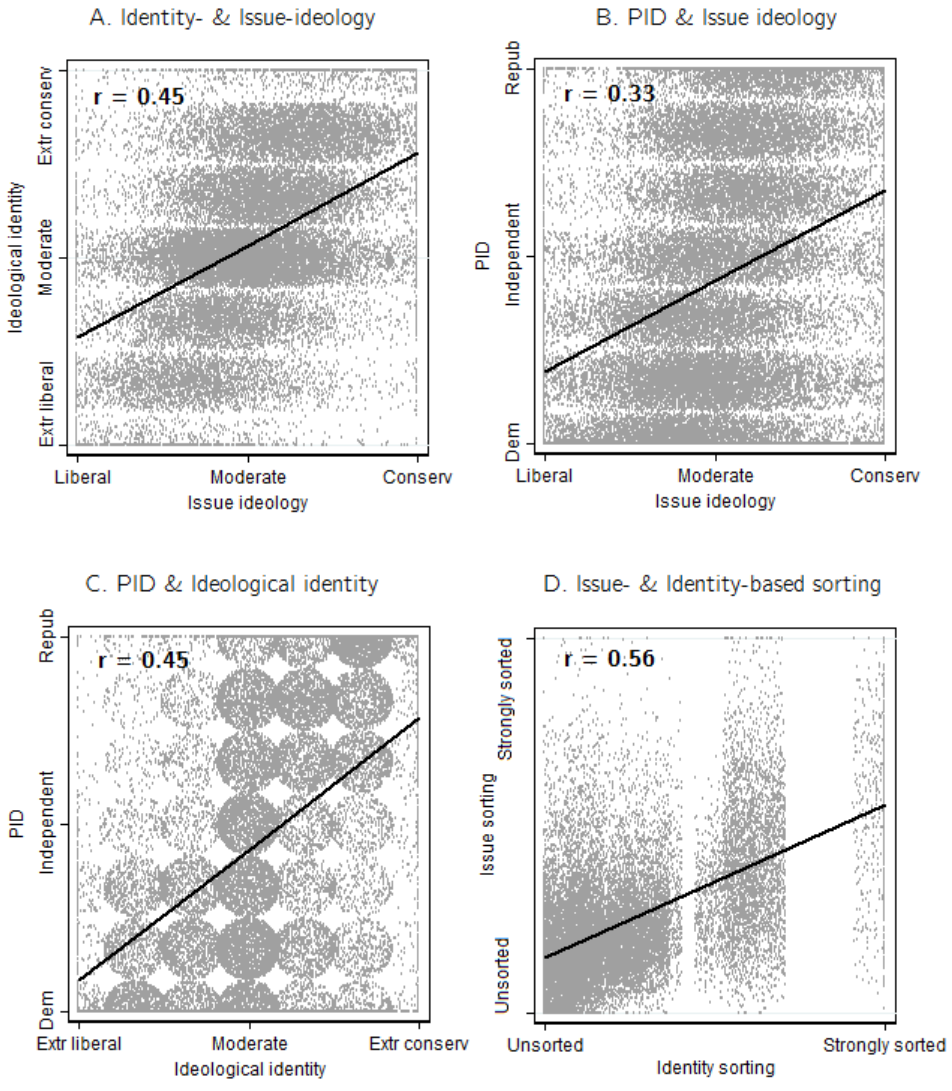
Figure B2. Policy-based assessments disaggregated by group membership



III Differentiating identity from policy-based sorting

The accompanying manuscript (implicitly) argues that identity- and policy-based sorting are two separate forms of political sorting. Figure B3 reproduces a series of jittered scatterplots, which graphically portrays the relationships between 1) identity- and issue-based ideology, 2) partisanship and issue-based ideology, 3) partisanship and ideological identity, and, finally, 4) identity- and issue-based sorting. Although identity- and issue-based sorting are obviously moderately related ($r = 0.56$), this work nevertheless argues for a firm distinction between these forms of sorting.

Figure B3. Scatterplots of the Relationship between Ideology and Partisanship



Notes: Scatterplot estimates have been jittered to account for layered or iterative variation.

