The Dislikability Heuristic: Out-Party Negativity and Partisan Preferences, 1988-2012*

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Abstract

Research from the past half century of American politics demonstrates the powerful effects that positive, in-party attachments have on a wide variety of opinion and behavior. Recent trends in public opinion, however, merit a closer look at how out-party *negativity* might affect political attitudes as well. In this paper, I explore how—and to what extent—the trend of rising out-party hostility influences the way that individuals understand their place in the political world. I demonstrate that the affective basis for opinion preferences has changed fundamentally over the last several decades. Whereas both in- and out-party affect have always played a significant role in partisans' issue and ideological self-placements, the effect of negative feelings toward the other side now far exceeds that of in-party feelings in their ability to predict these attitudes. Since 2000, the influence of hostile feelings toward the opposition has surged while the impact of in-party warmth has evaporated. These effects are strongest among the most politically knowledgeable but also persist among those with only a moderate understanding of politics. My results suggest revisiting the relationship between identities and partisanship: out-group antipathy, rather than in-group attraction, now appears to dominate partisans' thinking about political issues.

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Since the earliest days of public opinion research, scholars have recognized the central role that emotional attachments play in party identification. *The American Voter*, in fact, defines the concept explicitly as "an individual's *affective* orientation to an important group-object" in the political environment (1960, 121). Building on this understanding, political science has produced a wealth of evidence demonstrating the wide-ranging influence that party attachments have on how Americans think about politics and how they behave politically. Individuals look to their self-identified party for guidance on just about everything political, including evaluations of candidates and leaders (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Weisberg and Rusk 1970), perceptions of relevant political conditions (Bartels 2002), issue preferences (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Layman and Carsey 2002; Lenz 2012; Zaller 1992), political values (Goren 2005; Goren et al. 2009; Jacoby 2014) and interpretations of factual information (Gaines et al. 2007; Hochschild and Einstein 2015; Taber and Lodge 2006).

Most research in American politics over the past half century has, understandably, focused on the central importance of people's attachments to their favored party. Such thinking makes sense because theories of identity—including those regarding party identification (Green et al. 2002)—are based on the primacy of in-group favoritism (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Recent changes in public opinion, however, suggest the need to explore more deeply the influence that people's feelings about the party they do not favor have on opinion and behavior. Little doubt remains that contemporary politics is more partisan than a few decades ago (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Bartels 2000; Hetherington 2001; Levendusky 2009), yet partisans' feelings toward their own side have remained largely warm and stable over time. In contrast, partisans' evaluations of the other party have plummeted over the past 30 years (Haidt and Hetherington 2012; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015; Abramowitz and Webster 2016).

In this paper, I explore how—and to what extent—the trend of rising out-party

negativity influences the way that individuals understand their place in the political world. Do partisans continue to rely primarily on their feelings toward their own party in orienting themselves to politics, as researchers have understood for decades? Or does out-party affect now dominate partisan political thinking? I demonstrate that the affective basis for opinion preferences has changed fundamentally over the last several decades. Before 2000, the effect of feelings was in line with a traditional understanding of social groups: positive feelings toward one's own party outweighed negative feelings toward the opposition in influencing policy preferences. The reverse is now true; the influence of hostile feelings toward the opposition has surged while the impact of in-party warmth has evaporated. These effects are strongest among the most politically knowledgeable but also persist among those with only a moderate understanding of politics. My results suggest revisiting the means by which partisanship functions in a new, polarized political environment: out-group antipathy, rather than in-group attraction, now appears to dominate partisans' thinking about political issues and ideology.

The Changing Influence of In- and Out-Party Evaluations

Like other social domains, politics is dominated by the human tendency to understand the world in terms of groups (Brewer and Kramer 1985; Huddy 2001; Kinder and Kam 2009). Unlike in other democracies in which class, race, and ethnicity continue to play a large role in guiding political behavior (e.g. Deegan-Krause 2007; Evans 2000; Chandra and Wilkinson 2008), the most important source of contemporary political group conflict in the United States is that between the two major parties. Americans express such deep and enduring group attachments to the Republican and Democratic parties as to classify their party affiliation as social identities in and of themselves, akin in strength to even ethnic or religious identities (Green et al. 2012; Greene 1999; Greene 2003; Weisberg and Greene 2003).

Aside from its durability, part of why party identification functions as a social identity is because partisans exhibit favoritism toward their own party and negativity toward the other party (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002). People who think of themselves as Democrats tend to like the Democratic Party and dislike the Republican Party, and vice versa (Green et al. 2002; Greene 2003). This behavior is consistent with psychological theories of intergroup relations predicting the import of in- and out-group membership for individual attitudes and behavior. Based on even the most trivial criteria—arbitrary assignment to groups—people exhibit strong biases toward their own group and against the out-group (Huddy 2001; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Nearly two decades prior to the conceptual development of social identity theory, Campbell and colleagues (1960) noted the tendency of partisans to display this exact behavior. They found that "responses to each element of national politics are deeply affected by...enduring party attachments" (Campbell et al. 1960, 128). Party identification is so central to individuals' self-conceptions that it colors interpretations of all other matters political. People use the party they favor as a cue provider to evaluate other areas of politics and to determine the kind of information they choose to accept or reject (Campbell et al. 1960; Zaller 1992).

