The Polarized American:

Views on Humanity and the Sources of Hyper-Partisanship

One of the most debated issues in the study of American politics centers on the alleged polarization of the electorate. Some scholars argue that the American electorate is becoming increasingly polarized (e.g., Koch 1994; McDonald and Popkin 2001; Olson 2008). Others contend that American voters are not becoming more polarized (Hetherington 2009). Still others have maintained that it is not the electorate that has become increasingly polarized but rather the political elite in the United States, particularly in the US Congress (Bond and Fleisher, 2000; Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Dixit and Weibull 2007; Jones 2001; Layman, 2001; Layman and Carsey, 2000a; Mann 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2009; Poole and Rosenthal, 1997; Rohde, 1991).

This paper does not seek to weigh in on the debate about whether the electorate or the Congress has become more polarized over time; instead, it explores those individuals who think of themselves at the polar extremes of the mainstream American party spectrum. In other words, this paper develops an argument about why some Americans view themselves as strong partisans, either of Republican or Democratic leanings. Thus, we hope to explain what individual-level factors make one think of oneself as a “strong Republican” or a “strong Democrat.”

Our argument is that a crucial factor in determining whether one is a “hyper-partisan” is how an individual views humanity. We contend that the more negative a view of humanity a person has, the more likely she is to self-identify as a “strong Republican.” Conversely, the more positive someone is toward the nature of humanity, the more likely one is to self-identify as a
“strong Democrat.” When an individual thinks of herself as a strong Democrat or Republican she is thinking of herself as being either a strong liberal Democrat or a strong conservative Republican. A strong conservative Republican is likely to view the social world from a pessimistic basis, believing that people are, generally, not trustworthy. A strong liberal Democrat is likely to have a more positive view of humanity. Thus, it is the social psychology of the individual that shapes a large part of the ideological predisposition that culminates in a particular partisan identity.

This study will first explore what others have argued about the sources of polarization among the American electorate. The section to follow develops an argument about how views of humanity shape partisan worldviews. From this, a set of hypotheses are derived that are then tested in a regression analysis employing data from the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES). The paper concludes with what the findings tell us about the nature of polarized partisanship in the United States.

**Definitions of Political Polarization**

What do we mean when we refer to political polarization within the electorate? Esteban and Ray (1991, 1994), have argued that polarization is the process whereby individuals feel alienated from each other. They identify with a particular group, say a political party or an ideological movement, and they believe themselves to be at odds with the “out-group.” They call this an “identification-alienation” framework. In a polarized situation, by identifying with one group, an individual feels alienated from another group.
DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996) have created a definition of polarization that is often used in the literature. They posit that polarization in the electorate is the movement towards the poles of the Left-Right distribution of voters. Thus, if the electorate is polarized, voters are clustered on the ideological Left and Right extremes, with the middle being relatively empty. What is important for purposes of this study is who the people at the polar ends of the distribution of the electorate are and why they are there.

**Common Explanations of Elite and Voter Political Polarization**

There has been a large amount of literature generated on the issue of political polarization in the United States in recent decades. The literature tends to focus on political elite polarization, voter polarization, or the nexus between the two.

Some have argued that the institutional changes of the past several decades in the United States should have reduced political elite polarization because measures to promote openness in government should logically have reduced distrust among elites and thus reduced a sense of “us versus them” (see Stasavage 2007). But Stasavage (2007) has argued that the opposite has happened. He and others have pointed to the political parties’ convention delegates, candidates, and members of Congress as all having grown increasingly polarized on social welfare, racial, and cultural issues (Bond and Fleisher, 2000; Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Layman, 2001; Layman and Carsey, 2000a; Poole and Rosenthal, 1997; Rohde, 1991; Stasavage 2007; Stone, Rapoport, and Abramowitz 1990). Some have argued that when the leadership of the parties polarizes, it can pull the whole party system in a centripetal pattern. (Layman and Carsey 2002, 200). Some of the explanations offered for this elite polarization are gerrymandering (Wolfson
and one’s location in the electoral calendar (Nicolson 2003). This elite polarization may seem to make voters more polarized because the parties have offered them polarized candidates. The voters' positions on the issues may be moderate, even if their choices in the voting booth are not (McGhee and Krimm 2009, 348).

