Leading the Leaders: Who Drives Affective Polarization Among Politicians?*

Samuel Frederick†

Columbia University

This version: August 15, 2024‡

Abstract

Scholars have recently noted an increase in partisan affective polarization at the mass level. Despite the growth in research about partisan hostility, little work has examined this phenomenon among politicians. In this research note, I present results from an original survey of American local elected officials. I show that politicians are most hostile toward out-party activists, followed by politicians and finally, by voters. My survey highlights an asymmetry in politicians' perceptions of the parties: politicians' feelings toward the out-party are closest, on average, to their feelings toward out-party activists, while politicians seem to distinguish their own party from its activists. This gap in attitudes toward the parties appears to increase affective polarization among politicians.

affective polarization | partisan identity | elite behavior

*This research was supported by funding from the Rapoport Family Foundation. The study design was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Columbia University.

†Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science, Columbia University. sdf2128@columbia.edu.

‡This draft is preliminary and incomplete. Please do not circulate without permission from the author.

Introduction

Political scientists have long debated whether politicians, activists, or the masses are to blame for increasing ideological polarization in American politics. For their part, politicians tend to be more polarized than the mass public (Bafumi and Herron, 2010), and ordinary citizens often follow political leaders (Broockman and Butler, 2017; Lenz, 2012; Zaller, 1992), indicating that politicians may have generated polarization (Carmines and Stimson, 1989). Others contend that extreme activists, through the provision of valuable campaign resources, pull politicians toward the extremes (Aldrich, 2011; Bawn et al., 2012; Cohen et al., 2008; Layman et al., 2010). Finally, Schickler (2016) documents the role of the mass public in driving polarization among politicians, showing how the public held established views on racial policy before politicians altered their stances.

While a great deal of work explores how different groups shape policy-based polarization among politicians, little work examines how groups shape *affective* polarization, hatred of the opposing party and warmth toward one's own party, among politicians. Amidst a rising interest in affective polarization at the mass level (e.g., Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012), Enders (2021) shows that politicians are even more affectively polarized than the public, and inter-partisan interactions between politicians have become increasingly hostile, if not violent, in recent years (Constantino, 2021; Griffiths, 2023). Yet, little work seeks to understand *why* politicians increasingly exhibit partisan animosity.

Politicians are a distinct group in American politics—both as a self-selected group and as a group subject to different forces than the masses. Politicians are surrounded by other politically engaged individuals, who influence how politicians perceive politics (Pereira, 2021). Unlike the masses, politicians tend to think ideologically (Broockman, 2016; Converse, 1964), and they must be wary of electoral challenges from the opposing party, which could make their partisan affiliations more potent. Therefore, by focusing on politicians,

research may highlight previously overlooked drivers of affective polarization that are either less powerful or entirely absent among the masses.

In this letter, I present results from an experiment embedded in a survey of local elected officials. Building on Druckman and Levendusky (2019), I randomly vary whether elites are asked their feelings toward the parties' voters, activists, or candidates and elected officials. In addition, I ask all respondents for their feelings toward the parties themselves, allowing me to parse how politicians' views of the parties relate to their views of party groups (Kingzette, 2021). In short, I am able to analyze *who* drives affective polarization among political leaders. My results indicate that politicians are most hostile toward out-party activists and least hostile toward voters. While their feelings toward the out-party are closest to their feelings toward activists on average, they separate their attitudes toward their own party from attitudes toward in-party activists. In this way, politicians display an asymmetry in perceptions of the parties that serves to exacerbate affective polarization.

Who Drives Affective Polarization?

Political parties are traditionally viewed as amalgams of "parties-in-the-electorate," "parties-as-organizations," and "parties-in-government," corresponding roughly to party voters, activists, and politicians (Aldrich, 2011; Hershey, 2007; Key, 1947; Sorauf, 1964). Due to their lower level of involvement in politics, party voters are generally conceived of separately from the party proper (Aldrich, 2011). Nonetheless, party voters are crucial to politicians' election and do exert pressure on the parties' policy positions (Canes-Wrone, Brady and Cogan, 2002; Hall and Thompson, 2018; Schickler, 2016). Politicians and activists, on the other hand, are generally treated as the central actors in parties: Aldrich (2011) defines parties in terms of politicians, while Bawn et al. (2012) and Cohen et al. (2008) conceive of parties

as coalitions of ideologically extreme activists.[1] Under both theories, there is a functionalist demarcation between activists, who supply the resources required to reach elected office, and the politicians, who often enact activists' preferred policies when they obtain power. These theories of parties suggest that scholars hoping to understand the group dynamics of partisan affective polarization should consider all three groups: voters, activists, and politicians.

In order for certain party groups to be driving affective polarization among politicians, it must be the case (1) that politicians feel differently about the distinct party groups and (2) that politicians' views of specific party groups are particularly closely related to their views of the parties themselves. For example, for party activists to contribute to politicians' affective polarization, politicians should feel uniquely coldly toward out-party activists *and* associate the opposing party with the activists. Thus, I begin by considering how feelings might vary toward different party groups and then, consider how perceptions of each group might relate to the parties themselves.

Existing studies of affective polarization at the mass level emphasize two characteristics of partisan groups which make them particularly likely to generate partisan animosity: ideological extremity and political engagement. On many issues, the average voter is not very extreme (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2008; Fowler et al., 2023; Levendusky, 2009; cf. Broockman, 2016), which places the average voter at a distance from party ideologues. Further, cognitive biases exaggerate their perceived differences with the opposing party (Druckman et al., 2022; Settle, 2018; Stone, 2023). Ideological extremity, by increasing both the real and perceived distance from opposing partisans, can therefore generate partisan hostility. Indeed, ideologically extreme out-partisans tend to evoke the most hostility from mass partisans (Druckman et al., 2022; Druckman and Levendusky, 2019; Kingzette, 2021), and ideological polarization generates more affectively polarized evaluations of candidates (Ro-

[1]"Activist" is here taken to be a broadly encompassing term, capturing everyone from those who take simple political actions beyond voting to interest group members, convention delegates, and campaign workers.

gowski and Sutherland, 2016). Additionally, Druckman et al. (2022) and Krupnikov and Ryan (2022) show that the mass public tends to like out-partisans less when told that the out-party members are politically engaged. Higher levels of ideological extremity and political engagement may explain why out-party politicians tend to drive affective polarization at the mass level more than voters (Druckman and Levendusky, 2019; Kingzette, 2021).

Building on the logic of mass-level studies, I expect that among opposing party groups, politicians feel the warmest and exhibit the least affective polarization toward voters, who are less extreme and engaged than politicians or activists (Bafumi and Herron, 2010; Druckman and Levendusky, 2019; Kingzette, 2021; Krupnikov and Ryan, 2022). On one hand, activists tend to be more ideologically extreme than politicians (e.g., Aldrich, 2011; Bawn et al., 2012; Layman et al., 2010), which may generate more hostility toward activists than politicians. On the other hand, politicians are, by definition, more engaged in politics than activists and often have to compete against out-party politicians to retain their jobs, plausibly aggravating partisan animosity toward out-party politicians (Sherif and Sherif, 1953). The zero-sum conflict between opposing-party politicians leads me to expect that politicians generate the most hostility and affective polarization, followed closely by party activists.

Hypothesis 1(a). *Politicians should feel more coldly toward out-party politicians than toward out-party activists and more coldly toward activists than out-party voters.*

Hypothesis 1(b). *Politicians should display the most affective polarization when asked about party politicians and the least polarization when asked about party voters, with activists falling between the two groups.*

There are, however, some reasons to suspect that elites might perceive the groups differently than the mass public. Politically engaged and partisan members of the public are more willing to contact politicians (Mason, 2018), and an increasing number of these contacts result in threats of violence (Hakim, Bensinger and Sullivan, 2024; Riccardi, 2023). Such interactions involving intense disputes are likely easier to remember than banal or positive

interactions with out-partisans (e.g., Kensinger, 2009; Qasim et al., 2023). The self-selected nature of contact and biased information processing may lead politicians to misperceive the public's policy positions (Broockman and Skovron, 2018; Kübler, 2024; Pereira, 2021; Pilet et al., 2024; Walgrave et al., 2023; Walgrave and Soontjens, 2023). Potentially compounding any misperceptions of party-group extremity, group members tend to perceive out-groups as more homogeneous than they are (e.g., Settle, 2018). Lastly, out-partisans from all groups are often the most direct obstacles to politicians keeping their jobs. Thus, due to biased contact, perceptions, and inter-group competition, we might expect all groups to generate relatively similar levels of hostility and affective polarization.

Hypothesis 2(a). *Politicians should feel similarly toward out-party activists, politicians, and voters.*

Hypothesis 2(b). *Politicians should display similar levels of affective polarization whether they are asked about party voters, activists, or politicians.*

Apart from heightening the salience of differences between groups, political engagement and extremity help determine which groups are "top-of-mind" when politicians think of the political parties (Druckman et al., 2022; Zaller, 1992). Extreme politicians and party leaders tend to receive the most (social) media attention (Ballard et al., 2023; Padgett, Dunaway and Darr, 2019; Zeitzoff, 2023). Consistent media coverage may make it easier for politicians to call to mind other politicians when thinking of the parties (Druckman et al., 2022). Media attention may even lead politicians to overestimate the prevalence of extreme politicians (Druckman and Levendusky, 2019; Druckman et al., 2022; Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). Indeed, at the mass level, Druckman and Levendusky (2019) and Kingzette (2021) find that feelings toward the parties as a whole are closer to feelings toward politicians than toward voters. Less engaged than politicians but more engaged than voters, activists might be more present than voters in the minds of politicians when thinking of the parties. Activists should, therefore, be distinguished from the party more than politicians but less than voters.

Still, by virtue of their unique environment, politicians could come to see voters, activists, politicians, and parties similarly—particularly if they interact most often with partisan and ideologically sorted voters (Mason, 2018) and if they perceive the out-party as more homogeneous than it is (Settle, 2018). In this case, politicians may distinguish less between each group and the broader party.

Hypothesis 3(a). *Politicians' affective polarization and feelings toward the out-party as a whole should be most similar to their feelings toward party politicians, followed by activists and then, by voters.*

Hypothesis 3(b). *Politicians' affective polarization and feelings toward the out-party as a whole should be similar to their feelings toward party activists, politicians, and voters.*

Study Design

To test these hypotheses, I embedded an experiment in an original survey of local elected officials. This survey was fielded by CivicPulse between March 20 and April 10, 2024. CivicPulse maintains a database of local elected officials (legislators and executives from counties, municipalities, and townships with populations over 1,000). In total, 513 local policymakers responded to the survey for a final response rate of 7%—comparable to other recent studies of American politicians (e.g., Druckman et al., 2023). Early in the survey, I asked all respondents to rate how they felt toward "the Democratic Party" and "the Republican Party" using feeling thermometers, ranging from very cold and negative (0) to very warm and positive (100).[2] Later in the survey, building on Druckman and Levendusky (2019), I randomly assigned respondents to answer feeling thermometer questions about the parties' "voters," "activists," *or* "candidates and elected officials" (hereafter politicians).[3]

[2]Full question wording for this study can be found in Appendix F

[3]Respondents were block randomized into treatments by random question order group, party, and whether they identified with a party on the traditional party identification battery or preferred one party on the party-based feeling thermometer. Every individual across blocks had the same probability of treatment. Details about covariate balance across conditions can be found in Appendix A.

This design allows me to evaluate whether different groups elicit different feelings from respondents.

I pre-registered my analyses at OSF.[4] My pre-registered analyses use out-party feeling thermometer ratings and affective polarization (the difference between in- and out-party feeling thermometer ratings) as the main outcome measures. Because these measures are only defined for partisans, I subset my data to party identifiers and leaners (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012). Of the 513 survey respondents, 450 identified with or leaned toward one of the parties.

