

# The Polarized Public: A Product of Party Polarization?

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Political polarization in Congress has been steadily increasing for the past thirty years. Polarization has made it difficult for parties to come to agreement, leading to legislative gridlock. My paper examines the effect of partisanship in Congress on public attitudes and how the increase in party polarization has affected ideological polarization within the public. In this study, I look at DW-NOMINATE scores from the United States Senate from the years of 1977 to 2012 and compare them to party ideological scores within the public between the same years. The comparison will allow me to analyze if there is an increase in DW-NOMINATE scores and if that increase corresponds with an increase in ideological polarity within the public. I will also compare the difference in partisanship between Democrats and Republicans, with DW-NOMINATE data, in order to test a problem brought forth by Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein that Republicans are at fault for the rising partisanship in Congress.

Over the past three decades, the United States has experienced political polarization in the form of increased party divisions in Congress on policies, ideological positions, and moral issues. As the parties have become more internally unified and more sharply differentiated from one another, party voting and party cohesion scores have increased. Today, the Republican and Democratic parties in Congress are vastly different, uncooperative, and ideologically distinct from one another.

Political polarization is also evident among the electorate. Republicans and Democrats in the electorate are split ideologically, with Republican voters holding strong conservative views and Democratic voters, conversely, embracing liberal positions. Political scientists have offered a number of theories about why the public has become more polarized. Some argue that these divisions are driven by broad economic, social, and demographic changes in American society. Others argue that the public is polarized because party officials and candidates focus on polarizing issues in order to mobilize voters and maximize their respective party's chances at reelection. Accordingly, there are also counterarguments that argue that the public is not polarized and instead the public takes cues from the polarized government, mirroring the already polarized Congress.

This paper will test how partisanship in Congress effects ideological polarization in the public. By exploring DW-NOMINATE scores in order to test partisanship in roll call votes within the State Senate, there should be a clear view in how polarization has increased over time within Congress. Accordingly, a scale on public opinion will be categorized using the one through seven party identifier method to show how over time

the public has shifted to the extreme poles (one and seven, strongly conservative and strongly liberal) showing a more polarized ideological shift. Both of these variables will show overtime the comparison between partisanship in Congress and ideological polarity within the public. Another question that will be analyzed within this paper is how this relationship differs for both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

Has Congress become more polarized? If Congress has become more polarized then which party is more at fault for this rising divide and tension? What effect does this rising polarization have on the public? Is the public polarized? Does the polarization in Congress reinforce the polarization within the public? Or is there no relationship at all? These are just a few of the many questions that will be analyzed within this study.

### **Polarization**

Political polarization is the divergence of political attitudes to ideological extremes (Therriault, 2006). Polarization in politics is seen most clearly in the shifting ideological positions of the Republican and Democratic parties in Congress. Over the past five decades, moderates have lost their political voice and the parties have become more ideologically extreme (Therriault, 2006). Sean Therriault (2006) argues that polarization is driven by shifts in political ideology. The parties use their ideology to form opinions on certain issues, all in an effort to appeal to the public for reelection. Therriault (2006) argues that the ideological shift of the parties in Congress has been caused by two developments: member adaptation and member replacement (486). Following the Voting Rights Act of 1965, moderate Democrats within the electorate began to shift towards more conservative positions, creating a void in moderate voices and increasing conservatism within the Republican Party (Therriault, 2006).

Paul Frymer (2011) argues that party polarization is nothing new. Frymer (2011) outlines that the realignment of the Democratic moderates only revealed the polarization that was already present; the parties were already polarized but the realignment made it more visible to the public. In the last three decades, the Senate has become 28% more polarized and the House has become 47% more polarized (Frymer, 2006). Even after the loss of the moderate voice in Congress, the divide of polarization has only increased. Therriault (2006) argues that polarization is engrained in new representatives. Woon and Pope (2008) explain that the parties are an avenue for new challengers, giving them access to party resources and an established party voter base. Through member replacement and adaptation, polarization in Congress is slowly increasing (Therriault, 2006).

Trends in polarization are generally measured using two methods. The first is party cohesion which is the measure of the party's internal consistency. The second method is party voting which is the measure of division within the parties. The division is seen as the percentage of votes that 90% of one party opposes 90% of the other party (Carroll et

al, 2009). A preferable way to measure both of these methods is DW-NOMINATE scores because these scores reflect the ideological division of the parties both internally (party cohesion) and externally (party voting).

DW-NOMINATE scores were developed by Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal to analyze legislative roll-call voting behavior. Roll-call data is used to compare ideologically similar and dissimilar legislators from one another (Carroll et al, 2009), measuring both party division and specifically party division along ideological dimensions. When legislators voting patterns are mapped along issue dimensions, it reveals a growing divide between Democrats and Republicans. DW-NOMINATE scores show that since 1970, party delegations in Congress have become “ideologically homogenous and distant from one another,” (Carroll et al, 2009). Carroll et. al. explain that DW-NOMINATE scores show us the ideological divide between parties on issues and the issues that spark the most debate and conflict. Hare and Poole (2014) argue that DW-NOMINATE scores are the most accurate way to map party polarization because parties are split along ideological lines. DW-NOMINATE analytics show the relationship between the familiar liberal-conservative spectrum and how it effects votes on salient issues within Congress.

#### *Causes of Polarization in Congress*

Beginning in the 1960’s, Moderates lost their voice and the parties became more ideologically distinct from one another. Richard Pildes (2011) argues that the increase in polarization is the effect of three political elements: persons, history, and institutions. Pildes (2011) outlines that polarization occurs as a reflection of “particular polarizing personalities” (pg280). This phenomena is described as a party leader or party member that sits in the national spotlight sharing polarized views to the public. This polarizing effect reflects onto the American public that the government is polarized.

