

The Tie That Divides: Cross-National Evidence of the Primacy of Partyism

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Abstract

Using evidence from Great Britain, the United States, Belgium, and Spain, we demonstrate that in integrated and divided nations alike, citizens are more strongly attached to political parties than to the social groups that the parties represent. In all four nations, partisans discriminate against their opponents and to a degree that exceeds discrimination against members of religious, linguistic, ethnic, or regional out groups. This pattern holds even when social cleavages are intense and the basis for prolonged political conflict. Partisan animus is conditioned by ideological proximity; partisans are more distrusting of parties furthest from them in the ideological space. The effects of partisanship on trust are eroded when partisan and social ties collide. In closing, we consider the reasons that give rise to the strength of “partyism” in modern democracies.

In democratic societies, political parties represent group interests. The classic account of party system formation in Europe (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) posits that the salient socio-economic cleavages at the outset of the 20th century shaped the positions taken by parties, and that the persistence of these cleavages led to the “freezing” of European party alignments and patterns of party competition. A similar historical account applies to party system development in the United States, where “realigning” events (e.g. the Civil War and Great Depression) led to fundamental changes in the composition of the party coalitions, followed by periods of long-term stability (see Key 1959; Chambers and Burnham 1975; Burnham et al. 1967).

Since parties exist to promote the agendas of particular groups, the concept of group identity plays a vital role in explaining individuals’ party choices (Green et al. 2002; Huddy et al. 2015; Greene 1999). Those who identify as working class are more likely to support Social Democrats, while voters on the opposite side of the class divide align with parties on the ideological right. In countries with longstanding, deep cleavages, and where these cleavages are reinforcing (rather than cross-cutting), multiple and politically consistent affiliations create a sense of “us against them” (see Verba 1965; Lijphart 1968; Dahl 1982). Individuals acquire a strong sense of solidarity with their own reference group and a corresponding social distance from out groups (see, for instance, Dunning and Harrison 2010). Under these conditions, dissatisfaction with economic or political outcomes leads group members to demand political redress and autonomy, in some cases using violent forms of protest (Selway 2011; Gubler and Selway 2012). Recent manifestations of this pattern include the unrest in the Russian speaking regions of Ukraine, the sectarian political conflict in Northern Ireland, and independence movements in the Basque and Catalanian regions of Spain as well as the Flanders region of Belgium.

Since it is the competing group interests defined by social cleavages that give rise to party politics, it can be expected that the sense of identity and polarization based on these cleavages carries over to partisan identity and polarization. In deeply divided societies, strong

in-group and out-group sentiments should spill over to the parties representing the groups in question. In the case of the Basque Country in Spain, for instance, where supporters of the separatist movement frequently resorted to violence and terrorism, we might expect equally high levels of distrust across the regional cleavage and across parties that support or oppose Basque independence. In more homogeneous societies, on the other hand, where the overarching sense of national identity takes precedence over social group affinities, group polarization is expected to be weaker and partisan affiliations may form the strongest basis for polarization. In fact, in these less-divided societies, the only overt conflict and “fighting words” occur between parties. Partisans are hence likely to develop stronger affective ties to their party than to the social groups the parties represent. This pattern of strong partisan identity or “partyism” (Sunstein 2014) fits the case of the United States, where recent evidence demonstrates that polarization is stronger for partisan than for racial or social class affiliations (see Iyengar and Westwood 2014). It is, however, unknown whether this is an idiosyncratic pattern attributable to distinctive American institutions and practices or a more general phenomenon that holds across the spectrum of democratic societies.