Recent trends in public opinion, however, merit a closer look at how out-party *negativity* might affect political opinions as well. Although partisans' feelings toward their in-group are more or less the same as they were in the 1970s, their feelings toward the out-group—their political opponents—are now much cooler than they were in decades past (Haidt and Hetherington 2012; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015; Abramowitz and Webster 2016). Examining how these rapidly changing out-party evaluations influence individuals' relationships to the political world seems to be the key to understanding the "resurgence" in partisan thinking and behavior in a time when individuals' in-party attachments remain more or less stable (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Bartels 2000; Hetherington 2001; Levendusky 2009).

Why Should Out-Party Affect Matter Now?

The idea that partisans might use their negative feelings toward the opposition to orient themselves to politics is not entirely new. Scholars have long recognized that individuals' cognitive limitations and limited interest in politics cause them to rely heavily on affect in forming political judgments (Achen and Bartels 2016; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). Reliance upon affect toward political groups or candidates is, quite simply, "a quicker, easier, and more efficient way to navigate a complex [and] uncertain" political world (Slovic et al. 2007). Although people's memories may fail them in recalling specific details about policies or candidates, people can recall their summary affective evaluations and use them to inform preferences and vote choice (Clore et al. 2001; Lodge et al. 1995). The idea that people regularly engage in this type of behavior in relation to groups specifically is also well established. More than 30 years ago, Brady and Sniderman (1985) demonstrated that people can use an affective calculus—a "likeability heuristic"—about social groups specifically to make inferences about where such groups stand on issues.

There are several reasons to suspect, however, that deployment of positive and negative affect in individuals' evaluations is now skewed more heavily in favor of the latter. Instead of weighing in-party positivity and out-party negativity equally, partisans' negative evaluations toward the opposition are much more likely to exert a strong influence on their issue and ideological placements since the onset of polarization. The possibility that partisans now orient themselves to politics using this *dis*likability heuristic is one that is likely due to the increased saliency of out-party negativity in the contemporary political environment. This is due in part as a response to rising levels of uncivil discourse at the elite level. While scholars continue to debate the substance of polarization among the masses (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Abramowitz 2010; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; DiMaggio et al. 1996; Fiorina 2005; Fiorina 2009; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Layman and Carsey 2002), there is little doubt that

elites are now more ideologically polarized than they have been in over a century (McCarty et al. 2008; Poole and Rosenthal 2015). Greater conflict on an increasing number of dimensions is likely responsible for a growth in uncivil talk and behavior on the part of elected officials (Fiorina 2013). The incentives for political politeness, deference, and courtesy decline as political gridlock increases because there are no strategic advantages to using it (Herbst 2010; Strachan and Wolf 2013). Political discourse, therefore, is more affectively charged in this era of political polarization than it has been in years past, because "for familiar psychological reasons, substantive conflict generates emotional affect and personal animosity" (Fiorina 2013, 150). Because mass partisans' exposure to uncivil speech conveying negative information about the other party is on the rise, it seems likely that individuals would pick up on and incorporate hostile out-party feelings in their own political evaluations (Campbell et al. 1960; Zaller 1992). Indeed, short-term exposure to partisan incivility and negativity present in these partisan news sources also causes people to doubt the legitimacy of the opposition's arguments and increase their own use of uncivil language (Gervais 2014; Mutz 2015).

Even if the amount of elite incivility were to remain constant, media trends have undoubtedly increased the saliency of out-party negativity by increasing partisans' exposure to information that portrays the opposition in a bad light. The availability of videos that can be circulated and replayed ad nauseam on either broadcast television or the internet contributes, at the very least, to the *perception* that incivility has increased over the past few decades (Levendusky and Malhotra 2016). Visual frames that produce intensely negative emotional reactions—including those that emphasize the physical distance between political opponents and tight camera shots—are far more prevalent now than they were in the past (Mutz 2015). The increase in partisan media sources only exacerbates these effects. With partisans now able to choose their own information delivery system, their contact with opposing viewpoints that might moderate their views is greatly reduced (Prior 2007). Increased exposure to like-minded partisan

news outlets also increases the likelihood that viewers evaluate the other side more negatively (Levendusky 2013) and indeed exerts a causal effect on affective polarization (Lau et al. 2016). The proliferation of internet access throughout the early 2000s also likely contributed to the rise of negative out-party feelings. Greater access to broadband internet appears to have increased the hostility that partisans feel toward their opponents by granting them easier access to a variety of partisan sources (Lelkes, Sood, and Iyengar, 2016).

Regardless of the cause, high levels of out-party negativity are associated with increasingly partisan behavior in a several areas. Hostile out-party feelings appear to cause higher levels of anger, a heightened tendency to characterize opponents in negative terms, and a decline in trust in government (Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015). Negative out-party affect is also associated with increased levels of political participation and straight-ticket voting (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Mason 2015). Perhaps most relevant to this research, scholars have also demonstrated that hostile feelings toward the out-party are deeply ingrained and automatic in individuals' minds (Iyengar and Westwood 2014). The fact that these effects are most clearly documented only recently, however, suggests that the relative importance of in-party and out-party attachments has likely changed over time. Rising levels of negativity directed at the out-group, coupled with the amplified effect of out-party feelings on attitudes and behavior, suggests that our understanding of how partisan identities shape public opinion is imperfect. For decades, scholars convincingly demonstrated the source of partisan cue-taking to be in-party in nature: partisans focused on what elites in their favored parties said or did, and adjusted their behavior accordingly. In a polarized political environment, however, partisans may have switched to rely more heavily on cues from the opposition in determining their own stances on important issues (Arceneaux and Kolodny 2009; Goren et al. 2009; Nicholson 2012). Our understanding of if and when this switch occurred, however, remains incomplete.