Another cause is outlined as a historical realignment (Pildes, 2011). The historical realignment referenced by Pildes is the Voting Rights Act of 1965. After the Voting Rights Act of 1965 Democratic moderates moved more conservatively, losing the moderate voice in Congress. The parties realigned to appeal to new constituencies. The parties redefined themselves along “different, more ideologically coherent and polarized lines” (Pildes, pg283). The public sorted themselves to match the parties, so that their “ideological preferences and their preferences for candidates and political parties fell into line with each other”. The coinciding realignment within the parties and the public, reinforced polarization and created an environment built on ideological differences and policy preferences.

Political institutions play a part in polarization as well (Pildes, 2011). The first is through primary elections. Primary elections have a lower voter turnout than general elections. The low turnout means that the primaries are mostly dominated by engaged, active party supporters. Engaged voters tend to be more polarized and ideologically

extreme compared to the average voter, making it more likely that an engaged voter would vote in favor of a partisan candidate. The structure of the primaries also plays a part as closed and semi-closed primaries represent half of the primary elections in the United States. Closed primaries are elections where the voters must register under a specific party affiliation and must do so in advance. This creates an election primarily with left-right voters (Pildes, 2011).

The second institutional factor that scholars associate with polarization is gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is the manipulation of boundaries to favor one party in terms of votes in a district. This strategic technique is used by parties to create “safe” seats in Congress. Pildes (2011) argues that safe representatives are more polarized than representatives in competitive districts because the “safe” representatives do not have to worry about reelection.

The last cause of polarization, brought forth by Pildes, is internal legislative rules. New rules in the House have been made limiting committee chairmanship (Pildes, 2011). These rules have put the power of committees in the hands of party leadership. New committee chairs must gain and maintain the approval of their party leadership, forcing new committee chairs to please their parties or relinquish their seat. There are now incentives for being partisan (Pildes, 2011).

But what explains polarization in the Senate? The House is effected by redistricting and gerrymandering as House representatives are elected into office by the public. Pildes (2011) explains that the Senate is polarized because of two reasons. Firstly, Pildes reiterates that the Senate is polarized but instead of being an outcome of institutions it instead is because of the theory of “member replacement”, as outlined by Sean Theriault (2006). Pildes (2011) explains that Theriault’s theory of member replacement occurs when polarized House members cross the aisle and become a part of the Senate. These new Senate members bring with them House culture of polarized politics, replacing older members that were less polarized.

These incentives are the product of rule changes within the House. David Rohde (1991) presents the theory that there has been a shift in unorthodox lawmaking alongside changes in congressional rules that incentivizes voting along party lines. This creates a political environment where there are consistent Republicans and consistent Democrats that, in order to remain the chair of a committee, will not deviate from their party’s plans (Rohde, 1991).

Another theory is presented by Mann and Ornstein (2012) that the divide between Republicans and Democrats is caused by the radical shift to the right by Republican delegates becoming more radically conservative. Because of this shift, there has been an increase in hostility and a shift in ideological party identity within the public. The public views this divided government and as a result the public, specifically republican voters,

shift more to the right as well (Mann & Ornstein, 2013). Mann and Ornstein argue that polarization and partisan hostility is the direct result of the new Republican Party.

#### *Trends of Polarization in the Public*

Although there is a consensus that Congress is polarized, researchers disagree on the question of polarization among the public. Fiorina (2013) argues that the public is mostly moderate, but the polarized choices of the parties force the public into polarized party positions. Noam Lupu refutes this claim. Lupu (2015) argues that party sorting reinforces polarization within the public. The very act of party sorting and party labeling groups the American public. This causes sorted voters to focus more on the ideological aspects of their party and the polarized issues that accompanies them (Lupu, 2015). Layman and Carsey (2002) argue that this is the effect of “conflict extension”. Layman and Carsey add that ideological polarization is reinforced by the extension of conflict. Polarized issues in Congress are issues where the parties are split along ideological extremes. There is little compromise and conflict accompanies any discussion about these issues in Congress. The conflict within the parties extends to the public as well. The public views this conflict, and forms a polarized opinion based on the stances of the parties (Layman, 2002).

#### *Causes of Polarization in the Public*

Fiorina and Abrams (2008) argue that the public is more centrist, less ideological and less partisan than those who represent them in Congress. Although the public is generally moderate, the parties in the electorate are grouped and sorted along ideological lines because Congress is polarized and sorts voters in this fashion. The elites and the most engaged members of the public take their cues from Congress (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). Fiorina and Abrams explain this as cue theory. Cue theory explains that the general public is not polarized. Instead the public takes polarized cues from the party elites. These cues effectively sort voters but polarized opinions are not formed.

Pildes (2011) offers a counter-argument to Fiorina and Abrams that the public is polarized but is split into two categories, voters and non-voters. Voters are polarized because they are engaged. Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) view the engaged public as the key polarizing agent in the public. Engaged voters are informed on party ideologies and policies. Uninformed voters have no strong opinion on polarized issues and will vote on what appeals to them (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008). The public is polarized but only the voters that are engaged.

Layman and Carsey (2002) present the theory that public polarization is a product of “conflict extension”. The public is polarized because the public mirrors the divide and conflict within Congress. “Conflict extension” is seen in controversial issues within the public, such as social welfare, racial issues and cultural issues (Layman & Carsey, 2002).