My design differs in several ways from previous studies of affective polarization at the mass level. First, I include activists as a separate group in the question randomization, whereas Druckman and Levendusky (2019) include only voters and politicians. Yet, voters, politicians, and activists are crucial in theories of parties and polarization (e.g., Aldrich, 2011), suggesting all three should play a role in the study of politicians' affective polarization. Second, I use pre-treatment feeling thermometer ratings of the parties themselves (hereafter party feeling thermometers) in addition to feeling thermometer ratings of the randomized groups (hereafter party-group feeling thermometers). This feature of my design is similar to the study of Kingzette (2021) who asked respondents to rate the parties, average partisans, and politicians without randomization. However, by including pre-treatment party feeling thermometers *alongside* randomized party-group thermometers, I am able to increase power by using pre-post measures, while also retaining the benefits of causal identification from randomization.[5]

To determine whether changing the party group affects animus, I regress party-group

[4]The full pre-registration is located here: https://osf.io/tbryj/?view_only=792fa9b3f5754305b2c1f58948fc0f5c. Additional pre-registered model specifications are located in Appendix C.

[5]By including the pre-treatment party feeling thermometer measures, I am able to increase power by as much as 64%. Power simulations indicate my design has 80% power to detect effect sizes between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ of a standard deviation, amounting to between 6 and 8 points on feeling thermometer scales. These effect sizes are slightly larger than those found by Druckman and Levendusky (2019) and somewhat smaller than some of the compound effects in Druckman et al. (2022).

feeling thermometer measures on indicator variables for the party-group treatments and the pre-treatment party feeling thermometer ratings. For simplicity in comparing all three party-group treatments (i.e., politicians vs. voters, politicians vs. activists, and activists vs. voters), I run two separate regressions with different reference levels. Specifically, I run regressions of the following form:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 Politicians_i + \beta_2 Activists_i + \beta_3 Y_{i,party} + \varepsilon_i$$

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 Politicians_i + \beta_2 Voters_i + \beta_3 Y_{i,party} + \varepsilon_i$$

where Y is either the out-party party-group thermometer rating or the difference between the in- and out-party party-group thermometers (affective polarization). $Politicians$ is an indicator for whether the group thermometer asks about politicians. $Activists$ and $Voters$ are indicator variables corresponding to the activist or voter feeling thermometers, respectively. Y_{party} is the pre-treatment party version of the outcome measure.

Next, to determine which group's feeling thermometer ratings are more closely linked to those of the party as a whole, I regress the difference between the party-group thermometer ratings and the party thermometer ratings on indicators for the party groups.[6] These regressions take the following form:

$$Y_i^* = \alpha + \beta_1 Politicians_i + \beta_2 Activists_i + \varepsilon_i$$

$$Y_i^* = \alpha + \beta_1 Politicians_i + \beta_2 Voters_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where $Y_i^* = Y_i - Y_{i,party}$. In Appendix D, I also show that my results for group-party differences are robust to bootstrapped confidence intervals (Kingzette, 2021).

Because politicians as a group have distinctive considerations and goals, some may be

[6]For these models, I am primarily interested in the average difference between the group and party thermometers for each group.

concerned that survey responses are impacted by social desirability bias or electorally strategic calculations—that politicians may report feeling more warmly toward party voters than they actually do, believing it to be less acceptable to report ill will toward the mass public. In Appendix E, I provide several tests of social desirability bias and electoral calculations. I find large and statistically significant effects even for politicians who should experience the least pressure to obfuscate. Moreover, several of the observed trends are inconsistent with the social and electoral desirability hypotheses.

Results

In Table 1, I show results from regressions of out-party feeling thermometer ratings on party-group indicators and the pre-treatment party feeling thermometer ratings. We see that politicians feel much more coldly toward out-party politicians than out-party voters—a difference of more than 11 points on the 0 to 100 scale. This finding replicates the results of Druckman and Levendusky (2019) and Kingzette (2021) that individuals feel more coldly toward party elites than toward average partisans. Strikingly, the gap between thermometer ratings of voters and candidates is much larger than the gap of roughly 4 points found by Druckman and Levendusky (2019) and is slightly larger than the estimates of Kingzette (2021). In all, the large difference between feelings toward out-party politicians and voters offers some evidence in support of Hypothesis 1(a).

Turning next to feelings toward party activists, Table 1 shows that politicians dislike out-party activists even more than out-party candidates and elected officials—contrary to Hypothesis 1(a). In fact, local policymakers were 7 points colder toward out-party activists than candidates and 18 points colder toward out-party activists than voters. This finding lends further support to the results of Druckman et al. (2022) and Rogowski and Sutherland (2016): ideological extremity provokes more extreme affective responses. Activists, who are

often on the leading edge of polarization in American politics, tend to pull other groups toward the extremes (e.g., Bawn et al., 2012; Layman et al., 2010). Perhaps because of this extremity, even in relation to ideologically polarized elites, politicians express the greatest amount of disdain for opposing party activists relative to voters and other politicians.

The two final columns of Table 1 show results from regressions of affective polarization measures (the difference between in- and out-party feeling thermometers) on party-group indicators and pre-treatment party affective polarization. In both the third and fourth columns, we see that politicians are significantly more affectively polarized when thinking about candidates and elected officials compared to when they think about either activists or voters. The gap between in- and out-party feeling thermometer ratings is largest when thinking about politicians, indicating that politicians may be driving affective polarization among elites, as expected under Hypothesis 1(b). However, interestingly, there is no significant difference in affective polarization between voter and activist thermometers—a result more consistent with Hypothesis 2(b).

Overall, then, my results in Table 1 show that politicians' evaluations of the out-party groups do exhibit considerable variation, offering little support for Hypothesis 2(a). On the other hand, these findings offer only mixed evidence in support of Hypotheses 1(a) and 1(b). As expected, politicians and activists do indeed provoke more hostility and affective polarization than voters. However, activists were viewed less favorably than politicians, suggesting that ideological extremity is potentially a more powerful influence on elite affect than political engagement or direct zero-sum competition, or that activists' type of political engagement may be viewed less favorably than running for office. Affective polarization was essentially the same whether measured using voter or activist feeling thermometers, which is somewhat compatible with Hypothesis 2(b). I explore this finding regarding affective polarization more below.

Table 1: Feeling Thermometer Ratings and Party Groups

	Out-Party Thermometer		Affective Polarization	
	Voter Reference	Activist Reference	Voter Reference	Activist Reference
Politicians FT	-11.183***	7.062***	5.435*	5.837*
	(2.046)	(1.740)	(2.590)	(2.594)
Activists FT	-18.245***		-0.402	
	(2.135)		(2.780)	
Voters FT		18.245***		0.402
		(2.135)		(2.780)
Party FT Rating	0.698***	0.698***		
	(0.043)	(0.043)		
Party FT Difference			0.699***	0.699***
			(0.038)	(0.038)
Constant	36.118***	17.874***	36.989***	36.586***
	(1.693)	(1.286)	(1.964)	(1.977)
N	441	441	441	441

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

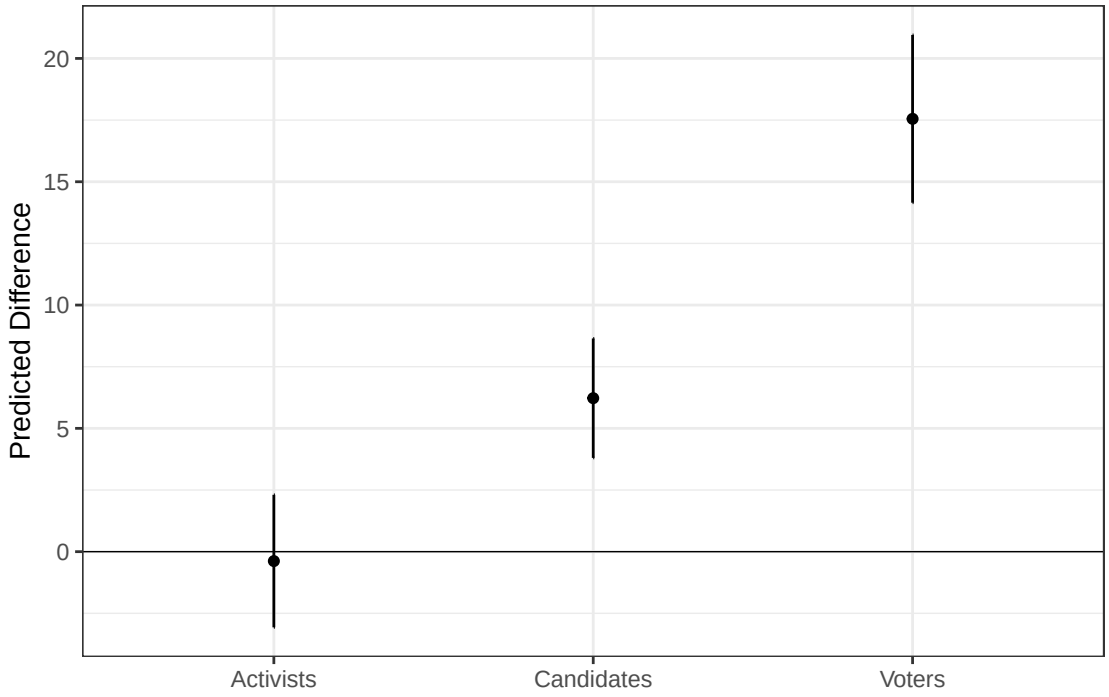
Note: OLS regressions of out-party feeling thermometer ratings (columns 1 and 2) and feeling thermometer difference (columns 3 and 4) on randomized group indicators and party-based outcome measures. Regression models fit with HC2 standard errors (in parentheses).

To test Hypotheses 3(a) and 3(b), I evaluate the results from regressions of the difference between group- and party-based feeling thermometers on party-group indicators. Figure 1 shows that ratings of out-party activists are not significantly different from ratings of the out-party as a whole, conflicting with Hypothesis 3(a). Politicians are about 6 points more warm toward out-party politicians than toward the out-party as a whole, on average. Finally, as expected under Hypothesis 3(a), politicians feel much more warmly toward out-party voters than toward the party as a whole: local policymakers rate out-party voters more than 17.5 points higher than the out-party as a whole on average. The small and statistically insignificant difference between out-party activist and out-party thermometer ratings suggests that politicians' feelings toward the out-party may be driven by their feelings toward out-party activists. This finding is notable in light of the results of Druckman and Levendusky (2019) and Kingzette (2021)—both of whom find that the mass public connects the out-party most strongly with out-party politicians.

Next, I examine how affective polarization differs when comparing party-group and party measures (see Figure 2). Mirroring my results from Table 1, I find that the affective polarization toward voters and activists is about 10 points lower than affective polarization toward the parties. On the other hand, affective polarization toward candidates and elected officials is only about 5 points lower than party-based polarization. Though the differences between groups are not statistically significant, Figure 2 offers suggestive evidence in line with Hypothesis 3(a) that affective polarization among politicians is more driven by elites than by average partisans in the electorate—that elites are thinking of other politicians when thinking about the parties.

My results provide mixed support for Hypothesis 3(a). As expected, politicians' feelings toward the out-party are less closely related to their feelings toward out-party voters than toward politicians and activists. Moreover, affective polarization, measured using thermometer ratings of politicians, is more tightly linked to party-based affective polarization.