Evaluating the Influence of Out-Party Negativity Across Time

I focus my analysis in this paper on tracing the changing influence of in- and out-party affect on individuals' issue placements and ideological identification, with the expectation that out-party affect has become increasingly important to these placements since the onset of popular polarization. Focusing on these dependent variables in particular is a rigorous test of the theory. As opposed to evaluations of political conditions or the ideological placements of parties or candidates, self-placements on issues and ideology are arguably more difficult to change than evaluations of other matters. People are more likely to change their opinions of external objects than matters related to themselves (Festinger 1957).

This is, of course, not to say that these self-placements are immobile. There are several reasons to suspect that changes in individuals' affective orientations toward the parties *can* and *do* influence issue and ideological self-placements. As noted previously, party identification is a strong predictor of individual political thought and action because it creates "perceptual screen" through which individuals view the world (Campbell et al. 1960). Voters adopt issue positions, adjust candidate perceptions, and invent facts to rationalize decisions they have already made based on social identities like partisanship (Achen and Bartels 2016). Since affective in- and out-group orientations are central to party identification (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002; Greene 2003), changes in these feelings should induce changes in issue placements.

Ideological self-placements are not likely to be immune to the influence of party affect, either. Most people know and care little about politics, making their independent understanding of ideology rather weak (Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Ellis and Stimson 2012; Jacoby 1986; Luttberg and Gant 1985). In fact, most people adopt the terms "liberal" and "conservative" more because of their meaning outside of politics than for any connection that the terms have to policy positions (Conover and Feldman 1981; Malka and Lelkes 2010; Ellis and

Stimson 2012). The fact that over time, individuals have changed their ideological self-identifications to match their partisan identities (Levendusky 2009) further suggests that party affect would exert a causal influence on these placements rather than the other way around.[1]

To test this theory, I estimate a series of OLS regressions predicting individuals' mean issue and ideological self-placement as a function of their feelings toward their own party and the opposite party—measured by feeling thermometer ratings—and a series of relevant control variables. To construct the dependent variable, I average together individuals' ideological self-placement and self-placements on all domestic issue items asked consistently in the American National Election Studies in those presidential election years ranging from 1988 to 2012. These 10 issue items span both the economic and social policy agendas.[2] Restricting the analysis to only those issues and ideological questions that appear in every survey over this time period allows me to mitigate concerns that changes in attitudes in any given year are due solely to the nature of the survey instrument (e.g. the addition/subtraction of particular questions or changes in question wording).[3] I use a mean score as the dependent variable in the analysis here merely for the sake of parsimony; estimating the same model for each issue and ideological self-placement yields similar results.

[1] This is not to suggest, of course, that certain issues do not exert a causal an influence on party affect. Indeed, some of the issues that individuals find to be particularly salient can cause people to change their party identification (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Carsey and Layman 2006). Often, however, scholars conflate these sorts of changes with partisan persuasion, and thus underestimate the power of partisanship in moving individuals' positions even on issues as "easy" as abortion (Achen and Bartels 2016).

[2] Issue items include those related to abortion, government aid to blacks, guaranteed jobs for blacks, gay discrimination laws, government spending and services, government health care, child care spending, school spending, Social Security spending, and guaranteed jobs.

[3] Also in the interest of consistency, I excluded those respondents who received the "new" versions of half-sample questions in any given year. For example, in 2008 and 2012, the ANES administered new question wordings to half the sample on items related to government spending, health insurance, abortion, and defense spending, all of which regularly appear on ANES surveys. I also exclude respondents who participated in the ANES in 2012 via an online survey, as all previous versions of the ANES were administered in face-to-face interviews.

To rule out alternate explanations for changes in self-placements, I include several control variables. Arguably the most important of these are dummy variables for individuals' strength of partisanship, as I am interested in how in-party and out-party feelings influence attitudes *independent* of the effect of merely naming oneself a strong or weak Democrat or Republican.[4] I also include dummy controls for strength of political knowledge, using interviewers' assessments of respondents' understanding of the political environment. I then collapse respondents into three knowledge levels: low, medium, and high.[5] I include these indicator variables because those respondents who know more about politics are more likely to understand the parties' positions on issues and thus understand where they stand by comparison.

Because I posit that the relationship between party affect and individual attitudes has changed over time, I subdivide my analysis into two time periods: the presidential election years before 2000 (that is, 1988, 1992, and 1996) and those years after 2000 (2004, 2008, and 2012). I use the year 2000 as the breaking point between the periods for two reasons. First, trends in public opinion suggest that mass polarization accelerated in the time period following the 2000 election

[4] While party identification and party feeling thermometers are correlated, the correlations are not as high as one might suspect. From 1988-2012, the correlation between party identification and the Democratic Party feeling thermometer is about -0.7 and the correlation between party identification and the Republican Party feeling thermometer is 0.6. The correlation between the thermometers themselves over the same time period is also surprisingly weak (-0.4).