These salient issues present a divide in Congress that the public can see. Layman and Carsey however, explain that party polarization within the general public is driven by “party identifiers” (2002).<sup>1</sup>

### **Research Question**

The parties in Congress are polarized along ideological extremes that increase conflict between Republicans and Democrats. The purpose of this study is to compare over time if there is a relationship between the increase of partisanship in Congress and the effect that increase has had on polarization in the public. This study will control for region, percentage of population with a bachelor’s degree or higher, percentage of the population that is non-white, and mean family income. The independent variable will be time. The dependent variable will be partisanship in congress and ideological polarization in the public, testing how over time polarization has been effected (both in the public and in congress).

The purpose of this study is to assess whether the changes in partisanship in Congress are strongly correlated with changes in the ideological polarization of the public. In addition, this analysis will show the patterns of polarization for Democrats and Republicans, allowing us to test Mann and Ornstein’s claim that polarization is a “Republican problem.”

### **Research Design**

When researching partisanship in Congress, researchers have generally turned to DW-NOMINATE data to analyze the divide between conservatives and liberals. DW-NOMINATE data compares roll-call votes on issues that display a “cutting line” between “yay” and “nay” outcomes. From here a conclusion can be made on how split the vote was based on Democrat and Republican votes. The slope of the “cutting” can then be interpreted as the separation between both parties. Another aspect within this data, is how far from the “cutting line” is each delegate? This is known as the 1<sup>st</sup> dimension

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<sup>1</sup> Consequences of Polarization is important to gauge why studies such as Layman and Carsey are necessary to see the effect on polarization in Congress on polarity in the public. Some consequences found in recent research include but is not limited to a number of findings. There is an increase in legislative gridlock. Legislative gridlock is explained as the ineffectiveness of Congress to approve policies because of disagreement amongst the parties. There is an increase in party conflict. Another consequence is that there is a more incentive to be partisan. The parties have become more unified because of the power of partisan party leaders and party discipline. The main consequence studied within this paper is the consequence of polarization on voting behavior and public opinion. Voters now are more apt to use “party” in their voting decisions. Voters have also grown increasingly split in bipartisan support. Polarization has caused an increase in party based voting, leading to gerrymandering of districts that focus on party unity. These districts are considered “safe”. The consequence is that there is a “growing partisan homogeneity of House districts”, causing a loss of competitiveness and an increase in polarized representatives.

coordinate. The 1<sup>st</sup> dimension coordinate is a range between -1 and 1. The closer a 1<sup>st</sup> dimension coordinate is to the poles (-1 and 1), the more partisan that dimension (or delegate) is. So if we analyze a roll-call vote and add in a “cutting line” we can find our 1<sup>st</sup> dimension coordinate by seeing how far a delegate is from the “cutting line”. DW-NOMINATE data will be used to compute a polarization score for each delegate.

Within this paper I will be analyzing DW-NOMINATE data in order to understand the rise in partisanship in Congress. I will accomplish this by analyzing the 1<sup>st</sup> dimension scores of every United States Senator from the 95<sup>th</sup> United States Congress through the 112<sup>th</sup> United States Congress. DW-NOMINATE data will be collected from *voteview*, a data collection website. I will analyze the 1<sup>st</sup> dimension scores by converting those scores into polarization scores. Polarization scores are calculated on a scale of 0 to 1. Every 1<sup>st</sup> dimension coordinate will then be converted to this scale.

*For Example: a (-.415) 1<sup>st</sup> dimension coordinate would be converted to a (+.415).*

As a result of this conversion, when averaging the 1<sup>st</sup> dimension data, we get a positive average. I am able to do this because 1<sup>st</sup> dimension data is from -1 to 1 and the closest the data is to the poles the higher the partisanship. I am treating negatives and positives unilaterally. The closest the polarization score is to 1 the higher the polarization score. Since I am focusing on US Senate data there are two 1<sup>st</sup> dimension scores for every state. From here I calculate the polarization scores for each senator and average the two scores to get one polarization score per state. Once calculated for every state, the average will be taken for every state within that term. The average polarization score per term will be used to show how partisanship in Congress has increased over time within the Senate. A separate average of the polarization will also be calculated per term for both Republicans and Democrats. A comparison can then be taken to see which party has had more of an effect on polarization in congress. Multiple variables will be created from this analysis. First, there will be a variable for the average polarization score per term from the 95<sup>th</sup> US Senate through the 112<sup>th</sup> US Senate. Second, there will be a variable for the average polarization score of all Republicans per term from the 95<sup>th</sup> US Senate through the 112<sup>th</sup> US Senate. Third, there will be a variable for the average polarization score of all Democrats from the 95<sup>th</sup> US Senate through the 112<sup>th</sup> US Senate. These variables will give me the ability to see if the Congress is polarized, if that polarization has been increasing, and whether or not Democrats or Republicans are the most to blame.

The other part of this research focuses on whether or not there are signs of ideological polarization in the public. Researchers have generally turned to the 7-point ideology scale when analyzing whether or not the public is polarized along ideological lines. The 7-point ideology scale ranges from “(1) Extremely Liberal, (2) Liberal, (3) Slightly Liberal, (4) Moderate, (5) Slightly Conservative, (6) Conservative, and (7)

Extremely Conservative”. The 7-point ideology scale will best represent ideological polarization within the public because it will show how over the years the public has shifted their ideology more to the extreme polls (1) and (7). Data will be analyzed between the years of 1978 and 2012 to compare with our 95<sup>th</sup> and 112<sup>th</sup> Senate data, respectfully. The 7-point ideology scale data will be analyzed on a yearly basis. The data will be obtained from ANES, the American National Election Studies. This variable will give us the ability to analyze if the public is even ideologically polarized and whether or not that ideological polarization is increasing.