Figure 1: Difference Between Group and Party Out-Party Feeling Thermometers



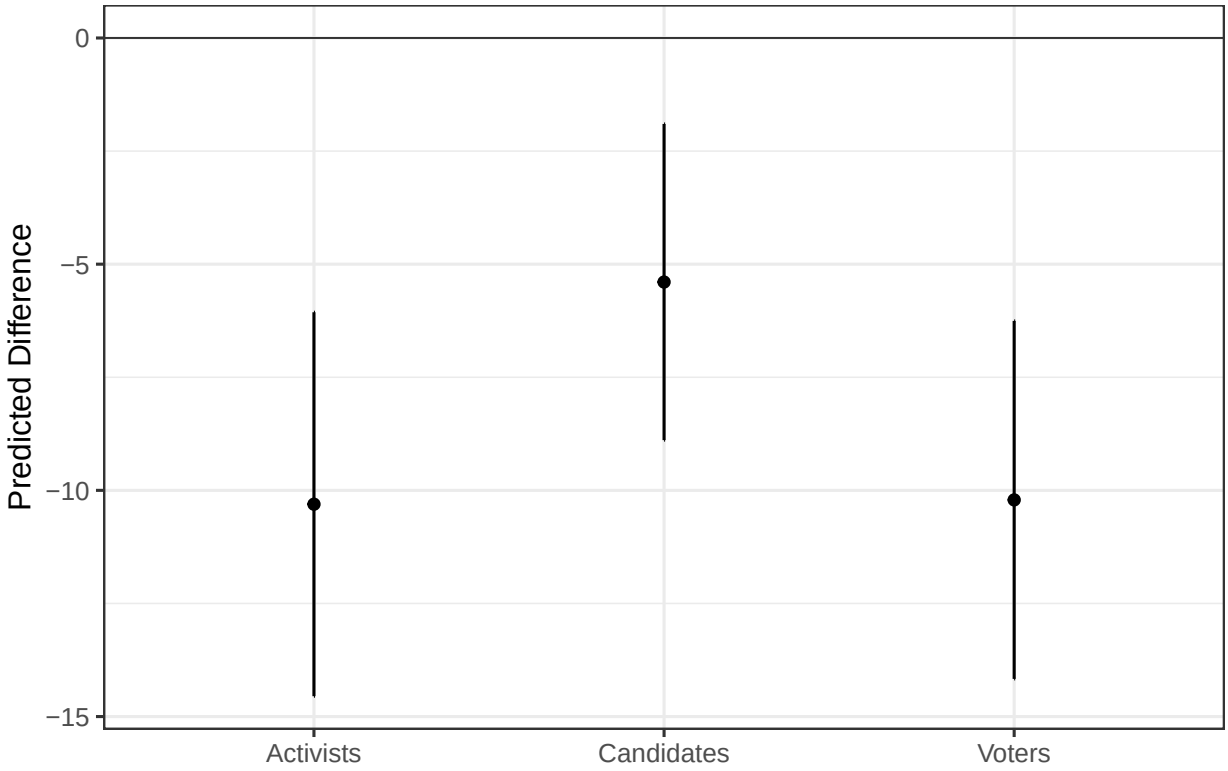
Note: Predicted difference between group and party thermometer ratings from OLS regressions of differences on group indicators. Regression models fit with HC2 standard errors. Bars display 95% confidence intervals. Full regression output is in Appendix B.

That said, politicians' views toward the out-party are even more related to their views of out-party activists, on average, than their views toward out-party politicians, inconsistent with my expectations. Additionally, activist feeling thermometers do not generate a level of affective polarization that is closer to party-based affect than voter feeling thermometers—again, contrary to expectations under Hypothesis 3(a) but somewhat congruent with Hypothesis 3(b).

Exploratory Analyses: In-Party Feeling Thermometers

Given the results of Rogowski and Sutherland (2016), it is rather counterintuitive that out-party activists provoke the most hostility among politicians but do not generate the most affectively polarized evaluations. As such, I explore the in-party part of the affective

Figure 2: Difference Between Group and Party Affective Polarization



Note: Predicted difference between group and party affective polarization from OLS regressions of differences on group indicators. Regression models fit with HC2 standard errors. Bars display 95% confidence intervals. Full regression output is in Appendix B.

polarization measure to better understand these results. Though not pre-registered, I provide the results of exploratory analyses, repeating the above analyses for in-party feeling thermometers.

Table 2 displays the results of regressions of in-party thermometer ratings on party-group indicators and pre-treatment party thermometer ratings. Echoing my results for out-party thermometer ratings, politicians feel more coldly toward in-party politicians than in-party voters; however, this gap is much smaller than the gap between out-party politicians and voters (4.4 points for the in-party as opposed to 11.2 for the out-party). Notably, politicians feel differently about in-party activists than other in-party groups: they are roughly 18.5 points colder toward in-party activists than toward in-party voters, and their average rating of in-party activists is an ambivalent 53. These results offer one explanation for the affective polarization results above: politicians generally are not fond of party activists. Out-party activists provoke a unique amount of hostility, but in-party activists are also not viewed very favorably. The relative dislike of both groups of activists compresses the amount of affective polarization observed using activist thermometer ratings. Further, politicians feel much more warmly toward out-party voters than activists or other politicians, but the gap between feelings toward in-party voters relative to in-party politicians is smaller. Again, this seems to compress the amount of affective polarization observed for voters and leads to affective polarization being the largest for politician thermometer ratings.

In Figure 3, I show the differences between group and party-based in-party thermometer ratings. Politicians feel roughly 11 points more warmly toward their party than toward their party's activists, and nearly 7 points more warmly toward their party's voters than toward their party. They do not differ significantly in their attitudes toward their party or their party's politicians. These results highlight a striking asymmetry in elite perceptions of and attitudes toward the parties: politicians appear to associate the *opposing* party with the party's activists but separate their own party from party activists. Additionally, politicians

appear to connect their *own* party with their party's politicians. Likely due to the extremity of party activists (Layman et al., 2010), this association leads elites to dislike the opposing party more than if they saw the other party in terms of its voters. On the other hand, the perceptual linkage between the in-party and its politicians enables elites to maintain warmer feelings toward the in-party than if they tied their own party more closely to its activists. In turn, these asymmetric perceptions of the parties serve to reinforce affective polarization. Indeed, my results indicate that if politicians perceived both parties in terms of the same groups, party-based affective polarization could be between 5 and 10 points lower.

There are several possible reasons we observe these differing perceptions of the in- and out-parties. First, Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue that a desire to generate intergroup comparisons that are positive for the in-group is inherent in the process of social identification. Thus, politicians should set the terms of the comparison most favorably to their own party, viewing the in-party as distinct from the most extreme activists but the out-party as inextricably connected to party activists. Second, the process of positive group differentiation may be exacerbated by cognitive biases that serve to exaggerate perceived intergroup differences. Politicians could project their attitudes and beliefs onto their own party, leading them to perceive that they are more similar to their own party. Indeed, Pereira (2021) finds that politicians project their policy beliefs onto their party. The projection explanation is consistent with my findings that politicians' views of the in-party are most related to those of in-party politicians—a partisan subgroup of which they are members. Further, politicians might engage in motivated reasoning, seeking out confirming and rejecting disconfirming evidence regarding their beliefs about the parties (e.g., Taber and Lodge, 2006). Thus, the process of group identification and cognitive biases offer potential reasons politicians view the parties as they do.

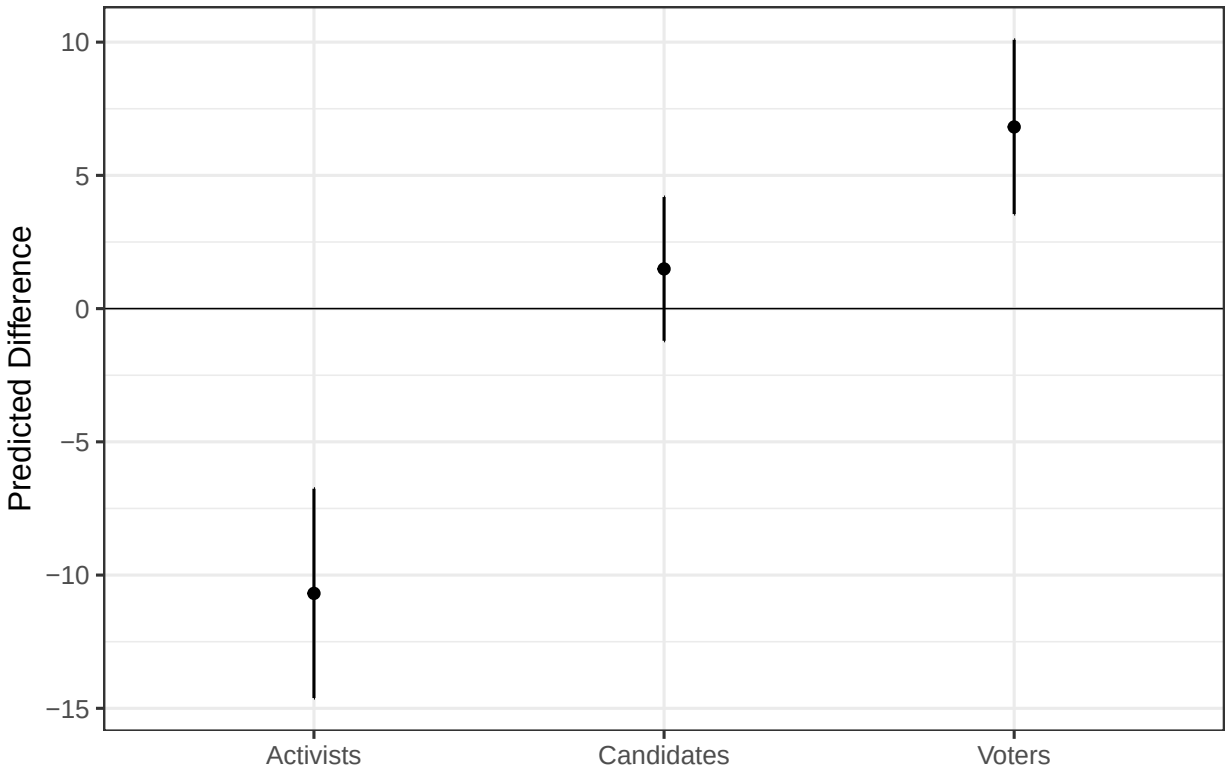
Table 2: In-Party Thermometer Ratings and Party Groups (Exploratory)

	Voter Reference	Activist Reference
Politicians FT	-4.420*	14.069***
	(1.815)	(2.204)
Activists FT	-18.489***	
	(2.324)	
Voters FT		18.489***
		(2.324)
Party FT Rating	0.528***	0.528***
	(0.058)	(0.058)
Constant	72.385***	53.896***
	(1.388)	(1.854)
N	444	444

+ p $<$ 0.1, * p $<$ 0.05, ** p $<$ 0.01, *** p $<$ 0.001

Note: OLS regressions of in-party feeling thermometer ratings on randomized group indicators and party-based outcome measures. Regression models fit with HC2 standard errors (in parentheses).

Figure 3: Difference Between Group and Party In-Party Thermometers (Exploratory)



Note: Predicted difference between group and party in-party thermometers from OLS regressions of differences on group indicators. Regression models fit with HC2 standard errors. Bars display 95% confidence intervals. Full regression output is in Appendix B.

Discussion

In this research note, I presented results from an original survey of American local policymakers. My results indicate that politicians dislike out-party activists the most intensely, followed by out-party candidates. At the same time, politicians elicited the most affective polarization relative to other groups while there was little difference in affective polarization between voter and activist thermometers. My results for affective polarization are counter-intuitive in light of previous studies and politicians' feelings toward out-party activists. By examining in-party feeling thermometers in exploratory analyses, I was better able to sort out the reasons for these results: relative to other groups, politicians feel the coldest toward

party activists—even in their own party.

These results provide important insights into study of affective polarization. First, while much of the existing affective polarization research has focused on the mass public, this note presents novel findings regarding affective polarization at the elite level, showing both how affective polarization among politicians resembles and differs from affect at the mass level. Second, in light of increasing evidence that elites misperceive the public (e.g., Broockman and Skovron, 2018; Kübler, 2024; Pilet et al., 2024; Walgrave et al., 2023), scholars may worry that politicians' feelings toward the public are skewed by misperceptions and unequal patterns of mass-elite contact (Pereira, 2021; Walgrave and Soontjens, 2023). Reassuringly, politicians appear to distinguish the engaged and extreme voters who often contact politicians from the parties' voters, viewing out-party voters more favorably than other out-party groups. Third, my results indicate who drives partisan hostility among politicians: out-party activists. Ideologically extreme and politically engaged out-party activists evoke a great deal of hostility among politicians, indicating that ideological extremity and political engagement are key to understanding partisan hostility among politicians (congruent with the mass-level results of Druckman et al., 2022; Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016). Future work could explore how politicians view activists—who they see as activists and what attributes of activists are most central in driving hostility. Fourth, I find a notable asymmetry in politicians' perceptions of the parties: they view the opposing party primarily through the lens of out-party activists, but they separate their own party from its activists. Instead, their views of the in-party are closest to those of in-party politicians, on average. Given the distaste with which politicians view activists, this perception asymmetry reinforces affective polarization among politicians.