In this paper, we show that party identity has come to replace and even dominate the originally underlying social cleavages. With evidence from four cases that span differing democratic systems and levels of social conflict, we show that parties themselves have become the primary cleavage. Social divides are instrumental in the formation of parties, but the intensely competitive nature of democratic representation encourages the parties to demonstrate overt hostility toward their opponents, hostility that is untempered by the social norms of respect and tolerance that regulate competition between most social groups. Over time, partisan ties have absorbed social ties, with partisanship now consistently dividing citizens to an extent that exceeds other salient social divides. We document this remarkable pattern by comparing the strength of group identity and polarization at the level of political parties with identity and polarization at the level of the social and cultural groups represented by parties. We do so in four different countries that vary in the strength of

their social divides. The United States and United Kingdom are relatively unified societies in terms of language, religion, and ethnicity. Belgium and Spain, on the other hand, are countries with strong linguistic, ethnic, and regional cleavages (that in some instances have resulted in violent strife). Our expectation is that partisan polarization will dominate social polarization in relatively integrated societies, while divided societies will exhibit both partisan and social polarization. We focus in particular on affective polarization—the degree to which group members express animus and distrust toward members of opposing groups. In each of the four countries examined, we implement an experimental design to compare affective polarization based on party affiliation with polarization based on a salient social cleavage.

Contrary to expectations, we find that in divided and integrated societies alike, distrust based on party affiliation easily exceeds distrust based on social group ties. Partisanship exerts a stronger psychological bond than affiliation with racial, religious, linguistic or ethnic groups—even when those cleavages are highly conflictual and the principal basis for the parties’ ideological positions and electoral appeals. Representative democracy, it is widely argued, cannot exist without parties and party loyalties (Stepan and Linz 1978; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997; Przeworski et al. 1999). Our results show that the sense of partisan identity—however necessary for democratic representation and governance—has developed to an extent where it now constitutes a strong form of out-group prejudice and inter-personal discrimination.

We proceed as follows. First, we elaborate on the related concepts of identity and affect as markers of group polarization. Next we explain our criteria for selecting the four cases in question, describe the experimental design, and our behavioral measure of group polarization. Third, we present results showing that partisan polarization is considerable in all four cases, that ideological proximity and coalition politics weaken polarization in multiparty states, and that citizens are consistently more polarized by party than their regional, linguistic, ethnic, or religious affiliations. In closing, we address the political implications of our findings and

speculate over the reasons underlying the primacy of partisan affect.

Identity and Affect as Markers of Group Polarization

A standard indicator of polarization is the extent to which group affiliation engenders affection for the in group and hostility toward the out group (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Oakes and Turner 1980; Doise 1988). Psychological theories of group dynamics take as axiomatic that all forms of group affiliation—even those based on involuntary membership—result in the combination of positive affect for fellow group members and animus for members of opposing groups (Billig and Tajfel 1973; Tajfel and Turner 1979).

While early studies treated partisanship as a manifestation of other group affiliations (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. 1960), more recent work argues that party is an important form of social identity in its own right (Green et al. 2002; Huddy et al. 2015; Greene 1999; Iyengar et al. 2012). As anticipated by the social identity theorists (e.g., Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1970), under conditions of competition, group membership inculcates especially warm feelings for the in group and correspondingly hostile evaluations of out groups. In the case of the U.S., this divergence in affect toward the in and out parties has increased substantially over the past three decades (Haidt and Hetherington 2012; Iyengar et al. 2012), only partly in response to increased disagreement on the issues (see Sood and Iyengar 2014). Alternative explanations for the increased level of inter-party animus in the American context include “sorting” or increased congruence between voters’ partisan and ideological identities (Levendusky 2010; Mason 2015), and prolonged exposure to the rhetoric and sloganeering of media-based campaigns in which candidates routinely attack and denigrate their opponents (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995).

Unlike race, religion, gender and other social divides where group-related attitudes and behaviors are constrained by social norms (Maccoby and Maccoby 1954; Sigall and Page 1971; Himmelfarb and Lickteig 1982), there are no corresponding pressures or sanctions that

mute disapproval of political opponents. If anything, the rhetoric and actions of political leaders demonstrate that hostility directed at the opposition is acceptable, even appropriate. Partisans therefore feel free to express animus and engage in discriminatory behavior toward their opponents. Some might worry that the lack of social norms to limit partisan animus merely allows citizens to speak their minds. In this paper we deploy an experimental design (economic games) that minimizes possible social desirability effects (see Iyengar and Westwood 2015). We see the absence of social norms that regulate partyism not as a problem of measurement but as a major explanation for the development of partyism—the absence of social norms allow partyism to grow and flourish in the public consciousness.