Layman and Carsey (2002: 227) argue that elite polarization is indeed having an impact on voter polarization in a concrete way. They posit:

Our evidence confirms that this is part of the partisan change process. However, we also clearly show that some individuals respond to increases in elite-level polarization not by changing their party ties but by changing their issue attitudes in response to those ties. When Democratic and Republican elites are clearly differentiated on an issue and citizens recognize that difference, then a significant number of party identifiers will bring their attitudes on the issue closer into line with the stance of their party’s leaders. When party elites are polarized on more than one issue agenda, the process of party identifiers converting their positions on issues toward the dominant stand of their parties means that issue dimensions, such as social welfare and culture, that were once orthogonal to each other will not remain so over time.

Layman and Carsey (2002, 228) also argue that party politics exerts a strong influence on political values and issue attitudes among the electorate. Those individuals who are most attached to a particular political party are likely to be most influenced by the cues that they get from the party leadership on issues (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Classen and Highton 2009, 546; Kam 2005; Nie et al. 1976; Zaller 1992). But it is not just partisan attachment; it is also awareness of politics that will play a role in shaping how elite behavior and cues affect the electorate. Thus, the most politically sophisticated and aware people are most likely to be affected by relative positions of political elites (see Sniderman et al., 1991; Zaller 1992).
The above arguments about the process of elite and voter polarization, by no means, represent a consensus view. Several scholars have argued that the data do not bear out the argument that the American electorate in becoming more polarized. Hetherington (2001; 2009) has shown that if one uses the definition of polarization as a growing bi-modality of American voters at the extremes, then there is little evidence of polarization. The distribution of American voters is not clearing out the middle as the polarization hypothesis would suggest.

McGhee and Krimm (2009) are also prominent critics of the polarization thesis. They point to the growth in independent registration among voters. This would indicate less partisan attachment and not more. It might make the electorate appear more polarized, however, because the voters who are left with partisan registrations—who then vote in the primaries (particularly closed primaries)—are the most ardent partisans and most ideological voters, thus creating the appearance of a more polarized electorate.

The Focus of This Study

This study does not seek to answer the question of whether there is indeed a growing process of polarization in the American electorate or what has or has not driven that process. This study is not interested in change in partisanship over time, but rather explores the extremes of the partisan distribution in the United States in a cross-sectional “snap-shot.” This study focuses on explaining what individual-level factors put voters at the extreme ends of the Democrat-Republican distribution of voters.
The study’s dependent variable is self-identification as a “strong Democrat” or a “strong Republican.” Thus, we seek to identify the individual-level factors that would account for why an individual would think of himself or herself as a “strong Democrat” or “strong Republican.”

It is common for models meant to predict partisanship to include ideology as an explanatory variable (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; 2006; Alvarez and Garcia Bedolla 2003; Carmines and Berkman 1994; Carmines and Stanley 1992; Franklin and Jackson 1983). We have chosen to do the same despite acknowledging that they are so closely linked in a person’s mind that there may be a high degree of endogeneity in a model with both variables included. This is because a person who views herself as a strong partisan is also very likely to view herself as a strong ideologue, leaning toward one or the other end of the ideological distribution. To control for this possibility, we will present results demonstrating the inclusion and exclusion of ideology as an explanatory variable.