References

Aldrich, John. 2011. *Why Parties? A Second Look*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bafumi, Joseph and Michael Herron. 2010. "Leapfrog Representation and Extremism: A Study of American Voters and Their Members in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 104(3):519–542.

Ballard, Andrew, Ryan DeTamble, Spencer Dorsey, Michael Heseltine and Marcus Johnson. 2023. "Dynamics of Polarizing Rhetoric in Congressional Tweets." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 48(1).

Bawn, Kathleen, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel and John Zaller. 2012. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 10(3):571–597.

Broockman, David. 2016. "Approaches to Studying Policy Representation." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41(1):181–215.

Broockman, David and Christopher Skovron. 2018. "Bias in Perceptions of Public Opinion Among Political Elites." *American Political Science Review* 112(3):542–563.

Broockman, David and Daniel Butler. 2017. "The Causal Effects of Elite Position-Taking on Voter Attitudes: Field Experiments with Elite Communication." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(1):208–221.

Canes-Wrone, Brandice, David W. Brady and John F. Cogan. 2002. "Out of Step, Out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting." *American Political Science Review* 96(1):127–140. Publisher: Cambridge University Press.
URL: *https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/abs/out-of-step-out-of-office-electoral-accountability-and-house-members-voting/A5E4346ED9DD671DEFC6EE48064A0812*

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

Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel and John Zaller. 2008. *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Constantino, Annika Kim. 2021. "House Democrats Move to Censure GOP Rep. Gosar over Anime Video Depicting Him Killing AOC.". Publication Title: CNBC.
URL: *https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/12/house-democrats-move-to-censure-gop-rep-paul-gosar-over-violent-video-.html*

Converse, Philip. 1964. The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. In *Ideology and Its Discontents*, ed. David Aprter. New York: The Free Press pp. 206–261.

Druckman, James N and Matthew S Levendusky. 2019. "What Do We Measure When We Measure Affective Polarization?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 83(1):114–122.

Druckman, James N., Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, Matthew Levendusky and John Barry Ryan. 2022. "(Mis)estimating Affective Polarization." *Journal of Politics* 84(2):1106–1117.

Druckman, James N., Suji Kang, James Chu, Michael N. Stagnaro, Jan G. Voelkel, Joseph S. Mernyk, Sophia L. Pink, Chrystal Redekopp, David G. Rand and Robb Willer. 2023. "Correcting misperceptions of out-partisans decreases American legislators' support for undemocratic practices." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120(23):e2301836120.

Enders, Adam. 2021. "Issues vs. Affect: How Do Elite and Mass Polarization Compare?" *The Journal of Politics* 83(4):1873–1877.

Fiorina, Morris, Samuel Abrams and Jeremy Pope. 2008. "Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings." *The Journal of Politics* 70(2).

Fowler, Anthony, Seth Hill, Jeffrey Lewis, Chris Tausanovitch, Lynn Vavreck and Christopher Warshaw. 2023. "Moderates." *American Political Science Review* 117(2):643–660.

Griffiths, Brent D. 2023. "Kevin McCarthy threatened to beat up Democrat Eric Swalwell on the House floor as the pair cursed at each other: report.".
URL: *https://www.businessinsider.com/kevin-mccarthy-eric-swalwell-house-floor-curse-weak-2023-7*

Hakim, Danny, Ken Bensinger and Eileen Sullivan. 2024. "'We'll See You at Your House': How Fear and Menace Are Transforming Politics." *New York Times* .
URL: *https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/19/us/politics/political-violence.html*

Hall, Andrew B. and Daniel M. Thompson. 2018. "Who Punishes Extremist Nominees? Candidate Ideology and Turning Out the Base in US Elections." *American Political Science Review* 112(3):509–524.
URL: *https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S0003055418000023/type/journal$_a$rticle*

Hershey, Marjorie. 2007. *Party Politics in America*. 12th ed. New York: Pearson Longman.

Iyengar, Shanto, Guarav Sood and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social-Identity Perspective on Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(3):405–431.

Kensinger, Elizabeth. 2009. "Remembering the Details: Effects of Emotion." *Emotion Review* 1(2):99–113.

Key, V.O. 1947. *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*. 2nd ed. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

Kingzette, Jon. 2021. "Who Do You Loathe? Feelings toward Politicians vs. Ordinary People in the Opposing Party." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 8(1):75–84.

Krupnikov, Yanna and John Barry Ryan. 2022. *The Other Divide*. Cambridge University Press. Google-Books-ID: XY2AzgEACAAJ.

Kübler, Marie. 2024. "United in Misperception? How Politicians and Party Electorates Assess Each Other's Policy Preferences." *Party Politics* .

Layman, Geoffrey C., Thomas M. Carsey, John C. Green, Richard Herrera and Rosalyn Cooperman. 2010. "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics." *The American Political Science Review* 104(2):324–346.

Lenz, Gabriel. 2012. *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 How Conservatives Became Republicans*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mason, Liliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Padgett, Jeremy, Johanna Dunaway and Joshua Darr. 2019. "As Seen on TV? How Gatekeeping Makes the U.S. House Seem More Extreme." *Journal of Communication* 69(6):696–719.

Pereira, Miguel. 2021. "Understanding and Reducing Biases in Elite Beliefs About the Electorate." *American Political Science Review* 115(4):1308–1324.

Pilet, Jean-Benoit, Lior Sheffer, Luzia Helfer, Frederic Varone, Rens Vliegenthart and Stefaan Walgrave. 2024. "Do Politicians Outside the United States Also Think Voters Are More Conservative than They Really Are?" *American Political Science Review* 118(2):1037–1045.

Qasim, Salman, Uma Mohan, Joel Stein and Joshua Jacobs. 2023. "Neuronal Activity in the Human Amygdala and Hippocampus Enhances Emotional Memory Encoding." *Nature Human Behavior* 7:754–764.

Riccardi, Nicholas. 2023. "U.S. grapples with rising threats of political violence as 2024 election looms." *PBS NewsHour* .
URL: *https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/u-s-grapples-with-rising-threats-of-political-violence-as-2024-election-looms*

Rogowski, Jon C. and Joseph L. Sutherland. 2016. "How Ideology Fuels Affective Polarization." *Political Behavior* 38(2):485–508.

Schickler, Eric. 2016. *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932-1965*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Settle, Jamie. 2018. *Frenemies: How Social Media Polarizes America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sherif, Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif. 1953. *Groups in Harmony and Tension: An Integration of Studies on Intergroup Relations*. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers.

Sorauf, Frank. 1964. *Political Parties in the American System*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Stone, Daniel. 2023. *Undue Hate: A Behavioral Economic Analysis of Hostile Polarization in US Politics and Beyond.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Taber, Charles S. and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3):755–769. Publisher: [Midwest Political Science Association, Wiley].
URL: *https://www.jstor.org/stable/3694247*

Tajfel, Henri and John Turner. 1986. The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In *The Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Stephen Worchel and William Austin. Chicago: Hall Publishers.

Tversky, Amos and Daniel Kahneman. 1973. "Availability: A Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability." *Cognitive Psychology* 5:207–232.

Walgrave, Stefaan, Arno Jansen, Julie Sevenans, Karolin Soontjens, Jean-Benoit Pilet, Nathalie Brack, Frédéric Varone, Luzia Helfer, Rens Vliegenthart, Toni van der Meer, Christian Breunig, Stefanie Bailer, Lior Sheffer and Peter John Loewen. 2023. "Inaccurate Politicians: Elected Representatives' Estimations of Public Opinion in Four Countries." *Journal of Politics* 85(1):209–222.

Walgrave, Stefaan and Karolin Soontjens. 2023. "How Politicians Learn About Public Opinion." *Research & Politics* 10(3).

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zeitzoff, Thomas. 2023. *Nasty Politics: The Logic of Insults, Threats, and Incitement.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Supplementary Information for "Who Drives Affective Polarization Among Politicians?"

Samuel Frederick

Contents

A Covariate Balance **1**

B Full Regression Results **4**

C Alternative Model Specifications **6**

D Bootstrapped Differences Between Group and Party Feeling Thermometers **13**

E Social Desirability Bias **14**
E.1 Party-Based Feeling Thermometers 14
E.2 Electoral Competition 17

F Survey Questionnaire **22**

References **24**

A Covariate Balance

Below, I show group means in the party identifier data subset for the main covariates used for LASSO covariate selection in Appendix C. Among the 132 differences displayed in the table, only three reach traditional levels of statistical significance: the differences between the politician and voter groups are significant for the percent noncitizen, percent foreignborn, and percent veteran.

Table A.0.1: Covariate Balance by Randomized Feeling Thermometer Group

	Activists (N=150)	**Politicians** (N=150)	**Voters** (N=150)
Survey Questionnaire			
Policy Dim. 1[1]	0.05	0.00	-0.05
Policy Dim. 1 (Squared)[1]	0.61	0.67	0.62

Policy Dim. 2[2]	-0.02	0.01	0.01
Policy Dim. 2 (Squared)[2]	0.52	0.43	0.47
Competition	40.56	44.96	39.19
Competition NA	0.22	0.25	0.24
In-Party Thermometer	63.79	67.53	65.19
Out-Party Thermometer	17.68	19.07	18.82
Affective Polarization	46.10	49.03	46.82
Party-Consistent Ideology[3]	6.86	7.02	6.75
Ideology DK/Prefer Not to Say	0.01	0.05	0.04
Democrat	0.44	0.44	0.44
Party Strength[4]	2.23	2.31	2.26
Government Experience[5]	10.89	12.83	10.52
Random Question Order	0.48	0.48	0.52
County-Level Election Results[6]			
Democratic Voteshare 2020	0.46	0.46	0.47
Abs(Democratic Voteshare - 0.5)	0.15	0.15	0.16
In-Party Voteshare 2020	0.58	0.57	0.56
Government-Level 2022 ACS 5-Year Data			
log(Government Population)	9.25	9.22	9.46
County-Level 2022 ACS 5-Year Data[7]			
Population Density (Square Miles)	660.70	545.23	737.88
Renter-Occupied Housing Percent[8]	29.47	29.59	31.04
Age 18-39 Percent	27.93	28.00	28.72
Age 40-59 Percent	25.10	25.14	25.15
60 and Over Percent	25.82	25.80	24.65
High School or Less Percent[9]	39.01	39.57	38.95
College Percent[9]	19.27	18.81	19.23

Graduate or Professional School Percent[9]	12.25	11.58	12.04
Median Household Income	74467.08	73394.02	74127.75
Female Percent	49.96	50.02	50.15
Veteran Percent[10]	7.13	7.63	7.02
Hispanic Percent	11.97	9.95	12.53
Nonhispanic American Indian and Alaska Native Percent	0.57	0.43	0.59
Nonhispanic Asian Percent	3.18	2.93	3.42
Nonhispanic Black Percent	6.95	7.95	8.41
Nonhispanic Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Percent	0.08	0.09	0.08
Nonhispanic Other Percent	0.39	0.33	0.35
Nonhispanic White Percent	73.45	74.95	71.28
Foreignborn Percent	8.39	7.00	8.79
Noncitizen Percent	4.07	3.47	4.31
Married Percent[11]	51.33	50.95	50.82
Census Region			
West	0.17	0.18	0.17
Midwest	0.35	0.40	0.36
Northeast	0.26	0.22	0.24
South	0.22	0.20	0.23

[1]First dimension factor analysis scores from five policy questions.
[2]Second dimension factor analysis scores from five policy questions.
[3]0-10, higher scores indicate an ideology that is 'more consistent' with party (e.g., more liberal Democrats).
[4]1-3, from party leaner to strong partisan.
[5]Answers from open-ended question about length of government service. I coded answers indicating some nonspecific time less than 1 year in government as 1 year (e.g., "under a year" $\rightarrow$ 1). I coded answers indicating that the number given was uncertain as the number (e.g., "75+" $\rightarrow$ 75). Where multiple answers were given given (both time elected and total time in government), answers were coded as total time in government.