### *Sample*

In this experiment I will be relying on two separate datasets. First, I will rely on DW-NOMINATE data to access partisan scores from every senator between the 95<sup>th</sup> congressional term and 112<sup>th</sup> congressional term. Each senator will be sorted by state and then an average polarization score will be calculated for each congressional term. Republican Senators and Democratic senators will also be separated into their own variable in order to see the difference in polarization scores between the two parties.

The other data that my research will rely on is the ANES cumulative data file with election statistics. ANES contains ideology party scores from the public between the years of 1972 and 2012. I will be relying on this dataset for the ideology party scores (a 1 – 7 scale) between the years of 1982 and 2010. The dataset alone does not provide me with the necessary scores for analysis but after running a comparative of means test on the ideology variable an ideology score can be recorded from the population. Mean ideology scores will be recorded every two years (1980, 1982, 1984 etc).

### *Variables*

There are two dependent variables within this study that will be compared in order to analyze if a relationship exists or not. The first dependent variable is partisanship in congress. This variable will be calculated over time (congressional terms) and sorted by state. The second dependent variable is ideological polarization in the public. This variable will be calculated over time and data will be analyzed every two years between 1980 and 2012. The independent variable for both dependent variables is time.

Good control variables for this research includes but is not limited to the following: median family income, region, percent of population that is non-white, and percent of the population with education higher than a Bachelor’s degree. These control variables will allow us to see if there are any confounding variables that may be effecting the relationship. Because of time these control variables were not introduced in the study but hopefully a researcher can expand more in-depth off of my initial analysis.



### *Hypotheses*

My analysis will test two hypotheses about how polarization has effected American society, whether through the government or the public.

Hypothesis 1: If polarization increases in Congress over time then polarization in the public will also increase because the public is engaged and will shift to fit party ideologies. This hypothesis will act to refute Fiorina and Abrams' claim that the public is not effected by the rising polarization in Congress but instead fits the argument made by Abramowitz that the engaged public is polarized through interactions with the government.

Hypothesis 2: In a comparison of individuals, those who are Republican Senators will be equally as likely to be just polarized over time as those that are Democratic Senators. This hypothesis will act to refute Mann and Ornstein's claim that Republican delegates are more partisan and are at fault for the rising polarization in Congress.

My reasoning for the first hypothesis is because polarization in the public is still disputed amongst scholars. Is the public polarized? How is the public polarized? Is the public polarized because of polarization in Congress? Or is the public polarized on their own. My analysis of public polarization, in terms of ideology of parties will hopefully shed light on these questions. My reasoning for the second hypothesis is because if polarization in Congress is increasing then which party is more at fault for this increasing divide? I hypothesize that both parties are equally at fault and that the theory presented by Mann and Ornstein is unfounded.

### *Limitations*

Due to time I was only able to gather data from the House. In an ideal study, data from both the House and the Senate would be better to illustrate partisanship in Congress as a whole. Also because of time I was unable to account for the effect of electoral safety. Ideally I would have liked to include the Cook Index and controlled for this variable that may have an effect on my dependent and independent variables. I also found limitations within the ANES dataset for my ideology party sorting variable. The sample size for the 2 year increments yielded small results. With this small sample size, each participant heavily influenced the data. Because of this, maybe deciding to collapse the ideology variable into three 10 year samples may yield stronger conclusion. A also was unable to have any control variables which limits my research and my overall conclusions. Control variables are important to see if there are other intervening factors and without control variables my analysis is left open to criticism.

### Analysis

The first question that I wanted to ask was, is congress polarized? One of my limitations within my research was that I was unable to have the time to fully analyze the DW-NOMINATE scores from the House. Data from the House would have aided me in finding if elected officials are more polarized than officials who are not elected by the people. I would have been eager to compare the House data verses the Senate. Theorists have stated that the House is more polarized than the Senate and DW-NOMINATE data supports those theories. When asking is Congress polarized, taking data from both aisles of Congress would have been ideal. Instead I was able to analyze data from the Senate. Senate data proved to be more helpful because the variable of reelections and appealing to constituents does not play as much of a role or present as much of an intervening variable in the Senate as in the House. The Senate data proved to be fruitful in showing polarization and how polarization has increased over the years. In order to portray how polarization has increased, polarization in congress was treated as the dependent variable and time was the independent variable. A scatterplot was used to show how over time the polarization scores have shifted and increased. A line of best fit was used to show a relationship within the data.

