

Political Polarization Amongst the American Public

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Abstract

American politics is currently substantially polarized. Politicians, party activists, and political elites are extremely polarized. The current political situation at the national level demonstrates this in detail. The situation is constantly in flux and in truth has evolved substantially in the time this dissertation has been produced. Both political parties are becoming more entrenched on their sides of the aisle. Some factions of political scientists have a theory on the subject; that politicians, and political activists are the only segment of society that is polarized. Fiorina posits that there is no culture war, that Americans are closely divided but not deeply divided. He is so sure he announces in the very title of his tome—*The Myth of a Polarized American*.¹ Contrary to the views of these political scientists, Americans from every part of society are polarized, in many cases deeply so. There are contrary views. This is a contested debate in the literature. Jacobson for example offers a cogent argument that there in fact is a deep schism in the electorate.²

There is an interesting evolution from relative consensus on many political policies to deep polarization. From roughly 1940 until the end of the Cold War in 1989 Americans were not nearly as polarized as they are presently. Americans had a great deal to bring them together, from WW II, to the space race to the Cold War. By the end of the Cold War Americans seemed to be moving toward a more polarized political and social situation.

If Americans are simply closely and not deeply divided issues such as abortion, health care, and climate change are clear examples where Americans are in fact deeply polarized. There are no close divides on these subjects. Americans are still fighting over abortion more than forty years after *Roe v Wade*. There is an explanation as to how Americans have become polarized. There are specific causal mechanisms that influence the American public.

America is polarized from the top down. They are not only closely divided, they are deeply divided. There are factors that influence this such as religion, the media, and education. Even more specifically Americans are polarized at all levels, not only political

¹ Fiorina, Morris P. with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman: p. 12.

² Jacobson, Gary C. 2008. *A Divider Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*. New York: Pearson Longman.

elites but the American public as well. Americans are deeply polarized.

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Dedication

For my mother: Jaylene Marie Elder. Thank you for everything. This work would never have been written if not for all you did for me. My thirst for knowledge was kindled by all the books you read to me. You encouraged my intellectual curiosity in a time and place where that was simply not valued but more than that was openly ridiculed. We lived in a world of unthinking, unfeeling, and uncaring human beings and you showed me a much better way to live my life. You made sure your children were educated when no one else around us was interested, motivated, or aspired to greater things. Thank you for your sacrifices.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The American public is deeply polarized about myriad of different political policies. Compromise, which we generally recognize as an essential part of making public policy has been largely abandoned in modern politics. Compromise has become a word that many politicians refuse to even use for fear of the consequences. Many Americans have even come to expect their representatives to refuse to compromise to garner more for their districts, but then can't seem to understand why the government can't pass any meaningful legislation. Since many Congressional districts are safely conservative or liberal we would expect to see ideological polarization. Some are long standing issues about which Americans have been polarized for years such as the Second Amendment and abortion. Quality of life issues such as health care and marriage equality have also become very prominent polarized issues.

Polarization occurs for many reasons including, education, religion, and the media which can influence peoples' views on politics and policy preferences. This polarization starts at the top with the political elite and filters down through to the public. While polarization has its roots in political elites it filters down to the public. The public takes cues from the top just as political elites and politicians take cues from the public. Politicians pay attention to polling data concerning the publics' policy preferences. I posit specifically that there are certain variables that influence polarization that are not fully explained in the literature upon which I will elaborate. This chapter outlines the basic debate in the literature, specifically where the literature seems to be deficient, and to outline my hypothesis and framework for an in-depth discussion of political polarization.

Specifically, the literature is lacking a description of where we expect to find

polarization and why and which areas where we don't expect to find polarization. I will explain the conditions under which we expect to find polarization. This will serve as a base of information from which to launch further studies of polarization.

Polarization defines the division of the electorate towards the extremes of the ideological spectrum on policy preferences. In simplest terms, political polarization is an extreme difference of opinion on policy preferences. Polarization has several dimensions. This is one of the dynamics that makes polarization so difficult to understand.

1. Position on ideological preferences.
2. Strength of position (willing to change).
3. Strength of direction of partisanship.
4. Gap from other parties' view.

Polarization is therefore more difficult to understand than the word implies. One must account for several factors and measure polarization on several different factors. It is not only about accounting for policy preferences but defining the strength of those preferences, willingness to compromise, and the distance between policy preferences on the ideological scale.

Historically, political polarization is a relatively new topic of study. It is only in the last few decades that political polarization has been seriously studied in the literature. However, politics in America has been polarized to some extent since the creation of the Republic. Simply reference the Founders; they were polarized over many points of the Constitution. It was never certain that they would even ratify the Constitution. This can be seen even in the birth of the Republic in the fierce debate over the Constitution. Political polarization has ebbed and flowed through American history. At certain points in American

history polarization has been relatively low. In recent years, it has become much more pronounced. However, we do know that in that last half-century political polarization has grown and is worse than at any other point in modern American history

Despite recent high levels of polarization there have also been periods of consensus in American politics. In recent history, there has been consensus amongst Americans on certain issues. For most of the last half of the 20th Century there was widespread consensus amongst both politicians and the public concerning the Cold War. There was tremendous consensus on foreign and military policy concerning relations with the Soviet Union and its satellite states. The Soviet Union represented a significant existential threat that brought Americans together over concern for another world war, authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Following this consensus there has been a sharp increase in polarization in America. More recently polarization has become more pronounced and has increased in intensity. However, it is not entirely clear what has caused this. There is far less consensus on foreign and military policy with the end of the Cold War. The past thirty years have brought serious debate concerning the need, and more specifically the size and scope of the American military. The War on Terror has introduced a multitude of different problems and little consensus concerning how to address them.

There is a gap in the literature as to the specific conditions under which we expect polarization. Although Fiorina and Jacobsen have explained the general arguments on the existence of a culture war,³⁴ they don't necessarily have a comprehensive explanation of the

³ Fiorina, Morris P. with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman.

⁴ Jacobson, Gary C. 2008. *A Divider Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*. New York: Pearson Longman.

specific conditions that cause polarization. Different scholars have studied various variables that can influence polarization but few if any studies try a comprehensive study on a specific set of variables that influence polarization. Jamieson and Falk successfully elaborate on incivility in Congress and its eroding effect on compromise and policy making, specifically how growing incivility in Congress has served to inhibit the policy making process.⁵

Baldassarri and Bearman speak to one of the specific disagreements about the existence of polarization in the literature, “Some scholars argue that the country is polarized because people experience homogeneity in their everyday interactions. A second group argues that we are not socially polarized because we do not observe divergence in attitudes along classical social categories, such as age, education, income, race, and ethnicity”.⁶ None of these critiques quite get to a comprehensive reason why Americans are polarized. They don’t expound on the sources of polarization, or more specifically the influences of polarization. Baldassarri and Bearman do reach an important point, that certain factors are inherent in influencing polarization. There are certain conditions which will influence polarization.

Polarization in the public is more likely to occur:

1. Amongst an attentive public.
2. Amongst a highly-educated public.
3. Amongst a highly religious public.
4. On salient issues.
5. Amongst party activists.
6. Amongst those with higher levels of income and/or socioeconomic status.
7. On moral values, and post-materialist issues.

⁵Jamieson, Kathleen Hall and Erika Falk. 2000. “Continuity and Change of Civility in the House.” In *Polarized Politics: Congress and the President in a Partisan Era*, ed. Jon R. Bond and Richard Fleisher. Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 96-108.

⁶Baldassarri, Delia and Peter Bearman. 2007. “Dynamics of Political Polarization.” *American Sociological Review* 72 (5): 784-811: p.807.

Definition of Polarization

Polarization in politics is a definite, specific and measurable difference of opinion on matters of policy and/or ideology. This involves not simply a moderate difference of opinion, but a difference that reaches the extremes of the ideological spectrum. In simple terms issue saliency is an important factor producing polarization. Polarization is not limited to politicians and party elites as many political scientists argue. Polarization occurs amongst the public at higher levels and for more complicated reasons than is commonly perceived. This is where the current literature misses the mark and where I will fill the gap.

In a general sense polarization can be summarized as the distinct and measured differences in ideological and political preferences. In a conceptual sense polarization is defined as large and significant differences in opinion and ideology amongst people. There are very significant gaps in ideological and policy preferences both amongst the public and political elites. Polarization is the term with which we describe these differences in opinion. It has become part of the American lexicon. When the term polarization is used, it is generally in a political and ideological sense and people understand it this way. Contemporarily the term polarization has come to represent the large gap in ideological and policy preferences in America. In a certain sense polarization, has almost reached cliché status. It has come to be an accepted “fact” that Americans are highly polarized. It is however partly defined by the media. Americans get a steady diet of how polarization is playing out in the media.

We must also distinguish between the public and political elites. Political elites are people who have specific special access or position in the political process. Political elites are those who have greater access to politicians, actively participate in the political process

including voting, lobbying for and donating to politicians. Political elites are those who both pay a great deal of attention to politics and the political process, have a great stake in policy outcomes, and have a great deal of influence in the political process. As opposed to political elites we have the rest of America. Those who don't pay quite as much attention to politics. Those in the middle class who are so busy trying to simply live. This is where scholars see that Americans in general are not polarized. But Americans are polarized. A few examples to begin with would be abortion, which has been under continual debate since the decision decades ago. The environment another. Race is still and issue that divides America. It is shortsighted to state that Americans are simple closely but not deeply divided. A simple but straightforward model shows us the parameters of polarization. When there is strong opposition to both sides of the ideological spectrum we have polarization. When we have weak opposition then we have little or no polarization. From here we will build more sophisticated model of polarization and how the public is polarized.

Strongly Oppose	Polarized	Strongly Support
Weekly Oppose	Not Polarized	Weekly Oppose

Table 1.1

There is a distinct difference between public polarization and polarization amongst party elites and in fact the literature misses the mark here in several different ways. Fiorina states that "...the notion of a deeply divided population is largely a myth."⁷ He misses the mark because polarization exists amongst the general public. The distinctions between responses to the Cold War and the War on Terror are one illustration on this. There are deep

⁷ Fiorina, Morris P. with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America. New York: Pearson Longman: p. 12.

divides on the manner and extent to which terrorism threatens the average American and the scope and ranges of solutions to this. As Jacobsen explains a significant divide exists amongst Americans concerning support of, and solutions to the War on Terror. In a 2003, National Election Study “The least aware Republicans and Democrats were 31 points apart; the most informed were 77 points apart.”⁸ Opinion leadership seems to influence public opinion. Americans are not simply polarized due to cues from political elites. Cold War consensus has given way to deep divisions on the existence and scope of threats to the United States and how or if to respond to them.

Polarization gets substantial media attention, much of which is uninformed or just plain wrong. It is used as buzzword, a cliché to generate attention. Pundits use it to illustrate the dire state of America and American politics because of the perceived deep, unfixable divide in policy preferences. This is good for ratings and is meant to attract viewers. Polarization has become a buzzword that many people use but very few completely understand. The visually appealing yet misleading red/blue divide maps heavily used during campaign season seem to succinctly summarize the deep divides in American society. Yet these maps are highly misleading. Americans are not simply polarized along geographical lines nor are they polarized on simply a few key issues. Political scientists need to understand the specific and profound reasons American politics has become polarized.

In the last fifty years America, has undergone a sea change in society and politics. America emerged from the Cold War as the lone world superpower. Consensus on Cold War policy has given way to a profound debate and differences in opinion concerning how

⁸ Jacobson, Gary C. 2008. *A Divider Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*. New York: Pearson Longman: p. 133.

America should conduct its foreign policy. Democrats and Republicans seem to have moved further to the left and right of the ideological spectrum. This is in part related to profound changes in society and social mores. Issues such as abortion and LGBT rights have become important parts of the agenda and this represents a profound evolution from post-World War II social issues. In the immediate aftermath of the war there was a conscious effort in America and especially in countries destroyed by the war to rebuild and revitalize economies. Huge civil works projects such as the interstate highway system in the United States. This segued into projects like the space race in which Americans dedicated a decade of time and treasure to putting humans in space. There was a certain harmony and consensus by the American people into these difficult projects. Americans were also in large measure to the Cold War and the existential threats that could result from this conflict. Contemporary more contentious issues such as quality of life and the growing gap in the economy. Full rights for homosexuals, racial issues, and the threat of terrorism began to divide Americans. In large part, social issues evolved from issues that tended to bring people together evolved into issues that very much divided issues in part because they encompassed deeply held personal and religious beliefs.

We do understand some aspects of polarization. However much of the knowledge is fragmented and not particularly useful to a comprehensive understanding of polarization. We know that polarization does exist and that it can affect policy outcome. Few scholars have managed to specifically identify many of the causal mechanisms concretely linking polarization to specific policy outcomes. An understanding of polarization and its effects on the policy making process would lead to many answers as to policy outcomes.

First, we know that policy polarization is not a new phenomenon; contemporarily

polarization has become much more pronounced than at any other time in American history. A great deal of consensus has existed since the Great Depression and New Deal policy initiatives. To deal with the misery of the depression, most Americans agreed that the government had a certain responsibility to provide a safety net in case the economy completely collapses and in fact many of FDR's New Deal programs were, and still are highly popular. Following this was consensus among Americans concerning World War II. Finally, there was a great deal of consensus concerning the Cold War. There was a consensus that America had to beat the Soviet Union in the arms race. This has evolved into the existential threat of terrorism, but consensus on how to handle this is much more fragmented. It is not nearly as easily defined because it exists everywhere and nowhere. Because of the internet terror groups can be organized all over the world. People can become self-radicalized. There is more room for polarization on this issue.

This historic consensus in the earlier parts of the twentieth century is interesting and problematic in studying polarization for several reasons. The bureaucracy that FDR created was extremely popular. During the Depression, many Americans were hurting because of the lack of jobs and the general poor state of the economy. The federal government then grew out of the need to help the American people and the expectation they had that the government should help them through this rough time. One of the common refrains we hear today from the public and from many pundits is that the government needs to get out of the way. For these people, the government and more specifically government regulation is to blame for many of the economic woes people face and that inefficiency in the government is both a waste of tax dollars and a hindrance to private enterprise. The electorate in large part has turned on government programs and agencies that they not so long ago demanded from the

government. The electorate can be very fickle in its preferences and this is one of the more difficult dynamics in studying polarization.

In addition to an end of the consensus during the Cold War, there are much greater gaps in public opinion on morality issues. Not so long ago, the notion of marriage equality was unthinkable to many, and not even present in the public discourse. In the last ten years, there have been significant changes in attitudes on this issue. The military has gone from a ban on homosexuals serving, to a don't ask, don't tell policy, to an outright acceptance of gay and lesbian soldiers. America is on the verge of complete marriage equality no matter one's sexual orientation. Despite this progress there is still significant opposition on these issues. Americans have moved from consensus on many of these issues to a very high degree of polarization.

Public policy has become a much more complicated dynamic in the last thirty years, principally because of the evolution of certain issues, and the lack of a Cold War enemy to fight; there is a much higher degree of discord. Americans no longer have a common enemy to fight and a common cause around which to rally. Finally, other cherished programs such as The War on Drugs have become a bane to many politicians because of the seeming failure and outright futility. Corresponding with this is the fact that there is a general decline in social capital and social trust amongst citizens. Putnam has shown the link between the decline in social trust amongst citizens and a corresponding decline in electoral participation.⁹ Americans are increasingly distrustful of one another and of policy preferences. While there is a decline in participation there is also an increase in distrust. Americans are rethinking many issues that a few years ago, enjoyed bipartisan popularity. Americans are more

⁹ Putnam, Robert. 1995. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 675.

polarized than at any other time in our history. This is causing a great deal of discord both in the general electorate and amongst politicians. Because Americans no longer have a common cause around which to rally there is a great sense of loss of purpose, loss of direction, or simply lack of direction, more specifically bipartisan direction. Americans are highly polarized.

The American political system was designed with partisan differences in mind as James Madison reminds us.¹⁰ Policy preferences and civil discussion are an integral part of American politics. The foundations of America are rooted in debate concerning the size and power of the national government. The debates between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists concerned the size, scope, and proper function of government. From these basic ideas came debates and compromises between the Founders that brought about The Constitution. The Founders understood that there would be dissent but that also there must be compromise for the government to function. Madison understood that there would be factions competing for resources but that these factions would act as a check on one another. It is a matter of simple mathematics. In most cases, either party does not have a significant advantage in numbers to pass policy without at least some support from the other party. Public policy is generally subject to other branches of government, specifically Presidential veto and judicial review. Even if a piece of legislation passes it is subject to approval by other branches of government and legislators are mindful of this. Many different people from a myriad of political ideologies involved in the policy process.

It is relatively apparent that there is a great deal of dysfunction in American politics.

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Madison, James. Federalist No. 10: "The Same Subject Continued: The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection." *New York Daily Advertiser*, November 22, 1787.

Alan Wolfe posed the question “Should we therefore conclude that their American is experiencing a culture war?”¹¹ Government shutdown has become a political strategy. It is a popular belief that much of the political debate is between politicians, activists, and party elites. Through the process of conducting extensive interviews with middle-class Americans across the United States he concludes that in fact there is a culture war but that it is being fought by intellectuals and not by most Americans.¹² In a specific example he concludes that while most Americans are worried about moral values they, for the most part, are not intolerant. In fact, Hunter argues that a primary example of a culture war that never really materialized surrounding was Teri Schiavo case which was ultimately an intense battle amongst both parties and politicians not just at a local but at a national level. In other words, this was one case that ultimately became a polarized political battle at the national level. Not simply between politicians and political elites but amongst the public. The public took cues from the media and politicians that turned this into a polarized issue. Without cues from the elites and intense media coverage this would not have evolved into the nationally polarized issue that it ultimately became.

Per the other school of thought about civil discourse in the United States is that there is a distinct culture war and that it is deeply rooted in American society, that there is a significant and polarized debate concerning many of the most basic issues in American society. James David Hunter makes some very fundamental observations about the deep cultural debates over many of the fundamental issues of the last half century. For Hunter

¹¹ Hunter, James Davidson and Alan Wolf. *Is There a Culture War?: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*.

Baltimore: Brookings Institution Press : p. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*

underneath, the many political controversies over cultural issues are "...deeper crises over the very meaning and purpose of the core institutions of American civilization. Behind the politics of abortion was a controversy over a momentous debate over the meaning of motherhood, of individual liberty, and of our obligations to one another".¹³ These are deep issues concerning fundamental beliefs and long held values and yet at the same time there has been a cultural revolution since the 1960's in America that has challenged many of these deeply held beliefs. It is difficult to argue that Americans do not care about these issues or that they are only just closely divided over them. Hunter goes on to say "Cumulatively, these debates concerning the wide range of social institutions amounted to a struggle over the meaning of America".¹⁴ There is little doubt that polarization exists in the American public. To say that Americans don't care about these fundamental and long held political, cultural, and religious views is very problematic at best.

Differences in policy preferences lead to polarization, but to reach polarization this must be a significant difference of opinion, which is measurable. The extent to which polarization affects politics and political outcomes is a subject of some debate. In truth, the existence and extent of polarization are of some debate in the literature. McCarty et al suggest levels of polarization have "...grown dramatically to levels not seen since the early twentieth century".¹⁵ Scholars across all areas of study in political science argue that polarization can affect outcomes in election, policy, and in general most aspects of politics and the political discussion. The sources of polarization are many and varied. They can

¹³ Ibid: p. 13.

¹⁴ Ibid: p. 14.

¹⁵ McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. "Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?" *American Journal of Political Science*. 53 (3): 666-680: 666

range from religion to political affiliation to geography to ideological beliefs and many others. Polarization occurs across all ideological, geographical, and political spectrums. However, this presents one of the principal difficulties for political scientists. Though we know that polarization occurs in many different situations we lack a comprehensive explanation of the causes of polarization.

Conclusion

Political polarization is no doubt and intricate issue. It is misunderstood by many, even political scientists. Public polarization no doubt exists. Americans are polarized about many issues and at all levels of the socio-economic spectrum. They are not simply closely divided but they are deeply divided. One can understand why some might speculate that Americans are simply closely divided. There are issues about which this is no doubt true. Issue saliency accounts for some of this. Misinterpretation of polling data and simply bad polling data can account for some of this. However, Americans are very deeply divided on many issues, quality of life, issues framed by religious beliefs, and post-materialistic issues. Americans have distinct beliefs on a variety of issues that cannot be explained away by any other conclusion than that they are deeply polarized. Now we begin a systematic explanation of this dynamic.

Chapter 2 Political Polarization and Theories

Introduction

American politics is an inherently complicated and constantly changing dynamic. Politics is by necessity a competitive exercise in which different groups compete for increasingly scarce resources. American politics has been a highly competitive exercise from the beginning; simply agreeing upon and ratifying the Constitution showed that abundantly. James Madison¹⁶ envisioned in a large republican political system where different factions compete with one another over differing policy preferences. In large part, this proves an effective system as factions very often do act as a check on one another, making it difficult for any one group to become too powerful. Most democracies function within the paradigm of a competitive party system. Party systems work well provided there is a requisite amount of compromise. No one party can get everything it wants in a true democracy where there is more than one party. A party system forces negotiation and eventually compromise if policy is to be enacted. It forces competing factions to come to consensus in order ultimately pass policy.

Compromise is not always ensured. In an adversarial system, a certain amount of gridlock is expected. The American government is specifically designed to have a system of checks and balances that will slow the policy process and theoretically produce better policy outcomes as policy is not dictated by the whims of the electorate or the demands of any one politician or group of politicians or any one branch of government. Competition between

¹⁶ Madison, James. Federalist No. 10: "The Same Subject Continued: The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection." New York Daily Advertiser, November 22, 1787.

factions, or parties slows the policy process. Policy must be approved by the legislature and the president and at times reviewed by the judicial branch. The Founders designed the system to produce compromised outcomes.^{17 18} The system is designed specifically so that one party does not dominate the policy process; thus, political policy is a mixture of different ideas and points of view. The Founders recognized the dangers inherent in monarchies, authoritarian regimes, plutocracies and oligarchies where a few powerful people had unlimited power in and the governed had no choice but to follow the directives of a handful of the whims or short termed or short-sighted goals of a few unelected officials.