[6] Two-Party Voteshare from 2020 presidential election at the county level from MIT Election Data and Science Lab (2018). Where the sum of county-level results did not match statewide totals, county-level results were taken directly from state election offices. Alaska results were calculated at the state legislative district level because absentee ballots were only presented districtwide. Maine reports overseas ballots at the congressional district level, as such these ballots are omitted here, following MIT Election Data and Science Lab (2018); however, results using overseas ballots imputed at the county level from Voting and Election Science Team (2020) are similar.
[7] One municipal government is split between two counties. I use the county FIPS code assigned by CivicPulse.
[8] Percent of Occupied Housing Units
[9] Percent of Population 25 Years and Over
[10] Percent of Civilian Population 18 Years and Over
[11] Percent of Population 15 Years and Over

B Full Regression Results

Table B.0.1: Full Regression Results for Group-Party Differences

	Affective Polarization		In-Party FT		Out-Party FT	
	Voter Ref.	Activist Ref.	Voter Ref.	Activist Ref.	Voter Ref.	Activist Ref.
Politicians FT	4.816+	4.912+	-5.328*	12.177***	-11.327***	6.605***
	(2.693)	(2.805)	(2.162)	(2.431)	(2.130)	(1.846)
Activists FT	-0.095		-17.505***		-17.932***	
	(2.960)		(2.607)		(2.212)	
Voters FT		0.095		17.505***		17.932***
		(2.960)		(2.607)		(2.212)
Constant	-10.211***	-10.306***	6.818***	-10.687***	17.551***	-0.381
	(2.019)	(2.165)	(1.668)	(2.004)	(1.735)	(1.371)
N	441	441	444	444	441	441

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: OLS regressions of difference between group and party thermometers on group indicators. Models fit with HC2 standard errors. Columns 1 and 2 (Affective Polarization) correspond to Figure 2. Columns 3 and 4 (In-Party FT) correspond to Figure 3. Columns 5 and 6 (Out-Party FT) correspond to Figure 1.

C Alternative Model Specifications

In this section, I present alternative pre-registered model specifications. First, I display all main-text model specifications using a subset of the data which contains individuals who did not identify with a party on the party identification battery but who leaned toward a party on the feeling thermometer ratings. Second, I present all main-text model specifications using LASSO-selected covariates (Belloni, Chernozhukov and Hansen, 2014; Bloniarz et al., 2016). Third, because the perceived electoral competitiveness and ideological identification questions allow for explicit non-answers, I also fit another set of models using grouped LASSO to select covariates (Yang and Zou, 2015). While the grouped LASSO selection process is not pre-registered, it is functionally similar to the standard LASSO. However, the grouped LASSO allows me to include zero-imputed competition and ideology scores along with missingness dummies, either selecting *both* the zero-imputed main variable *and* the corresponding missingness indicator or neither. Including the zero-imputed variable alongside the missingness indicators is potentially important because nearly 27% of respondents selected at least one of the "Not Applicable" options for perceived electoral competition or ideology, reducing the amount of data with which the standard LASSO covariate selection is fit.

The main covariates used in covariate selection are listed in Table A.0.1. For the subset of party identifiers, I include individual block identifiers (the unique combinations of the "Democrat" indicator and the "Random Question Order" indicator). For the data subset which includes both party identifiers and feeling-thermometer partisans, the individual block identifiers are the unique combinations of the "Democrat", "Random Question Order", and "Feeling-Thermometer Partisan" indicators. It should also be noted that, while the ungrouped LASSO covariate selection was performed using the unimputed competition and ideology variables, the models fit when these variables were selected used the zero-imputed competition and ideology variables and included the missingness indicators, following my pre-registration.

Table C.0.1: Out-Party Ratings, Voter Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	-11.183***	-11.113***	-10.910***	-11.123***	-10.520***	-10.449***
	(2.046)	(2.116)	(2.093)	(2.016)	(2.048)	(2.020)
Activists FT	-18.245***	-17.243***	-16.978***	-18.611***	-17.944***	-17.407***
	(2.135)	(2.134)	(2.141)	(2.068)	(2.079)	(2.091)
Party FT Rating	0.698***	0.607***	0.594***	0.691***	0.636***	0.592***
	(0.043)	(0.051)	(0.052)	(0.042)	(0.048)	(0.051)
Constant	36.118***	38.831***	40.080***	36.132***	41.210***	43.543***
	(1.693)	(5.290)	(5.249)	(1.688)	(4.220)	(5.396)
N	441	427	427	480	470	464
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		22	23		3	20

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.0.2: Out-Party Ratings, Activist Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	7.062***	6.130***	6.067***	7.489***	7.424***	6.958***
	(1.740)	(1.767)	(1.795)	(1.629)	(1.669)	(1.656)
Voters FT	18.245***	17.243***	16.978***	18.611***	17.944***	17.407***
	(2.135)	(2.134)	(2.141)	(2.068)	(2.079)	(2.091)
Party FT Rating	0.698***	0.607***	0.594***	0.691***	0.636***	0.592***
	(0.043)	(0.051)	(0.052)	(0.042)	(0.048)	(0.051)
Constant	17.874***	21.588***	23.102***	17.521***	23.266***	26.136***
	(1.286)	(5.209)	(5.107)	(1.194)	(3.955)	(5.050)
N	441	427	427	480	470	464
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		22	23		3	20

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.0.3: Affective Polarization, Voter Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	5.435*	5.032+	4.780+	6.204*	5.472*	5.349*
	(2.590)	(2.702)	(2.730)	(2.512)	(2.593)	(2.554)
Activists FT	-0.402	-1.825	-2.017	0.230	-1.311	-1.400
	(2.780)	(2.670)	(2.674)	(2.640)	(2.538)	(2.500)
Party FT Difference	0.699***	0.615***	0.619***	0.700***	0.619***	0.627***
	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.036)	(0.040)	(0.039)
Constant	36.989***	20.655**	21.877***	35.218***	19.677**	22.033***
	(1.964)	(6.301)	(6.087)	(1.911)	(6.477)	(5.592)
N	441	426	426	480	464	464
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		11	12		18	13

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table C.0.4: Affective Polarization, Activist Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	5.837*	6.857**	6.797**	5.973*	6.783**	6.750**
	(2.594)	(2.500)	(2.490)	(2.451)	(2.344)	(2.336)
Voters FT	0.402	1.825	2.017	-0.230	1.311	1.400
	(2.780)	(2.670)	(2.674)	(2.640)	(2.538)	(2.500)
Party FT Difference	0.699***	0.615***	0.619***	0.700***	0.619***	0.627***
	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.036)	(0.040)	(0.039)
Constant	36.586***	18.830**	19.860***	35.448***	18.366**	20.633***
	(1.977)	(6.189)	(5.880)	(1.838)	(6.469)	(5.449)
N	441	426	426	480	464	464
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		11	12		18	13

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table C.0.5: In-Party Ratings, Voter Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	-4.420*	-4.925**	-5.082**	-3.679*	-4.078*	-4.061*
	(1.815)	(1.844)	(1.869)	(1.850)	(1.784)	(1.893)
Activists FT	-18.489***	-17.941***	-18.162***	-18.198***	-18.114***	-18.635***
	(2.324)	(2.289)	(2.289)	(2.287)	(2.217)	(2.233)
Party FT Rating	0.528***	0.459***	0.455***	0.558***	0.476***	0.491***
	(0.058)	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.059)	(0.055)
Constant	72.385***	55.256***	53.754***	70.673***	60.013***	58.100***
	(1.388)	(4.487)	(5.368)	(1.445)	(4.351)	(5.100)
N	444	433	433	483	472	467
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		11	17		4	20

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.0.6: In-Party Ratings, Activist Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	14.069***	13.016***	13.080***	14.519***	14.035***	14.574***
	(2.204)	(2.084)	(2.054)	(2.120)	(2.070)	(2.014)
Voters FT	18.489***	17.941***	18.162***	18.198***	18.114***	18.635***
	(2.324)	(2.289)	(2.289)	(2.287)	(2.217)	(2.233)
Party FT Rating	0.528***	0.459***	0.455***	0.558***	0.476***	0.491***
	(0.058)	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.059)	(0.055)
Constant	53.896***	37.315***	35.592***	52.475***	41.900***	39.465***
	(1.854)	(4.574)	(5.404)	(1.759)	(4.289)	(5.137)
N	444	433	433	483	472	467
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		11	17		4	20

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.0.7: Group-Party Difference Out-Party Ratings, Voter Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	-11.327***	-11.327***	-11.327***	-11.270***	-11.270***	-10.518***
	(2.130)	(2.130)	(2.130)	(2.100)	(2.100)	(2.105)
Activists FT	-17.932***	-17.932***	-17.932***	-18.639***	-18.639***	-17.853***
	(2.212)	(2.212)	(2.212)	(2.163)	(2.163)	(2.190)
Constant	17.551***	17.551***	17.551***	17.509***	17.509***	13.500**
	(1.735)	(1.735)	(1.735)	(1.741)	(1.741)	(4.302)
N	441	441	441	480	480	471
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		0	0		0	4

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table C.0.8: Group-Party Difference Out-Party Ratings, Activist Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	6.605***	6.605***	6.605***	7.369***	7.369***	7.335***
	(1.846)	(1.846)	(1.846)	(1.741)	(1.741)	(1.783)
Voters FT	17.932***	17.932***	17.932***	18.639***	18.639***	17.853***
	(2.212)	(2.212)	(2.212)	(2.163)	(2.163)	(2.190)
Constant	-0.381	-0.381	-0.381	-1.130	-1.130	-4.353
	(1.371)	(1.371)	(1.371)	(1.284)	(1.284)	(4.257)
N	441	441	441	480	480	471
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		0	0		0	4

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table C.0.9: Group-Party Difference Affective Polarization, Voter Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	4.816+	4.816+	4.956+	5.497*	5.497*	5.784*
	(2.693)	(2.693)	(2.672)	(2.599)	(2.599)	(2.588)
Activists FT	-0.095	-0.095	-0.420	0.847	0.847	0.762
	(2.960)	(2.960)	(2.925)	(2.819)	(2.819)	(2.793)
Constant	-10.211***	-10.211***	-10.225***	-10.761***	-10.761***	-10.896***
	(2.019)	(2.019)	(2.018)	(1.964)	(1.964)	(1.963)
N	441	441	440	480	480	479
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		0	1		0	1

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.0.10: Group-Party Difference Affective Polarization, Activist Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	4.912+	4.912+	5.376+	4.649+	4.649+	5.021+
	(2.805)	(2.805)	(2.745)	(2.643)	(2.643)	(2.595)
Voters FT	0.095	0.095	0.420	-0.847	-0.847	-0.762
	(2.960)	(2.960)	(2.925)	(2.819)	(2.819)	(2.793)
Constant	-10.306***	-10.306***	-10.645***	-9.914***	-9.914***	-10.133***
	(2.165)	(2.165)	(2.127)	(2.022)	(2.022)	(1.993)
N	441	441	440	480	480	479
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		0	1		0	1

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.0.11: Group-Party Difference In-Party Ratings, Voter Reference Models

	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	-5.328*	-5.328*	-4.882*	-4.685*	-4.545*	-4.685*
	(2.162)	(2.162)	(2.113)	(2.135)	(2.184)	(2.135)
Activists FT	-17.505***	-17.505***	-16.552***	-17.312***	-16.764***	-17.312***
	(2.607)	(2.607)	(2.539)	(2.525)	(2.527)	(2.525)
Constant	6.818***	6.818***	-0.572	6.269***	7.444***	6.269***
	(1.668)	(1.668)	(5.264)	(1.686)	(2.204)	(1.686)
N	444	444	435	483	479	483
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		0	9		8	0

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C.0.12: Group-Party Difference In-Party Ratings, Activist Reference Models