[5] In using the interviewer assessment variable, I depart somewhat from past studies that have used respondents' ability to correctly place the parties (i.e. placing the Democratic Party to the left of the Republican Party) as a means by which to gauge respondents' understanding of the political environment (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Hetherington 2001; Carsey and Layman 2006; Levendusky 2009). While that measure seems theoretically appropriate, the percentage of partisans who can correctly place the parties has exploded in the past decade, with anywhere from 75-95% of partisans fulfilling this requirement (Levendusky 2009; Mason 2015). This lack of variation makes it difficult to detect knowledge effects, since the proportion of the public considered to be "low knowledge" (that is, the ones who cannot order the parties correctly) is small. Using the interviewer assessment measure allows for a slightly more nuanced test, since roughly 22% of respondents fall into the "fairly low" or "low" knowledge categories, 33% fall into the "average" category, and 44% fall into the "fairly high" or "very high" categories in the 1988-2012 period. Furthermore, using this measure provides the additional benefit of being able to track the effects of knowledge over time, since the content and difficulty of objective political knowledge items changes by election (Bartels 1986). Interviewers' assessments of respondents' knowledge is also highly correlated with other knowledge measures, making it a valid means by which to measure political sophistication (Luskin 1987; Luskin 1990).

(Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015), suggesting that the relationship between affective evaluations and self-placements likely changed between the two periods. Secondly, media trends changed substantially in the early 2000s. The rise of partisan news networks like FoxNews and MSNBC and increased use of the internet allowed people greater exposure to political discourse while simultaneously increasing their ability to selectively consume like-minded partisan news content (Prior 2007; Lelkes, Sood, and Iyengar 2016). These trends suggest that the influences of in- and out-party affect on political attitudes likely changed between the pre- and post-2000 eras. While I collapse the years into two time periods, I allow for idiosyncratic variation for each election by introducing year fixed effects.[6] Finally, to allow for the possibility of differential effects for partisans on each side of the aisle, I also estimate separate regressions for Democrats and Republicans.[7] This leaves us to compare effects across four models, one for each group of partisans in each time period: Democrats pre-2000, Democrats post-2000, Republicans pre-2000, and Republicans post-2000.

Table 1 displays the results of these analyses. All variables in the model have been re-scaled from 0-1. The dependent variable is scaled so that 0 represents an average response that is *least* consistent with the party position (that is, the most *conservative* response for Democrats and the most *liberal* response for Republicans) and 1 represents the response that is *most* consistent with the party position (the most *liberal* response for Democrats and the most *conservative* response for Republicans). Positive coefficients, therefore, indicate a greater likelihood to place oneself closer to the ideological/issue position espoused by one's party.

[6] Replicating this analysis for each individual year reveals a similar pattern to that shown in the results here, which simply collapse the years into the two different time periods.
[7] I include "leaning" partisans in these groups per previous research suggesting that Independent leaners think and behave similarly to partisans (Keith et al. 1992).

Table 1. Determinants of Average Issue/Ideological Self-Placement

	Democrats Pre-2000	Democrats Post-2000	Republicans Pre-2000	Republicans Post-2000
In-Party Affect	0.109***	-0.001	0.086***	-0.019
	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.031)	(0.048)
Out-Party Affect	-0.161***	-0.206***	-0.246***	-0.322***
	(0.023)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.040)
Strong Partisan	0.003	0.037***	0.044***	0.031
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.021)
Weak Partisan	0.032***	0.020	-0.015	-0.003
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.020)
Female	0.033***	0.042***	-0.028***	-0.005
	(0.009)	(0.0105)	(0.010)	(0.015)
Black	0.083***	0.050***	-0.065*	-0.097*
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.037)	(0.051)
High Knowledge	0.033**	0.040**	0.056***	0.105***
	(0.015)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.031)
Mid Knowledge	0.002	0.008	0.026	0.108***
	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.033)
1992	0.013		0.022*	
	(0.011)		(0.012)	
1996	-0.005		0.066***	
	(0.013)		(0.013)	
2008		-0.016		0.002
		(0.013)		(0.020)
2012		-0.031**		-0.013
		(0.013)		(0.018)
Constant	0.393***	0.274***	0.521***	0.577***
	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.0481)
Observations	935	521	882	409
R-squared	0.175	0.249	0.260	0.247

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, two tailed

Source: ANES Cumulative File, 1988-2012.

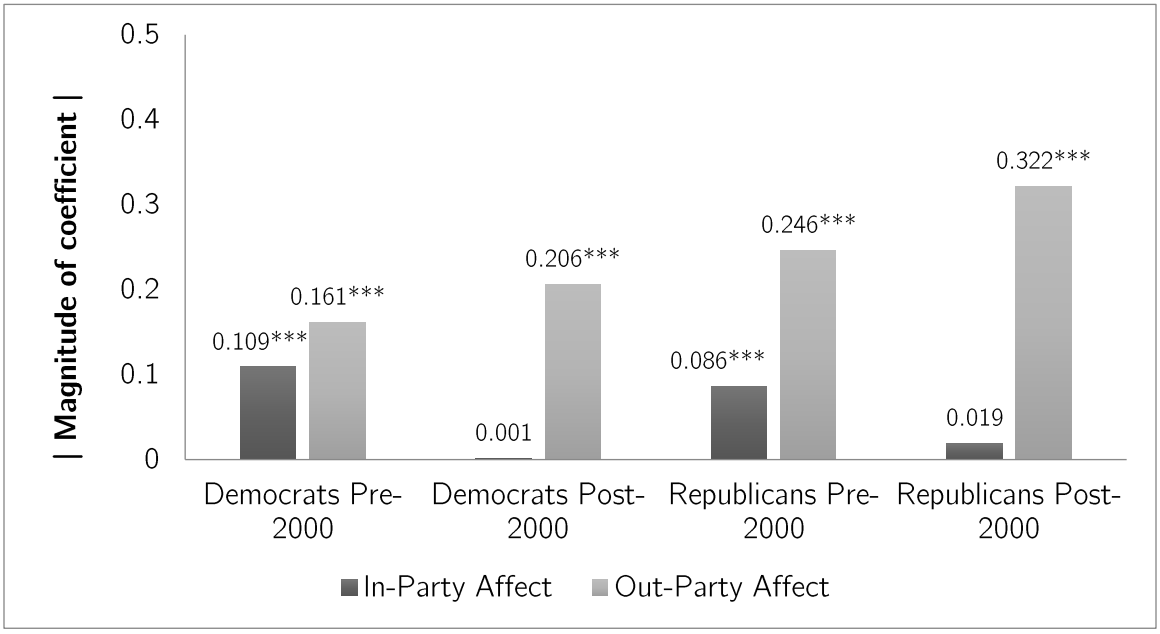
Looking first at the effects among Democrats, we can see that in-party affect appears to exert a strong influence on issue and ideological positions in the pre-2000 period. The coefficient of 0.109 indicates that as Democrats change their feelings toward their own party from neutral (.5) to highly positive (1), they increase their agreement with their party's position by an average of around .05, or about a third of a point on a seven-point issue or ideology scale. This is impressive given that this is the effect of in-party affect *independent* of strength of party identification. The effect of out-party affect on Democrats' placements during the same period, however, is even stronger, with β=-0.161. This coefficient indicates that the more warmly Democrats feel toward the Republican Party, the more likely they are to adopt a conservative position. Conversely, the more negatively they feel toward the Republican Party, the more likely they are to adopt a liberal position.