Although the American political system is designed to be deliberate in the policy process the electorate does not possess an unlimited amount of patience. It will tire of partisan squabbling and policy stagnation. The government controls the educational system, is responsible for important infrastructure, the military, monetary supply and policy, and myriad different other responsibilities that keep the country, economy, and society running. Partisan bickering, policy gridlock, and polarization can therefore hurt Americans in many ways. There is significant motivation for politicians to compromise. Even so politicians are currently polarized. This is a perplexing situation. What's more is that the American public is as polarized on many of the key issues. Why this is has heretofore been unanswered in the literature.

Even though the American system of checks and balances works well in many instances it is not perfect. Intense competition between different factions can produce policy

¹⁷ Hamilton, Alexander, or James Madison. Federalist No. 51: "The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments." New York Packet, February 8, 1788

¹⁸ Hamilton, Alexander Federalist No. 73: "The Provision For The Support of The Executive and The Veto Power." The New York Packet, March 21, 1788.

polarization. The policy process can break down when policy preferences become so polarized that there is no possibility of reaching any compromise. In this case polarization has the potential to produce undesirable outcomes such as extremely polarized policy or policy stagnation. In a certain sense politics is comparable to a game of poker; both sides generally start with a certain set of cards and they must play that hand to maximize their chances of winning. Each party wants to project, whether true or not, that they have the winning hand. Each party must therefore work to project power and the confidence that they have the winning hand to maximize their bargaining position. They must be careful not to overplay their hand and be ready to fold in order not to lose too much. In the policy process, political parties start the bargaining from a position that allows them to give concessions to the competing party without giving up too much of their agenda. They must not overplay their hand and risk losing the concessions they have already gained. However, unlike a game of poker, there does not have to be a loser in the policy process if both sides can learn to live with the concessions they have gained keeping in mind that in the next policy debate they may come out better than the last time. It should not, nor does it have to be a zero-sum game. You win sometimes and you may lose sometimes but the point is that everyone at some point each party gets something they want. However, at some point political parties must be able to concede that they have as much as they are going to get but do so in a way that still projects a certain amount of power and confidence.

Events change greatly under a highly-polarized system. Polarization generally either allows for nothing to get done, or at times for only one side to win. Even when one party controls the legislature and the presidency we can still have gridlock. The minority party has a plethora of tools to block the policy process precisely because in contemporary politics it

can be political suicide to work with the other party on anything. The American people have come to expect gridlock in most instances. Politicians fear the wrath of the electorate and both politicians and the electorate are afraid that one compromise will lead to much greater concessions later. Polarization creates gridlock, and slows the policy process. We can clearly see a great deal of polarization in most current issues. The Affordable Care Act (Obama Care) has been one of the most polarized. Since having been passed in 2009, and mostly upheld by a 5-4 vote of the Supreme Court in 2012, Republicans have spent a great deal of their time trying to get rid of Obama Care. They have been unwilling to accept the fact that it was passed in Congress and upheld by the Supreme Court. And every time they fail to reverse Obama Care they double down on their efforts. This has created a situation where the Republican Party has an almost singular focus on one policy. It is as if they have either forgotten, or simply chosen to ignore the fact that the system has worked as it was intended to. There was debate, a vote, the President signing it into law, and then the Supreme Court upholding the law. However, Republicans have still chosen to vote at least 6 times to kill Obama Care in its entirety and 54 times to kill different provisions of it. This has taken time away from other policy debates. It has created gridlock and a multi-year fight over a law that seems destined to be upheld.

Although there has been a certain amount of polarization in American politics, it has evolved and grown over time. Going back to the Constitutional Convention and the debates between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, to the Lincoln/Douglas debates, there have been fierce disagreements in American politics. Despite these disagreements compromise was not out of the question. The entire American system of government was created despite intense disagreements. Government continued to evolve and function through these disagreements.

Contemporarily there is a great deal more polarization in the United States now than at any other point in American history, or at least since the last high water mark the 1890's. Compromise has come to be an unspeakable, unthinkable action for many politicians. It has come to be defined as weakness and betrayal of one's party. Compromise which once was the cornerstone of the policy process is a notion that is unthinkable for many politicians. This is a complete reversal of attitudes from the mid twentieth century through the Reagan administration. Tip O'Neal in his biography¹⁹ spends an entire chapter describing a much more congenial situation in his era. Members of Congress would spend time socializing after work. They would engage in many recreational activities such as playing cards or having a drink et cetera. They would socialize without talking politics. This was a non-partisan activity. In other words, legislators had respect for one another. There was a time for politics and a time for socializing, even becoming friends. This is not to say that politicians didn't fight for their agendas. It is that they did so in a mature mutually respectful manner. Speaker O'Neal noticed the end of this type of behavior by the end of his career and much more contention. This marked the beginning of a much more contentious type of politics.

Many politicians seem to think that they can and should get everything they want while conceding nothing to the other party. John Boehner, in a recent interview, rejected the word compromise; for him the notion does not even exist.²⁰ He refused to even say the word. This position resounds with the electorate. Politicians who refuse to compromise have come to be seen by many of the electorate as resolute, politicians with character who refuse to concede their core values. They are almost seen as heroes who with uncompromising moral

¹⁹ O'Neal, Tip. M. Man of the House. 1987. New York: Random House.

²⁰ Nunberg, Geoff. "What The Word Compromise Really Means" NPR. July 19, 2011.

standards. When politicians start from a position of never surrender and never compromise, there is sure to be policy polarization. There is little chance of compromise and polarization is likely to follow. People follow cues of politicians and political elites just as much as politicians follow cues from the electorate. Thus, if politicians are polarized the electorate will follow cues from politicians and become more polarized.

Polarization is not limited to a few high-profile issues. The American people are polarized on many important issues such as abortion, gun control, immigration, gay marriage, the War on Drugs, immigration, welfare, foreign policy, and terrorism. It also follows that polarization has grown deeply more recently in the United States since many of the most polarizing issues were not even on the radar as recently as ten or twenty years ago. Twenty years ago, gay marriage was not even a debate in the policy arena. The role of females in the military has expanded tenfold in the last twenty years. Although the idea of publicly funded health care has been around since at least the early 1900's it and a few serious attempts at legislation the Obama administration made it a priority and it quickly became intensely contested issues. These issues have evolved quite quickly and I submit that they have added significantly to polarization. Through the 1960's and 70's more issues, post-materialist, quality of life, feminism, environmentalism have added to the overall debate and have expanded polarization along with some of the more long-standing issues. Increasingly politicians have had to take sides on a more diverse set of issues that have complicated the overall policy process.

Compromise has in large part come to be identified with weakness and has taken on a pejorative connotation by both politicians and the electorate alike. A study of polarization and its effects on politics is warranted because there are few studies that specifically enunciate

the conditions where we find polarization. Most works focus on a specific aspect of polarization. Much of the scholarship focuses on polarization amongst political elites, and some argue that polarization is a phenomenon that exists only amongst political elites.²¹ Fiorina marginalizes or even disputes the existence of political polarization. I will demonstrate that polarization does exist amongst the public. Furthermore, I will show the conditions where we can expect to find polarization.

Polarization gets substantial media attention, much of which is uninformed. It is used as buzzword, a cliché to generate attention. Political pundits use it to illustrate the dire state of America and American politics because of the perceived deep unfixable divide in policy preferences. Although this tactic is good for ratings, and a convenient argument for pundits to convince viewers to keep watching, it serves more to confuse the public than anything else. It serves to further divide Americans and spread the notion that apocalypse is near and that America is on the verge of imploding at any moment. Continually stirring up the American public on a nightly basis and trying to convince them that they must watch your network to get the “truth” about the dire state of politics and the world, is a great tactic to garner loyal viewers is a great tactic to higher ratings and more advertising dollars. An obvious by product of this is to further inflame the electorate.

Quality of life issues, most especially those viewed as morality issues are most often proffered as the issues on which there can be no compromise. We hear dire warnings predicted almost daily for instance if gay marriage is allowed or if marijuana is decriminalized. We are warned that these issues will most certainly lead to the complete

²¹ Fiorina, Morris P. with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman.

decay of society as we know it. However political pundits and politicians and even political scientists seem to lack a basic understanding of the nuances of these issues. More specifically they seem to lack a basic understanding as to how and why the electorate view these issues the way they do. This is good for ratings and is meant to attract viewers. Turn on any cable news network at almost any time of day at it will have the words “Breaking News” flashing across the screen, it is made to seem that there is some political emergency 24 hours a day. This affects polarization specifically affects polarization because viewers constantly have their political beliefs reinforced because much of the programming is partisan. Polarization has become a buzzword that many people use but very few completely understand.

America experienced a great deal of change in the latter half of the 19th Century. After the Civil War America experienced a deep and lasting change brought on in part by the reconstruction, the industrial revolution, and demographic changes brought on by the closing of the frontier and movement from rural to urban areas. Thus, there was a peak in polarization in the 1890’s. The Industrial Revolution, the change from a rural to a more urban America, and the evolving issues and technologies that have effected polarization. America was changing substantially during this time. Then in the early to mid-20th century America emerged and evolved even further from an isolationist rural nation to the lone world superpower by the end of the century.

In the last thirty years America has undergone a sea change in society and politics. America emerged from the Cold War as the lone world superpower. From the mid to late 20th century American politics experienced a great deal of consensus on Cold War and post-materialist issues. America was growing on several different levels. Consensus on Cold War policy has given way to a profound debate and differences in opinion concerning how

America should conduct its foreign policy. Democrats and Republicans in general have also seemed to have moved further to the left and right respectively of the ideological spectrum. This is in part related to profound changes in society and social mores. Issues such as abortion and gay rights have become important parts of the agenda and this represents a profound change from post-World War II social issues. Many contemporary issues such as gay marriage did not exist at the time. Times have changed, issues have changed, political parties have adapted by taking positions on evolving political and social issues. But this seems to have added to polarization in that many of the evolving issues are those that tend to be more polarizing. This has been a rapidly evolving process especially since some of the most polarizing issues have evolved at unprecedented speeds.

The literature answers some questions about polarization. America has not always been highly polarized. A great deal of consensus has existed since the Great Depression and New Deal policy initiatives. To deal with the misery of the depression, most Americans agreed that the government had a certain responsibility to provide a safety net in case the economy completely collapses. Most of FDR's New Deal programs were, and still are highly popular. Following this was consensus among Americans concerning World War II. There were three horrible and powerful dictators bent on ruthlessly ruling the entire world. After Pearl Harbor Americans were firmly and almost unanimously agreed that World War II must be won whatever the required sacrifice. Finally, there was a great deal of consensus concerning the Cold War. America again faced a ruthless regime bent on world domination in the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact nations and they must be stopped. Throughout the Cold War there was a consensus amongst politicians of both parties that again, this conflict must be won whatever the cost.

The current rise in polarization has been precipitated by new evolving issues coupled with increasing discontent on coupled with polarization on previously less contentious policy. In addition to an end of the consensus during the Cold War, there are much greater gaps in public opinion on morality issues. Not so long ago, the notion of gay marriage was unthinkable to many, and not even present in the public discourse. Gay rights even twenty years ago were very much considered a non-issue. Homosexuality is something that people knew existed but did not want to acknowledge. In the last ten years, there have been significant changes in attitudes on this issue. The military has gone from a ban on homosexuals serving, to a don't ask, don't tell policy, to an outright acceptance of gay and lesbian soldiers. America is on the verge of complete marriage equality no matter one's sexual orientation. Americans have moved from consensus on this issue to a very high degree of polarization. Although there is much greater acceptance of gays and lesbians there is a certain subset of voters on the right who have not moved on this issue and likely never will.

All of this leads to the conclusion that public policy has become a much more complicated dynamic in the last thirty years, principally because of the evolution of certain issues, and the lack of a Cold War enemy to fight; there is a much higher degree of discord. Americans no longer have a common enemy to fight and a common cause around which to rally. Finally, other cherished programs such as The War on Drugs have become a bane to many politicians because of the seeming failure and outright futility. Corresponding with this is the fact that there is a general decline in social capital and social trust amongst citizens. Putnam has shown the link between the decline in social trust amongst citizens and a corresponding decline in electoral participation.²² Americans are increasingly distrustful of

²² Putnam, Robert. 1995. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 675.

one another and of policy preferences. While there is a decline in participation there is also an increase in distrust. Americans are rethinking many issues that a few years ago enjoyed bipartisan popularity. Americans are more polarized than at any other time in our history. This is causing a great deal of discord both in the general electorate and amongst politicians. Because Americans no longer have a common cause around which to rally there is a great sense of loss of purpose, loss of direction, or simply lack of direction, more specifically bipartisan direction. Americans are highly polarized.

The American political system was designed with partisan differences in mind.²³ Policy preferences and civil discussion and debate about such are an integral part of the American politics. The foundations of America are rooted in debate concerning the size and power of the government. The debates between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists concerned the size, scope, and proper function of government. From these basic ideas came debates and compromises between the Founders that brought about The Constitution. Madison understood that there would be factions competing for resources but that these factions would act as a check on one another. It is a matter of simple mathematics. In most cases, either party does not have a significant advantage in numbers to pass policy without at least some support from the other party. Public policy is generally subject to other branches of government, specifically Presidential veto and judicial review. Even if a piece of legislation passes it is subject to approval by other branches of government and legislators are mindful of this. Many different people from a myriad of political ideologies involved in the policy process. Public policy is not made in an ideological vacuum, more specifically policy

²³ Madison, James. Federalist No. 10: "The Same Subject Continued: The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection." New York Daily Advertiser, November 22, 1787.

is made by a collaboration of politicians of different ideologies.

However contemporarily there is considerable debate concerning factions, or more specifically civil discourse. Dworkin asserts that Americans are very deeply divided on many issues.

American politics are in an appalling state. We disagree, fiercely, about almost everything. We disagree about terror and security, social justice, religion in politics, who is fit to be a judge, and what democracy is. These are not civil disagreements: each side has no respect for the other. We are no longer partners in self-government; our politics are rather a form of war.²⁴

There is no shortage of scholars who hold the same or similar views as Dworkin. It is a popular belief that polarization is essentially a function of the debate between politicians, political activists, and party elites. Fiorina is of the same opinion that most if not all the polarization is between a few at the top and that most Americans are simply closely but not deeply divided. Hunter and Wolfe posed the questions “Should we therefore conclude that there American is experiencing a culture war?”²⁵ Through the process of conducting extensive interviews with middle-class Americans across the United States he concludes that in fact there is a culture war but that it is being fought by intellectuals and activist, not by common folk.²⁶ Specifically he concludes that while most Americans are worried about moral values they, for the most part, are not intolerant.

According to the other school of thought about civil discourse in the United States is

²⁴ Dworkin, Ronald. *Is Democracy Possible Here?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006: p. 1.

²⁵ Hunter, James Davidson and Alan Wolf. *Is There a Culture War: A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life.*

Baltimore: Brookings Institution Press : p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

that there is a distinct culture war and that it is deeply rooted in American society, that there is a significant and polarized debate concerning many of the most basic issues in American society. James David Hunter makes some very fundamental observations about the deep cultural debates over many of the fundamental issues of the last half century. For Hunter underneath, the many political controversies over cultural issues are "...deeper crises over the very meaning and purpose of the core institutions of American civilization. Behind the politics of abortion was a controversy over a momentous debate over the meaning of motherhood, of individual liberty, and of our obligations to one another".²⁷ These are deep issues concerning fundamental beliefs and long held values and yet at the same time there has been a cultural revolution since the 1960's in America that has challenged many of these deeply held beliefs. It is difficult to argue that Americans do not care about these issues or that they are only just closely divided over them. Hunter goes on to say "Cumulatively, these debates concerning the wide range of social institutions amounted to a struggle over the meaning of America".²⁸ There is little doubt that polarization exists in the American public. To say that Americans don't care about these fundamental and long held political, cultural, and religious views is extremely problematic at best.

Differences in policy preferences lead to polarization, but to reach polarization this must be a significant difference of opinion, which is measurable. The extent to which polarization affects politics and political outcomes is a subject of some debate. In truth, the existence and extent of polarization are of some debate in the literature. McCarty et al suggest levels of polarization have "...grown dramatically to levels not seen since the early

²⁷ Ibid: p. 13.

²⁸ Ibid: p. 14.

twentieth century”.²⁹ Scholars across all areas of study in political science argue that polarization can affect outcomes in election, policy, and in general most aspects of politics and the political discussion. The sources of polarization are many and varied. They can range from religion to political affiliation to geography to ideological beliefs and many others. Polarization occurs across all ideological, geographical, and political spectrums. However, this presents one of the principal difficulties for political scientists. Though we know that polarization occurs in many different situations we lack a comprehensive explanation of the causes of polarization. Specifically, the literature is lacking a description of where we expect to find polarization and why and which areas we don’t expect to find polarization. I will explain the conditions under which we expect to find polarization. This will serve as a base of information from which to launch further studies of polarization.

Despite what we do know about polarization, not all scholars agree concerning the extent or specifically the reasons it exists. Baldassarri and Bearman note the “Some scholars argue that the country is polarized because people experience homogeneity in their everyday interactions. A second group argues that we are not socially polarized because we do not observe divergence in attitudes along classical social categories, such as age, education, income, race, and ethnicity”.³⁰ We know that there are several weaknesses with this second view. Income inequality at its highest since the 1890’s. This exacerbates other differences such as those social cleavages, education levels and social mobility. These arguments complicate the study of polarization because they reduce the paradigm to its simplest elements

²⁹ McCarty, Nolan, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. “Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?” *American Journal of Political Science*. 53 (3): 666-680: 666

³⁰ Baldassarri, Delia and Peter Bearman. 2007. “Dynamics of Political Polarization.” *American Sociological Review* 72 (5): 784-811: p.807.

when in fact polarization is a complicated and highly nuanced issue.

Research Debate

There is a larger debate concerning the existence of polarization. This debate is illustrated by an analysis of the work of Fiorina and Jacobsen. Specifically, Fiorina³¹ argues America is not polarized, or more specifically that Americans, though divided about policy preferences are closely but not deeply divided. He takes issue with the notion of the red/blue divide in America. Every election cycle we typically see electoral maps of the red/blue state divide about the deep divide amongst Americans concerning political ideology. This presents a picture of a highly-polarized America that is deeply divided principally on geographical lines with areas that are either conservative or liberal.

Fiorina explores in length the notion of the red/blue state divide, specifically that the idea and enunciation of a red/blue state divide is distorting the paradigm because it draws a very sharp line of demarcation between states as ideologically distinct, mostly in line with the electoral vote count. A state is labeled blue or red in correlation with how their electoral votes are generally aligned either for the Democrats or Republicans. In a simple analysis, this can greatly distort the notion of how and where Americans fall intellectually. However, as Fiorina notes, “California is a blue state, but most of the state’s counties are red. Similarly, Texas is a red state, but there is considerable blue in its large cities and along its border with Mexico”.³² He does recognize one of the principal flaws in his argument that when we look

³¹ Fiorina, Morris P. with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman.

³² Ibid.

at county map of the electoral vote; there are very large swaths of the country that are deeply red or blue. This is an argument that he never directly overcomes. For example, rural parts of America such as Idaho and Utah are deeply red and by overwhelming margins and elect strongly conservative Republicans. Parts of the Rust Belt are very deeply blue in large part because of blue collar union workers, unions are typically strong supporters of the Democratic party. These are not political elites. They are middle to lower middle-class people. They work for a living and fewer of their children attend college than higher social classes. Fiorina's thesis that only activists and elites are the only polarized demographic begins to fall apart when we look more deeply at the far reaches past the east and west coasts. Americans are polarized at a basic level.

Fiorina's principle argument is that America is closely but not deeply divided. Fiorina states that "...ordinary Americans instinctively seek out the center while the parties and candidates hang out on the extremes".³³ In other words most Americans are centrists and politicians are the extremists. However, this theory has many problems, not the least of which is median voter theory which demonstrates that candidates try to move to the center of the policy spectrum to appeal to the largest number of voters. Abramowitz and Saunders state that "According to Morris Fiorina, Americans are moderate, tolerant, and ambivalent in their political attitudes. This has always been true and it is, if anything, truer today than in the past".³⁴ Specifically Fiorina states that,

Americans are closely divided, but we are not deeply divided, and we are closely divided because many of us are ambivalent and uncertain, and consequently reluctant to make firm commitments to parties, politicians, or policies. We divide evenly in elections or sit them out entirely because we instinctively seek the center while the parties and

³³ Abramowitz, Alan I and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. "It Polarization a Myth?" 70 (2): 542-555: p. 553.

³⁴ *ibid*: p. 1.

candidates hand out on the extremes.³⁵

Fiorina posits that Americans are divided on some issues but that these are not deep divides. Instead whatever polarization does exist is a phenomenon of political elites and party activists. He postulates that yes, Americans are divided, but instead of a deep chasm existing he states that the electorate is rather closely divided. In other words, Americans hold differing political preferences but they are very close with only minor differences in their preferences. Fiorina is really stating that most Americans are centrists and this rather than polarized preferences drive the policy-making process. But the real question is exactly which parts of the demographic are polarized? In general, the literature does little to explain what demographics are polarized, most specifically in the public. While it is true that many voters are centrists or moderates there are many voters who are also polarized. In the last several election cycles Americans have elected several Tea Party candidates in primary elections and in some cases, have won the general elections. Mike Lee recently defeated longtime incumbent and moderate Bob Bennett in Utah. Whether simply making a strong challenge in the primary, winning the primary, or even winning the general election, the Tea Party has been a significant problem for Republicans. They have been torn between the moderates in a national sense, and much more conservative Tea Party candidates in more conservative parts of the country. This seems to contradict the Median Voter Theory which implicitly states that extremist candidates do not get elected. While historically the two-party system has inhibited extremist candidates, it has certainly not proven as accurate in recent election cycles. In Idaho, right wing candidate Raul Labrador came out of nowhere to defeat centrist and popular

³⁵ Ibid: ix.

candidate Walt Minnick. We have the Freedom Caucus which is gaining popularity and is extremely far to the right.