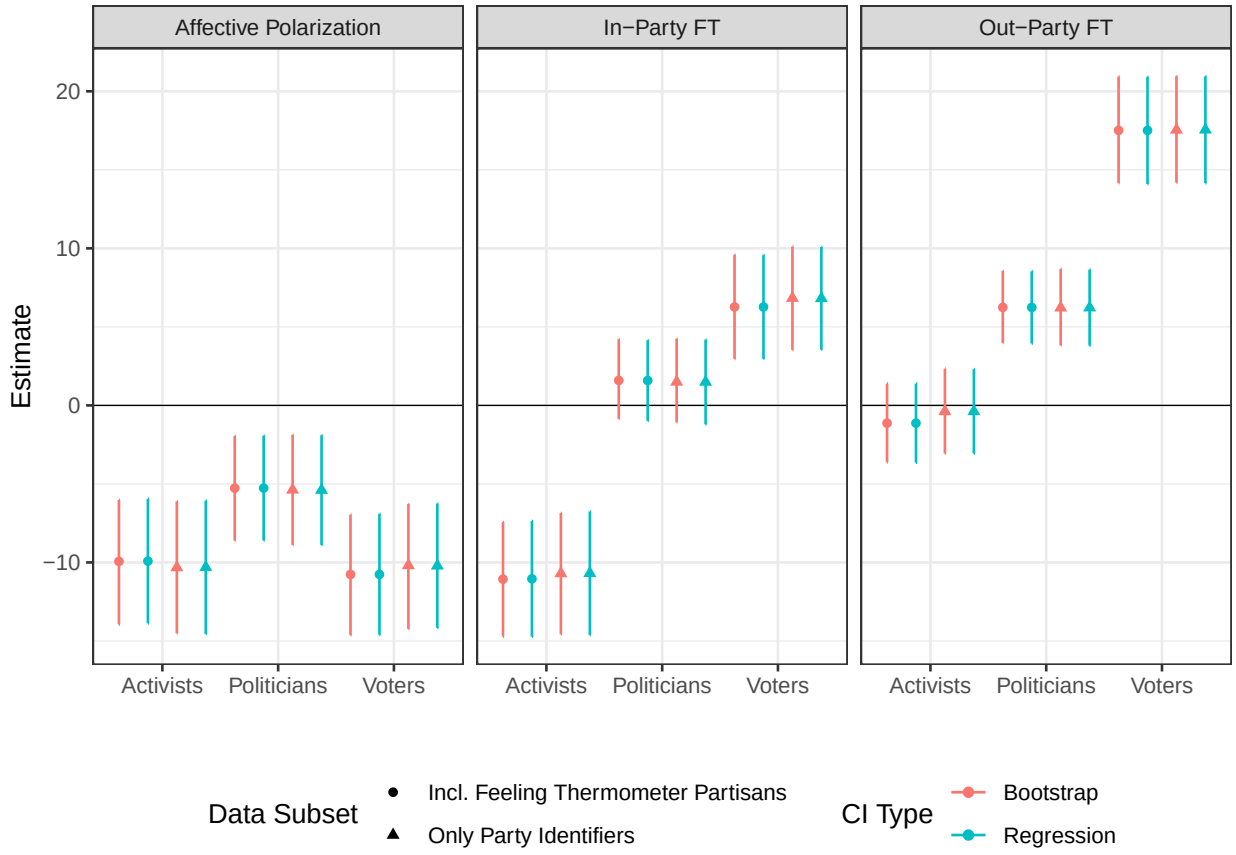
	Party Identifiers (PID)			PID + Feeling-Thermometer Partisans		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Politicians FT	12.177***	12.177***	11.670***	12.627***	12.219***	12.627***
	(2.431)	(2.431)	(2.299)	(2.291)	(2.289)	(2.291)
Voters FT	17.505***	17.505***	16.552***	17.312***	16.764***	17.312***
	(2.607)	(2.607)	(2.539)	(2.525)	(2.527)	(2.525)
Constant	-10.687***	-10.687***	-17.125***	-11.043***	-9.320***	-11.043***
	(2.004)	(2.004)	(4.892)	(1.879)	(2.512)	(1.879)
N	444	444	435	483	479	483
Covariates		✓	✓		✓	✓
Grouped Covariate Selection			✓			✓
Num. Covariates		0	9		8	0

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

D Bootstrapped Differences Between Group and Party Feeling Thermometers

Here, I show that my results for the differences between group and party feeling thermometers are robust to percentile-based bootstrap confidence intervals. As we can see in Figure D.0.1, the results do not differ appreciably between the bootstrap or regression results, or between data including or excluding feeling-thermometer partisans.

Figure D.0.1: Bootstrapped Confidence Intervals For Group-Party Differences



Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Data in red are from 10,000 bootstrap simulations, with confidence intervals from the 2.5 and 97.5 percentiles of the simulations. Triangular blue points are estimates from the main text. Circular points come from data which include feeling-thermometer partisans.

E Social Desirability Bias

It is possible that some of these findings are influenced by social desirability bias: politicians may think it is socially desirable to say they feel more warmly toward voters, whereas it may be more acceptable to criticize politicians and activists. While it is challenging to test this directly, we can examine whether treatment effects vary for different types of individuals in the sample who may feel more pressure to conceal their true beliefs. These analyses should be considered exploratory as they were not pre-registered.

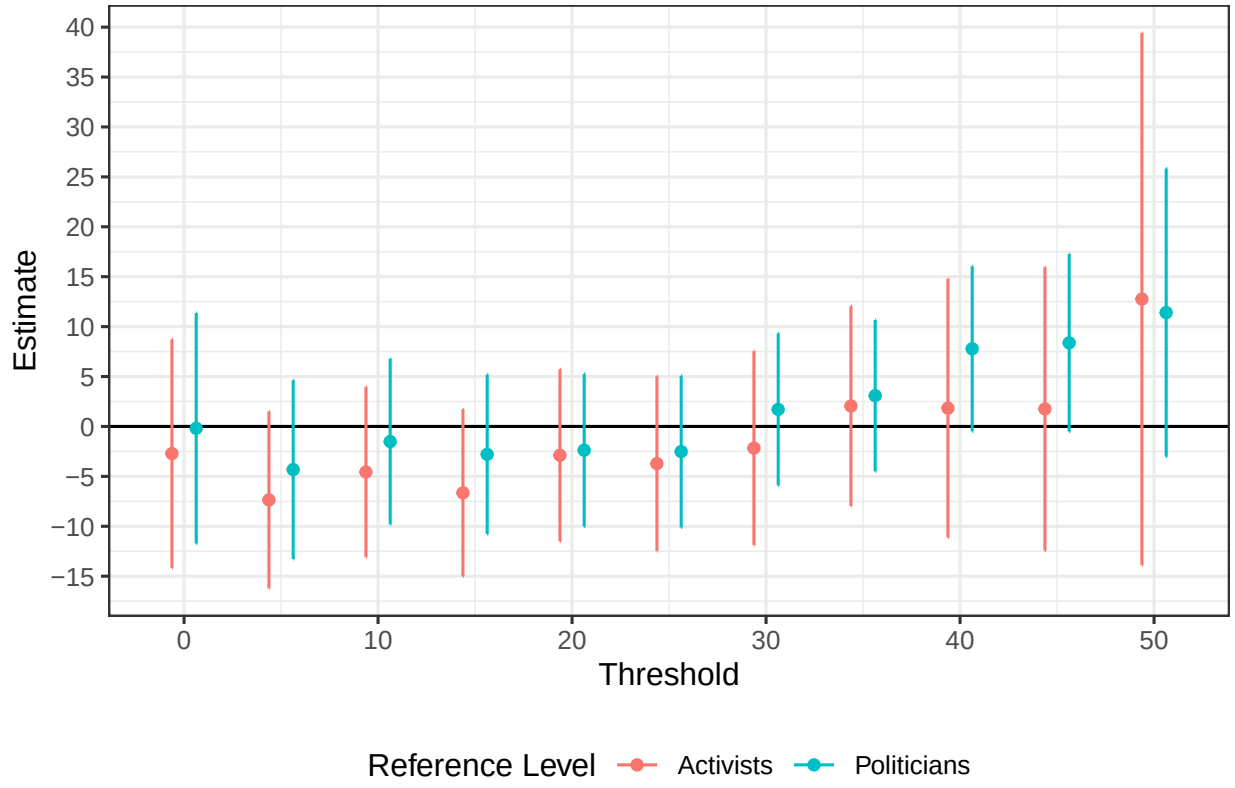
E.1 Party-Based Feeling Thermometers

First, people who report disliking the opposing party the most intensely presumably have more incentive to conceal their true beliefs when asked about out-party voters—assuming it is less acceptable to express dislike of voters compared to other groups. Thus, we should see that the treatment effects for the voter feeling thermometers are *larger* for people who report colder feelings toward the out-party as a whole. I test for this potential using regressions of the following form:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 Politicians_i + \beta_2 Voters_i + \beta_3 \mathbb{1}\{Y_{i,Party} \leq t\} + \\ \beta_4 Politicians_i * \mathbb{1}\{Y_{i,Party} \leq t\} + \beta_5 Voters_i * \mathbb{1}\{Y_{i,Party} \leq t\} + \varepsilon_i \\ Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 Activists_i + \beta_2 Voters_i + \beta_3 \mathbb{1}\{Y_{i,Party} \leq t\} + \\ \beta_4 Activists_i * \mathbb{1}\{Y_{i,Party} \leq t\} + \beta_5 Voters_i * \mathbb{1}\{Y_{i,Party} \leq t\} + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

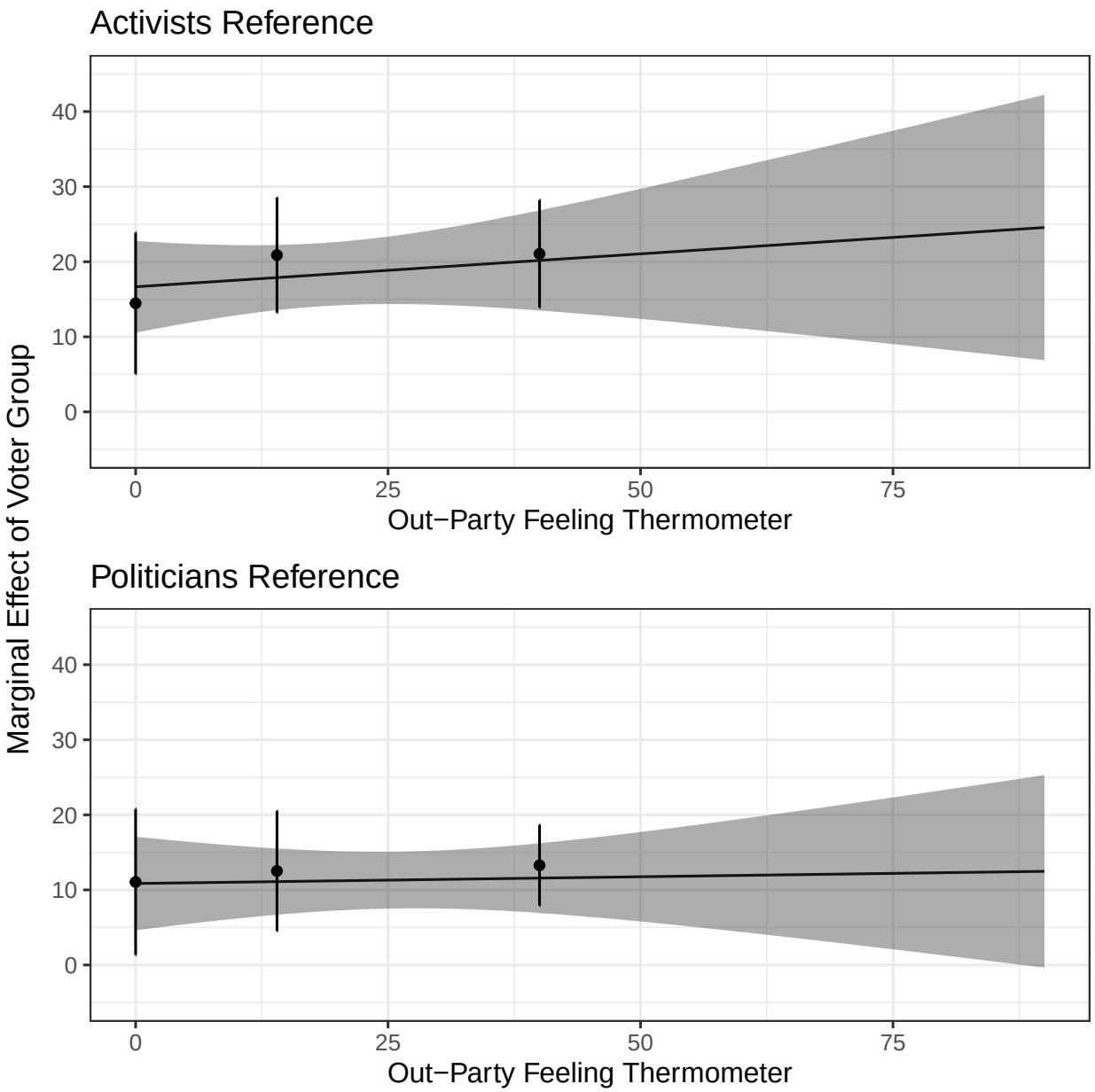
where t is a given threshold. If social desirability affects politicians' answers, we would expect β_5 to be positive. In Figure E.1.1, I display the estimates of β_5 for different thresholds between 0 and 50. We can see that, contrary to the social desirability hypothesis, the effect of the voter group assignment is, if anything, negative for most of the range of thresholds, indicating that the effect of the voter group assignment is lower among those who are coldest toward the opposing party as a whole. It is only for higher thresholds that we begin to see the voter-party threshold interactions start to turn positive. Moreover, none of these interactions approach traditional levels of statistical significance. I also use the binning estimator of Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019). In Figure E.1.2, we can see, again, that the binning estimator interactions between the voter thermometer indicator and the party-based thermometer rating are statistically insignificant and run counter to the social desirability hypothesis: those who dislike the opposing party most have the smallest treatment effects for the voter thermometers. In sum, these results reveal little support for the social desirability hypothesis.