While there is a growing body of scholarship bearing on affective party polarization in the United States, the comparative literature has largely ignored the question of affect and instead focused almost exclusively on ideological polarization and its consequences for voting behavior. Thus, a series of studies show that when parties are polarized, citizens find it easier to cast votes based on the spatial logic of issue or value proximity (see Berglund et al. 2005; Van der Eijk et al. 2005; Knutsen and Kumlin 2005; De Vries 2010). Other scholars have identified the conditions under which partisans see greater ideological differences between the parties. These include the strength of social and economic cleavages (Evans and de Graaf 2013; Bartolini and Mair 1990) and differences in electoral institutions (Cox 1997).

Given the preoccupation with ideological polarization, there is little evidence bearing on voters' feelings toward parties and party supporters outside the U.S. In fact, we know of only a handful of papers that address affective polarization in a cross-national context. Early work on party system development acknowledged the importance of affect (e.g., Stepan and Linz 1978, p.44) noting that ideological disagreements could lead to “deep personal antagonism” between party supporters. The first study to provide evidence on partisan affect (Richardson 1991) found that in the early 1980s voters in two of three European democracies (Britain and the Netherlands) expressed greater hostility toward their partisan opponents than did Americans. The author concluded that because European party systems

reflected long-standing social, cultural and religious cleavages, they generated more intense partisan conflict. More recent work, however, shows that the pattern of the 1980s has reversed and that partisan divisions in the United States now exceed those in the United Kingdom (Iyengar et al. 2012). A major limitation of this work is that the magnitude of partisan feelings is not compared to affect based on social cleavages.

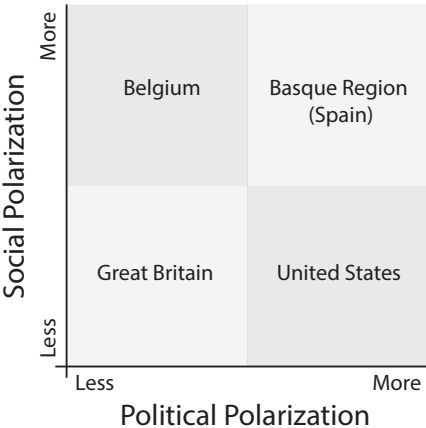
The most recent work on partisan polarization uses inter-personal trust as the relevant indicator. In a pair of studies conducted in the U.S., Iyengar and Westwood (2014) found that distrust based on party affiliation exceeded distrust based on the deepest social divide in the U.S., namely, race. The extent of distrust based on party affiliation outside the U.S. has been examined by Carlin and Love (2013) who implemented trust games in an assortment of developing nations and the United States. They found significant levels of partisan mistrust, but idiosyncratic case selection and reliance on student samples limit the generalizability of this work. Finally, in an extension to a developing African society (Ghana), Michelitch (2015) shows that during periods of election campaigns, when voters' partisanship becomes especially salient, the effects of party support on inter-personal trust rival the effects of the principal social cleavage, i.e. tribal affiliation.

Case Selection

We focus on four cases that represent differing levels and combinations of social and partisan polarization (see Figure 1). Our cases range from Great Britain, a weakly divided society and party system where there is meaningful cross-cutting between social and party cleavages, to Spain—a nation where partisan affiliation reinforces deep social (ethno-linguistic) divides. We also include two other intermediate cases. In the United States although party polarization is strong and the party cleavage reinforces racial, religious, and gender divides, the social cleavages in question represent relatively weak ties (Iyengar and Westwood 2014). In fact, in-group and out-group feelings across these social divides differ not at all in the

U.S. (Muste 2014). We also consider Belgium, a country with a strong linguistic cleavage, but where the cleavage cannot contribute to partisan attachments because of the absence of national parties that compete in both Francophone and Flemish regions. This set of cases allows us not only to document the magnitude of partisan polarization in both divided and integrated societies, but also to benchmark the partisan divide against social cleavages of varying strength. Finally, unlike prior work, our evidence on partisan affect is based on national samples (regional in the case of Spain).