Other scholars do demonstrate that Americans are less polarized on some issues. DiMaggio et al³⁶ show areas where Americans have become less polarized. They find that Americans have become more unified on acceptance of racial integration, women's role in the public sphere, and concerning crime and criminal justice. However, they do agree that Americans have become more polarized on attitudes towards abortion and on attitudes about the poor and social justice. Here Evans concurs but very interestingly still finds that there is increasing polarization on attitudes towards sexuality.³⁷ Evans notes that while others do not find significant differences in views towards sexual morality he does find statistically significant differences with increasing trends towards both more liberal and more conservative views. While these findings concur and bolster some of Fiorina's claims they still concede one important factor: that polarization does exist. In larger part, this point is conceded by most scholars who argue against or downplay the role of polarization. Whether it is amongst political elites, party activists, or amongst the general population on a few select issues the fact that polarization exists to some extent is the one point that all scholars must concede. What none of these scholars explain is polarization amongst the public or any of the reasons why the public is polarized.

Fiorina's arguments do not hold up to strict scrutiny. The consensus is that polarization exists at least on some issues and most scholars that dispute polarization do agree

³⁶ DiMaggio, Paul, John Evans, and Bethany Bryson. 1996. "Have Americans' Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102:690-745: p. 715.

³⁷ Evans, John W. 2003. "Have Americans' Attitudes Become More Polarized?—An Update." *Social Science Quarterly* 84:71-90.

that polarization does exist amongst political elites and party activists. Although the literature is lacking there have been some accurate descriptions of different aspects of polarization. Abramowitz and Saunders provide a well-structured argument to refute many of Fiorina's claims. They find that Fiorina is correct in claiming that most Americans are ideological moderates. In fact, "Only a tiny percentage of respondents in the 2004 NES survey were consistent liberals or consistent conservatives" (2005, 3). However, Abramowitz and Saunders find that unlike what Fiorina claims polarization is not limited strictly to the party elites and leaders. In fact, the ideological preferences of rank-and-file Democratic and Republican voters differed rather sharply. This is one of the basic sources of polarization. On a mean 11-point ideological scale Democratic voters scored 5.0 while Republican voters scored 7.5. They found that this difference was highly statistically significant ($p > .001$) (Abramowitz and Saunders 2005, 4). Rank and file Democrats and Republicans tend to be very highly polarized on a wide array of issues.

Abramowitz and Saunders agree with Fiorina in the sense of political elites being polarized: according to them this is in fact largely a phenomenon of partisan elites. Active partisans seem to be much more polarized than the overall electorate.³⁸ This adds greatly to the overall dynamic of polarization. In addition, contrary to Fiorina's argument that active partisans make up only a very thin slice of the electorate, Abramowitz and Saunders argue that rather they make up a very significant portion of the electorate. "Twenty-two percent of all respondents in the 2004 NES survey and 28 percent of all voters in the survey engaged in at least two activities beyond voting. These were the highest percentages in the history of the

³⁸ Abramowitz, Alan. and Kyle L. Saunders. 2005 "Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America." *The Forum*. 1076. 1-19: p. 60.

NES. Active partisans are not a small group of left-wing and right-wing extremists. They are a large minority of both parties' general election voters and they may well comprise most both parties' primary voters.³⁹ It seems rather clear that polarization is not isolated to a few select issues. Neither is it simply a phenomenon that occurs amongst party activists. Of course, activists and politicians will be more cognizant of issues and more likely to hold an opinion. However, in a larger sense the electorate takes cues from these people. Political parties for instance serve to inform the public on policy issues. These messages will be delivered with an emphasis on the interests of the party. The electorate is also socialized by their church, their parents, and different political pundits all of which are more likely to hold polarized views. Of course, those with more to gain or more at stake are more likely to be polarized however they are not the only ones who will be polarized.

Some very high-profile issues are clearly polarized and consequently serve as case studies on the extent of polarization. Abortion is an issue that most scholars agree is highly polarized amongst most demographics. In the United States, in the last half-century at least, abortion has been a very controversial issue. Democrats and Republicans have been significantly polarized on this issue since the Roe V Wade decision in 1973.⁴⁰ Around this time Democrats began to take on a more pro-choice stance while Republicans became the party of the pro-life movement. This likely coincides with the Republican Party becoming more associated with groups such as the Christian coalition. Democrats embraced liberal positions on social policy while Republicans took very conservative stances on social issues. Baldassarri and Bearman note that most scholars agree that since 1990 public opinion is

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Adams, Greg D. 2008. "Abortion: evidence of an issue evolution." *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 718-737.

increasingly divided on abortion and more recently on sexual morality.⁴¹ From all outward appearances this would correlate directly to religion. One would also assume that this polarization is directly related to increased polarization amongst elites and party activists. They posit that polarization is in fact mostly a phenomenon of the political elite and party activists and in general agree with Fiorina on polarization. According to Baldassarri and Berman there is an increase in polarization amongst elites however they state that polarization amongst the electorate is stable or depolarization.⁴² According to Baldassarri and Bearman there is a distinct reason that polarization is incorrectly identified in the public. There are issues they categorize as takeoff issues. "...sometimes, typically for very short periods, some issues become the focus of intense attention and consequently appear to radically polarize Americans—for example, attitudes toward abortion, gays in the military, or the Iraq war. We call these takeoff issues".⁴³ Specifically then, takeoff issues cause confusion and even skewed data. An issue can suddenly become the focus of the news cycle, for attention military action. This can cause a great deal of polarization for a short period of time then fall off the agenda.

For Baldassarri and Bearman polarization in large part consist of short term intense differences of opinion on these few takeoff issues while for the most part there is little to no polarization on most issues. The larger part of their argument is that people tend to associate with people of similar interests tend to hear only arguments that concur with their own. This is exacerbated by cable news and the 24-hour news cycle. The public can watch news sources that reinforce their views and they can access this content all day every day. One is far less

⁴¹ Baldassarri, Delia and Peter Bearman. 2007. "Dynamics of Political Polarization." *American Sociological Review* 72 (5): 784-811.

⁴² *Ibid*: p. 787.

⁴³ *Ibid*: p. 784.

likely to change their opinion when it is constantly reinforced

Jacobsen argues that polarization is a highly influential dynamic in American politics using specific examples, principally the polarization surrounding President Bush and his seeming failure to be a uniter instead of a divider. According to Jacobson America is more polarized than at any time in history. He writes that President Bush has "...become the most divisive and polarizing president the more than 50 years that public opinion polls have regularly measured citizens' assessments of Presidents".⁴⁴ This is a bold statement but one that Jacobson defends effectively. Jacobson explains that for several reasons, but principally the war in Iraq, by October 2005, President Bush's approval rating amongst Democrats had fallen to 7 percent. To put this in perspective, this figure is a full 4 percentage points lower than that of Richard Nixon's just before he resigned in 1974.⁴⁵ President Bush was a significantly polarizing figure at least in part due to the Bush Doctrine. President Bush was determined to carry out his foreign policy preferences regardless of public opinion. One could define this as a takeoff issue. In other words that public opinion was temporarily inflated due to opinions about the war. However, the war has continued through 2017 in one way or another. Opinions concerning the war have can change due to changing circumstances but for the most part the war has remained unpopular with a steady number of supports. It is a polarized issue.

Jacobsen explains some of the circumstances under which we expect to find polarization. There was a certain religious factor to the polarization. Evangelical Christians

⁴⁴ Jacobson, Gary C. 2008. *A Divider Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*. New York: Pearson Longman: p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*: p. 5.

were much more likely to support the President's actions in Iraq throughout the entirety. Jacobsen notes that the divide between conservative Christian Republicans and disaffected Democrats was quite pronounced and greatly contributed to partisan divides on the president and the war. Religious views clearly added to the divide in public opinion as religiosity and ideology contributed to the acceptance of the President's explanation for the war.⁴⁶ Religiosity is one of the conditions which I expect to find polarization. We can see from Jacobsen's work that religiosity will contribute to greater partisan divides. Peoples' religious beliefs will influence their policy preferences.

Fiorina and Jacobsen represent the larger debate on polarization in the literature. Their work frames the debate in its broadest sense which provides a base from which to explore the more focused research on polarization. In the broadest sense, we could reduce the argument to the broadest terms under which Fiorina and Jacobsen make their arguments.

Along with this polarization have been more general questions about polarization. "Questions about whether voters rely on their policy preferences when casting ballots have been present since scholars first began examining the determinants of voting behavior".⁴⁷ In his work Highton specifically attempts to examine abortion policy voting in Senate elections. Specifically, Highton "...investigates how the effects of national party position divergence, candidate position divergence and voter information and salience moderate the relationship between abortion policy preferences and vote choices".⁴⁸ One of the main choices that the electorate has around the issue of abortion is the lead that the major political parties take

⁴⁶ Ibid: p. 158.

⁴⁷ Highton, Benjamin. 2004. "Voting In Senate Elections: The Case of Abortion." *Political Behavior*. 26 (2)181-200: p. 181.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

around the issue. Adams notes that in 1980 parties really solidified around the issues with Republicans taking the pro-life lead while the Democrats took the pro-choice stance.⁴⁹ In most of the elections since many of the rank and file voters have taken many of their cues from the established politicians who have really established positions and voting records on the issues already.

Highton reaches some very complex yet seemingly simple answers regarding the electorate and their voting choices regarding abortion. When examining the issue of whether voters imply a simple strategy of yes or no when choosing a candidate based on their position regarding abortion seems a very simplistic matter. Highton states that other more complex issues come into play such as information, opportunity, and motivation.⁵⁰ This means that although policy position does come into play there are still other important factors that can and do affect the process. However, a main incentive for politicians and their voting choices is the fact that they may be punished by the electorate. Those at the extreme ends of the spectrum therefore do have a significant chance of not only influencing elections but also policy outcomes because they are able to hold politicians accountable through the vote.

As Jacobsen posits, partisan politics can add to and/or create higher levels of polarization. There is naturally a divide between the parties concerning policy preferences. The two-party system in the United States likely adds to the polarization because American parties must be catch-all parties. They must appeal to many policy preferences. In this case, the two major political parties include everyone from moderates to those much closer to the

⁴⁹ Adams, Greg D. 2008. "Abortion: evidence of an issue evolution." *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 718-737.

⁵⁰ Highton, Benjamin. 2004. "Voting In Senate Elections: The Case of Abortion." *Political Behavior*. 26 (2)181-200.

extremes of the ideological spectrum. By necessity politicians must pay at least some attention to those at the extremes of their party. Consequently, the Tea Party has gained a great deal of power within the Republican Party. Though they represent a minority of Republicans they have managed to get several candidates in House and Senate races and in some instances, and in some cases, such as the Utah example, an established moderate has been unseated by a Tea Party candidate. McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal get at this dynamic in their work *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. The title of chapter two of their work, *The Polarization of the Politicians* nicely summarizes their theses. In general politicians have become much more polarized since at least the 1970's. Describing some of these changes from moderate to highly ideological politicians, they describe the five-year period that saw the transition of one of Pennsylvania's Senate seats from a Democrat to a very right-wing Senator. They state, "The Heinz-Wofford-Santorum transition from moderation to relative extremism has been repeated over and over in the past 25 years. It is the process that has increasingly polarized American politics".⁵¹ In other words there has been a measurable change in the last quarter century from legislators who are relatively moderate to many who are much more extreme. This sweeping change in representatives must coincide with a rise in polarization. Voters choose candidates who they feel best represent them.

But the deeper question here is where did the polarization start, with the public or the politicians? Since officeholders represent the voters' preferences it is much more likely that the public was polarized and therefore began to choose candidates that reflected their views. This is also evident on a quantitative level from analyses of roll call voting in Congress. This

⁵¹ McCarty, Nolan & Keith T. Poole & Howard Rosenthal, 2008. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. MIT Press Books: The MIT Press: p. 3.

paradigm shift from relatively moderate to extremism both the House and the Senate is indicative of fundamental changes in society and specifically in the electorate.

We did start to see a shift in the 1994 election. President Clinton and his policies were very popular. However, Newt Gingrich and his colleagues and The Contract with America, also known as the Republican Revolution. Republicans gained enough seats to take control of the House. This is one demarcation in history where one may see a significant change in attitude. At this point Republicans did seem to start entrenching themselves politically.

McCarty et al do not rely simply on anecdotal evidence; they more than adequately quantify their work in large part in multivariate analyses of roll call votes in Congress. They find that beginning in the 1970's Democrats began staking out much more liberal positions while to the contrary Republicans began staking out increasingly conservative policy preferences.⁵² This has at least in some part to do with deeper changes in society. Religion and religious issues started to become prevalent in the public debate. Groups such as the Christian Coalition became more influential within the Republican Party. Conversely Democrats in turn took a more liberal stance preferring that the government not get involved with legislating on issues of morality. Specifically issues such as abortion gained a place in the public debate and this drove politicians to stake out positions on these issues. Religion no doubt is influential on levels of polarization. Religion takes strong positions on morality issues, especially sex and abortion. Thus, religious adherents will be much more likely to favor legislation that makes abortion illegal. Lack of religious beliefs allows for a different interpretation of morality. For many these are simply choices that people make and not decisions that have eternal consequences These attitudes are very likely to result in

⁵² Ibid

polarization especially when a part of the electorate believe that there are eternal consequences at stake. Issues such as abortion are complex because it is affected by religious views and in America it is very much a partisan issue as well. In addition, political parties have claimed abortion among other issues that have not traditionally been a part of the public debate. This is in part affected by the public becoming more involved and concerned about the government attempting to legislate morality whether for or against.

If Jacobsen is correct polarization becomes an extremely important dynamic to understand precisely because it affects politics in a profound way and can be used as a tool by politicians to further their own agendas. This essentially means that in some part at least the margins have vanished and what remains is a void between the polarized poles. This is not a new development. Scholars have been debating the vanishing marginals for quite some time. As early as 1974 Mayhew described the vanishing marginals in Congress and some of the possible effects, most importantly the effects on the electorate and a certain loss of influence because incumbency essentially means a lifetime appointment for many in Congress.⁵³ Theriault agrees, he argues that “As the parties polarized in Congress, the political middle vanished”.⁵⁴ Poole and Rosenthal have noted that the vast middle of the electorate is underrepresented in part because of polarization.⁵⁵ Of course there are other dynamics at work here but polarization is one of the principal causes of the vanishing marginals. Gerrymandering and redistricting have made districts that are much more homogeneous and

⁵³ Mayhew, David R. 1974 “Congressional Elections: The Case of the Vanishing Marginals” *Polity*, Vol. 6, No. 3: 295- 317

⁵⁴ Theriault, Sean M. 2003. “The Case of the Vanishing Moderates: Party Polarization in the Modern Congress” Unpublished paper presented at The University of Texas at Austin. 3.

⁵⁵ Poole, Keith T. and Howard Rosenthal. 1984. “The Polarization of American Politics” *Journal of Politics* 46 (Nov.): 1061-1079.

has reduced the number of contested districts.⁵⁶ However these have long been a part of American politics and only provides part of the explanation for the growing levels of polarization. There are other specific conditions that influence polarization which is exactly the issue this essay will explain in greater detail.

There is a small body of evidence suggests that polarization is at least exaggerated by scholars or may even not exist. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope argue that the notion of a polarized America is a myth and that in fact people are moderate, tolerant, and even politically ambivalent.⁵⁷ However their argument seemingly falls short as the myth of the Red/Blue state divide it attempts to discredit. Though Americans are no doubt closely divided on some issues it is plainly evident that they are deeply divided as ever on issues such as abortion. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that polarization is as pronounced as Jacobsen argues. Abramowitz and Saunders contend that "...while some of the claims of culture war proponents about deep political divisions among the American public have been overstated, Fiorina systematically understates the significance of these divisions". However, in truth this is a topic about which we understand very little precisely because the literature is deficient. Though there has been scholarly work done on polarization, it mostly covers either certain specific aspects of polarizations in some cases and in others the literature cover the broadest overview and aspects of polarization. Although his work is a bit dated, Mayhew provides a solid start for further study of polarization. He makes a solid case for vanishing marginals and indicates some of the implications, but leaves out the underlying causes.⁵⁸ This

⁵⁶ Theriault: p. 4.

⁵⁷Fiorina, Morris P., with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York. Pearson Longman.

⁵⁸ Mayhew 1974.

study is one of the first of its kind on polarization it leaves a lot of room for further studies. If his work on vanishing marginals is correct, we can fill in a piece of the polarization puzzle. We then know that Congress is polarized and some of the reasons why. This polarization had to start somewhere. In the long run, it will matter to know where polarization started.

Fiorina while arguing against polarization does so in some of the broadest terms arguing that the Red/Blue state divide is oversimplified and in most cases non-existent. His argument lacks in large part from the same sort of vagueness that Americans are simply closely and not deeply divided. Abramowitz and Saunders in one of their seminal works refute most of Fiorina's claims but this consists of debunking Fiorina's five main assertions that Americans are mostly moderate, that partisan differences have been largely overstated, that geographical and social cleavages too have been overstated and that gerrymandering is largely responsible for partisan divisions. While they hint at parts of my arguments such as the influence of religion and education on polarization they don't connect all the dots and we need empirical data to test these claims. Furthermore, that gerrymandering affects partisan politics and partisan divisions is evident. Therefore, gerrymandering is used to shore up electorally safe districts thereby exacerbating geographical polarization and divisions by creating one party districts. Gerrymandering creates ideological divides within states by grouping ideologically like-minded people into congressional districts. Poole and Rosenthal⁵⁹ specifically have illustrated the effects of gerrymandering on polarization, specifically that gerrymandering creates safe districts where incumbents don't have to worry about reelection. This reduces competition and can add to political stalemates. Abramowitz and Saunders⁶⁰ for

⁵⁹Rosenthal, Alan and Keith T. Poole. "Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization" *American Journal of Political Science*. 53(3)666-680

⁶⁰ Abramowitz, Alan and Kyle L. Saunders. "Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized

their part paint a broad picture of polarization but they too miss the more specific conditions I will enumerate.

Conditions

Questions of morality are some of the most oft mentioned in the literature concerning polarization. Even so, religiosity has not been specifically linked with polarization in any of the literature. There we find a deficiency in the discussion. Religiosity influences levels of polarization for several different reasons. Religion can be an important factor in political socialization in general. Religion teaches that certain things are morally wrong and certain things are then morally right or correct. There is little grey area in most religions; things are black and white, right or wrong. There is no middle ground. Another way to say this is that there is no room for compromise. This would not be politically significant if churches did not bother with politics, or more specifically did not attempt to influence the policy process. Since at least the Reagan Administration, the Christian Coalition and other religious group have increasingly involved themselves in politics. Consequently, these views are bound to influence public opinion and by extension polarization. Simply put religion influences personal beliefs which in turn influences political and policy preferences. This then affects levels of polarization.

Religious beliefs enter debates that on the surface are seemingly entirely secular. One of the most important issues of the last ten years has been the debate concerning health care. There are questions about government involvement in citizens' personal lives juxtaposed with the fact that there are millions of people in the United States who lack adequate access to health care. Religions have inserted themselves in this debate but not always on the side one

America" The Forum Manuscript 1076.

might initially expect. The Catholic Church has a long history of promoting social justice and more specifically charity and service to the poor. Angrosino concludes that “The U.S. Catholic Church, like the Vatican itself in the past three decades, is socially progressive but conservative in matters of doctrine and ‘discipline’ (the norms regulating the behavior of the hierarchy, such as clerical celibacy and the ordination of women). The Vatican’s rationale is that only a well-disciplined church whose unity is reinforced by solid adherence to normative beliefs and practices is capable of being an effective vehicle for social reform”.⁶¹ The Catholic Church was an ally of President Clinton’s health care reform. The Church recognizes that in large part American health care serves too few people and costs too much.⁶² It is inherently difficult for poorest people to access quality and affordable health care. This is difficult to dispute and the Church is highly concerned with the poor who have no access to health care. In this vein, Catholics would be considered extremely progressive; in American political terms, liberal or left leaning. Religiosity does not automatically lead to conservative policy preferences. This introduces another level of nuance to interpreting religiosity and its influences on polarization.

Catholics have had a difficult time agreeing with politicians on health care reform because this inevitably entails access to birth control and abortion both of which the Church is adamantly opposed to. In fact, Catholics have called for a rejection of health care reform both then and now because of the inclusion of abortion and birth control”.⁶³ This creates difficulty for both church officials and membership which would like to see health care reform but

⁶¹ Angrosino, Michael V. 1996 “The Catholic Church and U.S. Health Care Reform” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 10(1): 3-19: p. 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*: p. 12.

under their own strict interpretation of what is morally right. Here legislation that corresponds with the Churches' teaching on social justice conflict with teachings on morality. Adding to the confusion is the fact the Church's' promotion of social justice conflicts with American values such as laissez-faire capitalism and a distrust of government interference in peoples' lives. This no doubt clashes strongly with those who have more secular beliefs and do not want the Church to interfere in peoples' lives nor do they want Christian values to dictate the direction of public policy. There is certainly a causal link to be explained between religiosity and political polarization. Religious beliefs do influence their political decisions.