**Figure 1: Polarization in the Senate**

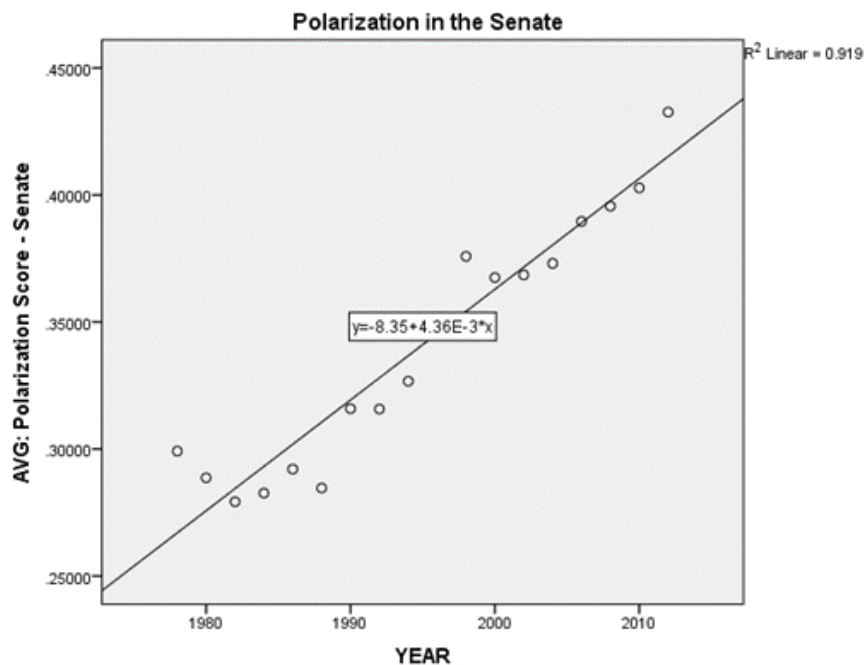


Figure 1 above shows a positive relationship between time and polarization whereas time increases so does polarization in the Senate. The polarization score was calculated based on DW-NOMINATE scores. The polarization score acts as an absolute score for DW-NOMINATE data being on a scale of zero to one instead of negative one

to positive one. The closer the polarization score is to one then the more polarized that year was. The data shows that polarization has continued to increase since 1978.

The next question I wanted to look at, in terms of the Senate polarization data, is who is at fault for this increase in polarization. Mann and Ornstein present a theory that Republicans in Congress are the ones to blame. The reasoning for this is that Republicans have become increasingly conservative and more conflict oriented. In order to question this theory I had to separate Senate DW-NOMINATE data into party categories. I compared DW-NOMINATE scores for both Republicans and Democrats in the Senate between the years of 1978 and 2012. From here I calculated the polarization scores of both Republicans and Democrats from each state and then averaged the polarization scores for each congressional term. I was able to calculate polarization scores for Democrats in given year as well as Republicans. The independent variable I used was time and the dependent variables were the Average Polarization Score of Democratic Senators and the Average Polarization Score of Republican Senators. From here I was able to review their relationship through a scatterplot. A scatterplot was necessary to show the data over time and if a relationship can be established. A line of best fit was used to show the relationship between the two dependent variables.

**Figure 2: Polarization in the Senate – Republicans v. Democrats**

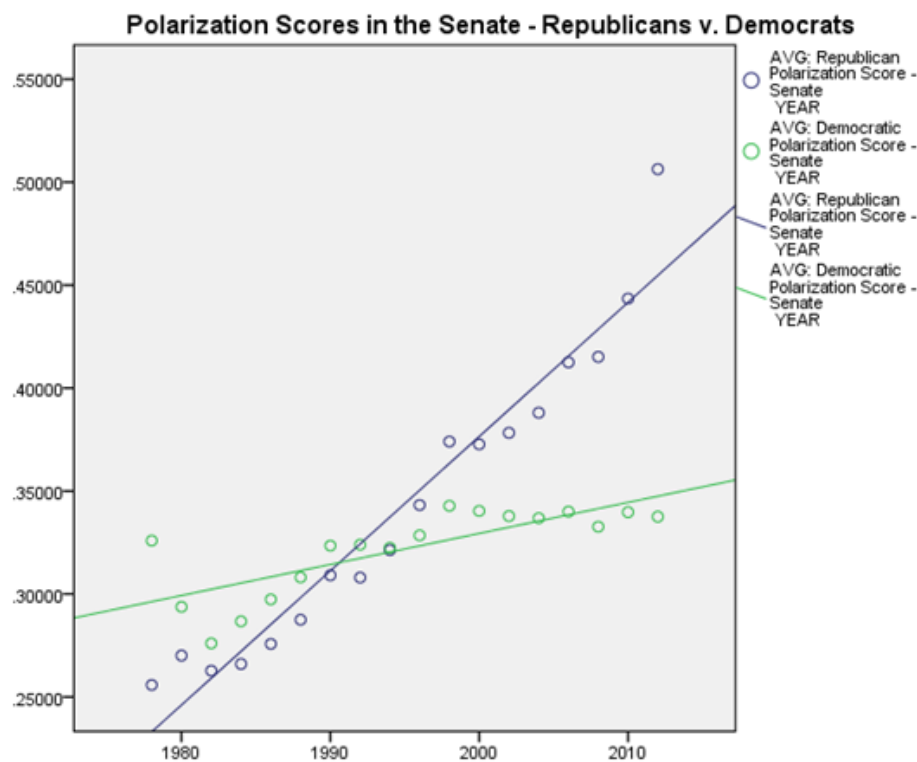


Figure 2 above shows how the Democratic Senators started out more polarized but over time Republicans in the Senate began to sharply become more polarized.

Democratic Senators marginally increased in polarization over time. It seems that Mann and Ornstein's theory that Republicans are more polarized than Democrats is supported by the data. Both parties have become more polarized but Republicans have had a sharper incline over the past 20 years. What this data tells us is that Mann and Ornstein's theory is fairly supported by the data. The next step would be to look at House data and see if we find a similar relationship.

The third question I want to look at is whether or not the public is polarized. We already can see a positive relationship in terms of polarization in the United States Senate over time. The next step is to analyze if there is a similar relationship in the public. The independent variable I used was time, as I wanted to test public polarization the same way I tested polarization in Congress. The dependent variable I used was ideological polarization in the public. I could not use DW-NOMINATE data for the public because that type of data strictly is based upon roll call votes in Congress. In order to test for polarization I utilized ideological party sorting measures to see if there has been more of a divide between liberal and conservative voters. The more ideologically polarized the voters the more the voters would be closer to the polls, one and seven. I then computed my own ideological polarization score by calculating the difference between the ideological score for both Democrats and Republicans. The ideological polarization score became my dependent variable. In order to test this relationship I created a scatterplot to map the data between the years of 1978 and 2012. A line of best fit was utilized to summarize the data.