Figure E.1.1: Interaction between Voter Indicator and Party-Based Out-Party Thermometer Threshold



Note: Coefficient estimates for interaction between voter group dummy and an indicator for whether the party feeling thermometer falls at or below the threshold. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Data in red are from models with the activist group set to the reference level, and data in blue have the politician group set to the reference level.

Figure E.1.2: Interaction between Voter Indicator and Party-Based Out-Party Thermometer (Binning Estimator)



Note: Points indicate marginal effect estimates from binning estimator regression with 95% confidence intervals represented by the bars. Lines represent marginal effect estimates from linear interaction models, along with 95% confidence intervals.

E.2 Electoral Competition

Second, we might expect that politicians who are in more competitive electoral environments would feel more pressure to express warmer feelings toward out-party voters. It should be noted that this is, admittedly, an imperfect test of social desirability bias in my results. Politicians in competitive environments might truly be different from other politicians: they might actually feel more warmly toward out-party voters (e.g., because individuals who feel more warmly toward out-party voters might be more likely to select into service in competitive areas, because politicians in these areas might feel more indebted to out-party voters for helping to elect them, or because politicians in competitive areas have more positive contact with members of the opposing party). Thus, we cannot determine whether an interaction between electoral competition and the voter treatment reflects social desirability bias or some other cause. Nonetheless, these results are a helpful approximation of social desirability bias.

As a first test of the electoral social desirability hypothesis, I use two-party county-level voteshares from the 2020 presidential election. To construct a measure of competitiveness, I take the absolute value of the difference between the two-party Democratic share and 0.5. Higher values therefore indicate less partisan electoral competition in the respondent's county. These county-level voteshares are a rough proxy for the respondent's own electoral situation: they are presidential results from nearly four years ago and are at the county level rather than the respondent's constituency level. Still, in the aggregate, these results give us some insight into how politicians from more generally competitive areas answer the survey. To allow for nonlinear functional forms in estimating the heterogeneous treatment effects, I employ the tercile binning estimator from Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019). I use the party-based out-party feeling thermometer ratings as a covariate. In contrast to the out-party feeling thermometer results in Section E.1, I do find some evidence in support of the electoral social desirability hypothesis. Politicians in the most competitive areas appear to have the largest voter treatment effects, and the differences in treatment effects between the most and second-most competitive bins are statistically significant. That said, these findings suggest that not all of the treatment effect is attributable to any electoral social desirability because the marginal effect of the voter assignment remains large, positive, and statistically significant even in the least competitive areas. Moreover, there appears to be some nonlinearity in the relationship between the marginal effect of voting and county competition. The marginal effect of the voter group increases somewhat from the middle bin to the least competitive bin. This observed increase for the least competitive group suggests that

As a final test of the electoral social desirability hypothesis, I use the respondent's perceived likelihood of facing a competitive election against an out-party candidate in the next election. Respondents were also able to select that this question was "Not Applicable," which could be explained by nonpartisan elections in the respondent's jurisdiction, for example. Due to the different structure of the "Not Applicable" response pattern, I fit slightly different binning models of the form:

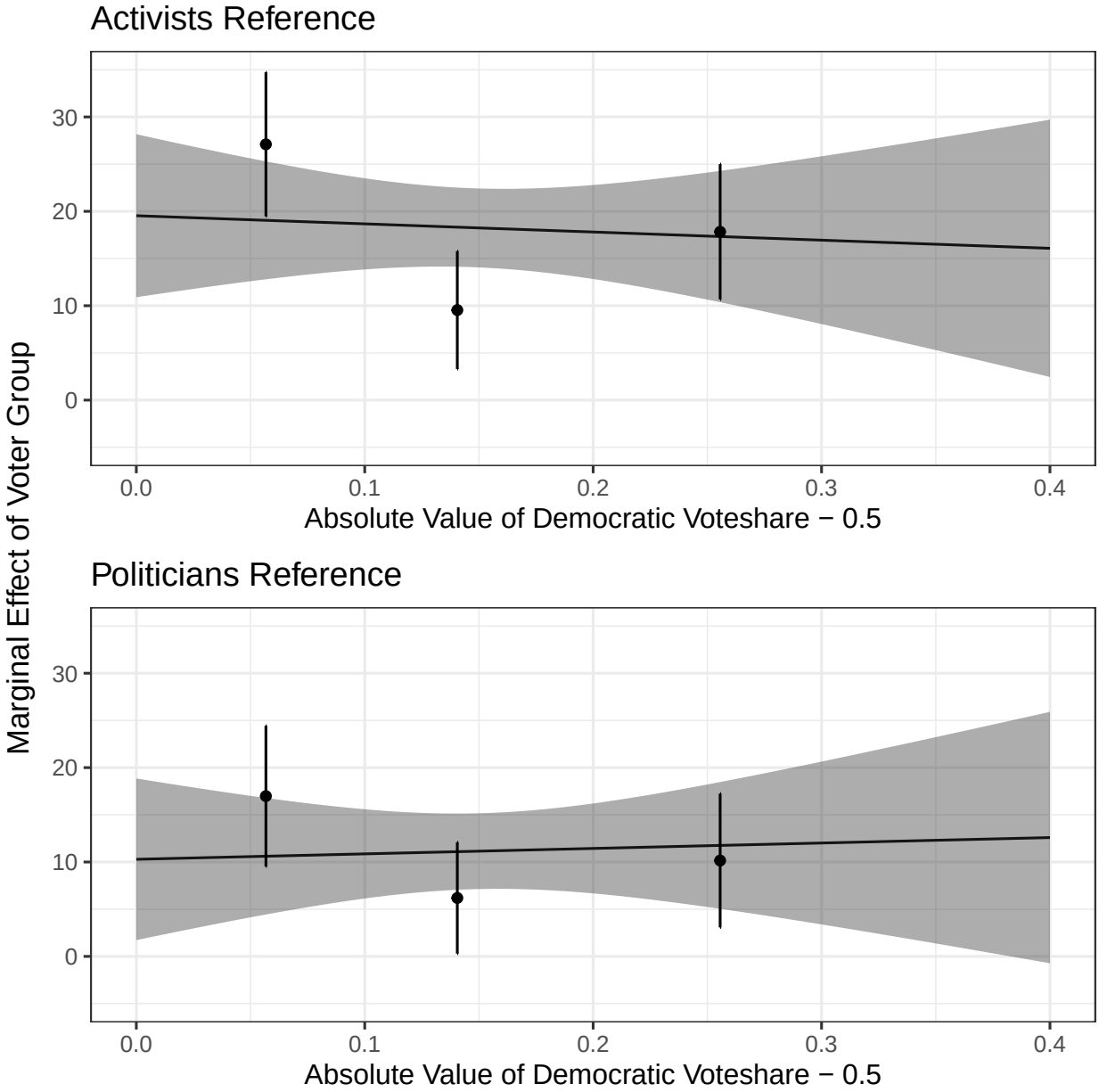
$$Y_i = \sum_{j=1}^{3} \{\alpha + \beta_1 Voters_i + \beta_2 Politicians_i + \beta_3(X_i - X_0) + \beta_4 Voters_i * (X_i - X_0) + \beta_5 Politicians_i * (X_i - X_0)\}G_j + \beta_6 M_i + \beta_7 Voters_i * M_i + \beta_8 Politicians_i * M_i + \beta_9 Y_{i,party} + \varepsilon_i$$

$$Y_i = \sum_{j=1}^{3} \{\alpha + \beta_1 Voters_i + \beta_2 Activists_i + \beta_3(X_i - X_0) + \beta_4 Voters_i * (X_i - X_0) + \beta_5 Activists_i * (X_i - X_0)\}G_j + \beta_6 M_i + \beta_7 Voters_i * M_i + \beta_8 Activists_i * M_i + \beta_9 Y_{i,party} + \varepsilon_i$$

where M_i indicates that the respondent selected "Not Applicable," and $(X_i - X_0)$ is the median-deviated competition response within each bin. G_j indicates the respondent's tercile in perceived competition (excluding the "Not Applicable" responses). These models are slight extensions of the Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019) binning estimator. It bears repeating that electoral competition is an imperfect measure of the social desirability hypothesis as politicians in competitive areas may actually feel differently toward out-party voters (differences in the effect of the voter treatment may not reflect a desire to conceal undesirable attitudes). Still, I provide the results here as an approximation to the influence of social desirability.

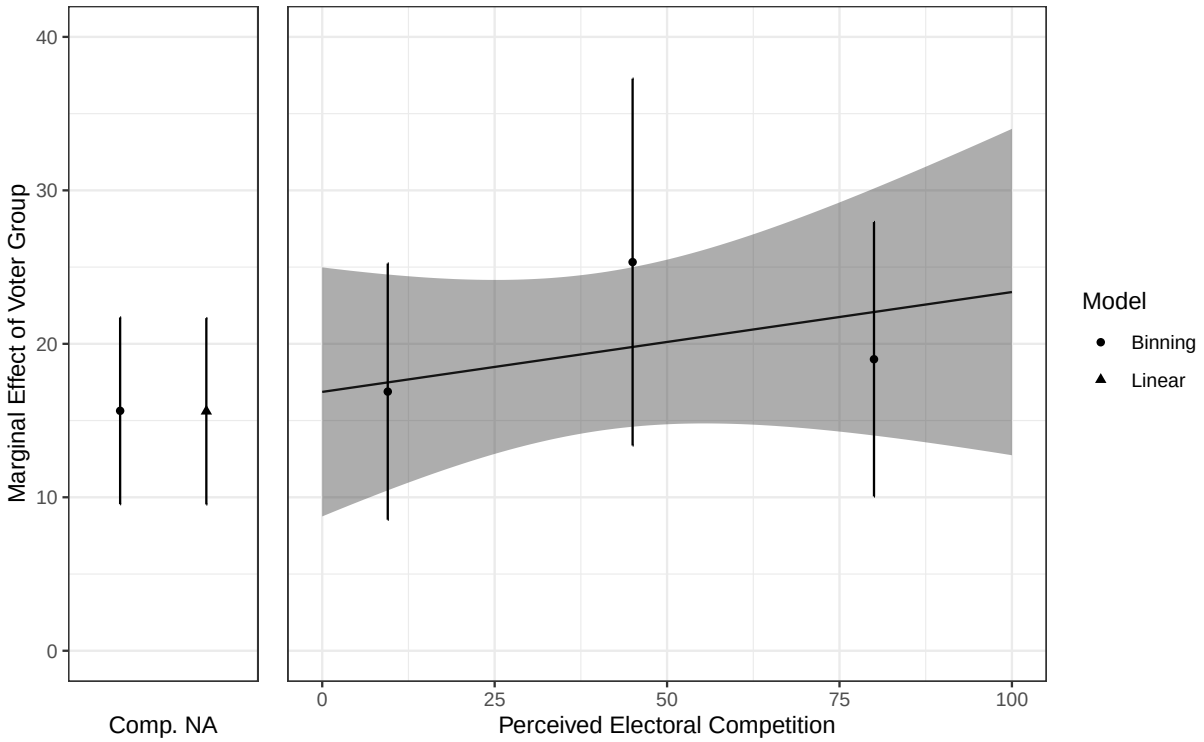
Interestingly, the patterns observed in Figures E.2.2 and E.2.3 appear to be the inverse of those in Figure E.2.1: those who perceive a middling likelihood of electoral competition apparently have somewhat larger voter treatment effects while those who perceive the highest likelihood of inter-party competition have lower voter treatment effects—though none of the tercile differences reach statistical significance. Even politicians for whom competition is not applicable have large and statistically significant voter treatment effects. In sum, the results for perceived electoral competition provide little support for the electoral social desirability hypothesis. Politicians who believe they are highly unlikely to face electoral competition (and those for whom electoral competition is not applicable) have similar treatment effects as those who believe it is highly likely they will face electoral competition.