Religion and its effects on polarization are a highly-nuanced dynamic. Anecdotally and without deep thought one may assume that religion influences polarization in a rightward direction. Much of the Judeo-Christian ethic is clear on issues of morality. Specifically, it demands strict adherence to rules concerning sexual morality which can conflict with liberal political ideals. Abortion, and gay marriage have been two of the most hotly debated issues of the last twenty-five years. All the monotheistic religions teach that these are serious sins and completely against God's will. However, the two main political parties in the United States have taken clear stances on these issues being either pro-choice and supporting gay marriage or being against them. Clearly one's religious beliefs, if applied to politics would suggest that one choose the party and the ideological position that these things should not be accepted in society. Since at least the Reagan Administration groups like the Christian Coalition have clearly involved themselves in the politics to the point of lobbying to influence policy outcomes. This has the effect of pushing polarization to the right and there is a clear division of the political parties on these to morality issues. Republicans want no acceptance of these both in a social and legal sense whereas Democrats view this as a personal choice, a

civil liberty, and advocate for government to stay out of people's lives in these matters.

On issues of social justice however religion can have a conflict with secular political ideologies in a much different manner. The notion of social justice has also been hotly debated in the United States since the Great Depression, through the years of President Johnson and his Great Society and into the eighties and nineties and the prosperous years of the Reagan and Clinton Administrations. The Catholic Church has long been very liberal on issues of social justice; one reasons Catholics have traditionally voted with the Democratic Party. The Catholic Church has long been an advocate for charity for the poor and social justice for those left behind by society for whatever reason. Of course, Catholics are not the only Christians who advocate for social justice. The New Testament is very clear on the obligations of Christians to participate in charitable activity, principally to care for those who are less fortunate. Therefore, there is a strong progressive element of Christianity which is generally at odds with contemporary conservative ideology, especially the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party. Interestingly this can drive polarization to the left. Religiosity does not only push polarization to the left of the political spectrum. When we describe religiosity as an influencing factor we must consider all aspects of religiosity not simply morality. Religiosity has a complex relationship to polarization. While religiosity certainly influences polarization, it does not automatically push polarization to the right. There is a Christian right and a Christian left. We must understand all aspects of religiosity to understand how it influences polarization.

On the same token, we cannot automatically assume that a lack of religion will push polarization to the right. Just as there is a Christian right and left there is an agnostic/atheist right and left. We cannot assume that an atheist will be to the left of the political spectrum.

One may be far to the right for several reasons other than morality issues and in fact have no qualms with the Judeo-Christian sense of morality influencing politics and we cannot assume that simply because someone has no religion that they have no regard for a Christian sense of morality. Finally, we have a distinct non-religious left concerning social issues/social justice. We must judge religious influence on polarization regarding these different and distinct situations.

Polarization will affect public policy. We would not expect to see major shifts in policy or even many policy changes in policy with a high degree of public polarization. Polarization in the policy process precludes compromise. Therefore, we expect to see little change. On policies where there is little polarization we would expect to see more policy change as there is more room for compromise. If there is satisfaction with the policy, we would not expect to see major changes in policy. Political polarization in some sense very easy to understand, and yet at the same time an incredibly complicated and difficult to comprehend. That the American public is polarized we know. However, an in-depth explanation of the reasons has yet to be offered. In the following chapters, this will systematically be described in an in-depth manner.

Conclusion

Though there are some scholars that argue that polarization does not exist or that it is limited to a small number of issues they are mistaken. Abramowitz and Saunders note the dramatic increase in ideological identification by party members between 1972 and 1992. In

1972 the correlation was .32, in 1992 it was .44 and in 2004 it was .66.⁶⁴ Polarization has become much greater between those Americans who are politically engaged directly correlating with my thesis that polarization is greater amongst party activists. Jacobsen provides a compelling argument that President Bush despite his desire to be a uniter and not a divider was clearly a polarizing figure. This was due at least in some part by Bush's use of going public and his unrelenting efforts to pass his policy preferences. And though Fiorina claims that Americans are closely and not deeply divided, his arguments are not convincing especially when considering some of the more highly polarized issues such as abortion and gun control. Americans have clearly and deeply divided preferences on a great many issues and more than likely will not come to a consensus on these issues. Despite Fiorina's best efforts Americans are in fact deeply divided on many issues.

Scholars range from the position that polarization does not exist to those argue that polarization is a very troublesome and dangerous dynamic in American politics. The reality lies somewhere in between. From this point of view, the literature is lacking as there are no comprehensive studies of polarization. Most look at one or two aspects of polarization or describe different methods of measurement. While these studies are of some intrinsic value none offer a wide enough view of polarization to explain more than small bits of how polarization affects politics and in a larger sense society in general. This is puzzling given many analyses that argue the more troublesome aspects (both assumed and known) of polarization. It is a dynamic that deserves much more attention than it has generally been given. This is precisely the void in the literature that this research will fill. I will explore the underlying causes of public polarization.

⁶⁴Abramowitz, Alan I and Kyle L. Saunders. 2008. "It Polarization a Myth?" 70 (2): 542-555: p. 547.

Chapter 3 Methodologies

Introduction

An examination of political polarization amongst the American public is at once a straightforward affair while at the same time a difficult and intricate procedure. What seems straightforward is the methods of measurement used to demonstrate the Americans are highly polarized. There is a plethora of polling data that tells us that Americans' policy preferences are moving farther to the poles of the ideological spectrum, the Federal Government is crippled by obstructive tactics meant to shame the other party, and the 2016 Presidential election showed the American people are highly polarized. We currently have a reality TV star as president that has at least one scandal per week come to light that at any other time or circumstance would have destroyed or any other politician. A specific subset of his followers seems to have no limit on the amount of scandals, tantrums, and frankly ugly behavior.

The American people are polarized. It is not just politicians, party activists, and political elites. This is the part of this topic that seems more than evident and would make one think that it is an easy task to show that Americans are polarized. Many polls show us how much Americans disagree on most issues. Therefore, we can assume America is polarized. Here is where the job of showing why Americans are so polarized becomes difficult. It is easy to point out the fighting and lack of progress in government, but why is this occurring? What specific variables are influencing Americas in their pollical and policy preferences to the point of extreme polarization?

In researching this topic, I have identified nine variables that directly influence polarization. This will serve for considerable material for future studies and whether

Americans continue to be significantly polarized or not, the polarization of this period will be an invaluable dynamic for political scientists to understand. However, for the sake of conciseness, I will focus on three of the most influential variables: education, religion, and the media. These variables are three of the most highly influential on the public's political preferences because they pervade almost every realm of American society. The level of education one attains has a direct impact on their politics. For instance, those with more education tend to know more about the topics and be more engaged in the political process. Religion affects polarization in several ways; typically, one's outlook on life as dogma influences behavior by codifying a set of rules by which one must conduct themselves. However, this is a complicated variable. Religious beliefs can push people to either side of the political spectrum as many adherents of Christianity see social justice, caring for the sick and poor, et cetera as one of the main duties. This is most generally a very liberal policy stance. Religion is a difficult variable because the effects it can have on ideology and by extension polarization can be very different. Finally, the media can influence polarization. With cable news 24/7 and the possibility of selective exposure the public can simply have their own views reinforced.

Methods

This nation was founded in part by the existence of polarization. There have been higher and lower levels of polarization at different times of history. However, this polarization seemed to have some intangible yet recognizable purpose. The historical disagreements of former politicians served to spur debates that ultimately led to compromises that furthered the cause of the Republic. However, this current strain of polarization seems to

be creating chaos and driving the people and politicians further apart with no visible signs of any positive changes or agreements. In other words, polarization is a difficult issue to explain. I will utilize several different types of analyses. In chapter 4 on Education and Religion I will analyze information derived primarily from polling data and sociological studies and in chart form organize and analyze the data for evidence of polarization. Studies on attitudes about religion hinge on polling data to get to the heart of peoples' views. Religion is the most personal of all the variables and since there is freedom of religion in the United States there is less data. Since religion is so personal we need to get to the heart of Americans' beliefs and how that affects decisions, especially political decisions.

For Chapter 5 on the media I will utilize original research by gathering data from different media outlets; an equal number of conservative, liberal, and unbiased. I will analyze each program in five-minute segments and account for the amount of liberal, conservative, and unbiased content. There will be several television programs and radio program on each topic. The biased programs are easily chosen as they disclose their political biases as either liberal or conservative. It is not a matter of deep analysis to find these programs. One must simply observe the content. To find unbiased programs is more difficult. Journalism has shifted from three major networks with some news content to countless programs on different types of media. There are programs that report on news stories without commentary about the political bent. Programs anchored by journalists that don't openly talk about their political preferences are the best choice. There are choices for more unbiased news programs. One must keep in mind that no matter how unbiased a journalist may be, they still have their own views and these cannot completely be ignored. But by judging the amount of biased content in these programs we can control for the possible bias by commentators and correspondents.

Bias is judged by content, amount of time spent on a certain topic, how strongly a commentator argued the specific topic, and on overall time spent in each program on the topics and how high or low the level of polarization. Finally, this data will be analyzed with statistical analysis software to flesh out the biases in the media.

Variables

Dependent Variable: The level of public polarization on an issue measured as high, medium, or low. This can also be measured by difference in strength of partisanship.

Specific definitions of high, medium, and low are as follows:

High: 25% or greater ideological gap between respondents.

Medium: 10%-20% ideological gap between respondents.

Low: 10% or smaller ideological gap between respondents.

Polarization Levels

Public Polarization & Affect Expectations

High	Medium	Low
Morality Issues	Education	Agriculture Issues
Quality of Life Issues	Environmental Issues	Transportation Issues
Monetary Issues	Defense Policy (Spending) Foreign Policy	Housing Policy

Table 3.1

In table 3.1 we see several different issues and the expectations of levels of polarization. For example, we expect to have higher levels of polarization. Morality, quality of life issues and monetary issues will be highly polarized. Historically these issues have been polarized to some extent. These issues are highly salient because they deal with

peoples' fundamental beliefs and value systems. Americans desire a good quality of life and enough money to live comfortably. Foreign policy is also important to Americans. It is becoming more important as America fights unending wars. This also links to monetary issues. Defense spending costs billions of tax dollars, money that can be argued could be better spent, education for example. In the bracket of issues that are less polarized are issues that are less salient. For example, in the early twentieth century many Americans were farmers. This would have been more polarized. Very few people are farmers today and very few people understand or care about agricultural issues. There is no saliency. Issues that are important to many people are more likely to be polarized.

Of course, polarization is not limited to these three variables but for sake of space and continuity we are limiting this study to three variables. Therefore, this topic is ripe for many future studies.

Independent Variables: Different Factors That Will Affect Public Polarization.

1. Education:

This variable is specifically defined as the level of education attained amongst the public. This of course has different demographics from high school dropout, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, some graduate school, graduate degree, et cetera. Level of education will influence political attitudes.

2. Religious Participation:

This variable measures the degree of religious participation by different demographics. This

ranges from no participation, to occasional church attendance, to devoutly religious regular church goers. Level of religious participation or lack of participation will affect public polarization.

3. Media:

The media, specifically framing will affect public polarization. How the media chooses to frame an issue will affect polarization. More specifically the media affects what issues are on the public agenda by choosing to whether to cover an issue and how much attention it will get. Selective exposure to media will also affect levels of public polarization. Those who watch only those with the same ideological views will be more polarized because their own political ideologies are constantly reinforced.

In this era of the 24-hour news cycle and ideologically driven cable news media, the media is a significant influence on polarization. This can be interpreted by choosing a specific issue for a specific time and measuring the amount of media attention given to the topic as compared to other topics. One can then interpret polling data on ideological preferences and policy outcomes for the same time and compare the outcomes. Alternatively, we may conduct polling directly asking respondents how much attention they pay to the news and how much this influences their opinions.

High levels of attention would be front page coverage in newspapers, lead stories on televised news, and total number of media attention, as compared to other issues. Issues deemed important by the media in these regards are more likely to be viewed as highly relevant and by extension more likely to be polarized. In more specific terms framing influences polarization. Zero information on a topic produces no polarization.

Policy Issue Types:

Certain policy issue types will be used in analysis. These issues represent a varied ideological and policy spectrum to ensure that public polarization is being measured accurately and that we are accurately determining which variable influence which policy types. Policy issue types must also represent issues that are typically polarized and those that are not.

Policy issue types are as follows:

1. Morality issues. (abortion, War on Drugs, pornography, gambling)
2. Economic issues. (immigration, minimum wage, banking regulation)
3. Quality of life issues. (environment, childcare, family leave, health care)
4. Distributive issues. (taxes—fairness of tax burden, distribution tax dollars)

Hypotheses

H₁ Those who have some college education or higher are more likely to hold polarized views than those with a high school degree or less.

H₂ Religious participation will affect polarization: Religious adherents are likely to be highly polarized. This polarization will manifest across the ideological spectrum. Religious participation will influence polarization to the left and right.

H₃ Media framing will produce higher levels of polarization. We expect issues that are frame as highly relevant and given high levels of attention by the media are more likely to be polarized:

Influences of Polarization

A look at table 3.2 provides a simple but effect explanation. With high levels of polarization, we expect policy stagnation. We could see policy change with moderate

amounts of polarization, and with low polarization we could see major shifts in policy.

Politicians are not wary of backing policy that public does not care about, but highly polarized issues create stagnation as politicians are much less likely to take a stand.

1. Policy stagnation=no policy changes.
2. Policy change=moderate changes. In other words, modification to existing policies not reversals or changes that represent significant ideological shifts.
3. Major Shifts in policy=Complete reversal or major ideological shift in policy.

Polarization Type	Policy Stagnation	Policy Change	Major Shift in Policy
High	X		
Medium		X	
Low			X

Table 3.2

Conclusion

Polarization has been a part of American politics since before the beginning of the Republic. Disparate groups of people came to the Americas for different reasons. For religious freedom, economic freedoms, or just for the freedom to be who one wants to be. In the new world, there was the opportunity for anyone to make of themselves anything they wanted. However, this different groups had different reasons, different motivations. This has helped to drive the development of the United States. Up to the disagreements concerning the Constitution. The Federalists and the Anti-Federalists disagreed fiercely over the forming of the Republic. The United States fought a war to ensure the Republic lived. More Americans died in the Civil War than any other to ensure the survival of America. The United States has been polarized since the beginning. However, these polarizations seemed to make the Republic stronger in the short run. The initial debate for the birth of the Republic made the country stronger because both sides fought for what they wanted and in the end and

agreement was made that gave the country a document by which it could govern itself like it never could have under the Articles of Confederation.

However, it seems that the evolution of polarization has done something to American politics that may not be able to be fixed. We have seen polarization grow over the last seventy-five years. The consensus that held the country together during the Cold War has denigrated and has been replaced by two parties that are disintegrating to something that no one longer recognizes. They fight between themselves over the smallest tenets of policy. They are willing to take the country to the brink of destruction every time it is simply time to approve a budget. America has entered an unprecedented time of polarization by electing a president who has neither the support of the people or even his own party. He ran an unconventional campaign based mostly on divisiveness. He is continuing this tactic in his first days as president. He has already planned on getting rid of a handful of different government agencies such as Public Broadcasting in the name of saving money. However most of the agencies he proposes to get rid of make up a tiny percentage of the federal budget. Meanwhile he is still proposing to build the wall on the Mexican border and making the Mexicans pay for it. In addition, he is proposing to re-negotiate or get rid of NAFTA altogether. The Mexican government is currently on the fence about diplomatic relations between the United States. He is also proposing the possibility that NATO is no longer needed or at the very least that America should reduce its role in NATO. These are serious matters that very well could serve to destabilize America's standing in the world and by extension limit its role in the world and destabilized the economy by alienating long standing allies and trading partners. Creating an adversarial relationship with the rest of the world creates a situation where the United States could find itself alienated, without any friends or

any trading partners. I submit that it is not an overreaction or hyperbole to suggest that war could follow these precarious actions that the government is currently taking,

Consequently, an in-depth study of polarization, or more precisely many in depth studies of polarization are to better understand the role of polarization in society and by extension domestic politics. In line with this then we may be able to understand how extreme polarization in American politics will affect its future relationships on the world stage.

This is simply the start of a larger study on polarization. With the new developments, this election cycle has brought further studies will not only be informative but necessary in understanding what is occurring in American politics and the possibilities both bad and good. A lingering question remains, and that is what is polarization doing to the Republic and with it eventually render America a shell of its former self? Will it ultimately bring about useful political policy or will it continue to divide America to the point of no return? I introduce these possibilities because during this study American politics things have changes so fast that it has become almost impossible to discern how exactly polarization has affected and is affecting the normal course of politics. The past election cycle in the country has added a new twist to this dissertation that I nor anyone else could have predicted. While it has added a new element of surprise that has in some way has produced exciting new possibilities but at the same time has complicated the study of polarization. While when I started this journey, polarization was happening in real time it has also speeded up the process. With constant new twists and turns in this election cycle polarization has speed up to the point that we must attempt to adapt at the same time.

Polarization, especially polarization amongst the American public is a truly dynamic topic. Polarization has been growing exponentially, especially since the elections in 1994 and

the growing competition between the parties to get the vote. The parties began to really dig in and evolve to their present state of non-cooperation. One important aspect has been omitted from the discussion and that is polarization amongst the American public. Polarization is no doubt affect politics and society so knowing the sources and causes of this polarization is deeply important. The entire point of the study and the methodologies then is to flesh out what is behind the rise in polarization. The foundation of understanding any topic is to know where and how it begins and what influences the topic.

Chapter 4: Education and Religion Effects on Polarization

America, it would seem, is miraculously both singular and plural, organized and scattered, united and different.

Henry S. Kariel⁶⁵

The central idea of the public philosophy by which we live is that freedom consists in our capacity to choose our ends for ourselves. Politics should not try to form the character or cultivate the virtue of its citizens, for to do so would be to “legislate morality.” Government should not affirm, through its policies or laws, any conception of the good life, instead it should provide a neutral framework of rights within which people can choose their own values and ends.

Michael Sandel.⁶⁶

Michael Sandel eloquently argues the point that many Americans both conservative and liberal hold that they have the right to choose for themselves their definition of the good life. While he does believe in the government setting certain laws and boundaries, people should decide for themselves the good life while government should provide a neutral framework of laws to govern society. However, through the battle of religion in the United States many citizens want to define the good life for everyone else by choosing representatives that will indeed try to legislate morality for everyone. In every election cycle, we endure endless speeches by politicians on both sides of the aisle touting their religious credentials and assuring the public that they do believe in God. This in no doubt to assure the public that they will advocate for laws that fit within the Judeo-Christian mindset. Republicans go so far as to make promises specifically to legislate morality. Every election cycle we still hear promises to overturn *Roe v Wade* for example. As we can see from the

⁶⁵ Kariel, Henry S. *The Decline of American Pluralism*. Stanford University Press: Stanford. 1961.

⁶⁶ Sandel, Michael J., *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge. 2005.

following chart Republicans and Democrats have increasingly dim views of one another. There is little doubt that polarization exists. It has been increasing exponentially in the last ten years at least and the divide is getting wider. In figure 4.1 we can clearly see that there is a rising gap between Democrats and Republicans in the last ten years. This includes policy preferences and attitudes towards one another. Any kind of professional courtesy and respect, any type of congeniality between legislators is deteriorating. We will see later in the chapter that Americans of different political ideologies find it more difficult to get along with one another let alone simply tolerate one another. It is not simply a difference in political preferences but we are seeing societal cleavages. People of different political ideologies seem to truly not like one another on a personal level.

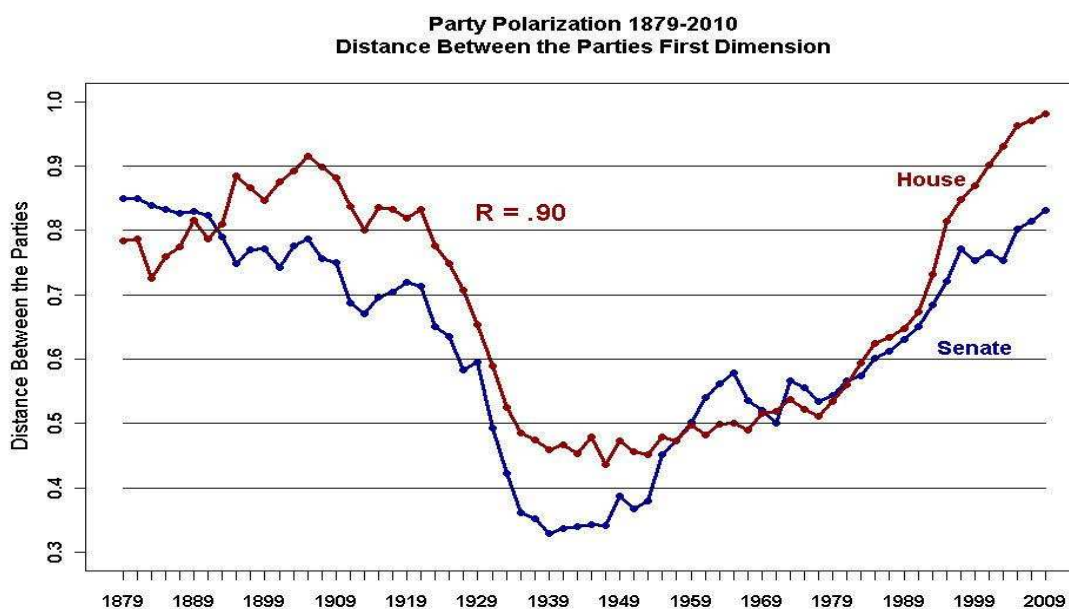


Figure 4.1⁶⁷

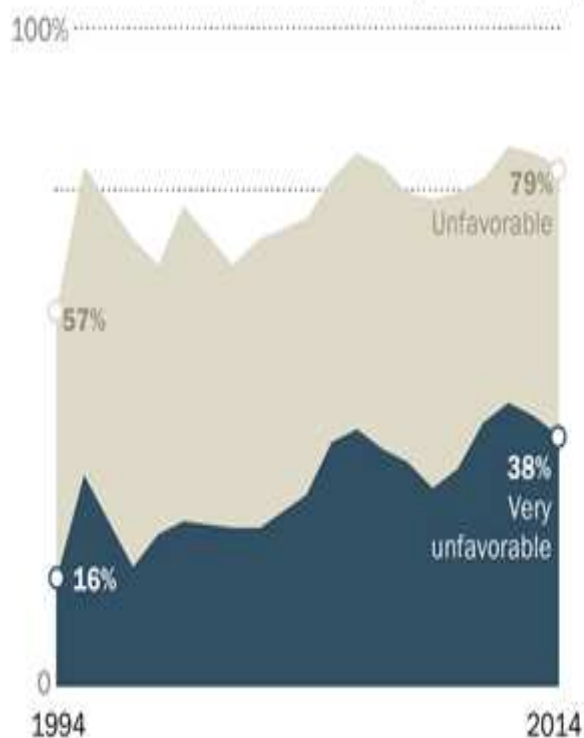
⁶⁷ McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, MIT Press, June 2006. See: http://voteview.com/polarized_america.htm#POLITICALPOLARIZATION

Political polarization is disturbing because it makes the policy process more difficult. It also seems to be getting worse. For example, in the last several years the budget process has gone down to the wire every time seemingly because both parties want to dominate the other. Some aspects of polarization can be disturbing if we attempt to examine what problems polarization may cause. But it is of note to recognize that America was also built on polarization. The Founders were deeply polarized on how to gain independence from Britain. Then when independence was gained it was a grueling process producing a Constitution that all could agree upon. Even then not everyone was happy. The Federalists and the Anti-Federalists were at odds as to the proper course of action especially concerning the Constitution. At that point, several big compromises had to be made between the groups, of course the 3/5 Compromise, and the Connecticut compromise both of which had tremendous influences on the government and the country. America has always been polarized in some way. However, that seemed to make the government work. The Founders knew the country needed a viable constitution, consequently they made the compromises necessary to make it happen. No one individual was completely happy but a working governing document was produced.