Figure 1: Social and Political Polarization in the Selected Cases



Our classification of Belgium and Spain as socially divided societies and the U.K. and U.S. as relatively integrated societies is consistent with standard measures of linguistic, religious, and ethnic fractionalization. Belgium and Spain have linguistic fractionalization scores (Alesina et al. 2003) exceeding .5 while the U.K. and U.S. rank near the bottom with scores of .05 and .25 respectively. Measures of ethno-geographic cross-cutting (confinement of ethnic groups to single regions or dispersion of ethnic groups across a nation) show similar results (see Gubler and Selway 2012), with the U.S. (crosscuttingness=.80) and U.K. (crosscuttingness=.86) classified as ethnically dispersed, while Belgium (crosscuttingness=.56) and Spain (crosscuttingness=.45) have ethnic groups concentrated in particular regions.

Great Britain

Great Britain represents a relatively homogeneous society. While social class was the principal cleavage during the era of pure two-party competition, class-based politics has all but disappeared (Evans and Tilley 2012b,a; Franklin 1985). Explanations for the weakened state of the class cleavage include increased affluence and economic mobility, the growing importance of valence factors (e.g. candidate images) that cut across class lines as voting cues (Sanders et al. 2011; Adams et al. 2012), and strategic movement toward the center by both major parties, but especially Labor during the 1990s under the leadership of Tony Blair.

Originally a two-party system in which Labor and the Conservatives amassed close to all the parliamentary seats, since the 1970s the U.K. has devolved into a multi-party system with the two major parties receiving only two-thirds of the popular vote in 2005. The Liberal Democrats emerged as a significant force in 2010 (with over 20 percent of the popular vote) and entered into a coalition government with the Conservative Party led by David Cameron. More recently, the nationalist UKIP Party, the Scottish Nationalists and the Green Party have all registered significant political gains. In the 2015 elections, the combined vote for the Liberal Democrats, SNP, UKIP, and Greens amounted to more than 31 percent of the electorate.

The increased volatility of the British party system reflects shifting electoral fault lines (Evans and Payne 1999; Dalton 2013). With the decline of class-based voting, the parties introduced new issues and divisions that included regional identities, the standing of Britain within the European Union, immigration, and—in the aftermath of multiple terrorist attacks within the country and a Muslim population numbering more than two million—concerns over national security and radical Islam.

As a relatively undivided society with centrist-leaning parties, the potential for affective party polarization is limited in Britain. The available evidence indicates that relative to the

U.S. the sense of party affiliation does not excite strong feelings among party supporters. British partisans express a weaker sense of social distance from their political opponents and less hostile evaluations of out-partisans than their American counterparts (see Iyengar et al. 2012).

United States

The U.S. also represents a case of weak social cleavages (Muste 2014) and party coalitions that cut across these cleavages (with the notable exception of race). However, unlike the U.K., the absence of strong social cleavages has not impeded party polarization defined in either ideological or affective terms. Post-1980, the elected representatives of the two parties have moved to the ideological extremes (see McCarty et al. 2006), a process accelerated by the political transformation of the American South into a predominantly Republican region and by the adoption of primary elections—characterized by low turnout limited to the activist strata—as the method of nominating candidates. Unlike their elected representatives, Americans with a party affiliation have remained centrist in their policy preferences (Fiorina et al. 2005; Hill and Tausanovitch 2014; for an opposing view, see Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). Nonetheless they treat their opponents as a disliked out group (Iyengar and Westwood 2014; Iyengar et al. 2012). In fact, affective polarization based on partisanship in the U.S. now exceeds polarization based on race. Thus the U.S. represents the unusual combination of a relatively undivided society coupled with strong partisan affect.