IV Full models with controls

Table B2. Sorting and group assessments (Table 2 in manuscript)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Symbolic assessments			
Perceived ideological differences	0.33**	-----	-----
	(0.02)		
In-party ideological extremity	-----	0.17**	-----
		(0.02)	
Out-party ideological extremity	-----	0.22**	-----
		(0.04)	
In-party ideological similarity	-----	-----	0.17**
			(0.03)
Out-party ideological dissimilarity	-----	-----	0.65**
			(0.03)
Policy-based assessments			
Perceived policy differences	0.12*	-----	-----
	(0.04)		
In-party policy extremity	-----	0.05*	-----
		(0.02)	
Out-party policy extremity	-----	0.07*	-----
		(0.03)	
In-party policy similarity	-----	-----	-0.04
			(0.02)
Out-party policy dissimilarity	-----	-----	0.02
			(0.02)
Controls			
White	0.02**	0.01	-0.01
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Black	0.02*	-0.01	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Hh income	0.01	0.01	-0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Male	-0.00	0.01	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)

Table B2 *continued...*

	(1)	(4)	(7)
Age	0.00	0.00*	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Old South	-0.01**	-0.00	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Political interest	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.02)
Know House majority	0.04**	0.03**	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Protestant	0.02**	0.05**	0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Year counter	0.00*	0.00**	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-2.44*	-4.11**	0.62
	(1.01)	(1.23)	(1.29)
R2	0.13	0.14	0.50
N	20,458	8,393	8,330

Source: 1972-2012 ANES Time-Series

Notes: Analysis matches "Table 2" in the main manuscript.

V A closer examination of the differences of group assessments across forms of sorting

The associated manuscript argues that group cues are not evenly related to identity-based sorting. One potential objective to the validity of the conclusions drawn from these analyses is that I have "moved the goal posts" by exchanging the omnibus measure of sorting employed in *The Partisan Sort* with an identity-based one. Table A5-1 replicates Levendusky's (2009) original analyses by regressing his measure of "awareness of elite differences," which aggregates policy and identity-based cues together, on his measure of sorting. This dependent variable is a form of sorting that 1) aggregates policy preferences and symbolic identities together, and 2) only captures "matching" between and not the strength of the constituent ideology / partisanship parts. I juxtapose this analysis by breaking down this omnibus measure of sorting into policy- and identity-based components. As I would expect, the awareness of group differences is not evenly related to these constituent components.

Transitioning to the next set of analyses in Table B3, I break down these cues into their respective group "types" to examine how these various assessments differentially affect symbolic and policy sorting (the analyses in the main body of the associated manuscript do not include this comparative analysis). Two conclusions are immediate. First, symbolic assessments exert an extremely strong effect on partisan-ideological (identity) sorting, while policy-based assessments exert a severely muted effect. Conversely, symbolic assessments contribute little to policy-based sorting, while policy-based assessments are strong correlates of policy-based sorting. Combining these items together in an omnibus metric "group assessments," however, totally obscures these differences. Clearly, the relationship of group assessments vis-à-vis sorting is predicated upon these nuances, which prior research has not explored.

Table B3. Comparing the effects of elite cues on different forms of sorting

	Levendusky	Issue sorting	Identity sorting
Awareness of elite differences (policy & symbolic cues)	0.33**	0.15**	0.26**
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.03)
White	0.01	-0.01*	0.02**
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Black	0.06**	0.07**	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Hh income	0.05**	-0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Male	0.00	-0.01**	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Age	-0.00	0.00*	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Old South	-0.02**	-0.01	-0.01**
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Interest	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Know House majority	0.05**	0.01**	0.04**
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Protestant	0.03*	0.01	0.02**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Year	0.00*	-0.00	0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-3.76*	0.29	-2.78*
	(1.50)	(0.73)	(1.30)
R2	0.12	0.08	0.12
N	23,140	23,140	20,458

Notes: *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table B4. Disaggregating the effects of group assessments on various forms of sorting