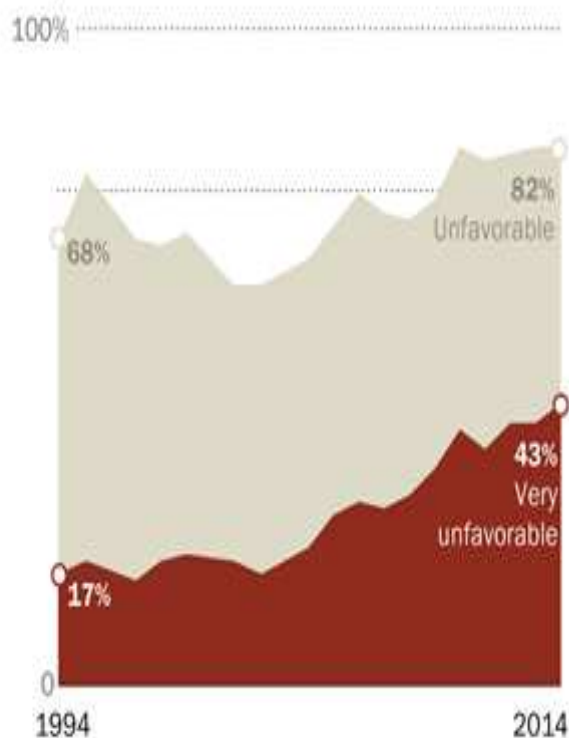
Historically there have been times when America has been more polarized than today. However, the one great period in early American history it was about a topic that really mattered, and had to be decided as opposed to many things that cause polarization today. Of course, the fight over slavery finally culminating in the Civil War was the high point of polarization. Modern polarization occurs over many issues that should be able to be solved by a bit of compromise by lawmakers.

A Rising Tide of Mutual Antipathy

Democratic attitudes about the Republican Party



Republican attitudes about the Democratic Party



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Note: Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents.

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Figure 4.2 ⁶⁸

The variables I have introduced are certainly the most important part of the puzzle. The goal here is to determine whether my variables do in fact influence polarization in the manner I have theorized. As we see in figure 4.2 there is a rising tide of mutual antipathy between Democrats and Republicans. If that answer turns out to be yes, we know then what

⁶⁸ Pew Research Center. Accessed. January 2017. Published June 12, 2014. <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

some of the basic causes of polarization are. In this time of uncertainty when we have elected a president who has no experience in government we are entering a time of unpredictability of how our government will react to dangerous situations around the world. President Trump has already begun a program of unprecedented executive orders where he appears to be taking the running of government in his own hands. He has already ordered the halt of all immigrants and refugees from several different Mideastern countries most notably the halt of all citizens entering the country from Syria. More than a few of his policies are likely to exacerbate polarization on religious matters, not to mention media because they have a steady diet of polarizing material.

President Trump is a bit of a wild card as of 2016. We really have no idea what troubles Trump's admiration may cause domestically and most importantly worldwide. There have already been repercussions from Trump's foreign policy. Many of the countries against which Trump has issued immigration and travel bans have already begun to reciprocate at least rhetorically. It is a situation where a juvenile series of tit for tat exchanges occurs until there will be a point of no return. It appears that many have been convinced that the United States can operate on an isolationist footing. However, since World War II that option has become untenable at best. The world has become dependent on international trade and cooperation. The big bodies of water that separate America from the rest of the world no longer work. The speed of travel and communication have rendered isolationism unworkable. In fact, one no longer needs a military capable of equipment requisite to attack another nation. Cyber warfare used in the right way has become a powerful tool. Electrical grids can be shut down, military computer systems can be hacked and disrupted, basically with the right computer programmers could wreak untold havoc can be reaped by someone sitting at a

keyboard.

This alone is a compelling reason to undertake comprehensive studies of polarization to learn why these things are happening in our country and by extension how that will affect relations with other countries and finally how that will affect our future as a nation. This study does not delve immediately into all those variables. We are trying to find out how some of the basic variables affect polarization. This provides a jumping off point to conduct further studies about the greater effects of polarization. This knowledge is becoming exponentially more important as domestic politics and more basically the American public is becoming more polarized. I submit that simply due to the uncharacteristic conduct and outcome of this last presidential campaign that there is no longer any doubt the America is becoming more polarized. Otherwise there is no little explanation as to what occurred during the last campaign cycle.

President Trump's first days in office relate strongly to political polarization concerning religion. Republicans have been insisting for years that the definition of terrorism include some reference to Islam or to Muslim extremists. There is no doubt that this is a situation that is strongly related to differences in religion and culture which are closely linked. Religion provides the basic tenets by which people live and there is a strong element of religious differences in the War on Terror. It is a clash of religion and culture. President Trump has banned immigration and travel specifically from countries that have high Muslim populations because the current administration seems to want to define this as a religious war.

Religion

Insecure people are quickest to find fault with others.
Michael Kammen⁶⁹

There is no doubt that religion is one of the variables that influences polarization. It is not difficult to look back to history to see the influence of religion in polarization.

Historically speaking polarization has both influenced and sometimes driven politics.

Throughout history wars have been fought over religion. The Thirty Year's War was started over conflicts between Protestants and Catholics and was one of the most destructive religious wars in Europe and ended in fragmenting the Holy Roman Empire. It began when the Holy Roman Emperor tried to enforce religious uniformity in his empire. Empires have been built and collapsed under the influence of religion. Furthermore, many wars have generally started over cultural differences with religion playing a large war. Religion is an important part of culture in most societies. Anthropology tells us that most cultures/empires have their own creation myths/religions and this has historically differentiated and divided peoples. One cannot understand a culture without understanding their religions which are a fundamental part of every culture. Even today when many nations in Europe have become much more secular, their religious history contributes to coterporally culture. And religion continues to affect politics to the present day not only in America but throughout the world. A brief review of history will allow us to connect religious influence over politics over the centuries.

Current religious cleavages are demonstrated in black and white in President Trump's first actions to keep Muslims out of the United States. One can describe this with many

⁶⁹ Kammen, Michael. People of Paradox. Ithaca. Cornell University Press. 1972.

different euphemisms but they are designed to keep people of a certain religions out of the United States as they have been identified as our greatest enemy. This is certainly about a difference in culture but primarily religion. Religion and culture go hand in hand. One influences the other. Therefore, we see vast differences in culture around the world.

President Trump has decided that one religion and culture is the harbinger of war and hatred against the United States. This is certainly the reason that he is trying to stop Muslims, specifically Muslims from certain countries from entering and specifically immigrating to the United States. This is the sole reason for Trump's ban on immigration: religion and culture. This goes against centuries of American tradition and law. We have never banned immigrants solely based on religion and culture.

This is nothing new really. World civilizations have been fighting one another over cultural and religious differences from time immemorial. If we go back to Roman times they were in constant conflict with societies surrounding their empire. This had two main objectives. One was to profit from the enemy's resources. The other was to Romanize these people to dominate them but also to Romanize them. They wanted to integrate their enemies into their society to facilitate trade, to make the enemy allies and not enemies, and instead of slaughtering them, to instead make them a part of the society in order completely control their societies. The Romans also needed new soldiers and they could pick the cream of the crop of enemy soldiers and make them part of the Roman military.

Moving farther into the future historically the Crusades were intended to occupy Muslim lands and eventually destroy their culture and occupy Jerusalem and the Holy Land. This was all about differences in religion and culture and to prove who was the stronger and better culture. This lasted many years yet this did not solve anything and simply cost many

lives and much treasure. Later the Thirty Years War was fought between Protestants and Catholics, was one of the deadliest religious wars in Europe which solved nothing. During the Inquisition, many were put to death most times because they simply made the church mad for some innocuous reason. Or they could have simply been different, maybe bit awkward socially.

Finally, we look at the conquest of the New World which was done in the name of God and country. Untold millions of Native Americans were murdered, died of disease or displaced. They were classified as godless heathens and therefore considered unequal to white Christian America. They were called savages because of their different belief systems and Christian missionaries did their best to convert Native Americans from their savage beliefs to Christianity. It was most certainly an assault on Native American cultures and belief systems.

This is not to condemn the Christian Church, or any for that matter. It is much more a function of illustrating the massive amount of polarization there has been concerning religion throughout time. It is not a recent development. And in this case, we are limiting our discussion to western European society and by extension Christian culture in the United States. Religion has been a factor in politics since there was politics. The amount to which it has affected politics has varied widely. There were times when one could be executed for going against the church. Contemporarily in the United States one might be shunned, refused service, called names, or worse, denied basic human rights. Lawsuits are common in religion versus state disputes. Protests are common. However, it can reach the point of seriously polarizing both the government and the population at large. This is the reason to study religion and polarization.

Religion no doubt affects polarization in several different ways. Religions despite their differences in dogma, however they all have basic tenets, or rules that govern their adherents or behaviors that govern their future reward in the afterlife. Of course, these practices are very important to the adherents of each religion. This no doubt causes deep seated beliefs that extend beyond the mere practice of religion to the political and policy preferences of religious adherence. History has detailed the attempts of religious leaders to effect political policy in the attempt to shape political policies to their belief systems.

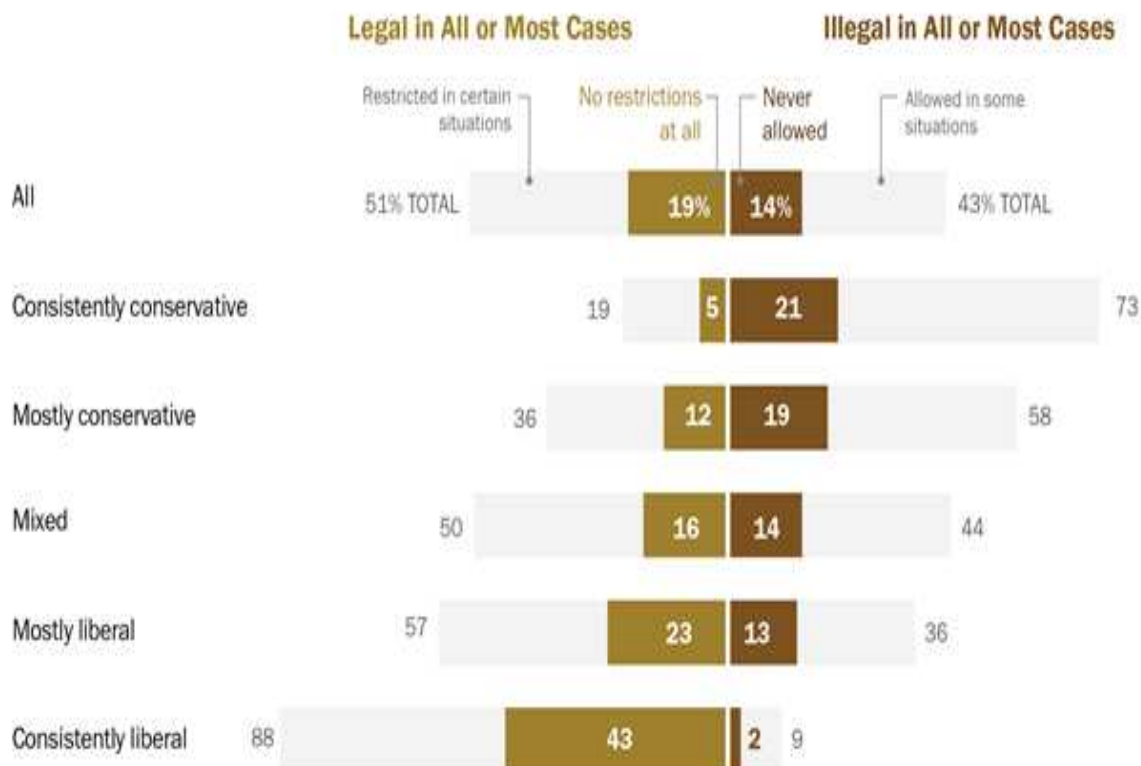
An important and highly relevant example is the half century battle over abortion since the *Roe v Wade* ruling. Although this has been the law of the land since the decision was handed down religious and secular leaders have been fighting over its meaning and repercussions. As we can see in figure 4.3 there is a tremendous cleavage in American outlook on abortion. In most cases liberals are much more likely to support abortion rights. On the other hand, conservatives, do not support abortion rights in any way. This has ended in violence in some cases as abortion clinics are routinely the target of protests and in a few extreme cases abortion providers have been murdered by the most extreme elements of most extreme side of the anti-abortion movement.

In America, there is a fundamental debate between Christians and secular leaders. There are more Christians in America than any other religion. Therefore, when we discuss religion in the United States and as such they have more influence in the religious sector. America is typically described as a Christian nation. The western Europeans that first colonized America were in large part Christians seeking religious freedom. Except for Native Americans they had the first claim on the religious influences in the new world. Laws based on Christianity were the first laws in America. They based these laws on the based these laws

on the basic tenets of Christianity

Liberals Most Likely to Favor No Restrictions on Abortion

Abortion should be ...



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public.

Notes: "Don't know" responses not shown. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A)

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Figure 4.3 ⁷⁰

To a certain, in some extent it is true that that America is in fact a Christian nation, if not officially since the Constitution religious tests or a state religious, Americans consider themselves a Christian nation by centuries of traditions. American has stamped Christian

⁷⁰ Pew Research Center. Accessed. February 2017. Published June 12, 2014. <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

beliefs on many public spaces, money, and official oaths. When I was sworn into Army, I finished my oath with the phrase, So Help me God. Our money contains the phrase In God We Trust, the pledge of allegiance states that we are one nation under God, in court we place our hands on the Bible and swear to the truth, and as we have just witnessed when the President takes to oath of office he places his hand on the Bible. In fact, President Trump planked his hands on two Bibles. The United States is dotted with Christian symbols included in its government buildings. Many Republicans classify America as a Christian nation.

There are great ideological differences between Christian political theorists and liberal thinkers as to be to the point of outright contempt or even possibly hatred. They lay the blame on one another for some of the most egregious acts it seems more a war of words than a political debate. Robert P. George writes of non-religious Americans that

“Contemporary liberal political theory abets the culture of death. My point is so bluntly saying so as not to be polemical, or even provocative; it is to be soberly descriptive. Self-described liberal theorists in the United States and elsewhere have, over the past two decades or so, quite explicitly set for themselves the task of justifying and defending the regime of abortion, euthanasia, and increasingly, infanticide, that constitutes the culture of death in the contemporary developed world. Indeed, six of the most prominent liberal theorists in the United State--John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Thomas Nagel, Robert Nozick, Tim Scanlon, and Judith Jarvis Thompson--have taken their attack on traditional sanctity of life principals out of the common room and the classroom and into to courts...”⁷¹

This is a serious charge and not simply soberly descriptive as George states, but a direct attack on all liberals; namely that they are a culture of death. He accuses them of infanticide and purely reveling in death simply for the sake of death and by extension an attack on all things pure and Christian. This seems like a personal attack on all liberals, and

⁷¹ George, Robert P. The Class of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis. ISI Books: Wilmington. 2001.39.

spurious at best as he cannot prove what a person thinks or believes. And as we can see from figure 4, people who are constantly liberal are very likely to believe in abortion rights. George unilaterally condemns these people simply for their personal beliefs on political policy.

It reminds one of the dire warnings conservatives made about the “Death Panels” included in Obama Care. They were convinced that godless bureaucrats would decide whether to kill ones’ elderly relatives. This falls squarely under the definition of political polarization. Notice that he adds defense of abortion rights as one of the most egregious of liberal sins and adds this to what he believes as an overall culture of death wherein liberals don’t care about life. This is not simply merely a small difference of opinion. This is both sides of the political divide accusing one another and trying to scare the public into thinking that one should fear for ones’ life if the other party is in charge.

On this principal, liberals are firmly entrenched in their beliefs. They don’t seem moved to engage in civil debate with the religious right on these matters. However, liberals despite strong feelings on the subject, Democrats don’t seem to have quite the same strong views of conservatives. For Dworkin’s part, he theorizes that “Evangelical Christians, for example, are rarely tempted to argue with those they believe to be secular humanists and therefore stuck in irremediable error”.⁷² Dworkin however seems to be a lot more conciliatory than George on these points. George is convinced that his opinions are unequivocally correct and that liberals seem to be the scourge of society. In Dworkin’s work, he speaks about finding ways to bridge some of the gaps between these two sides to facilitate a democracy that

⁷² Dworkin, Ronald. *Principals for a New Political Debate: Is Democracy Possible*. Princeton University Press. 2006. 8

might not be possible with the current divide of opinion.

Christians have been claiming assaults on their belief systems by liberal elements of the government. They have declared that there is a very public war on Christmas by secularists. They claim persecution on their belief systems. They are angry over the fact that they believe that the government is forcing them to abandon their entire belief systems by forcing them to do business with homosexuals even though freedoms are guaranteed to all by the Constitution. What they are complaining about is somewhat inexplicable since homosexuals are paying customers who simply want the right to patronize businesses without being refused because of their lifestyle and own beliefs. How this affects Christians at all is a complete mystery. It is not forcing them to condone the “sins” of other people. This is yet another example of how Christians are declaring that some sort of war is being waged against them.

If we consider each presidential election, Republican candidates spend much of their time courting the evangelical vote. They all take time to speak at Christian universities touting their ardent Christianity. There is no doubt that the evangelical vote is very important to the Republicans just as secularist are just as important to the Democrats. Of course, all religious people are not Republicans, just as all secularist are not Democrats. However, in sum these groups are loyal to their political parties. Religious beliefs or lack thereof are central to the way people live their lives. Herein lies the rub. Here is where we start to see political polarization as it pertains to religion. As I have taught in Political Science 101 religion is one of the factors in political socialization. The principals taught to children by their parents deeply affect their views of politics for a lifetime. Whether they reject what they have been taught in childhood or they hold onto these views they are influenced by the family

that serve to build and shape their political beliefs.

Here we must address an important issue in the influence of religion on polarization. Religion does not always push to the right side of the polarity. Social justice and a devotion to helping the poor and disadvantaged are crucial to many religious adherents. The teachings of many religions hold that helping the poor is a duty. This in fact is one of the most important teachings of Christianity are Christ's teaching concerning duty ones' duty to family and community, especially those that are less fortunate. Christ was very big on loving ones' neighbor, and treating others as you would expect to be treated. Since American is what many call a "Christian country" one would think that these teachings would be a major influence on society. I submit that they are but not always in the way that one would think. It is a highly-complicated dynamic. Religions have their teachings but what adherents do with them is not and cannot be controlled by the religion. In sum, religious practitioners will do what they want with the teachings they are given and these are difficult to predict. However, we do know that religion influences politics. It is generally an accepted fact that people vote per their beliefs on many issues, abortion, welfare, quality of life issues, et cetera. And politicians respond to these cues. Election cycles are an interesting showcase of how politicians try to convince America of their religious credentials.

Consider Mitt Romney's speeches during his run for president trying to convince America that Mormons are in fact Christians. Republicans constantly make the rounds of religious institutions to make speeches to convince the religious electorate that they will protect Christian values. All the while Democrats simply attempt to convince the electorate that they are religious at all, and they too will fight to keep America's "Christian" values intact. This is much more difficult for them since President Reagan's tenure Republicans

seem to have become the party of the religious right. Religion is a very difficult topic to flesh out in relation to polarization. As previously stated, even though many evangelicals do support the Republican party, there is a segment of religious adherents who are concerned about social justice, most specifically caring for the poor, helping to feed cloth, educate them, et cetera. So, we have a split in this demographic.

We can see however that interestingly Mitt Romney has done a good job in conniving evangelicals that Mormons are Christians. He did seem to be able to convince many on the religious right that Mormonism was less of a cult as they had seen it but as a Christian religion. As chart 4.3 shows Americans are becoming more tolerant of religion. Americans seem to be warming to religion to a certain extent. This would seem to be contradictory. However, Americas population is growing. The religious population is also growing. Also, many families are growing that have a split in religious vs non-religious who are growing to accept one another. America has also considered itself as a religious, specifically Christian nation. This is not going away simply because more people are identifying as non-religious they are coming to accept their family's traditional views on religiosity.