**Views on Humanity and Ideological Self-Identification**

We contend that a person’s view on the basic nature of humanity will play a large role in shaping her general ideological worldview. A person’s basic view of human nature refers to whether a person believes that other people can be thought of as being inherently good or inherently bad. If an individual thinks of human nature as inherently bad, that person will be less willing to trust other people in general. If, on the other hand, a person views human nature as being inherently good, this person is more likely to trust others in general than the person who has a negative view of basic human nature.
This propensity to trust or not others has profound implications toward how one views politics (Binning, 2007; Brewer and Steenbergen, 2002; Brewer, Gross, Aday, and Wilnat, 2004; Citrin and Sides, 2008; Herreros and Criado, 2009; Inglehart 1997; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005; Torgler, 2007; Uslaner 2000-1). While much research has focused on how social trust affects a whole range of attitudes toward political phenomena, there has been very little research on how social trust affects basic partisan self-identification. We contend that this is an important oversight as social trust forms a crucial part of the psychological basis for an individual’s general ideological worldview.

Let us first address what we mean by ideology. Ideology is a coherent set of ideas meant to generally explain political phenomena that a person confronts, as well as offer a general set of remedies to political issues that arise. Scholars have looked at political ideology as being a set of ideas that sit along two basic dimensions. The classical ideological dimension that has been referred to for a very long time is the traditional Left-Right dimension (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). This dimension was characterized by how an individual viewed the proper role of the state in managing the economy and distributing wealth in a society. People who were on the Left side of the ideological spectrum were likely more in favor of the state playing an activist role in the economy and redistributing wealth from the more fortunate (wealthy) to the less fortunate (the poor). This view was premised on the argument that the wealthy achieved their wealth in a system that was largely stacked in their favor. Thus, it was only fair that the state play a redistributive role and manage the market in order to aid those who were “losers” from the outcomes of the economic and political system.
The traditional Right, on the other hand, largely opposed a large redistributive and economic management role for the state, as the wealthy were assumed to have achieved their economic gains through hard work and perseverance and therefore a large, redistributive and economic activist state was not fair to the wealthy. Thus, the Left and the Right both couched their general arguments about the state in terms of fairness.

Political science viewed the political bases of support for these Left and Right positions as a function of a person’s class background (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Thus, a person who was born into the working class was likely to more supportive of the Left, because of her identification with those who looked to the state for redress of social and economic inequality. Conversely, those who were born into the middle and upper classes would tend to support the Right because they would want the state to play a minimal role in redistributing wealth to those who had lower incomes as funds for that redistribution would come from the wealthy through taxation and other means. Therefore, a person’s placement on the Left-Right ideological space was viewed as a function of economic self-interest.

But there has been another ideological dimension that has been identified by political scientists more recently that is meaningful: the Right authoritarian-Left libertarian dimension (Kitschelt 1995). This ideological dimension does not center on economic issues as the traditional Left-Right dimension does, but rather is concerned with the amount of freedom or constraint the state should create in society for its citizens. A person who is viewed as being more on the Right authoritarian end of the dimension would believe that the state should play a larger “law and order” role in society as well as play some role in preserving traditional moral values. An individual who is seen as more towards the Left libertarian end of the dimension
would believe that the state should try to maximize individual freedom of expression and
democratic participation and place less emphasis on law and order and the state playing a role in
defending traditional moral values. The Right authoritarian has a view of society as needing a
“Leviathan” and the Left libertarian view is that man is best served by allowing people the
maximum input into governance without being threatened by a state that infringes on their
personal rights.

Ingelhart (1977, 1997) has argued that the Right authoritarian-Left libertarian dimension
of politics has grown more important in many advanced industrial democracies as basic needs
have been met by economic growth and the creation of welfare states. Thus, political parties in
such states have tended to add authoritarian-libertarian issues to their platforms as these issues
have resonated more with their publics. Right parties have tended to take authoritarian stances,
arguing for the need for law and order measures in society, whereas Left parties, have tended to
take more libertarian stances in this “New Politics.”