While out-party affect appears to exert a more powerful effect than in-party affect for Democrats in the pre-2000 period, these effects change substantially post-2000. The effect of in-party affect on self-placements in post-2000 elections all but disappears, both in magnitude and in statistical significance. This pre- to post-2000 change in in-party affect is also statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (one-tailed). At the same time, the influence of out-party affect on Democrats' self placements appears to increase in magnitude between time periods (from β=-0.161 to β=-0.206), but this difference is only statistically significant at around the 80% confidence level (one-tailed). In comparing the difference between in-party and out-party effects across time periods among Democrats, it becomes evident that the influence of out-party affect *relative* to in-party affect has increased over time. Even though the effect of out-party affective evaluations remains about the same in magnitude across time, the influence of in-party affect evaporates—making feelings toward the other side substantially more important in attitude formation among Democrats in this latter era.

Even stronger effects emerge among Republican identifiers. In elections prior to 2000, the influence of out-party affect on self-placements (β=-0.246) was stronger than even that for Democrats in the post-2000 period. The effect of in-party feelings, on the other hand, was much smaller (β=0.086). The effect of in-party feelings among Republicans disappears in the post-2000 time period, while the influence of negative out-party feelings increases substantially (by a difference of about 0.08) between time periods. The changes in magnitude of both in- and out-party effects across time are also statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Out-party affect now exerts a powerful impact on self-placements among Republicans: a change from neutral to highly negative feelings toward the Democratic Party induces an average change in self-placements by about 0.15, or a full point on a 7-point issue/ideological scale.

As a final demonstration of these trends, Figure 1 graphically depicts the change in the effects (βs) of in- and out-party affective evaluations for both sets of partisans in both time periods. By graphing the absolute value of these effects, we can better compare the effects of in- and out-party feelings on self-placements over time. While the trends are undeniably stronger for Republicans, both sets of partisans discount their feelings toward their own party in orienting themselves to politics in the post-2000 period. Now, feelings toward the other party exert a comparatively larger effect on self-placements for both Democrats and Republicans. This effect itself increased for Republicans in the 2004, 2008, and 2012 elections.

Figure 1. Magnitude of Influence on Average Issue/Ideological Self Placement
(Absolute Value of Reported Coefficients)



*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, one-tailed.