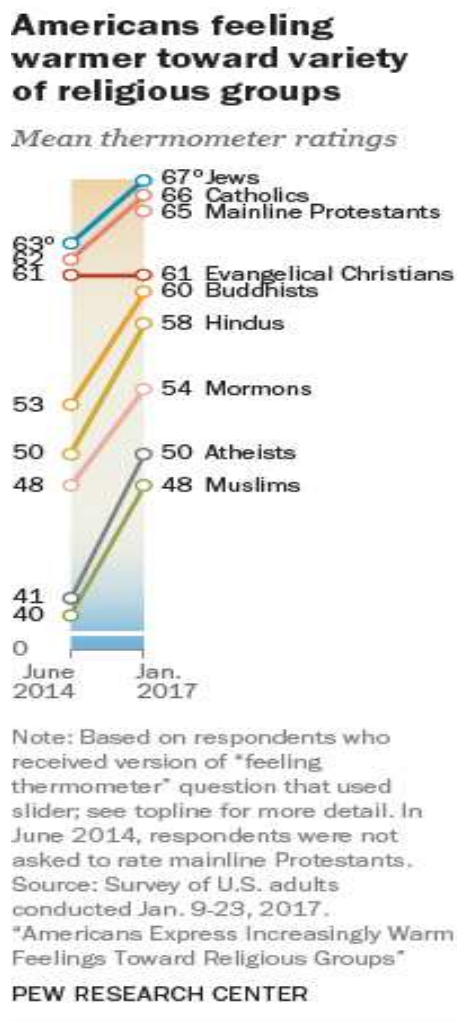


Figure 4.4 ⁷³

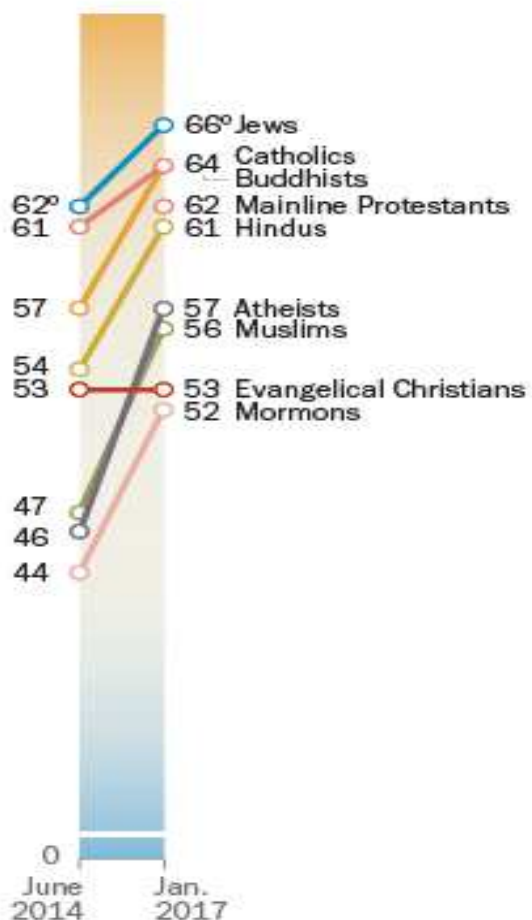
Religion is an increasingly difficult dynamic to explain. While it is a source of growing animosity between some people it also tends to bring people together. Many Americans seem to be willing to accept it as a part of American tradition that is not going away. As we have already seen religions will continue to grow in population over the next 50 years, overall population will continue to grow. This is a variable that will need continued study to determine how it will continue to affect polarization. It could be that if the population of non-religious people continue to grow it will serve as a greater agent of polarization. However, the religious right could start to grow more tolerant of those who are not. In that case religion, may become less and agent of polarization and more a way to bring people together as the religious class could grow to accept the more begin parts of the Bible that teach people to care for and love thy neighbor.

⁷³ Pew Research Center. Accessed. January 2017. Published June 12, 2014. <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

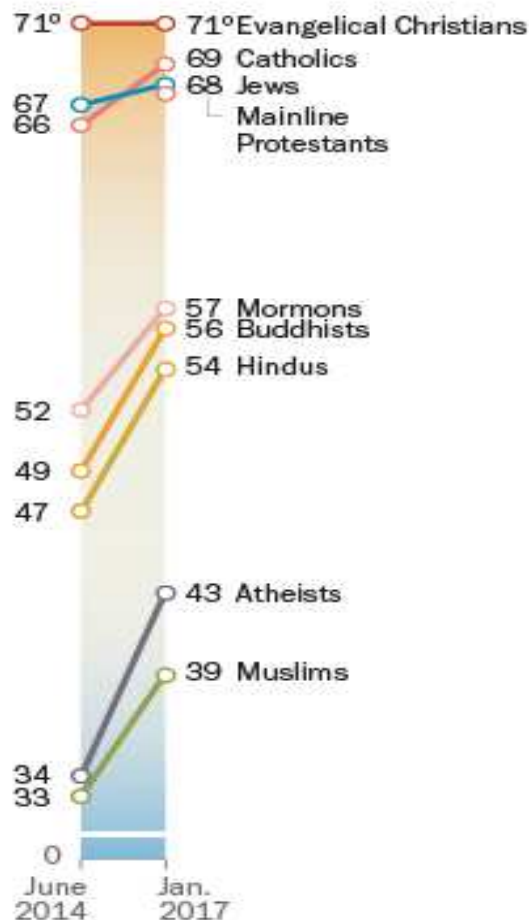
Growing warmth toward most groups among both Democrats and Republicans

Mean thermometer ratings

Among Dem./lean Dem.



Among Rep./lean Rep.



Note: Based on respondents who received version of "feeling thermometer" question that used slider; see topline for more detail.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-23, 2017.

"Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings Toward Religious Groups"

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Figure 4.5 ⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Pew Research Center. Accessed January 2017. Published June 12, 2014. <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

We also see a growing warmth between religions and political ideologies. This tells us several things. Here again we may see a more congenial situation between religion, politicians, and the electorate. This seems to make sense. However, a closer look at figure 4.4 Shows us that conservatism is much more likely to feel warmer towards religion. This could mean simply that a few more liberals may have fewer problems with religion however the political animosity would remain in tack. Or that simply more liberals will not be so against religion itself but that their political animosities will remain. Many of these variables between religion and politics are so tricky to interpret that only time will tell what exactly will happen. Sadly, the same could be said of all our variables However what we have seen does point to the fact that religion will continue to be a source of animosity.

There is one variable that has the potential to tell us the future of religion and its impact on society and polarization. We know that older people are the most political active of all demographics. They tend to do the activities that we know lead to more informed citizenry. They read the paper, congregate in social groups, and pay attention to current events, especially those that affect them. The AARP is one of the most active and powerful lobbying groups in the country. Even Republicans won't touch issues like social security and Medicare, so called "entitlement" programs that are the scourge of conservative politics. Why do republicans fear this group? Because they are informed of the issues and they vote. Sure, rich donors are important to all politicians, but informed lobbying groups are much more frightening to politicians because they have many votes and huge voting blocks are one of the keys to getting re-elected.

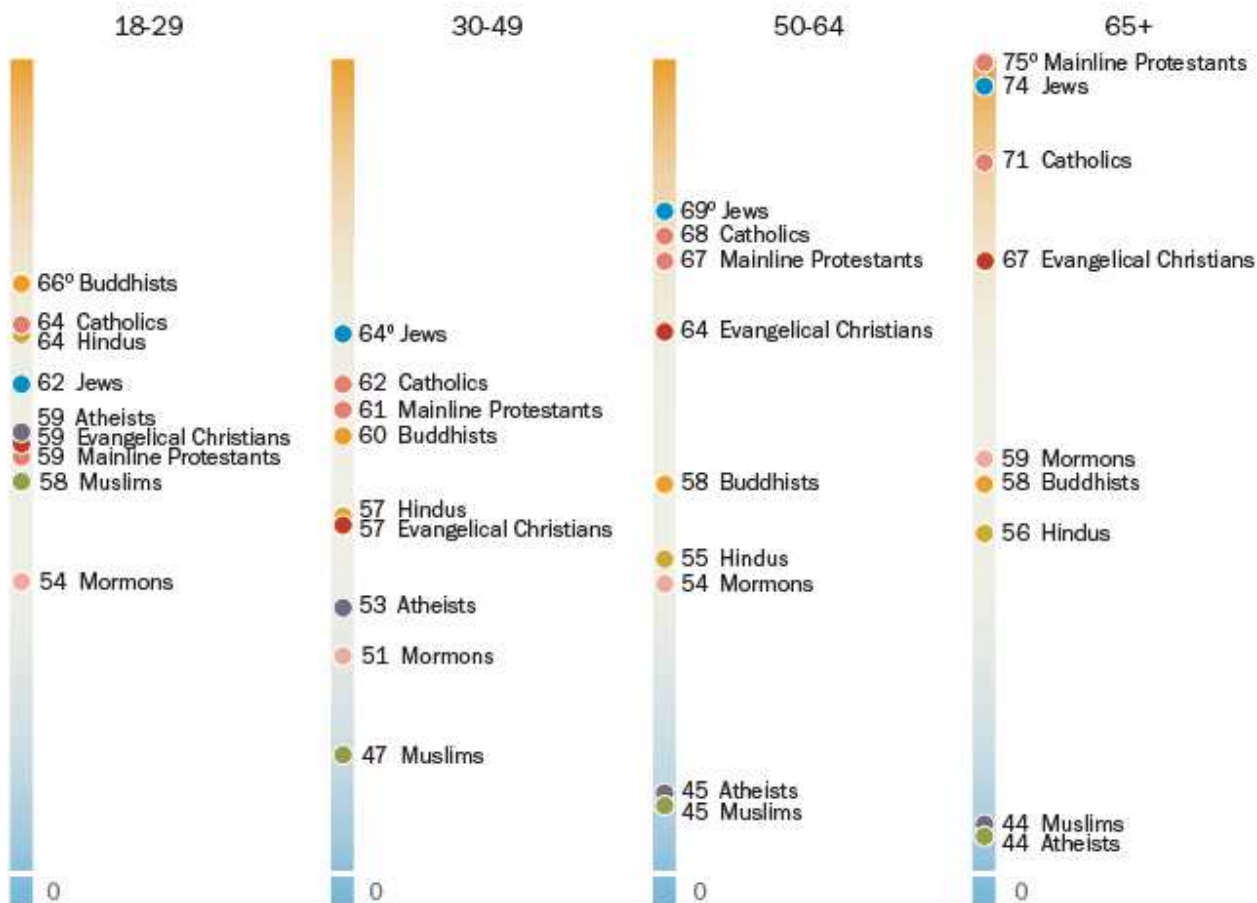
As can be seen in figure 4. older Americans are much more likely to have warm feelings and participate in religious groups than younger people. There is a growing gap

between younger and older people and religious attendance. In short religious attendance is beginning to die off. As older people die fewer younger people are there to take their place. This means that there is by connection a growing gap in religious attendance. Younger people are just less likely to attend church. Church attendance is no longer as important for them nor is it as socially mandatory. Growing up in a small town where everyone belonged to the same religion and most people were at least distantly related church attendance was almost mandatory. If one did not attend church it was known through the community everyone knew and the rumors would fly. Many people attended church simply to avoid being a social pariah.

Now more people live in cities than ever before. Many people there don't even know their neighbors nor care what they do with their time. In my world where the old societal system persevered I was much different. Church was one of the social glues that held society together. Now that has dramatically changed. As we can see from figure 4.5 that mode of living is dying off. Elder people care about church than younger. As cities grow and fewer people live in rural areas this will continue to change. In other words, the changing demographics of society are changing the importance of religion in society. As elder people die this will continue to change. Churches will begin to lose their congregations. Religion will be less of a driving force in society. Although we do have some contradictory evidence I submit that religion's hold over society will shift. It will not completely vanish as we know that years from now religion will still be here it will not hold the same influence over society as it once did.

Ratings of religious groups vary more widely among older than younger Americans

Mean thermometer ratings among Americans ages ...



Note: Based on respondents who received version of "feeling thermometer" question that used slider; see topline for more detail.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-23, 2017.

"Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings Toward Religious Groups"

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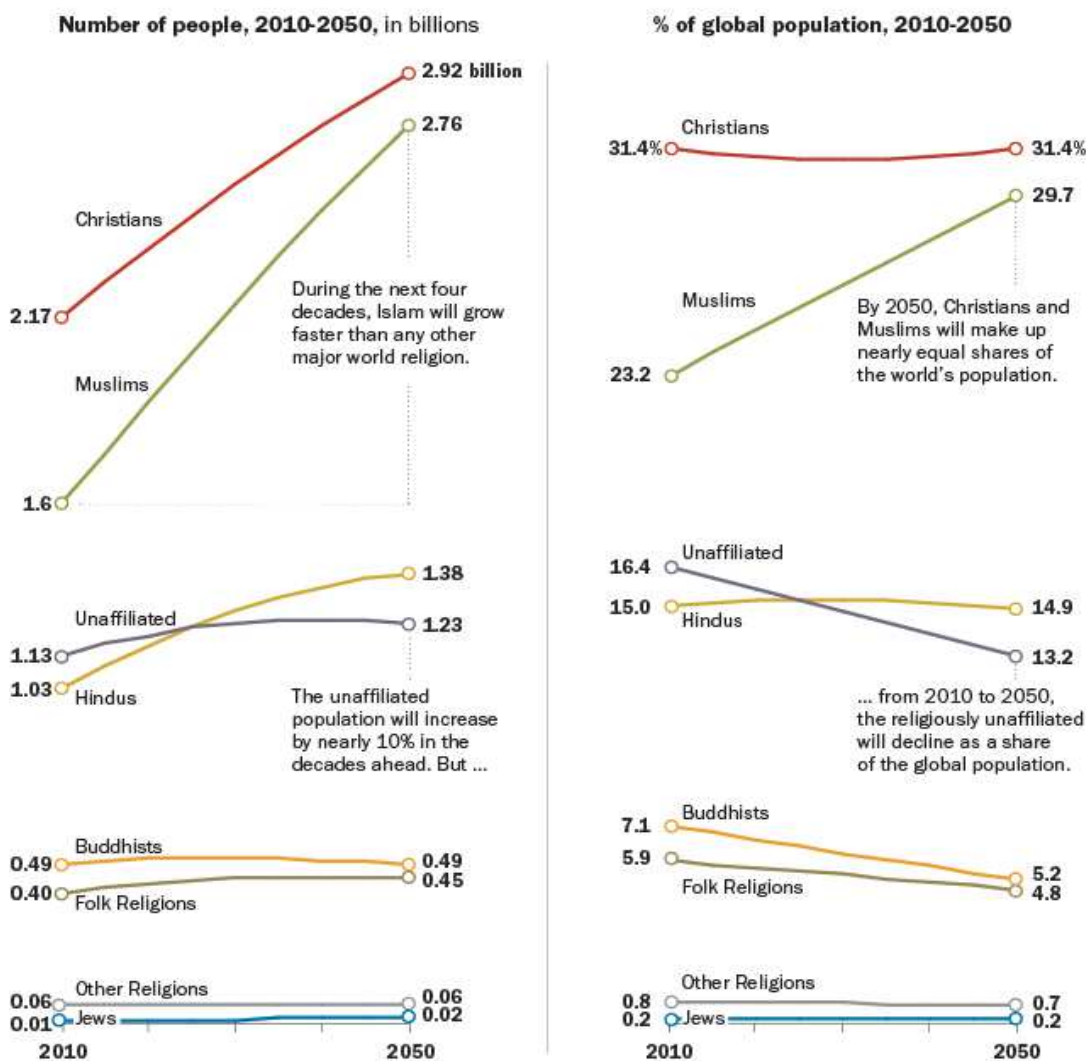
Figure 4.6 ⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Pew Research Center. Accessed Feb 20 2-17. Publisher Feb 13, 2017.

http://www.pewforum.org/2017/02/15/americans-express-increasingly-warm-feelings-toward-religious-groups/pf_17-02-15_feelingthermometer_demrep420px/

Projected Change in Global Population

With the exception of Buddhists, all of the major religious groups are expected to increase in number by 2050. But some will not keep pace with global population growth, and, as a result, are expected to make up a smaller percentage of the world's population in 2050 than they did in 2010.



Sources: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

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Figure 4.7 ⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Pew Research Center. Accessed. January 2017. Published June 12, 2014. <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

Conclusion

Here we get to the heart of the issue. We do know that atheist/agnostic demographic is growing. It is no longer socially taboo to admit to being an atheist. There is now a counterbalance to the evangelical vote. We can't jump to the conclusion from this that religion will necessarily lose its influence over politics. As we can see from figure 4.5 from now until 2050 the number of religious adherents will in fact grow; in other words, their numbers will continue to grow. However, this will not keep up with population growth so the gap will close a bit between believers and non-believers. Even though religious adherents' numbers will continue grow, they will not keep up with population growth so percentage wise religious influence will likely be less. However, from here considering the future we know that religion not only affects politics now but will continue to do so well into the future. Starting with this knowledge we know that religion will continue to be a factor in politics. How much of a factor is to be determined?

Education

Education is the next dynamic that influences political polarization. This is another influential factor in political polarization. We do know some basic facts about education and polarization to start the discussion. First the more education one has the more liberal they tend to be. In addition, those who have college degrees will make more money over a lifetime than those without. They are also more likely to pay attention to politics and likely better understand the issues as most have had at least rudimentary education in political science, tend to read more, and therefore are more in tune with the issues. College educated people

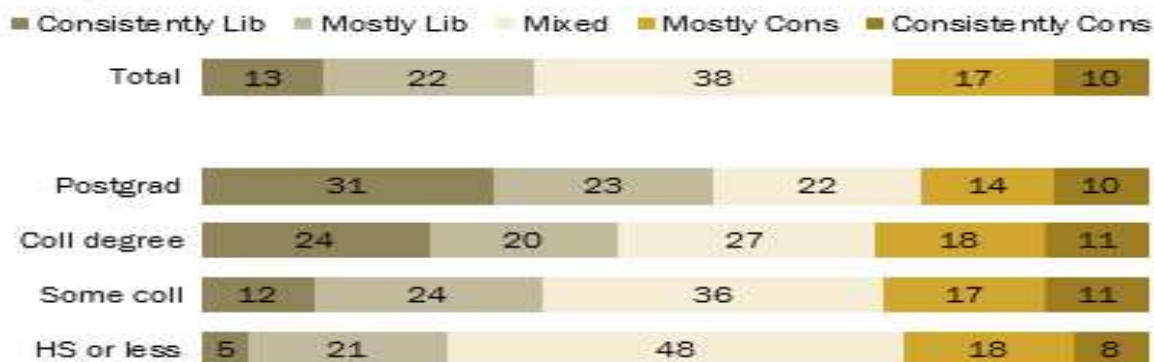
will be much more difficult for politicians to fool with empty promises. In short, the level of education goes hand in hand with levels of political participation, knowledge, and therefore influence over the process.

Those who are less education, specifically those with only some high school or a high school degree have less involvement with the political process. Generally, these people have less time to involve themselves in politics. They have a great deal to do simply surviving. Many don't know that they have recourses politically to possibly improve their situation. They don't have money to donate which these days is critical to gaining influence in the political process especially since the Citizens United decision by the Supreme Court. In many ways, the political process is owned by those with money. Unlimited amounts of money can be accessed. Furthermore, one rich person can prop up the campaign of any one candidate. Influence of this level is difficult if not impossible to beat, especially by a part of the electorate that is uneducated and living below the poverty level.

In figure 4.6 we see the probability that those with postgraduate experience are far more likely to be liberal than conservative. We see that those with a college degree are not quite as likely to be liberal than those with postgraduate degrees. And those with a high school degree or less are much more likely to be conservative. In fact, only five percent of those with high school degrees are likely to be liberal. This fact is difficult to flesh out for several reasons. Colleges are not political indoctrination centers and only a small percentage of students major in political science. Yet all students with more education are likely to be liberal and this number grows with the amount of education. Yet we do know that more education equals more liberal views. In the very least we can say that education is certainly a factor in political polarization.

Adults with postgraduate experience most likely to have consistently liberal political values

% with political values that are...



Source: Survey conducted Aug. 27-Oct. 4, 2015 (N=6,004). Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions.

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Figure 4.8 ⁷⁷

I submit that another issue with those who have less education is that many are convinced that they know more than they really do about politics, especially intricate policies that are very difficult to grasp. I would point out the famous photo of the man at a Tea Party rally demanding that the government keep its hands off his Medicare. Many don't understand their rights, how government programs can help them, and how they can become involved in the political process in a meaningful way that makes politicians take notice. It is true that rich people have more influence because they have money and access. But the poor, together in their masses can change the government. Although few may have true access, each person only gets one vote, and there are many more poor than rich. The lack of education can define and change the process.

⁷⁷ Pew Research Center. Accessed January 2017. Published April 26, 2016. <http://www.people-press.org/2016/04/26/a-wider-ideological-gap-between-more-and-less-educated-adults/>

One way of making sense of the educational gap is by comparing all voter's vs white voters. Figure 4.7 shows us the gaps in education and political ideology. When we count all voters, more are likely to vote Democratic in all educational groups. This is a consistent factor in all elections since 1980. Even amongst those with some college or less. However, when we count only white voters those with some college or less are highly likely to vote Republican. Objectively this does not make a lot of sense because Democrats are more likely to champion policy that is designed to help those with less education and generally less income. However, when we compare all voters they are more likely to side with the Democrats. We can rightfully assume that when minorities are counted they are more likely to vote with the Democrats who have historically been more successful with this demographic.