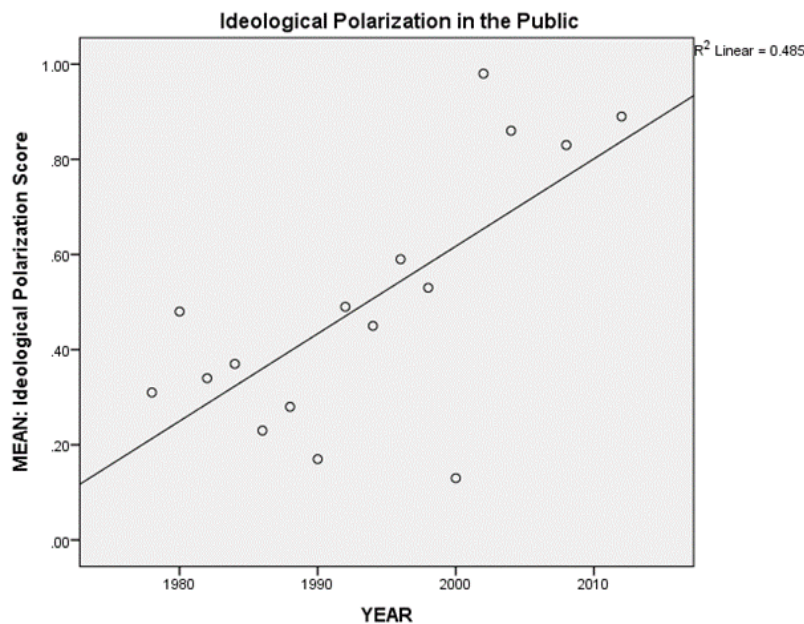
This question looks at the theories introduced by Abramowitz and Fiorina. The idea that the public is polarized is a contested issue amongst polarization theorists. Abramowitz introduces the idea that the public is polarized but only because of the engaged citizens, the voters. Fiorina on the other hand states that the public is not polarized and instead acts to mirror the polarization already found in Congress. For Abramowitz we would expect to see a positive relationship of ideological polarization over time. For Fiorina we may see more of a flatter graph if there is indeed no polarization but if the public truly mirrors Congress then that may show a positive relationship as well.

Figure 3 below shows how over time the Public has become more ideologically polarized. The calculation for the dependent variable was found by computing the difference between Democratic voters and Republican voters on an ideological party sorting scale of one through seven. The closest a voter is to 7 the more conservative a voter is and the closest a voter is to 1 the more liberal a voter is. Data was collected between the years of 1978 and 2012. The equation for the ideological polarization score in the public is Democratic Voters' Party Sorting Score subtracted by Republican Voters' Party Sorting Score. This means that the larger the difference between the parties the more divided the public has become. The graph shows us that the public has become

progressively more polarized and divided over time. The higher the ideological polarization score the more polarized the voters were of that given year. The graph indicates a positive relationship between time and ideological polarization in the public.

Early analysis would say that the evidence supports Abramowitz's theory more than Fiorina's theory. The public indeed appears not only suggest that the public polarized but also that the public has become increasingly more polarized. Abramowitz's theory is supported by the data that the public is ideologically polarized. Fiorina's theory on the other hand is a bit more complex. The public is polarized but how the public is polarized is Fiorina's question. Fiorina argues that the public is not polarized but instead mirrors the polarization already found in Congress. And while this graph indicates that the public is polarized the analysis is unable to shed light on whether or not this polarization is indeed mirroring the polarized government.