Figure E.2.1: Interaction between Voter Indicator and County Voteshare Competition



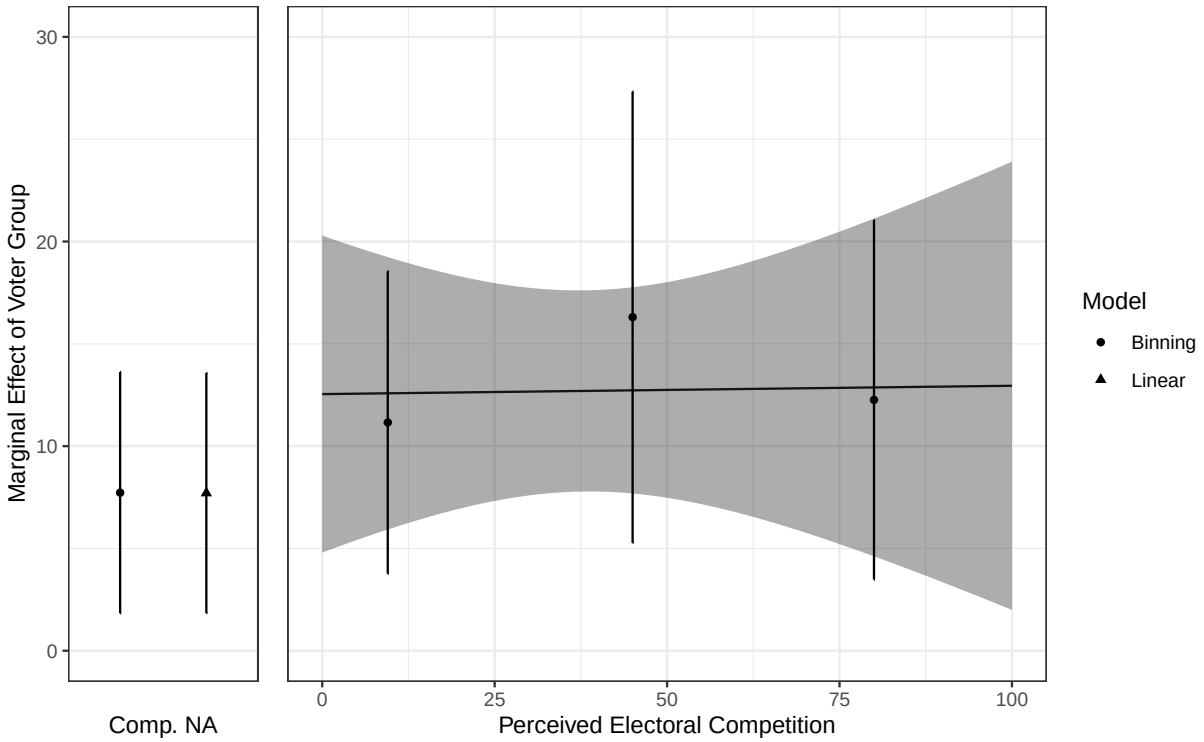
Note: Points indicate marginal effect estimates from binning estimator regression with 95% confidence intervals represented by the bars. Lines represent marginal effect estimates from linear interaction models, along with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure E.2.2: Interaction between Voter Indicator and Perceived Competition (Activist Reference)



Note: Points indicate marginal effect estimates from binning estimator regression with 95% confidence intervals represented by the bars. Lines represent marginal effect estimates from linear interaction models, along with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates in the pane labeled "Comp. NA" display the marginal effect of the voter indicator among those who report that inter-party electoral competition is "Not Applicable".

Figure E.2.3: Interaction between Voter Indicator and Perceived Competition (Politician Reference)



Note: Points indicate marginal effect estimates from binning estimator regression with 95% confidence intervals represented by the bars. Lines represent marginal effect estimates from linear interaction models, along with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates in the pane labeled "Comp. NA" display the marginal effect of the voter indicator among those who report that inter-party electoral competition is "Not Applicable".

F Survey Questionnaire

First, we'd like to ask your opinions about a range of policy proposals that local elected leaders might face.

Policy Questions

While we recognize that the details of any policy are important, generally speaking, to what extent would you support or oppose each of the following proposals?

	Strongly support	Support	Somewhat support	Neither support nor oppose	Somewhat oppose	Oppose	Strongly Oppose
Expanding voucher options for students to attend private or religious schools.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Expanding collective bargaining rights for public sector employees.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Increasing the use of cameras, speedbumps, or other traffic tools in residential areas.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Increasing government spending on park maintenance.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Rezoning residential areas to allow for more commercial use.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Next, we'd like to ask about your political stances and your experience working in local government.

Party Identification Questions

Main Party Question

party. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

- O Republican
- O Democrat
- O Independent
- O No preference
- O Other, please specify:

Party Strength

[Display if **party** is Republican or Democrat]

pty_strength. Would you call yourself a strong ${party} or a not very strong ${party}?

- O Strong ${party}
- O Not very strong ${party}

Party Lean

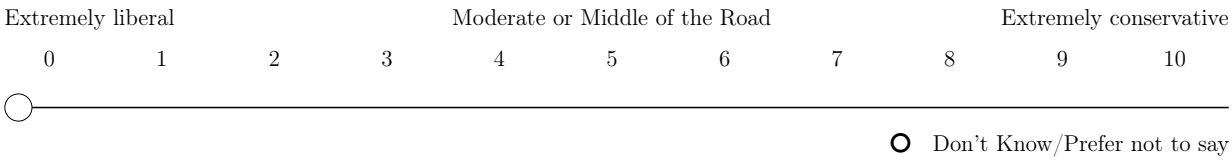
[Display if **party** is *not* Republican or Democrat]

pty_lean. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

- O Closer to the Republican Party
- O Neither
- O Closer to the Democratic Party

Ideology Question

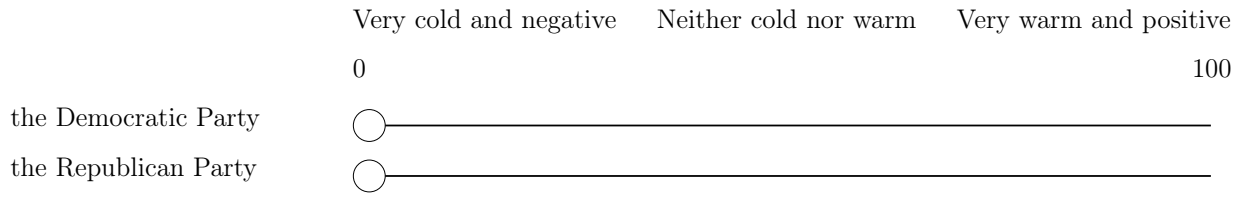
ideology. Here is an 11-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale? If you don't know or would prefer not to say, please select "Don't know/Prefer not to say."



- O Don't Know/Prefer not to say

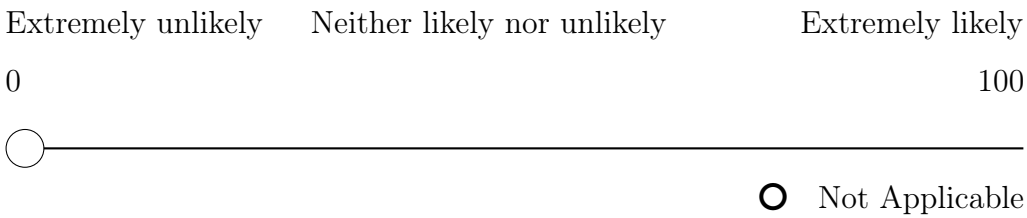
Party Feeling Thermometers

pty_ft. On a scale from 0 (very cold and negative) to 100 (very warm and positive), how do you feel toward...



Perceived Electoral Competition

competition. We know it's challenging to predict, but roughly speaking, how likely do you think it is that you will face a competitive election (e.g., a close race against an opponent) against a ${outparty} candidate in your next campaign?



Years in Government

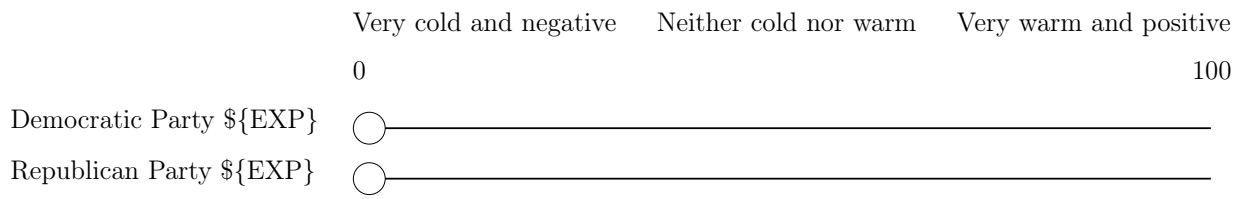
gov_exp. Over your career, how many years have you served in government IN TOTAL?

[Experiment for Other Study]

Party-Group Feeling Thermometers

[EXP randomly assigned to one of {"activists", "candidates and elected officials", "voters"}]

voter_exp_ft. On a scale from 0 (very cold and negative) to 100 (very warm and positive), how do you feel toward...



[Questions for Other Study]
(Question Order Randomized, either comes before or after Group Feeling Thermometers)

References

Belloni, Alexandre, Victor Chernozhukov and Christian Hansen. 2014. "Inference on Treatment Effects After Selection Among High-Dimensional Controls." *The Review of Economic Studies* 81(2):608–650.

Bloniarz, Adam, Hanzhong Liu, Cun-Hui Zhang, Jasjeet Sekhon and Bin Yu. 2016. "Lasso Adjustments of Treatment Effect Estimates in Randomized Experiments." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(27):7383–7390.

Hainmueller, Jens, Jonathan Mummolo and Yiqing Xu. 2019. "How Much Should We Trust Estimates from Multiplicative Interaction Models? Simple Tools to Improve Empirical Practice." *Political Analysis* 27:163–192.

MIT Election Data and Science Lab. 2018. "County Presidential Election Returns 2000-2020.".
URL: *https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VOQCHQ*

Voting and Election Science Team. 2020. "2020 Precinct-Level Election Results.".
URL: *https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/K7760H*

Yang, Yi and Hui Zou. 2015. "A Fast Unified Algorithm for Solving Group-Lasso Penalized Learning Problems." *Statistics and Computing* 25:1129–1141.