Wide education gaps in 2016 preferences, among all voters and among whites

Presidential candidate preference, by educational attainment

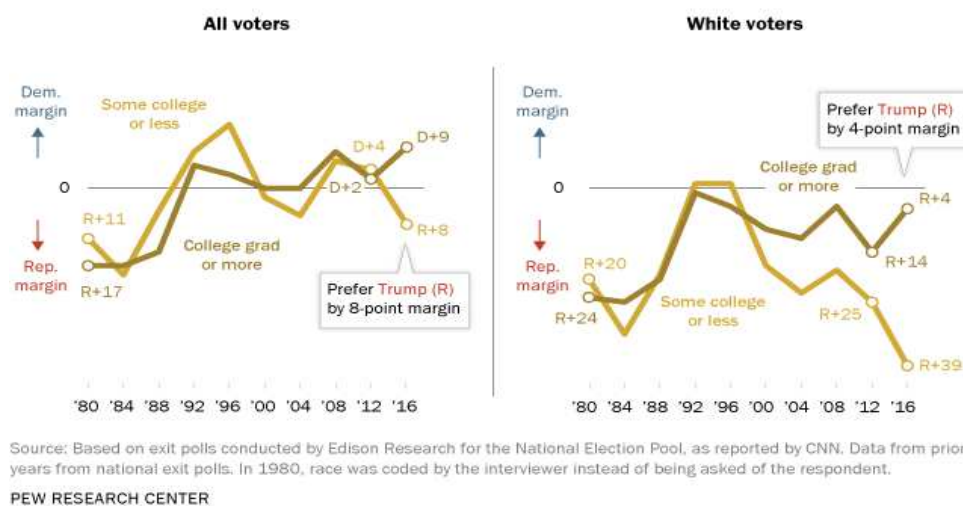


Figure 4.9 ⁷⁸

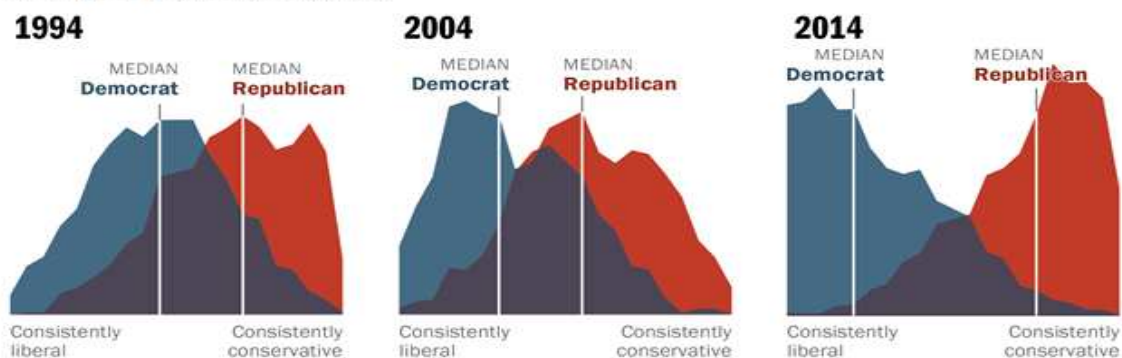
⁷⁸ Pew Research Center. Accessed January 2017. Published April 26, 2016. <http://www.people-press.org/2016/04/26/a-wider-ideological-gap-between-more-and-less-educated-adults/>

At this point it is a good time to mention the media here before we get into the media chapter; we can mention it in correlation with education. Less educated folks often do not know how to access information or have the time or desire. We do know historically that those who read the newspaper daily and pay attention to the news are more politically informed than those who don't. We know that those who are more educated have a better grasp on the issues. They have learned more about the political process through education, and have more at stake as they make more money, have a greater stake in tax rates and often have greater access to the political process than the less educated. Often, they also have more time as those in lower social economic brackets are generally more concerned with simply surviving than getting involved in greater political issues. Finally, they generally do not know how they can get involved and garner important media coverage which will attract the attention of politicians. Politicians do pay attention to polls and do need to attract as many voters as they can. As has been stated already, the poor greatly outnumber the rich in this country and this statistic is continuing to grow. The gap between the rich and poor is growing and more people are falling below the middle-class line into lower middle class and poor.

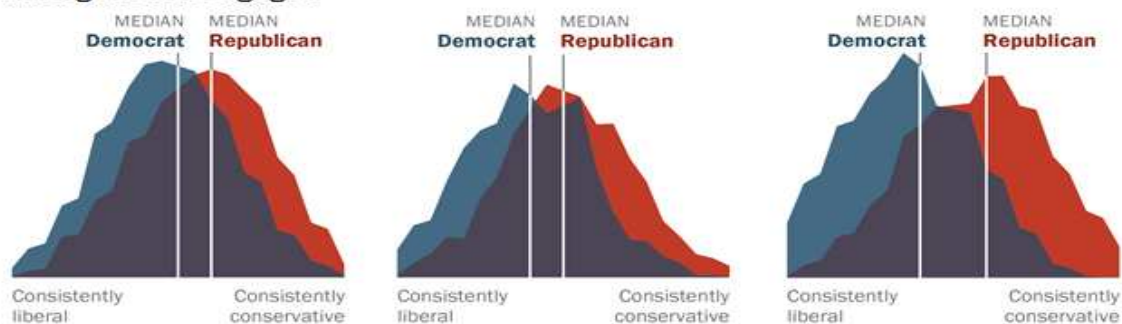
Polarization Surges Among the Politically Engaged

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values, by level of political engagement

Among the politically engaged



Among the less engaged



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B). Politically engaged are defined as those who are registered to vote, follow government and public affairs most of the time and say they vote always or nearly always.

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Figure 4.10 ⁷⁹

As figure 4.8 demonstrates those who are more politically engaged are more likely to participate in the political process. Therefore, they are more likely to be polarized. They have more at stake than those who are not engaged. Those who actively participate in the political process have something to gain or have goal in mind in the policy process. They are more likely to fight for their goals. As we know those who are more educated are more likely to be involved in the political process. Those who are not as engaged have less motivation to

⁷⁹ Pew Research Center. Accessed Jan 14, 2017. Published June 12, 2014. <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/section-1-growing-ideological-consistency/pp-2014-06-12-polarization-1-05/>

even know how the political process works and generally have less time and money to involve in the process. Thus, education is a great influence on the process.

Conclusion

Education has an influence on polarization. Those who are more educated are more likely to be liberal. They are more likely to have an influence on the process. They have been taught in their studies about the political process. They know how policy can affect the country and their lives. They know how to participate in the process. They know that they can influence the process by getting involved, joining lobbying groups, donating to the process, contacting their representatives, and generally making their opinions known.

The poor and less educated do not understand the process as well and do not have the same sense of participation. They have less time and clearly less money to contribute to the process. They do not participate in lobbying groups to the same extent and certainly have less access to the process. They do not associate as much with educated people. In sum, they do not have the time or money to participate and do not have the same sense that they can influence the system as their educated counterparts.

Chapter 5: Media Effects on Polarization

The latter half of the twentieth century may well go down as the age of television. Television takes up more of the typical American's waking hours than interpersonal interactions. Scholars from all the behavioral sciences have been fascinated with the medium and have attributed a kaleidoscope of effects—ranging from the stimulation of violence to the learning of altruism—to television viewing. A recent compilation of the social sciences literature identified no fewer than 1,043 effects (both antisocial as well as social) of television on social behavior.

Shanto Iyengar

Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues (1994)⁸⁰

The Media

The media gets its own chapter because it is one of the most difficult and nuance variable in the study of political polarization. We know many basic facts about education and religion. Education has a significant influence on polarization. The more education one has the more likely they are to be liberal and the more education one has the more likely to be they are to be more liberal on the ideological scale. Since these liberals have more education they are more likely to have good jobs and are more informed on the facts and mechanizations of the political process. They are more likely to participate in the political process, being involved in lobbying, donation to the election process, and have direct contact with their representatives. Because of their place higher on the political economic ladder they certainly do have more of an effect on the electoral process.

⁸⁰ Iyengar, Shanto. [Is Anyone Responsible Here?](#) Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 1991.

Religion as well produces an impact on the electoral process. The religious right has many strong beliefs about society and how government should direct society. They are more likely to support government involvement in our personal lives in many ways. Deeply religious citizens have very strong beliefs on issues such as abortion, what constitutes obscenity. They are against what they would call abnormal sexual relations, and proponents of what I would define legislating morality. Even behind closed doors they believe that homosexuality is politically and morally wrong. They support laws that curtail homosexual rights including marriage, legal protection against discrimination and in general do not believe that homosexuals have any right to live their chosen lifestyles. In Christian religious dogma homosexuals will go straight to hell and so it is easy for them to believe that they have no rights in society. Moreover, Christians believe that homosexuals are a threat to an orderly society because of their perceived obscene behavior. In general, they believe that they have the moral high ground and therefore should be able to legislate their personal beliefs.

After this brief review of how education and media influences polarization, we build a base to discuss how the media influences polarization. The media fans the flames of these established beliefs. With the rise of cable television and more importantly the internet selective viewing of news adds to the media's influence over the political process. Fifty years ago, the situation was drastically different. Only four television channels existed, with newscasts mostly in the evening. These were more specifically directed at simply delivering the news. Of course, market forces did dictate to some extent the content of the news. But it was generally accepted that the important news was being delivered relatively free of personal biases by the reporters. One cannot completely disregard the personal views of any journalist, but at the time there was a certain accepted ideal that reporters reported the news not their

personal views. This was the purpose of editorials where the reader knew they were consuming opinion rather than news. While there have always been muckrakers and other news outlets dedicated to stirring up public passions, these did not seem to dominate the news process. People depended on nightly news broadcasts and the daily newspapers. Then there was a certain amount of time between the delivery of the news and then next. People had time to read and listen to the news, think about what they had heard and develop opinions. Now there are countless news outlets dedicated to delivery of opinion and propaganda. Selective viewing allows for people to only hear “news” that reaffirms their beliefs. News has become more of a function of delivering the news and has moved to a more directed distribution of opinion. One can consume news any time of the day or night.

The situation has dramatically changed the journalistic landscape. The rise in the number of news outlets has created a situation where journalists must come up with more sensationalistic news to attract viewers. There is intense competition to draw viewers and more opportunities for opinion based news outlets. Many Americans do not have a grasp on what they are hearing because when they view news that reinforces their beliefs they begin to see opinion journalism as fact based news that delivers the “truth” to its viewers. This causes competition between these types of news outlets and they must produce news that their viewers want to hear. We see opinion based news outlets with taglines that try and reaffirm their objectivity. Fox News is very fond of its claim to be Fair and Balanced. They do have programs that claim to deliver “hard news” but they are not the programs that draw the highest ratings. Opinion based programs draw the biggest ratings. Fox News is very popular and routinely has some of the highest ratings in cable news. Anchors such as Bill O’Reilly claim vociferously to be fair and balanced. Regardless he delivers his opinions freely so

much that his claim to be fair and balanced are dubious at best. One of the most oft used tactics at Fox News is to invite the token liberal pundit coupled with a conservative pundit who team up with the host to show the liberal as a feckless pundit who knows nothing of what they speak. Again, this tactic makes the claim of being fair and balanced difficult to believe.

An interesting development at this point, is that as of the writing of this chapter Fox News has experienced significant changes, losing Roger Ailes and Bill O'Reilly because of sexual harassment charges and Megyn Kelly has left for NBC. The show with the highest ratings no longer exists. Kelly represented in large part the future of the network and one who the network looked to attract more moderate and especially more female voters. This is an excellent example of how the media can influence, and more specifically change the game. The one stalwart bulwark of conservative media coverage has changed drastically and almost overnight. In a few months, the situation on cable television may have completely changed and a more liberal network could take Fox News' place in the ratings. Conversely Fox News may make a comeback with even more popular shows. The game changes, and it changes quickly. This represents the greatest difficulty in understanding polarization amongst the public, the speed at which variables can change. Factors that were once highly stable, and long running can change in a matter of days and introduce an entirely new playing field.

Another leader in cable news, and the anti-Fox News, MSNBC provides more interest to the dynamic. These news outlets are different in several ways, but one of the most obvious is at MSNBC they do not try to make the claim of being fair and balanced. From weeks of research viewing different outlets I can verify these general observations. At MSNBC, however they do not try and hide their bias. Depending on the anchor they are left of center to highly left of center. However, there are several very noticeable differences. On Fox, there

is a lot of yelling, a lot of vitriol. Frankly some segments seemed to be specifically designed to be a yelling match. MSNBC anchors do present their views but very honestly it is a much more mature manner. Rachel Maddow interviews former RNC chairman Ron Steele quite often. While they do not share many opinions, their discussions are always conducted in a respectful manner. There are frequently even some jokes and a few laughs. The point being is that there are ways to present opinion news that informs. This is not an advertisement for any networks, however in months of viewing and analyzing opinion news I do see many patterns emerging, and this was one. While there are certainly differences many of the broadcasts follow this formula and it seems to filter down through the plethora of other news outlets.

The internet also provides the opportunity for hateful people to spread their extreme beliefs because of the anonymity of the internet many feel free to spew venomous and horrible opinions that they would never have the nerve to say to someone face to face. Simply enter the comments section of political news stories and there is an unbelievably vile discourse that belittles and divides people even more. These are fact free zones where hate and outrageous conspiracy theories abound. And many of these people are trolls who simply find it funny to say vile things. This enters the public discourse with proud self-described polemicists such as Ann Coulter, Rush Limbaugh and many others who say outrageous things meant to sell books and get ratings. Who knows if these people believe what they are saying or if they are simply political profiteers? Added to this are the conspiracy theory oriented internet sites which would be amusing if they did not have ardent followers. Civil discourse seems impossible, a thing of the past which may never return as technology allows for more of these outlets to prosper. The more outrageous the news the more viewers pile up. In some cases when these

people lose more legitimate platforms on television they move to the internet and become even more popular. When Glenn Beck and Fox News parted ways he simply moved to the internet and makes even more money. Here he can target his devoted followers without the need to pay attention to ratings or to formatting his program in any way to enlarge his audience. He is not tempered by the many constraints on television programs that many times makes them more moderate in attempting to appeal to as large an audience they can.

With all these machinations in motion it is difficult to flesh out the manner which the media affects political polarization. The situation was much easier to explain when there were only several television stations and news print. Americans got the same information from the same sources. Framing did have some influence over what was reported so many news stories went unreported. Newspapers filled this void to some extent, but there was not nearly the amount of news coming at the public. And there was no selective exposure so Americans who wanted the news had to watch the same sources and develop their opinions from there. Political debates amongst ordinary Americans centered on the few sources of news of the time. And Americans were exposed to a variety of different topics because of this. With time to digest what was seen on the nightly news and what was read in the paper there was time to think deeply on that which they had been exposed to. Political debate was then more focused on fewer issues and one had to relate to neighbors of different political ideologies.

There is no doubt that many cable news and radio news outlets are highly biased towards the far sides of the ideological scale. In fact, although some networks claim to be fair and balanced they clearly have an ideological agenda. Sean Hannity for example has become an endless propaganda machine for President Trump and his agenda. Although other

networks don't claim to be unbiased they generally present their programs as promoting the truth about the current political situation. This word is commonly used in their programs. The idea is that other networks are presenting highly biased material while they are bringing the truth of the matter. This allows for selective viewing so the public can simply have their already established beliefs about politics reinforced. Thus, the media is consciously increasing the amount of polarization. Gone are the days when news broadcast the news in a generally unbiased way for people to interpret for themselves. The public, in large part had to decide for themselves what news stories said about current events.

In producing a work concerning the polarization of the American people, and those things that can influence that polarization may seem like a tremendous task, and in some ways, it is. We live in a complicated world that gets more complicated by the day. Technology is changing every facet of society including the media. Just in my lifetime I have observed a wholesale change in the way news is delivered and how that news is digested by the American people. Society has changed in innumerable ways.

In his seminal work, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam gets to an interesting conclusion not necessarily directly related to the media but a central point in the metaphor that is the title of his work. People do not join bowling leagues anymore. More broadly they do not join many of the social groups that they used to such as book clubs, sewing groups, and similar social activities which were once a central part of American culture. They are less exposed to people with different beliefs of all kinds including different political beliefs. There is less public discourse and civil debate amongst neighbors, friends, and co-workers concerning civic and political matters. And with the advent of the internet and cable television people can congregate in their own little worlds with others of only likeminded thinking. The need to

congregate in communities where one must associate with neighbors, co-workers, and community of differing ideas is a thing of the past. Gone are the days of the nightly news and newspapers which generally gave broad attention to the news, people can simply switch channels to hear precisely what they want to hear. They can congregate in chatrooms with people throughout the world with similar beliefs. They now longer must digest the news and form opinions of their own within a community where they must converse with those of different beliefs, they can now have their opinions bolstered and intensified by “newscasts” that proffer to be bringing the truth as opposed to others who don’t. There are euphemisms such as left-wing media, ring-wing media, vast right wing and left-wing conspiracies, and poorly sourced programs painting stories with the targeted brush of their own narrow beliefs. This is fostering paranoid groups of the public who view the other political party as the enemy, evil, trying to control society. But more to the point people have more time to sit in their houses, with any type of entertainment, news, and information. People are disjointed from their neighbors and communities. And they can spend all their time-consuming information that supports their established beliefs.

Succinctly put social capital in America had plummeted and this no doubt has something to do with people becoming more polarized in their political views.

Putnam makes an important point that I think many have forgotten. American society has changed significantly in the last century. As time has gone on the changes have become more profound and complicated. They have affected society. Putnam’s point that really concerns the media and polarization is the fact that he shows how people do not interact like they used to. They are not part of a community anymore. With his metaphor about bowling alone, his point is that people do not join community groups anymore. They do not interact

with their local communities like they used to, and they have the internet to communicate with anyone around the world. More importantly they can selectively view the news. They can get information that reaffirms their already established beliefs.

In extensive research into the media and how it works and effects public opinion I understand some things better, but honestly have more questions than answers. It is extremely complicated to explain how the media is polarized and how that might affect public opinion. This is why I have chosen to make this chapter straight to the point and not inundate the reader with loads of statistics and minutiae of the dynamic. I wish to demonstrate several things. First that the American media is significantly polarized. Therefore, it is difficult for the American people to get an accurate picture of the news. That promoting sensational content seems to be a standard practice at many news networks. And finally, that this cannot help but influence polarization.

I think it has been established that different news networks are biased toward one political ideology or the other and there is a general tone of polarization not only in politics but in the public. To demonstrate that the media is polarized and that there are different levels of polarization in the media, I analyzed different programs in different categories. It can be tricky to choose the correct program it can be done. First many programs say up front where their politics lean or if they are opinion base news. More unbiased programs are a bit more difficult to find, but they do exist. Public television presents nightly news broadcasts aimed at bringing the news without superfluous commentary. Finally, there seems to be a movement in some segments of media to create programs that deliver an unbiased and informative news broadcast.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 cover one of the main themes of my research, that conservative and liberal outlets are polarized. This is true. However, it is unavoidable to conclude that conservative outlets are more polarized than any of the others. There are more shouting matches, more sarcasm, more of what I would call political theater. These newscasts after all are businesses. They must draw audiences and then sponsors. Many times, it is difficult to decipher the difference especially when we recognize that Fox News draws the highest ratings in cable.