**Figure 3: Ideological Polarization in the Public**

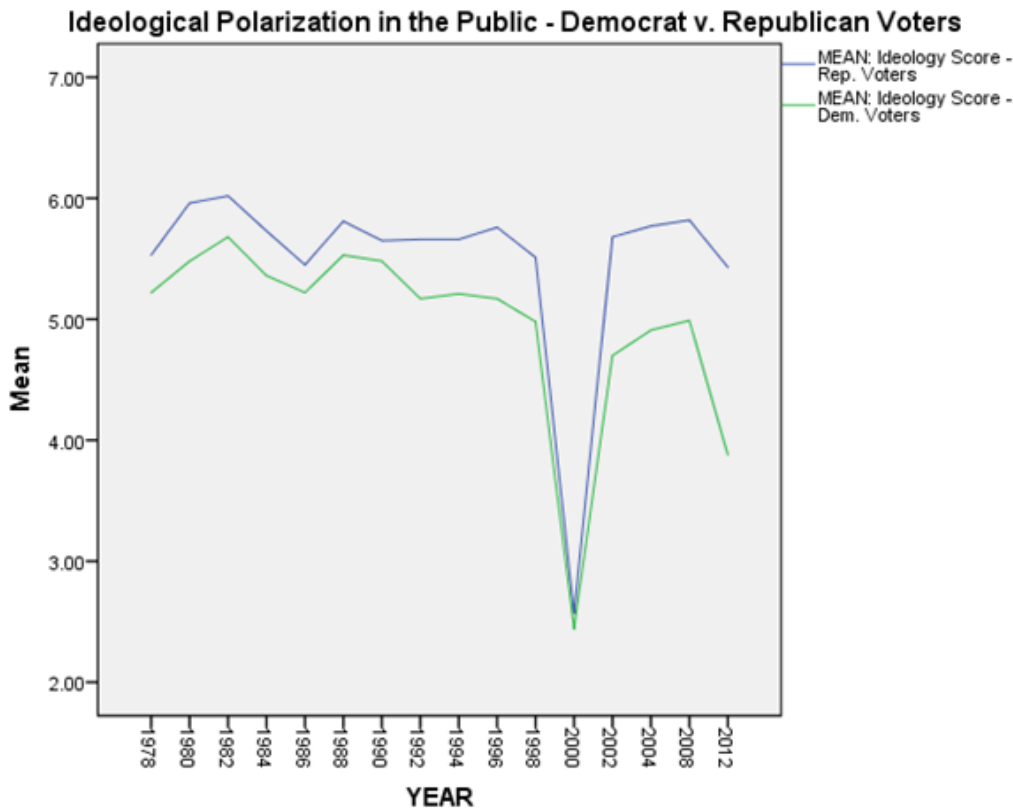


The next question to focus on is who is at fault within the public for this rise in ideological polarization? Much like the Senate, I focused on the party's role and whether or not there was a difference in polarization between Democratic voters and Republican voters. If my hypothesis is correct, that the public is effected by Congressional polarization, then one could assume that the Republican Party may be overall more polarized than the Democratic Party, in terms of both the electorate and members of Congress. One way to analyze this is by looking at ideological scores within the seven point party sorting data used for Graph #3. But instead of using the data for all voters I only examined the data for both Democrat and Republican voters. The independent variable is time. The dependent variables are Ideology Scores for Republican Voters and

Ideology Scores for Democratic Voters. The ideology scores were calculated the same as in Graph #3. A line graph was used to show the increases and decreases in ideology scores between voters of the two parties over time.

Figure 4 below shows how over time Republican and Democratic voters consistently stayed the same in terms of polarization. Voters that are Democratic seemed to actually decrease over time in terms of the mean ideological polarization score. There seems to be an anomaly in 2000 where there is a sense of unity within voters of both parties. Ultimately the relationship between Democratic voters and Republican voters seems pretty responsive to one another. The one analysis to note is that in 2012 the parties seem to be increasingly more separate from one another. Democratic voters seemed to become more moderate while Republican voters seem to be pretty stagnant with only minor surges and declines, except for the year 2000.

**Figure 4: Ideological Polarization in the Public – Republican Voters v. Democratic Voters**

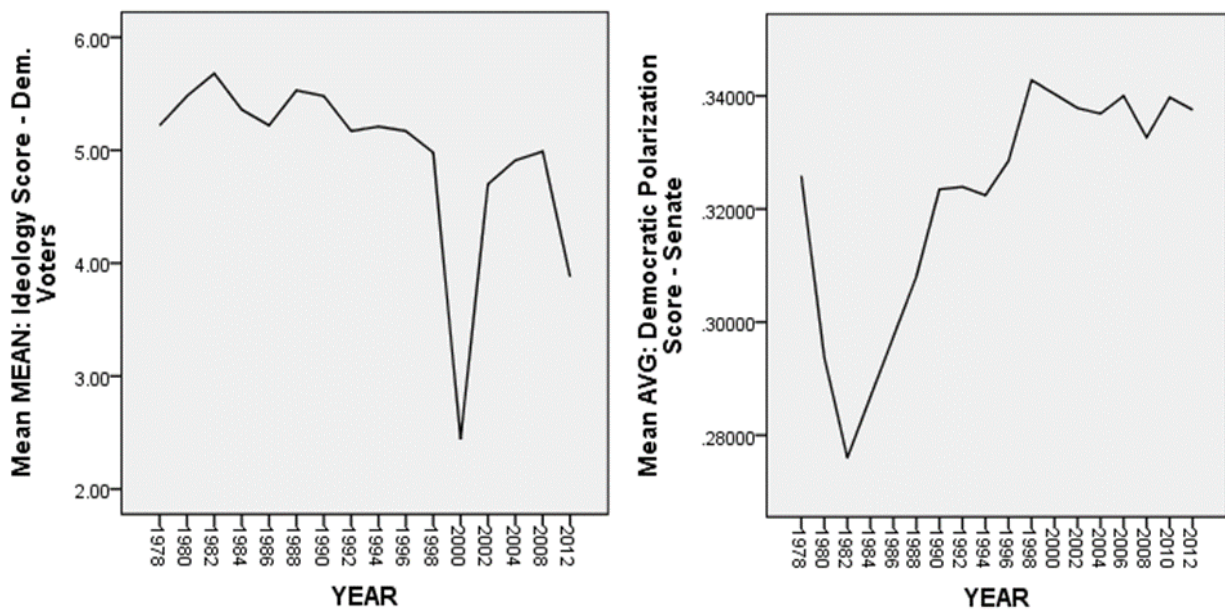


The next question that I analyzed is what is the relationship between party polarization in Congress and ideological polarization in the public? The best way to look at this is by comparing and merging Figure 2 and Figure 4, comparing both delegates and voters. I split this analysis into two comparisons, Democratic Senators v. Democratic Voters and Republican Senators v. Republican Voters. I wanted to test to see if there was

a responsive nature between both variables. I was expecting to see that when polarization in Congress increases the polarization in the public will increase as well. My independent variable is time and my two dependent variables are the Polarization Score of Democratic Senators and the Ideological Polarization Score of Democratic Voters. A line graph was used to illustrate the changes every two years in polarization. Using a line graph we should be able to map out a relationship if one is evident.

Figure 5 below compares the relationship between Democratic Senators and Democratic Voters, in terms of polarization, over a span of 34 years. The purpose of this comparison is to see if there is an evident relationship between the two variables. At first glance it seems that there is no real responsiveness between the two graphs. A spike in 1982 in polarization in Congress seems to have no real effect on the polarization of Democratic voters. Similarly, a spike in ideological polarization in the public in 2000 has little to no effect on polarization in the Democratic Senators around the same time. Also it seems that in general Democratic Voters are becoming less polarized over time compared to senators who are Democrat. The graphs show no clear relationship and thus no conclusion can be made that polarization in congress in fact does effect polarization in the public, at least in terms of the Democratic Party.

