Pre-analysis plan for a conjoint experiment on affective polarization

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Wednesday 27th June, 2018

1 Introduction

Studies from the USA (e.g., Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012) suggests that Americans dislike people from the other party to the extent that they would be unhappy if their son or daughter married someone voting for the other party. A recent study by Klar, Krupnikov and Ryan (2018) further suggest that negative affect toward the other political side is, first and foremost, negative affect toward partisans who discuss politics frequently, rather than rarely, regardless of the party they support.

Recently, Iyengar et al. (In press) further argued that the results by Klar, Krupnikov and Ryan (2018) "suggests that part of the opposition to inter-party marriage (and other types of social distance) may be that people assume 'Republicans' and 'Democrats' are the extremists portrayed in the media" or that, alternatively, "the finding may reflect the well-known association between politics and disagreement; most people prefer to be in agreeable relationships". Crucially, this suggest that the social distance approach (Bogardus, 1947) to measuring affective polarization is, potentially, ambiguous. Consequently, Iyengar et al. (In press) recommend that future research seek to understand the precise limitations of social distance measures for political affect research.

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This study aims to heed this call and is designed to test the relative effect of partisan affective polarization by using three different measures of social distance (Bogardus, 1947): (1) As close relatives by marriage, (2) as close personal friends, and (3) as neighbors on the same street.

I will field a conjoint experiment (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014; Knudsen and Johannesson, in press) and explore the relative effect of partisan affect compared to a range of other attributes simultaneously (see Table 1 for a list of all attributes). Importantly, this approach not only enables an analysis of the relative importance of partisanship compared to other attributes (such as religion, country of origin, and criminal record) through social distance measures (as shown through classic trust games Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Westwood et al., 2018), but also whether the effect of partisanship is ambiguous and thus masking other relevant information such as a partisan media diet (e.g., Levendusky, 2013) or frequently talking politics (Klar, Krupnikov and Ryan, 2018).

2 The design and data

This conjoint experiment is designed to explore the relative effect of partisan affect among American adults using three different measures of social distance.

The attributes in the experiment is shown in Table 1. The experiment consists of three different choice tasks asking all respondents: (1) "Please read the description of these two persons carefully. **If you had a son or daughter who where to marry one of these two persons, which person would you prefer he or she married?"**, (2) "Please read the description of these two persons carefully. **Then, please indicate which of the two persons you would personally prefer to have as a neighbor on the same street as you."**, and (3) "Please read the description of these two persons carefully. **Then, please indicate which of the two persons you would prefer as your close personal friend."** The order of the three choice tasks is randomized.

The survey will be fielded to about 1,000 respondents on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk). Eligibility to take the survey will be restricted to U.S.-based MTurk Workers. In this study, each respondent will evaluate three choice task—one task for each measure of social distance.

Table 1: Attributes in the Conjoint Experiment

Treatment attribute	Value
Current profession	Unemployed / Research scientist / Janitor / Teacher / Waiter / Construction worker / Financial analyst.
Main media source	Fox News / CNN / MSNBC / New York Times / The Washington Post / Breitbart.
Country of Origin	Germany / USA / Mexico / Iraq.
Religion	Atheist / Christian / Muslim / Jewish.
Political standpoint	Republican / Democrat /
Talk politics	Often talks about politics / Sometimes talks about politics / Rarely talks about politics.
Family	Comes from a wealthy family / Comes from a middle class family / Comes from a poor family.
Criminal record	None / Has a criminal record and served two years in prison.
Gender	Man / Woman.

Note: The "gender" attribute is not present in the choice task asking "If you had a son or daughter who where to marry one of these two persons, which person would you prefer he or she married?"

3 Pre-analysis plan

I will adopt the statistical approach developed by Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) and estimate average marginal component effects (AMCEs). The AMCE will show the average difference in the probability of a person being more or less preferred. Each attribute level is compared to a different attribute level within the same attribute.

The main attribute of interest is the attribute "Political standpoint". To investigate the relative effect of the political standpoint attribute, I will explore the relative effects of each attribute by each measure of social distance, by plotting the AMCEs (for an example see e.g., Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014; Knudsen and Johannesson, in press).

To get a more direct measure of the effect of partisan affect distance, I will, in the next step, match the party shown in the attribute list with a variable that measure the degree respondents like or dislike that specific political party. More specifically, I ask: "What is your overall opinion about the [Republican/Democratic] party?", on a four point scale from "Very favorable" to "Very unfavorable". I code the matched variables as "Like the party", "Dislike the party".

Following the same approach as detailed above, I will also match the main media source shown in the attribute list with a variable that measure the degree respondents like or dislike that specific media source ("Very favorable" to "Very unfavorable").

I will also explore whether the patterns in the three different choice tasks differ substantially and significantly among different age-groups, gender, education, party preference, and ideology.

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