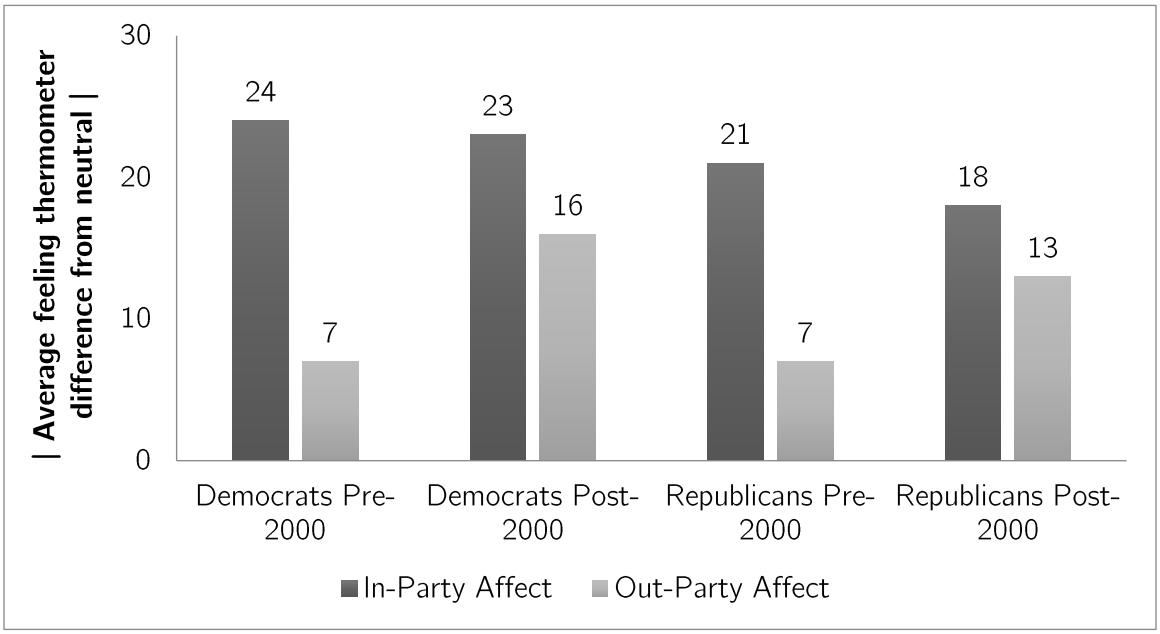
Source: ANES Cumulative File, 1988-2012

The Effective Importance of Changes in Affect

These results demonstrate that the influence of out-party feelings on self-placements has increased over time. In some cases, this is due to an increase of the magnitude of out-party effects; in others, it is a result of the fact that the influence of in-party affect has faded. While this seems consistent with my hypothesis, it only shows half the story. While there were changes in the *effects* of in- and out-party feelings between these two time periods, there were also changes in the *levels* of these feelings in the public (Haidt and Hetherington 2012; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015; Abramowitz and Webster 2016). To gain a full understanding of the importance of party affect in attitude formation over time, we must consider how changes in both the influence and prevalence of these feelings interact to produce changes in individuals' issue and ideological stances.

To do this, I first calculated the average levels of party affect in the pre- and post-2000 periods for both Democrats and Republicans. Figure 2 shows the average feeling thermometer score's distance from the 50 (neutral) point among both Democrats and Republicans for both parties in each era. For example, the average feeling thermometer score for the Democratic Party among Democrats in the pre-2000 period was 74 degrees, translating into a positive in-party bias of 24 percentage points. During that same era, Democrats' average rating of the Republican Party was 43 degrees, translating into an absolute (negative) out-party bias of 7 percentage points.

Figure 2. Changes in Average Level of Party Affect Among Partisans, Pre- and Polarization Periods
(Absolute Value of Average Distance from Neutral [50] Score)



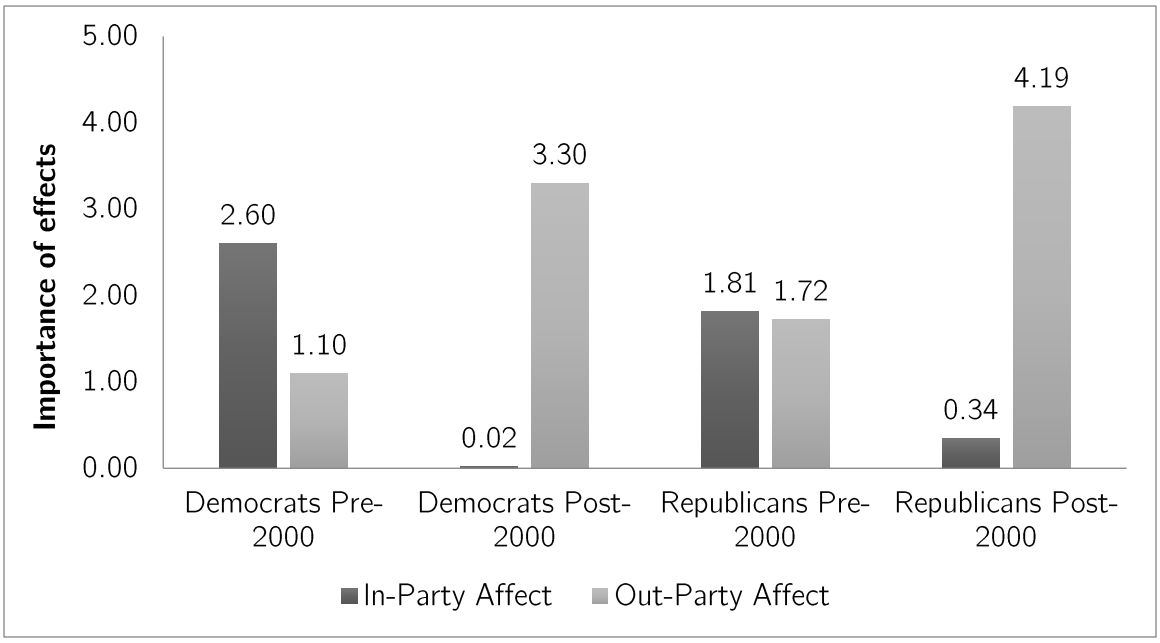
Source: ANES Cumulative File, 1988-2012

As we can see, there is very little change in partisans' affective bias toward their own party over time. Both Democrats and Republicans decrease only slightly in their average in-party scores—Democrats by a margin of one percentage point and Republicans by a margin of 3

percentage points. Levels of affective bias against the opposition, however, more than double among Democrats (by 9 percentage points) and increase nearly twofold among Republicans (by 6 percentage points) between periods.

Using these numbers as indications of the average level of in- and out-party affect in both periods, I multiply them by the corresponding effects for in- and out-party evaluations (βs) estimated in the first set of analyses. Figure 3 show the results of these calculations, giving us an indication of the overall importance of these affective changes to individuals' average placements.