**Figure 5: Democratic Senators v. Democratic Voters**



The next part of the analysis is to look at the other major party in American politics to see if there may be a relationship in terms of polarization between delegates and voters. After comparing Democratic Senators v. Democratic Voters it is important to see if there might be a relationship between Republican Senators v. Republican Voters. The

independent variable is time and the two dependent variables are Republican Polarization Score in the Senate and Ideology Score of Republican Voters. A line graph was used to note the changes of polarization every two years. A line graph gives us the ability to note the changes and compare between the two graphs.

**Figure 6: Republican Senators v. Republican Voters**

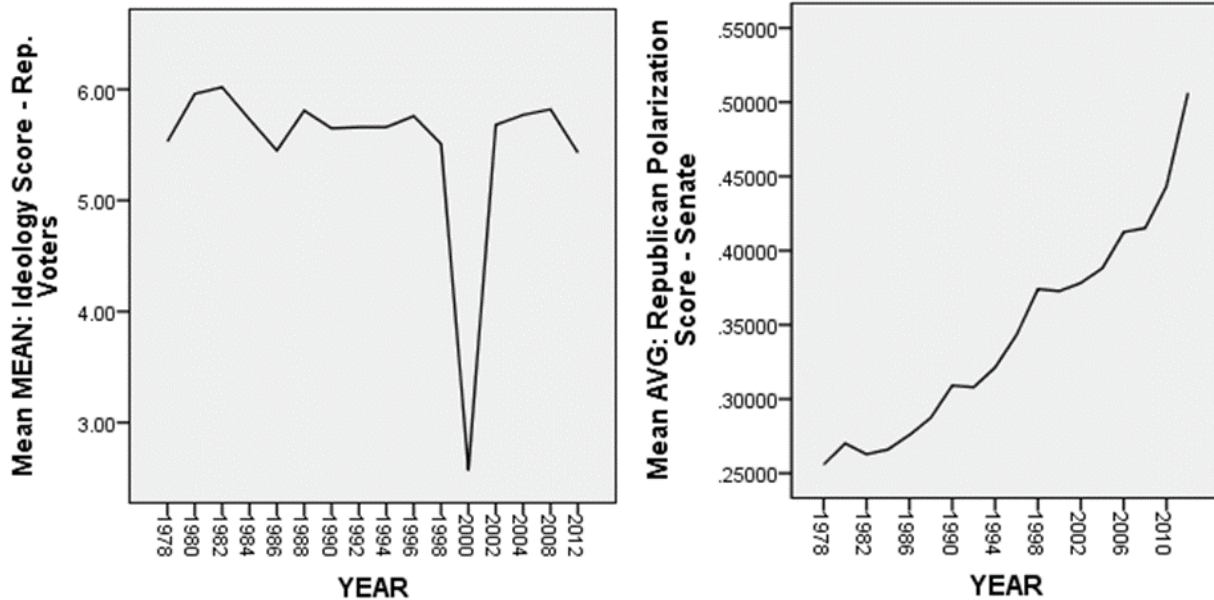


Figure 6 above illustrates how polarization has effected the Republican Party in terms of both delegates and voters. At first glance it seems that there is no real relationship between ideological polarization in the public and party polarization in the Senate. Party polarization in Congress is seen to be steadily increasing for the Republican Party while ideological polarization for Republican Voters is fairly stagnant with a couple of surges and declines. We see how there is very little responsiveness between the two graphs. In 2000 there is a steep decline in ideological polarization but there is still a steady increase in party polarization in the Senate. The graphs show that there is little, to no relationship between polarization in the public and in congress in terms of the Republican Party.

**Discussion**

Hypothesis 1 does not seem to be supported by the data. To an extent my hypothesis was correct that as polarization in Congress increases so will polarization in the public. Polarization in both Congress and the Public seems to be increasing but there does not seem to be a relationship between the two variables. I cannot say for certain that the polarization in Congress has effected polarization in the public. For now there seems to be a correlation but a causation has yet to be found. I cannot refute Fiorina’s claim that polarization in the public is just a mirroring of the polarized Congress. I can however,



support Abramowitz claim that the public is not only polarized but that polarization has been increasing.

Likewise, Hypothesis 2 also does not seem to be supported by the data. Republicans are not only more polarized but also have become increasingly more polarized over the past 10 years. Mann and Ornstein's theory is supported by DW-NOMINATE data but a conclusion can still not be made that the Republican Party is at fault for the rising divide between the two parties. Both parties have become increasingly polarized the Republican Party however, has had the steeper increase of the two.

### **Conclusion**

Polarization is a part of American politics, this is not in dispute. It is important that we not only understand how it is effecting the politicians we elect but also the general public as a whole. Polarization in Congress is as evident as ever, as we have public access to political analysis and political debates. The public is introduced to this rising tension and polarization on a daily basis. Party conflict is in the news every day and government shutdowns have been the result of legislative gridlock and extreme partisanship. How is the public effected by this? What effect has party polarization in Congress had on ideological polarization in the public? Is the public polarized? Scholars have tackled these questions but little evidence has been supported on the lasting effects that polarization may have on the American society, for both the public and the government. What is the agenda for future research? We need to be able to find how we are all effected by the increase in polarization. This is something that will come with time but for now we remained polarized and in the dark.

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