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1 These issues are often referred to as “New Politics” issues.
2 Ingelhart referred to post-materialist values as values that stressed helping others achieve a voice in politics and
society and placed emphasis on things like environmental problems. He viewed this as a new dimension of the
Left. They developed in societies where basic needs were met and the more economically-secure could focus on
matters beyond their own pocketbooks. In multi-party systems, post-materialists would often join Green parties.
In party systems given to two party dominance, the post-materialists would likely join the left-leaning party in the
system. This would be the case in the United States.
3 This “libertarianism” should not be confused with the specific American brand of libertarianism, which is more
focused on economic freedom from state action, although it does include an element of social freedom as well.
American libertarianism is a more conservative form of libertarianism, which focuses more on reducing the state’s
role in society overall, whereas the brand of libertarian politics referred to by scholars such as Inglehart (1977,
1997), envisions a positive and even activist role for the state to play in society by bringing people into the political
process and intervening in societal processes to ensure that individuals are free from oppression from others.
When the two dimensions of ideology are combined, we are presented with a schema that looks like the following:

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                   Authoritarian
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                        v

   Right Authoritarian  ---  "Traditional" Right
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                        |
                        |
                      "Traditional" Left
                        |
                        |
                        |
                   Left Libertarian
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When we apply this schema to American politics, we find that because of the nature of the electoral system and its tendency to punish small parties, the two main parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, have absorbed “New Politics” issues into their platforms alongside the traditional stances on economic distributional issues. The Republican Party has maintained its traditional stance as being the party less inclined to support economic redistribution in the American party system. The Democratic Party has maintained its traditional platform of being the major American political party more inclined to support economic redistribution and an economically activist state to aid the economically less advantaged.

In terms of the “New Politics” issues, the Republican Party has also taken on the mantle of being the party home for “Right authoritarian” voters, i.e., those who are more in favor of law
and order politics and the state playing a role in preserving traditional moral values. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, has become the major party home for “Left libertarian” voters who want the polity to increase inclusion in the political process, protect minority rights, and keep the state from trying to protect conservative, traditional morality. Thus, most Republican and Democratic voters can be thought of as situated along the diagonal axis that bisects traditional Left-Right politics as well as the “New Politics.” Thus, voters for the two major parties are a mix of materialists and those who vote along “New Politics,” i.e., authoritarian-libertarian lines.

We posit that the degree to which one trusts others will play a very important role in determining the leanings of the highly partisan American. We hypothesize that the more social trust an individual says she has, the more likely she is to self-identify as a strong Democrat. Conversely, the less social trust an individual says he has, the more likely that person is to self-identify as a strong Republican.

Social trust will condition attitudes toward both traditional Left-Right politics, as well as “New Politics.” A person with a higher relative degree of social trust will have a more positive attitude toward redistributive policies because that person will be more positive toward other people, in general, and believe that the recipients of aid from the government are deserving of such help. Thus the social truster will be more likely to identify with the Left than the Right. Such a person would more likely be a Democrat than a Republican.

Conversely, a person who is less trusting of other people, relative to others, will be less willing to have the state redistribute wealth to others because that person would not be positively
inclined toward others, in general, and would thus not favor such policies. This person would identify more with the Right and thus would more likely think of herself as a Republican.

When it comes to “New Politics,” a person’s relative propensity to trust others will also influence her identification with the Right and the Left. A social truster will likely identify with the Left on “New Politics” issues because such a person would not look to the state to constrain others through law and order policies because such a person would feel less threatened by others. This identification with the Left on “New Politics” issues would more likely make the person think of herself as a Democrat than as a Republican.

Those who are relatively less trusting of others would be more likely to identify with the Right on “New Politics” issues. The person who is relatively less trusting of others would be more likely to want the state to play a more constrained role in society in terms of law and order because of the more generalized lack of trust in others. Because of this identification with the Right on “New Politics” issues, the less trusting individual is more likely to be a Republican in the American context.