Figure 3. Average Importance of Estimated Effects
(Absolute Value of Average Coefficient * Average Level of Affect)



Source: ANES Cumulative File, 1988-2012

The results demonstrate clearly how central out-party affect has become in individuals' self-placements. Pre-2000, in-party affect was either more important (in the case of Democrats) or of equal importance to out-party affect (in the case of Republicans) to individuals' self-placements. In the three most recent presidential elections, the importance of in-party affect

almost completely disappears. Meanwhile, the influence of out-party evaluations has exploded. In the case of Democratic identifiers, out-party affect is now *165 times more important* than in-party affect in explaining changes in aggregate ideological/issue self-placements.

In- and Out-Party Effects by Knowledge

While these changes seem impressive, perhaps they are concentrated only among a small proportion of partisans—namely, those most knowledgeable about politics. Previous work suggests differential effects of issue and ideological polarization for partisans of different knowledge levels (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Abramowitz 2010; Layman and Carsey 2002). Perhaps the effects I report above are only present among those partisans who with a great understanding of the dynamics of the political environment.

Though I include knowledge controls in my first set of analyses, I can get a better sense of how the relationship between party affect and individual placements might change subject to knowledge levels by interacting party identification with knowledge in each time period. For ease of interpretation, I run separate models for Democrats and Republicans according to their knowledge levels during each time period. This produces a series of 12 regressions, three for each group of identifiers (low, medium, and high knowledge Democrats and Republicans) in each time period.

I present the results of these analyses in Tables 2 and 3. As expected, the effects of in- and out-party feelings on self-placements among highly knowledgeable Democrats and Republicans follow the familiar pattern. The influence of in-party affect among high-knowledge Democrats once again evaporates from a statistically significant β=0.158 in the pre-2000 period to the statistically insignificant β=0.015 in post-2000 elections. The impact of negative out-party feelings also seems to increase slightly (from β=-0.209 to β=-0.247), but the difference between the periods is not

statistically significant at conventional levels. The same trend holds true for high-knowledge Republicans as well: the effect of in-party affect disappears to a statistically significant degree (from β=0.107 to β=-0.081) and the influence of out-party affect increases (from β=-0.296 to β= -0.327), though the change between the periods is not statistically distinguishable from 0.

Though not as precise or large as those among high-knowledge partisans, the estimates suggest that a similar trend is alive and well among Republicans with only a moderate knowledge of politics. Though there appears to be not much change in either the influence of in- and out-party affect over time among mid-knowledge Democrats,[8] the influence of out-party affect on self-placements more than doubles among mid-knowledge Republicans from β = -0.168 to β = -0.379. This increase is the largest among any partisan group; in fact, in the post-2000 period, this effect size even surpasses that of out-party affect among high-knowledge Republicans.

None of the coefficients or differences in effects between time periods are sufficiently precise enough to tell whether the pattern persists among low-knowledge Democrats or Republicans. The sample sizes for these groups are remarkably small, particularly in the post-2000 period. As a consequence, it is hardly surprising that the patterns are somewhat confusing and that the effects are not statistically significant. Even with larger sample sizes, we cannot rule out the possibility that the thinking of these partisans is simply not subject to the affective patterns established above. This would be somewhat unsurprising, given that individuals would likely need to pay at least some degree of attention to the political environment for the effects to emerge. Even if there were no changes in the effects of in- and out-party affect on issue positions over time, there is important variation in the *levels* of party affect that these partisans exhibit pre- and post-2000. While trends among low-knowledge Democrats are slightly puzzling—they rate both their own party and the opposition five points more negatively between the pre- and post-2000 periods—

[8] That being said, the sample size (132) is rather small in the post-2000 time period.

low-knowledge Republicans maintain more or less consistent in their feelings toward their on party (decreasing by only 2 percentage points between eras) and evaluate the Democratic Party more negatively over time (by a margin of 6 percentage points). This evidence suggests that even if the effects of in-party and out-party feelings on issue and ideological positions among low-knowledge partisans are minimal, Republicans with little understanding of politics are not immune to the trend of increasing out-party negativity.

Discussion

The evidence presented in this paper suggests a need to re-visit our understanding of the way in which partisan social identities influence the way people orient themselves to politics. The majority of public opinion research emphasizes the centrality of in-group affect in determining individuals' opinions on a variety of matters: people adopt their party's issue or ideological stances because they *like* their party. While that may have been true in the past, it no longer appears to be the case. The influence of in-group feelings in partisan thinking has evaporated since the onset of "affective polarization" (Haidt and Hetherington 2012; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015; Abramowitz and Webster 2016). In the past three elections, partisans have relied more upon their feelings toward the opposition in determining their stances on important issues and their ideological identification. Now, people orient themselves to politics primarily by doing the opposite of what their opponents do because they intensely *dislike* the other party. These effects appear to extend beyond just those partisans who know a lot about politics; some identifiers with a moderate knowledge of political matters exhibit the same pattern. The fact that affective evaluations of the out-party continue to plummet among all partisan groups at the same time demonstrates that aggregate public opinion is increasingly shaped by out-group dislike rather than in-group attraction.