Belgium

Unlike the U.K. and the U.S., Belgium is divided by a deep and highly conflictual social cleavage. Belgian politics revolves around the competing regional interests of Dutch-speaking Flanders and Francophone Wallonia. Until recently, the linguistic divide competed with the liberal-conservative economic cleavage, and the Catholic vs. free-thinker religious cleavage. However, the religious cleavage has withered since the 1990s, the left-right cleavage has

remained salient, but linguistic tensions have dominated the agenda since the formation of the N-VA (in 2001), a party advocating increased autonomy for the Flanders region. In the 2014 national elections, the N-VA emerged as the largest Flemish party both in terms of votes and legislative seats. Whether the electoral success of the N-VA has deepened the language cleavage and increased Flemish support for separation of Belgium is unclear, but there is no doubt that the party has made the language issue central to Belgian politics.

The multi-party system in Belgium reflects the longstanding regional divide. All parties exist only within each region and party competition occurs along multiple points on the left-right continuum. However, the N-VA's platform combines a conservative economic ideology with demands for an independent Flanders. Thus, in Belgium today it is possible to examine both ideological proximity and linguistic-regional affiliation as bases for affective partisan polarization. Since the N-VA promotes both ideological and regional interests while all other major parties differ mostly on the former dimension, relative to these parties we should find greater animus between N-VA supporters and non-supporters.

Spain

Spain is at the leading edge of our typology of nations. It is a society split by ethno-linguistic fault lines, so much so that there are full-fledged independence movements in the regions of Catalonia and Basque Country. The separatist cause has a more prolonged history in the Basque region where violence and terrorism by pro-Basque activists resulted in more than 800 deaths prior to the 2011 cease fire.

We focus on Basque Country for two reasons. First, unlike the Belgian case, the region is home to both Basque parties and national parties. Voters in Basque Country can choose between national parties supporting a unified Spain and Basque parties supporting either maximal devolution or complete independence. The parties also diverge on the left-right continuum. However, the past thirty years of Basque politics have been dominated by the ethno-nationalist cleavage, with the left-right cleavage only playing a secondary role (Strijbis

and Leonisio 2012).¹ Second, the Basque region exemplifies a divided society. The intensity of the cleavage and the associated history of violence make this case an especially stringent test of partisan affect. If there is any region where social group affiliation should take precedence over party affiliation, it is Basque Country.

Within Basque Country, party politics not only divides Basques from non-Basques, but also splits these ethnic groups by left-right ideology. The four major parties in Basque Country reflect the intersection of these cross-cutting cleavages: there is one major party in each of the possible cells derived from crossing the left-right cleavage with the Basque-Spanish cleavage. There is a leftist and a rightist party in favor of Basque independence, and a leftist and rightist national Spanish party that favors the status quo, i.e. maintaining current levels of Basque autonomy within the framework of a unified Spanish state. On the Basque nationalist right there is the conservative PNV, which has won all but two elections in the Basque Country since the beginning of the democratic period. On the Basque left there is the so-called Basque Patriotic Left, which has been historically linked to the terrorist group ETA². At the national level, the conservative PP and the socialist PSOE both reject Basque independence in favor of an integrated Spain.

Since party politics in Basque Country features both rightist and leftist Basque and Spanish parties appealing to Basque and non-Basque voters,³ we are in a position to compare the effects of ethnicity and party ideology on group polarization. We can also examine their joint effects when the cleavages reinforce (similarity in both ethnicity and ideology) or when they are cross-cutting (similarity on one cleavage, but dissimilarity on the other).

¹Consequently there is only minimal movement of voters between Basque and Spanish ethnic party blocs (Leonisio 2012), while there is considerable movement between the two ideological groups within ethnic party blocs.