**Data, Measures, and Methods**

We employ ordered logistic regression analyses given the dependent variable is binomial and ordinal in nature. As mentioned earlier, we employ data from the 2008 American National Election Survey. The number of respondents in this sample was 2,203. Our final models include 518 respondents who responded to all questions employed as variables in our study. Most respondents are excluded for not responding to questions regarding their ideology or income. Based on diagnostics, there are no clear patterns in the excluded cases.
The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this model is strong partisan beliefs. The ANES asks respondents to identify the political party they most closely identify with and are able to break down respondents into a seven-point scale ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican. In order to examine our question of what individual-level factors determine whether someone is a strong Democrat or strong Republican, we create a binary variable for each. Respondents who identify as strong Democrats are coded 1 with all other respondents as 0. Then all respondents who identify as strong Republicans (seven on the seven-point scale) are coded 1 with all other respondents as 0. By doing so, we end up with two dependent variables.

A Picture of Polarization

The breakdown of the dependent variables find that 25.0% of respondents label themselves as strong Democrats while 9.9% declare to be strong Republicans. While it is unclear we there are so many fewer strong Republicans compared to strong Democrats, it could be that many of the strong conservatives have come to label themselves independents rather than strong Republicans.

We can go further in a descriptive analysis by looking at demographic differences between strong Democrats, strong Republicans, non-polarized individuals, and all respondents. By doing so, we can get a picture of the typical polarized Democrats and Republicans.

--INSERT TABLE 1 HERE--

When we look at the demographics, we find that there are many splits that follow widely-known partisan trends. Strong Democrats, for example, appear to have relatively lower incomes
while strong Republicans report relatively higher incomes. Likewise, strong Republicans are more likely to be married than the average respondent to the ANES while the typical strong Democrat is less likely to be married. The characteristic racial divide emerges—with strong Republicans more likely to be white than the average respondent and strong Democrats more likely to be members of a minority group. Lastly, we see a gender gap in terms of polarization with women more likely to be strong Democrats and men strong Republicans than their corresponding average respondents. None of these findings are particularly unexpected and confirm previous findings and beliefs.

Where we find more unique results are when looking at region and age. First, we can see that the Northeast and Southern Census regions have clear polarization patterns. Individuals living in the Northeast are considerably less likely to be polarized while those in the South are more likely to be politically polarized than non-polarized. It is, by far, the most polarized region in the country. The South is a region where strong Republicans outnumber strong Democrats, but not by a large margin. The North Central region has less polarization and there is a slightly greater likelihood of strong Democrats than Republicans and the West shows the same for strong Republicans outnumbering strong Democrats. This suggests that there are some marked regional considerations related to polarization in the United States. A pattern emerges with age as well, with older respondents being more likely to be polarized (regardless of party) than their younger counterparts. As individuals age, they appear to move toward the poles when considering their levels of partisanship.

**The Independent Variables**
Below are the questions that we use to test the predictive power of our argument about the role of social trust contributing to polarization in the United States. We also test a set of alternative hypotheses to determine relative predictive power of the most common arguments about what drives said polarization.

We include a very common measure of relative social trust in the model to test our primary hypothesis. The question asks: Can people be trusted? The respondent has the choice of answering that either you can’t be too careful or most people can be trusted. We argue that those individuals who believe people can be trusted will be more likely to be strong Democrats and that those who do not believe people can be trusted will be more likely to be strong Republican identifiers.

Given the links often discussed between religious beliefs and religiosity and partisanship, we include two religious measures (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006; Carmines and Stanley 1992; Franklin and Jackson 1983). First, the variable examining religiosity asks: Would you say you religion provides SOME guidance in your day-to-day living, QUITE A BIT of guidance, or a GREAT DEAL of guidance in your day-to-day life? Respondents are coded for not believing religion is important, religion provides some guidance, religion provides quite a bit of guidance, and religion provides a great deal of guidance. The religious beliefs measure asks: Which of the these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? Respondents are asked to choose from the following: 1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; 2. The Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word; and 3. The Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God.
We use a seven-point scale of ideology to measure where respondents place themselves in terms of political beliefs (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; 2006; Alvarez and Garcia Bedolla 2003; Carmines and Berkman 1994; Carmines and Stanley 1992; Franklin and Jackson 1983). The scale runs from one, indicating strong liberal, to seven, indicating strong conservative. Strong liberals are predicted to be strong Democrats and strong conservatives are most likely to be strong Republicans. As touched on above, there are concerns regarding endogeneity when utilizing ideology to predict partisanship. As a result, we will present our models showing results both with and without ideology included. We also include a measure of race. Our variable is dummy coded, with all non-white respondents coded as 1 and white respondents coded 0. Previous literature has demonstrated that race needs to be considered when examining partisanship and polarization (Avery 2007; Hutchings and Valentino 2004; McDaniel and Ellison 2008). As with typical party identification, white respondents are predicted to more likely be strong Republicans and non-white respondents are predicted to be more likely strong Democrats.