Table 2. Determinants of Average Issue/Ideological Self-Placement by Knowledge Levels, Democratic Identifiers

	(1) Low Knowledge Pre-2000	(2) Low Knowledge Post-2000	(3) Mid-Knowledge Pre-2000	(4) Mid- Knowledge Post-2000	(5) High Knowledge Pre-2000	(6) High Knowledge Post-2000
In-Party Affect	0.096	0.0240	0.063	0.092	0.158***	0.015
	(0.068)	(0.083)	(0.051)	(0.074)	(0.044)	(0.043)
Out-Party Affect	-0.077	-0.006	-0.122***	-0.128**	-0.209***	-0.247***
	(0.064)	(0.068)	(0.037)	(0.053)	(0.0330)	(0.033)
Strong Partisan	0.030	-0.092**	-0.013	-0.067**	-0.011	-0.021
	(0.037)	(0.045)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.016)	(0.017)
Weak Partisan	0.044	-0.031	-0.030	-0.028	0.025	-0.009
	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.021)	(0.032)	(0.016)	(0.018)
Female	-0.031	0.045	0.0340**	-0.067***	-0.025**	-0.039***
	(0.029)	(0.033)	(0.017)	(0.023)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Black	-0.122***	0.076**	0.092***	-0.091***	-0.061***	-0.046***
	(0.030)	(0.034)	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.017)	(0.016)
1992	0.018		0.012		-0.017	
	(0.032)		(0.021)		(0.015)	
1996	0.013		-0.002		0.011	
	(0.033)		(0.023)		(0.017)	
2008		-0.023		0.059**		0.013
		(0.036)		(0.029)		(0.016)
2012		-0.000		0.035		0.036**
		(0.034)		(0.025)		(0.016)
Constant	0.408***	0.325***	0.372***	0.395***	0.376***	0.200***
	(0.058)	(0.075)	(0.047)	(0.063)	(0.037)	(0.034)
Observations	101	48	299	132	535	341
R-squared	0.258	0.249	0.134	0.394	0.200	0.221

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, two tailed

Source: ANES Cumulative File, 1988-2012.

Table 3. Determinants of Average Issue/Ideological Self-Placement by Knowledge Levels, Republican Identifiers

	(1) Low Knowledge Pre-2000	(2) Low Knowledge Post-2000	(3) Mid Knowledge Pre-2000	(4) Mid Knowledge Post-2000	(5) High Knowledge Pre-2000	(6) High Knowledge Polst-2000
In-Party Affect	-0.100	0.234	0.095*	0.012	0.107***	-0.081
	(0.139)	(0.217)	(0.054)	(0.110)	(0.040)	(0.055)
Out-Party Affect	-0.204	-0.159	-0.168***	-0.379***	-0.296***	-0.327***
	(0.126)	(0.171)	(0.046)	(0.095)	(0.032)	(0.046)
Strong Partisan	0.053	-0.085	0.0172	0.002	0.052***	0.056**
	(0.074)	(0.092)	(0.023)	(0.043)	(0.016)	(0.025)
Weak Partisan	0.032	-0.078	-0.052**	0.002	-0.005	0.001
	(0.046)	(0.073)	(0.021)	(0.037)	(0.015)	(0.025)
Female	-0.065	-0.015	-0.020	-0.010	-0.032***	-0.006
	(0.044)	(0.066)	(0.017)	(0.032)	(0.012)	(0.018)
Black	0.091	0.078	-0.040	-0.175**	-0.191***	-0.109
	(0.106)	(0.131)	(0.060)	(0.085)	(0.059)	(0.075)
1992	-0.015		-0.007		0.042***	
	(0.048)		(0.021)		(0.015)	
1996	0.063		0.056**		0.076***	
	(0.053)		(0.023)		(0.015)	
2008		-0.070		-0.002		0.020
		(0.091)		(0.046)		(0.023)
2012		-0.038		0.055		-0.032
		(0.072)		(0.038)		(0.021)
Constant	0.638***	0.405**	0.540***	0.662***	0.567***	0.717***
	(0.128)	(0.189)	(0.048)	(0.091)	(0.034)	(0.044)
Observations	61	24	275	93	546	292
R-squared	0.142	0.270	0.191	0.302	0.306	0.240

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1, two-tailed

Source: ANES Cumulative File, 1988-2012

Some might classify this trend as evidence of an evolution in partisan thinking. No longer do partisans blindly follow the lead of their party; instead, their standing in politics is contingent upon what the out-party does as well. This may very well be true if these effects are limited only to a set of issues consistently on the policy agenda and on which elites maintain more or less stable positions. Recent trends, however, suggest that this is not the case. The domains in which elites disagree continue to grow, and party disagreements are dictated increasingly by conflict rather than by ideology. Consider the fact that many of the votes in Congress that *should* be non-partisan in nature—including, for example, legislation concerning good governance measures or reducing corruption—break down along party lines, contingent upon the party in control of the White House (Lee 2009). Within the past few decades, partisan elites have swapped positions on proposals for health care reform and reductions in federal deficit. The nature of debate on these issues did not change or expand; instead, elites switched from support to opposition largely due to the fact that the other party proposed reform (Hetherington and Rudolph 2015). Desire to thwart the ambitions of the opposition may also outweigh concerns about political feasibility. For example, while it was clear neither the Senate nor the President would support its final passage, Republicans scheduled 40 separate votes in the House to repeal health care reform during the 2011-2012 session (Clinton et al. 2015; Bateman et al. n.d.).

If partisans continue to determine their issue stances based on their feelings toward the opposite party, conflict extension at the elite level could exacerbate the areas in which mass partisans disagree with one another. In this case, partisan conflict becomes not merely a matter of policy disagreement. With such hostility to their political opponents, it seems unlikely that the public will find common ground on political issues because they simply do not trust the other side to make good decisions (Hetherington and Rudolph 2015). Even if issue and ideological divisions in the electorate remain "close" (Fiorina 2005), the increasing importance of negative out-party affect will likely deepen them.

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