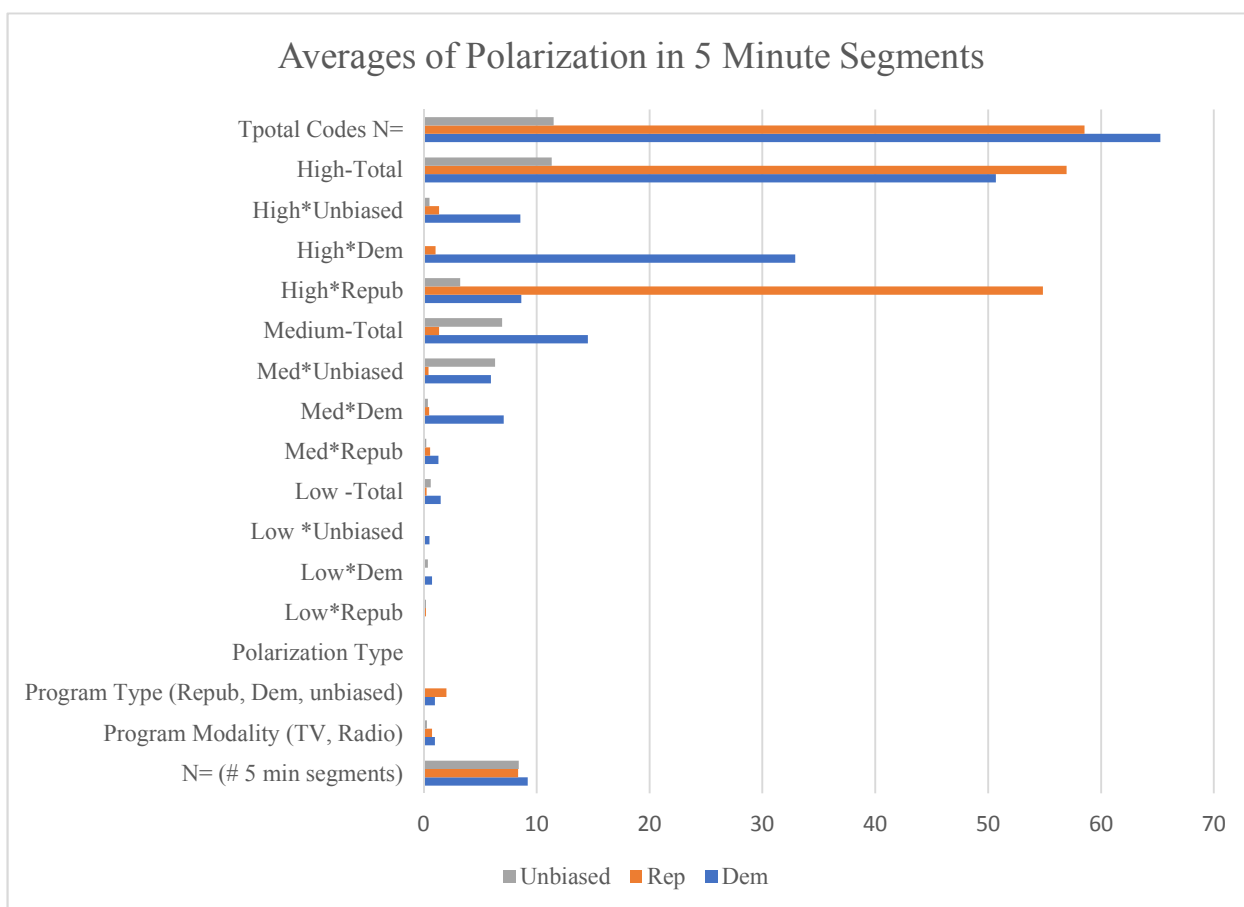


Figure 5.1

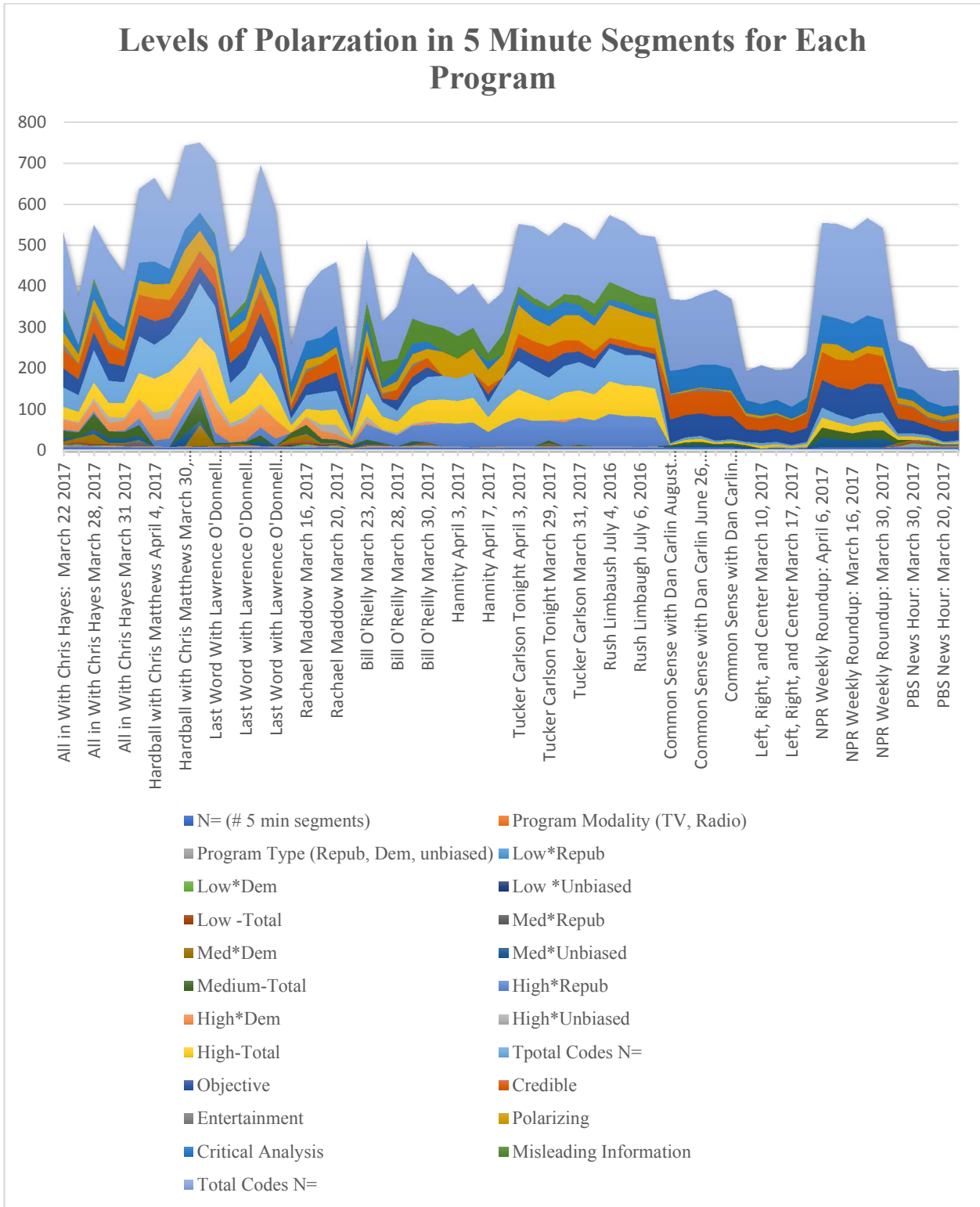


Figure 5.2

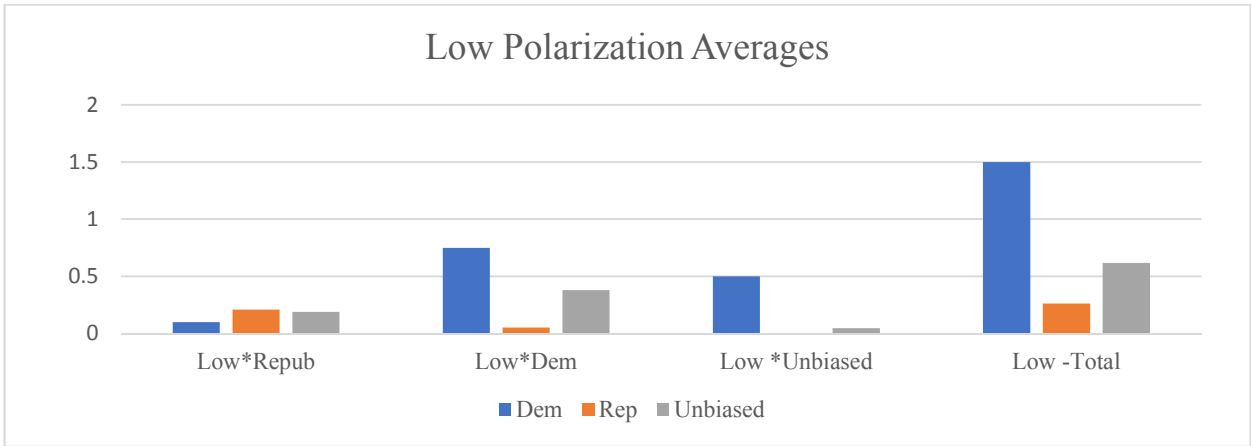


Figure 5.3

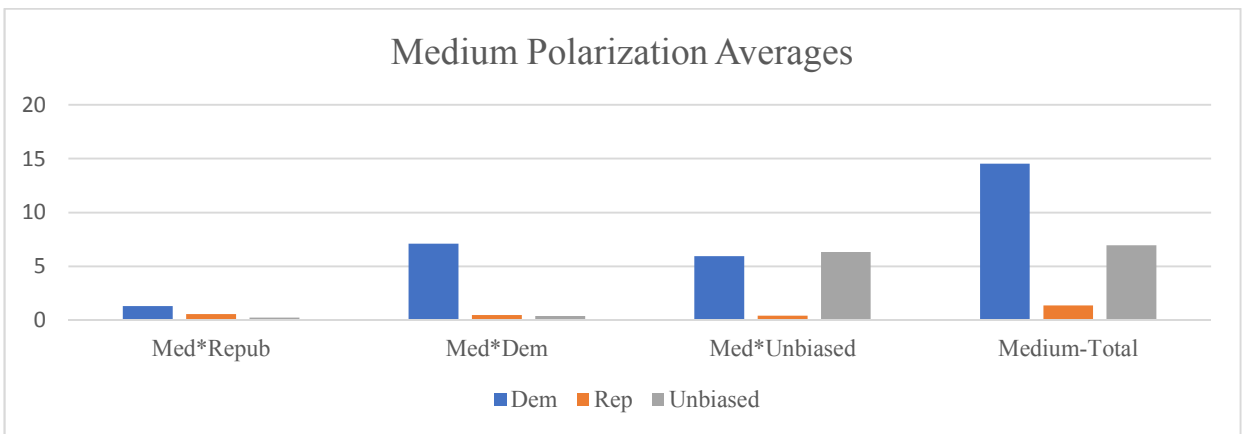


Figure 5.4

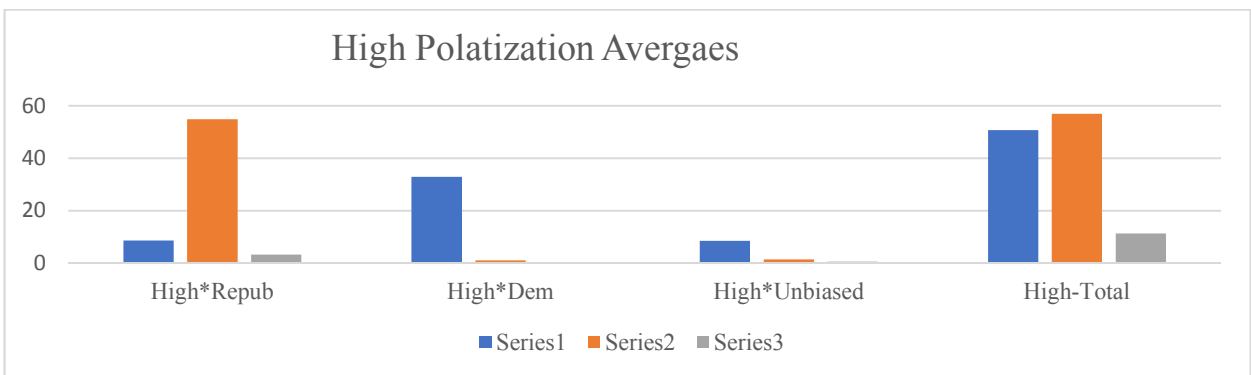


Figure 5.5

Figures 5.3-5.5 tell much of the story. First there is polarization in every part of the media. Journalists cannot completely separate their views from their work. Biases will creep in. In many of the unbiased news reports material that could be polarizing was included from time to time. Although this was not intentionally included it does influence peoples' views. There is polarization everywhere, in all parts of the media.

One should take note that as the measurements of polarization increase, the amount of polarization increase. In other words, in the low polarization category all categories have lower amounts of polarization. As we get to the high categories amounts of polarization tend to go up. Second, conservative polarization is high and gets higher. There is hardly any polarized content, but as we go from medium to high, the amount rises tremendously.

Interestingly in the liberal category we see fairly consistent levels of polarization through the different levels. In fact, liberal programs have significant amounts of polarized material in the lower and medium polarization levels. Polarization remains stable. Liberal outlets are polarized but the amounts and levels seem to remain stable.

We do see some polarization in unbiased outlets. This occurs for several reasons. They may have editorial or opinion sections. They may be reporting on material that is inflammatory that although not be design, is still polarizing. And again, one cannot separate their views from their jobs, even journalists who are supposed. to.

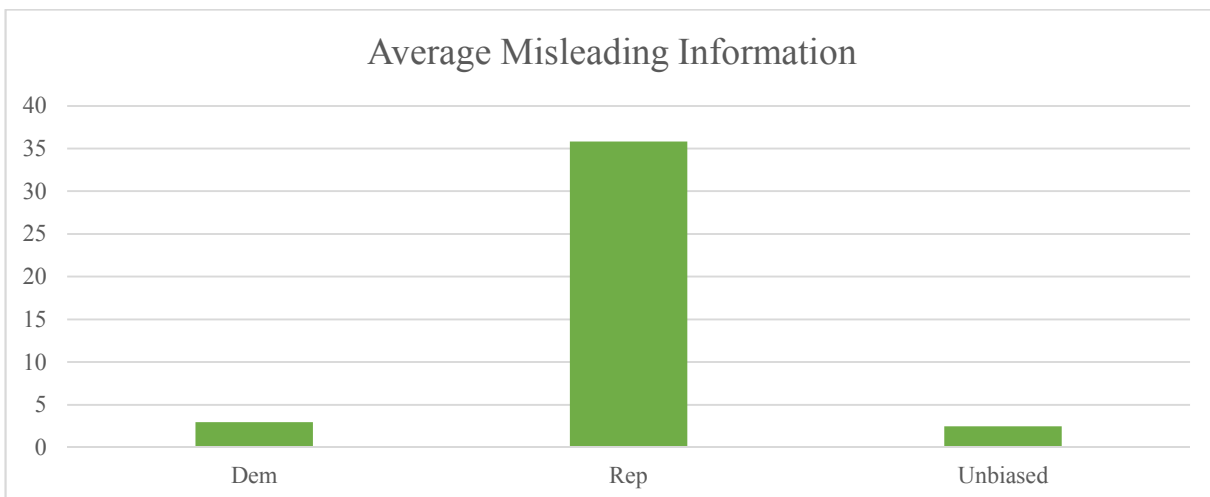


Figure 5.6

One of the more important aspects to discuss is the type of information. There is misleading information on any news outlet. A certain small amount of this may be attributed to honest mistakes. We even see some misleading information in unbiased networks. I did observe higher amounts of misleading information in the biased networks. In fact, it is incredibly high in the conservative category. The programs were chosen at random and different categories were analyzed on different dates. It is not a matter of the same sensational news event affecting the cycle. News outlets that are biased to one ideology or the other are simply not above arranging the facts, leaving out important information, or simply ignore the truth to make their point. This is sadly one of the reasons the media can be so influential. People watch newscasts. Take the news as fact. Discuss this news with their friends which reinforces the information, and it suddenly becomes the truth.

Oddly enough, as of the writing of this dissertation many things have been happening at the larger networks. Currently Fox News is going through a crisis, a crisis which started years ago. Glenn Beck finally went too far and was shown the door. His sponsors dropped him like a lit firecracker. Now we are finding out that there has been a systematic practice of

sexual harassment. This was so serious that Roger Ailes was fired. Network powerhouse Megan Kelly left for greener pastures. Now the anchor of the Fox News, Bill O'Reilly has been fired. His sponsors began to drop him faster than Glenn Beck's when it was shown that Fox had been paying out hush money for years to settle harassment claims against O'Reilly and there are a line of women now accusing him of sexual harassment. Even a month ago it would have been beyond thought that O'Reilly would be fired. He has the highest ratings at the network and is a proven money maker. It seems there is a line being drawn which even the most popular commentators cannot cross. This is an area that will be ripe for study in future papers; to see how this will affect the media's influence on polarization.

Who knows how all of this will turn out? Will biased news networks continue to influence the news cycle as they do now? Some of the questions are impossible to answer. What can be said is that America is polarized, politicians, political elites, and the public. There are specific influences on this polarization. They will continue to affect polarization.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Summary of Findings

America has entered a new and volatile chapter in its politics. Although American politics has been polarized in the past, this new chapter of politics becoming polarized to a level and form previously unknown. Technology has transformed the type and volume of news delivery drastically. People exist in worldwide corners of the internet that deliver polarized news 24 hours seven days a week. Americans are being bombarded by unwieldy amounts of information that is impossible to digest and interpret, and are left with the impossible task of understanding high volumes of information, especially when it comes tainted with the direct influence of highly politicized newscasts.

We know one thing for sure. The public is polarized. There is a certain segment of course for which there is no issue salience, or in plain terms they don't care. This is a variable we will study in further studies. However, Americans who pay attention are polarized. It is not simply party activists, politicians, and political elites. People care about politics and they have strong opinions. However, many times they are poorly informed. Biased news sources contribute substantially to that. People have their political beliefs and go to sources that reinforce their prior beliefs.

Religious beliefs affect political polarization. These beliefs are taught from an early age and affect peoples' political views. Politics necessarily involves legislating morality. What is obscene to one person is perfectly fine with another. Currently the country is in the middle of a debate concerning homosexuality and the rights these Americans deserve. Most religions teach that this is a sin and part of the electorate think these religious beliefs should

find their way into politics and law. Slowly however times are changing and attitudes are changing and along with this the laws guaranteeing homosexuals the same rights as all Americans. A debate is also afoot concerning marijuana and its legality. Times and attitudes are changing on this topic as well with more Americans deciding it is one's right to ingest whatever they choose. These dynamics seem to depend on time and changing hearts and minds as people wake up to certain realities. The future will tell which will be the next dominos will fall but religion's hold on political be in flux for the foreseeable future. This topic is ripe for study in further papers as the situation evolves.

Education is also a powerful influence on polarization. We have known for years that the more education one has the more liberal they are. Education is certainly more accessible than in the past. However, this dynamic is changing as prices are increasing at an alarming rate and without change more people will be priced out of education. Types of education will also be changing. With President Obama, we received the promise of more community colleges and education being more accessible to Americans. With a new administration, we don't know where this will go. However, there is a tremendous problem with millions of graduates in serious debt from student loans and degrees that will likely not enable them to pay off their debts. This dynamic is also in flux and will change dramatically in the coming years. It has become apparent to me that although we know a great deal about the influences of political polarization, things are changing and some will likely change rapidly. This topic will prove to be a viable study for the foreseeable future as we try to keep up with the changes in society.

This is the importance and excitement concerning this topic. The evolution, escalation, and growing influence of polarization in the time I have been producing this work

is amazing. It has both fascinated and surprised me. Political polarization is therefore both very important and timely. It is becoming more critical to understand this dynamic because of the potential influences and changes it can foster in politics and foreign affairs. Political polarization is no longer something that influences domestic politics but is beginning to show signs of influencing foreign politics as well. It is continually in flux and is ripe for study for the foreseeable future. The world is a dangerous place, and in many ways, is during the most dangerous times ever seen. Technology has produced weaponry that can destroy the world. High levels of polarization can be dangerous amongst political elites who are elected by and take their cues from a highly-polarized electorate. America has been in the longest state of warfare in its history. It is in fact a world war though not on the scale of the previous world wars. This situation can easily escalate to a dangerous state of world war by one silly mistake by a politician or government official. Russia is rattling its saber and is full of jingoistic rhetoric. One rash move on either side can easily escalate to war. North Korea is also increasing its saber rattling to a disturbing degree. America is on the opposite side of a war in Syria with Russia who also appears to want to rebuild its former empire. Russia is testing the waters as to how far NATO and the United Nations will go to stop its imperialistic aspirations. China is currently expanding its military and capabilities, going so far as to creating man made islands to militarize them in the south China sea. This alone points to imperialistic tendencies. These countries have the power and military infrastructure to do significant damage. Russia is expanding its military capabilities with new high tech fighting equipment. It is quite apparent that Russia worked to influence American elections. On top of this a coalition of nations are fighting a frontless world war on terror. With the internet terrorist can influence potential terrorists around the world. Domestic political polarization

can take on dangerous new overtones. Words said in haste without thinking can easily inflame issues. It is not too much to say that one over politicized comment can have worldwide repercussions. Aggressive foreign policy supported by an inflamed and uniformed public can do serious damage. Of course, this is to some extent speculation. However, this kind of rhetoric has inflamed war many times in the history of the world. The type of jingoism and polarization we are seeing in the United States is occurring around the world. It is not idle speculation to assume that the wrong words at the wrong time can bring about catastrophic results. Although this work is focused on polarization in the United States one cannot help to make note of parallels around the world and speculate a bit on the possible consequences. It also points to the importance of this research as it is currently evolving and changing. It will evolve into increasingly important research to track the influences and changes polarization is fostering in the current political debate.

The data clearly show the variables influence polarization. These variables are also described as agents of political socialization. Especially education and religion influence political views and ultimately polarization. In religious homes, certain values are established from an early age. Whether children accept or reject these values it influences their political views. Although we do have a separation of religion and state, most of the values taught in religion are necessarily involved in political policy. Abortion and gay rights specifically come to mind. In a country that defines itself as a Christian nation, Christian values will influence peoples' decision in the voting booths. When religion teaches, that abortion is a sin that one will be punished for in eternity the electorate will have influences on political policy.

These dynamics can also change. Gay rights are moving from something that completely separates Americans to something that more Americans are accepting. As more

people come out to friends and family society realizes that they have been a part of society forever and homosexuals are not just some deviant minority but friends and family. They are people that work, pay taxes, and contribute to their communities. As more states begin to recognize gay marriage more people will continue to accept the fact that gay Americans deserve every right that every other citizen enjoys. So, views can change and polarization can swing from one side to the other.

Finally, fewer Americans are identifying with a religion and atheists are one of the growing demographics that is changing and evolving. Polarization is not static. It is in flux as situations change.

Education and media no doubt also influence polarization. With more education people tend to be more liberal. Education broadens our horizons. With more education people evolve different views about which they were previously uneducated. Human beings are generally afraid and suspicious of things they do not understand and a lack of education means that people often do not understand the policies they oppose. However, education is becoming beyond many people as prices increase. Education no longer carries as much potential for greater earnings and many times leave students mired in debt. How education influences polarization in the future will depend on access to a quality education from an early age. America currently has issues with funding public education and access to higher education. This variable will continue to evolve but it is not certain how it will evolve.

Media is perhaps one of the most influential variables influencing polarization. It is very confusing to flesh out exactly where one can find unbiased information. With the proliferation of cable television, and the internet there is a plethora of both good and bad information. No doubt there is a proliferation of completely biased news. Many issues come

with this, not the least of which is the fact that many of these biased outlets profess to report the truth unlike “the liberal indoctrinating media”. Selective exposure allows people to access news that simply reinforces their previous views. With the loss of social capital and the need to interact with people of different political views polarization can flourish.

Limitations of the Study

For the sake of a focused study and time and space the number of original variables was reduced from nine to three. These were the most important of the three because they represent the most influential variables that cover more of the electorate. Future studies that include more variables will allow for a broader study of the influences of polarization. This is a topic that deserves much more attention and study as it will continue to influence politics and policy outcomes into the future. As previously noted some of these variables are evolving and changing and will need further treatment to see if the changes are significant enough to influence the thesis.

In addition, the recent election and obvious polarization at the national level will continue to play out over the next decade at least. This will influence changes in polarization and the variables that affect it. This well necessitate further study to track changes and evolutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is apparent that the electorate and public are polarized. This does not happen in a vacuum. There are specific reasons for it. These reasons are diverse and complicated. It is difficult to judge human behavior and motivations. However, it is not

impossible. We can identify many of the reasons for polarization, and further studies will continue to flesh out these reasons.

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