²The Basque Patriotic Left competes in elections using different names, in part because it was banned for a decade due to its connections to ETA. In the 2011 Spanish elections, it formed a coalition with several smaller Basque leftist parties under the name Amaiur. This is the party name we will use in the rest of this paper.

³Approximately 60% of residents of the Basque country have at least one ethnic Basque grandparents, meaning 40% are from other regions and ethnic groups.

Theoretical Expectations

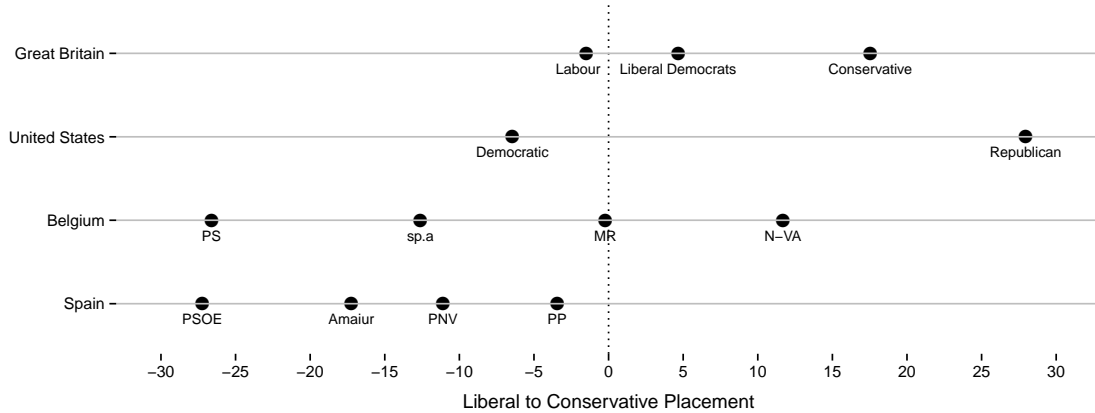
First, we expect partisans to exhibit the standard group polarization syndrome. They will display greater trust in co-partisans and prejudice against opposing partisans. We further anticipate that the trust divide based on partisan affiliation will exceed the corresponding divide based on social group affiliation, especially in the relatively undivided societies of the U.K. and the U.S. In Belgium and Basque Country, where the relevant social cleavage runs deep and has provoked prolonged political conflict, we expect that polarization based on regional and ethnic affiliation will rival polarization based on partisanship.

Second, we expect ideological distance between parties to enlarge or diminish negative affect toward opposing parties. European party systems span the full range of the ideological spectrum and we expect that opposing partisans affiliated with ideologically proximate parties will be considered more trustworthy than opposing partisans associated with ideologically distant parties. For instance, despite their participation in the 2010-2015 governing coalition, Liberal Democratic voters are in fact ideologically closer to the Labour Party and we expect greater levels of trust between Lib Dem and Labour supporters. Similarly, since in Belgium the ideological distance between N-VA and PS exceeds the distance between MR and SP.A, we predict that polarization across the N-VA-PS divide will exceed polarization across the corresponding MR-SP.A divide. In Spain, we expect the most trust where cleavages reinforce (the union of the Basque-Spanish and left-right divides). Thus, we expect the lowest levels of trust between supporters of Amaiur and PP because they diverge on both the left-right and ethnic dimensions. Figure 2 shows the ideological placement of the parties in each of our case nations (Volgens et al. 2014)⁴.

Finally, we anticipate that the degree of overlap between the partisan and social divides will also magnify or weaken partisan polarization; when supporters of the out party are also

⁴There are a variety of methods used to scale political parties, though most are specific to single nations. As our interest here is to scale parties similarly within and between cases we use data from the Comparative Manifestos Project. These results are roughly similar to placement data generated with other approaches.

Figure 2: Party Ideology



Data on party ideology from the Comparative Manifestos Project (see Volkens et al. 2014)

members of the social out group (reinforcing cleavages), the effects of party affiliation on trust will be enlarged. Conversely, when partisan opponents include members of the social in group (cross-cutting cleavages), the effects of partisanship on trust will be muted. We are able to pit the cross-cutting and reinforcing cleavage patterns against each other in three of the four cases under examination.