We also include a number of control variables for gender, age, education, and income as these are very common controls in studies of public attitudes toward polarization in the United States. We also include a measure of job security as a way to control for the economic insecurity of the respondent. We include this measure because it is possible that the respondent’s economic insecurity can affect the responses given in the survey.

Results of the Analyses

The ordered logistic regression analysis results for our model are presented in Table 2.

--Table 2 here--
Models one and two examine predictors of Strong Democrats. Model one includes ideology as an explanatory variable while model two removes ideology given possible concerns of multicollinearity from having it explain party identification (a variable it is closely linked with). We find relative consistency between both models in terms of predictions. However, our variable of most interest theoretically—social trust—is not significant when ideology is included. When ideology is excluded, however, we find that the more individuals trust others, the more likely they are to identify as strong Democrats (significant at the .05 level). Ideology, as would be expected, is significant at the .01 level when included in the model with strong liberals showing as being more disposed to being strong Democrats. Being non-white proves to be a strong predictor (.01 level) in both models in the assumed direction. When ideology is excluded, age becomes the only other significant predictor (at the .05 level). Being older is linked with individuals being more likely to be strong Democrats. No other variables produce significant relationships, including religion or other demographics.

For the Strong Republican models—three and four—we find similar results. When we account for ideology, it is significant at the .01 level and demonstrates that strong conservatives are more likely to be strong Republicans. In the same model, social trust is significant at the .05 level. Unlike in the Democrat model, however, the relationship is negative (as hypothesized) and suggests that social distrusters are more likely to be strong Republicans. When ideology is removed from the model, we again see congruity with the Democratic model. Social trust remains significant at the .05 level in the negative direction. Non-white racial status—as it does in the Democratic model without ideology—remains as a significant predictor (at the .01 level) and demonstrates that white respondents are more likely to be strong Republicans. Unlike in the
Democratic models, however, in our Republican model that excludes ideology, we find both religious variable to be a significant predictor. At the .05 level, individuals who believe the Bible to be the literal word of God and who claim to use religion to guide their life are shown to be more likely to be strong Republicans. This finding aligns with the belief that conservative Christians are more likely to be strong Republicans.

When we consider the impact played by ideology in both models, we find that the inclusion of ideology does far more in explaining strong Republican identification compared to strong Democrats. If we look at the Pseudo $R^2$ values for the models, we find that the inclusion of ideology leads to the strong Democrat model explaining approximately 3.5% more of the variance in our dependent variable whereas its inclusion leads to an increase in model explanatory power of just over 10% when looking at the strong Republican model.

Given that we use logit, the coefficients reported in Table 2 do not represent the marginal effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables. As a result, we report the first differences of our significant independent variables in Table 2 as well. The first difference reported measures the probability of the dependent variable, signifying identification as a strong partisan, when the independent variable of interest is moving from its minimum to its maximum value while all remaining independent variables are held at their appropriate measures of central tendency. This allows us to consider the substantive significance of each independent variable to explaining variation in the dependent variable.

When looking at the strong Democrat models, we find that ideology has the largest first difference value—.375. This value tells us that taking an individual from strong liberal to strong conservative makes them 37.5% more likely to be a strong Democrat when all other variables are
held constant at their central tendency. Non-white racial status is the second most substantive predictor (.202) followed by age (.184). With ideology removed, however, we see social trust having a significant impact in the model with a value of .085, yet it still has less substantive impact than non-white racial status (.251) and age (.225).