	Levendusky sorting		Issue sorting		Identity sorting	
Symbolic assessments	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Perceived polarization	0.17**	------	0.06**	------	0.17**	------
	(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)	
In-party similarity	------	0.21**	------	0.10**	------	0.17**
		(0.03)		(0.02)		(0.03)
Out-party dissimilarity	------	0.36**	------	0.14**	------	0.65**
		(0.03)		(0.02)		(0.03)
Policy assessments						
Perceived policy differences	0.16*	------	0.11**	------	0.06*	------
	(0.06)		(0.04)		(0.02)	
In-party similarity	------	-0.10	------	-0.21**	------	-0.04
		(0.06)		(0.03)		(0.02)
Out-party dissimilarity	------	0.48**	------	0.39**	------	0.02
		(0.06)		(0.03)		(0.02)
Controls						
White	0.01	0.00	-0.01*	-0.00	0.02**	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Black	0.06**	-0.05**	0.06**	-0.03*	0.02*	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.03)
Income	0.05**	0.07**	-0.01	-0.00	0.01	-0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Male	0.00	0.03**	-0.01**	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.00*	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Old South	-0.02**	0.01	-0.01	-0.00	-0.01**	-0.01*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Interest	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.05)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.02)
Knows House majority	0.05**	0.02**	0.01**	-0.00	0.04**	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Protestant	0.03*	0.03**	0.01	0.02**	0.02**	0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Year	0.00**	0.00**	0.00	0.00**	0.00*	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-3.70*	-3.68**	0.03	-1.25*	-2.21*	0.62
	(1.33)	(0.73)	(0.64)	(0.43)	(1.02)	(1.29)
R2	0.12	0.45	0.08	0.41	0.13	0.50
N	23,140	8,330	23,140	8,330	20,458	8,330

Source: 1972-2012 ANES Time Series

Notes: *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table B5. Modelling for Figure 5

	1972	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996
In-party similarity	0.03	0.07*	0.06*	0.07	0.07	0.13**	0.07*	0.03	0.01	0.06	0.05	0.15**
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Out-party differences	0.52**	0.56**	0.55**	0.49**	0.59**	0.49**	0.53**	0.56**	0.58**	0.56**	0.66**	0.61**
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
White	-0.00	0.02	-0.04	-0.01	0.03	0.01	-0.00	0.04*	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03*
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Black	0.06	0.06	-0.05	0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.00	-0.02	-0.00	-0.00	-0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Income	0.01	-0.01	-0.02	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Male	0.01	-0.00	0.02	0.03*	-0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.00	-0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age	0.00*	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	0.00**	-0.00	0.00	-0.00*	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Old South	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.01	-0.00	-0.01	-0.02*	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Interest	0.03**	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.06**	0.05**	0.03*	0.05*	0.03*	0.04**	0.07**	0.05**
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Know House majority	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.04**	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.04**	0.00	-0.00	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Protestant	0.01	0.01	0.02*	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.02*	-0.00	0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	-0.02	-0.10**	-0.01	-0.06	-0.10	-0.08*	-0.03	-0.10**	-0.00	-0.09**	-0.06	-0.16**
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)
R2	0.44	0.44	0.41	0.38	0.43	0.39	0.40	0.42	0.45	0.43	0.53	0.51
N	1,213	1,118	1,120	734	692	1,203	1,238	1,089	1,044	1,429	1,107	1,104

Table B5 *continued....*

	1998	2000	2004	2008	2012
In-party similarity	0.10*	-0.02	0.12*	0.12**	0.21**
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.02)
Out-party differences	0.58**	0.55**	0.63**	0.67**	0.67**
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.02)
White	-0.03	0.00	-0.00	-0.02	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Black	-0.05	-0.07	-0.09**	-0.06*	-0.05**
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Income	0.03	-0.08*	0.06**	0.09**	-0.04**
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.01)
Male	-0.02	-0.01	-0.00	-0.03*	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Old South	-0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.00	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Interest	0.04*	0.09**	-0.03	0.09**	-0.06**
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.01)
Know House majority	0.02	0.01	0.03	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Protestant	-0.00	0.03	0.04**	0.06**	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Constant	-0.03	0.06	-0.17**	-0.24**	-0.13**
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.03)
R2	0.42	0.38	0.50	0.54	0.51
N	813	423	741	655	4,394