Both Republican models present similar results. In model three, ideology has a first difference of .454 while social trust is only at .053. Non-white racial status splits the two with a first difference value of .083. When ideology is removed in model four, being non-white has the largest first difference value (.134) while biblical literalism, religion guide life, and social trust and all increase the likelihood of someone being a strong Republican by between 5.1% and 7.0% when moved from their minimum to maximum values.

In short, our results demonstrate that while social trust is an important predictor that must be considered when discussing the increased polarization of the American electorate. Previous research on partisan identity has ignored this important social psychological factor.

Conclusion

This article has examined what factors lead Americans to identify as polarized partisans. Moreover, we have attempted to test congruency in explanatory factors between strong Democrats and strong Republicans. Most importantly, we introduced the concept of social trust into America’s understanding of political polarization. We argued that Americans general predispositions toward others will impact the likelihood of their declaring to be strong partisans. For Democrats, we posited that being social trusters would increase the chances of an individual
identifying as a strong partisan while for Republicans we hypothesized that being a distruster would increase the odds of identifying as a strong partisan.

Much of the current polarization research focuses on the role of varying ideological and demographic characteristics, including ideology, age, income, and religious beliefs and behavior. In this article, however, we demonstrate how social trust conditions the psychological basis for an individual’s general ideological worldview—including their propensity to be hyper partisans. By including social trust, the discussion about polarization begins to see a shift in interpretation. First, it moves the decision away from any easily traced demographic basis. While variables such as race, income, or education can be gleaned from national census data, there is no similar measure of individual-level social trust available. Without being able to fully account for what has been shown to be a meaningful predictor, it makes the process of predicting the future of polarization more difficult.

It is especially important to note this when we remember that social trust still proves to be significant even when ideology is included within the model. It comes as little surprise that strong liberals would be strong Democrats or strong conservatives would be strong Republicans given the long observed relationship between ideology and partisanship in the United States. This only goes further to explain why it is important to consider the potential role played by social trust in shaping political attitudes.

If hyper-partisanship is impacted by individual social trust, it makes it significantly more difficult to be optimistic regarding hope for more bipartisan political beliefs, attitudes, and policies in the United States. When polarization is based on politics or demographic characteristics, we can change policies or alter the discourse to bring people back to the middle.
If it is caused by social psychology, i.e., general predispositions towards others, however, it will require a more fundamental shift in citizen attitudes which would be far more difficult to achieve.

One of the key questions that arise from this research is: What does the relationship between social trust and polarized partisanship indicate for the future of partisan relations in the United States? There is reason to expect that polarized partisanship is likely to increase in the near to medium term. The reason for this is that the economic crisis that befell the United States in 2008 has left in its wake a weakened economy and bleak prospects for many younger Americans. As we know that an individual’s pessimism about his/her future tends to make a person less trusting of others, this means that the proportion of people who have a dim view of humanity will grow in this country. This will increase the ranks of the hyper-partisan Right, as will also likely increase the ranks of the partisan Left who look to the government to protect and aid them from economic circumstances. Thus, this research does not offer much room for optimism that the highly partisan nature of American politics will diminish in the near future.
References


Table 1: Demographic Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Strong Democrat</th>
<th>Strong Republican</th>
<th>Non-Polarized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest 25% Income</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-50% Income</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-75% Income</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest 25% Income</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Married</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>58.5</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>82.1</td>
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<td>South</td>
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<td>55.7</td>
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Table 2: Logistic Regression Model Results

**Dependent Variable: Strong Partisanship**

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<th>Model One Strong Democrat</th>
<th>Model Two Strong Democrat</th>
<th>Model Three Strong Republican</th>
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<td>-.090</td>
<td>.123</td>
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*Note: Figures are unstandardized coefficients shown alongside standard errors. *p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01.*