Method

We deploy the classic trust game (Berg et al. 1995) to assess levels of partisan and social polarization. Behavioral games are used extensively to assess group cooperation and conflict measured in terms of willingness to donate money to individuals with varied group affiliations (Berg et al. 1995; Eckel and Grossman 1998; Fershtman and Gneezy 2001; Habyarimana et al. 2007; Whitt and Wilson 2007). Typically, participants are given a cash allocation and told that they can give “some, all or none” of the money to a second player. They are also told that the researchers will *triple* any amount given by Player 1 to Player 2. Player 2 could at her discretion return some, all or none of the money back to Player 1. Thus, the more Player

1 trusts or expects reciprocity from Player 2, the more Player 1 should allocate to Player 2.

The behavioral economics literature suggests that Player 1, contrary to the axioms of rationality, typically allocates non-trivial amounts (Johnson and Mislin 2011; Wilson and Eckel 2011) and that the allocation varies depending on attributes of Player 1 and the group affiliation of Player 2 (Fershtman and Gneezy 2001; Fong and Luttmer 2011). Women, for instance, tend to allocate greater amounts and are less prone to withhold on the basis of group attributes (Eckel and Grossman 1998). Prior work by Fowler and Kam (2007) detected small but significant traces of favoritism directed at co-partisans, but their study focused on the effects of biases in giving on political participation and did not compare partisanship with other social divides as a basis for trust between recipients.

Participants completed a simple set of demographic questions and then read detailed instructions about the trust game. They were then given several examples and answered a series of comprehension questions. Each participant was told that they would play with a number of other people who happened to be completing the survey at the same time. Because demographic questions were asked at the start of the study the information provided in each Player 2 profile could have ostensibly come from other individuals completing the study.⁵ Each participant completed a randomly ordered set of trust game scenarios (a within-subjects design). To avoid order effects and feedback-based allocations each participant only played as Player 1 (participants were told that they would learn of Player 2’s allocations at the end of the games). Participants were fully debriefed at the end of the experiments. Participants were allocated 10 dollars in the US, 10 pounds sterling in Great Britain and 10 Euros in Belgium and Spain.⁶ ⁷ Throughout we estimate treatment effects with multilevel models

⁵In each of our four case nations, we use identical instructions, illustrative allocations to familiarize participants with the game, and measures of trust (see supporting materials for English instructions).

⁶These amounts represent different levels of purchasing power; however, the proportion of the money allocated by Player 1 to Player 2 is remarkably similar across cases see Figure 3. We therefore do not rescale to a common level of purchasing power. This also makes our estimates easier to interpret. In our implementation of the trust game players interacted online and not face-to-face, which the prior literature shows to produce comparable results (see Iyengar and Westwood 2014). Given the online design, participants played with virtual currency rather than cash “in hand.” Participants were all given identical remuneration, regardless of actual allocations.

⁷Full sample descriptives are included in the supporting materials.

that include a participant random intercept. It is important to note that our use of a within-subjects design has the effect of controlling for individual-level variation in generosity, sense of egalitarianism, and other relevant predispositions (see Habyarimana et al. 2007; Whitt and Wilson 2007).

The profiles participants saw included information on party identification (PID) or a characteristic that cued a particular social divide (race in the US, religion in the UK, and ethnicity in both Belgium and Spain). To make our interventions less obvious and to increase the plausibility of the player description, we also provided each player’s gender, age, and income in Player 2 profiles. Gender was randomly drawn for each Player 2 (except in the U.S. where gender was fixed as male), income was randomly drawn within a narrow band around the median income in each nation and age was randomly assigned to range between 25 and 35.

Samples

For the study in Great Britain a sample was drawn from the Survey Sampling International (SSI) online panel. The sample (N=923) included participants from Great Britain drawn to approximate national demographics (it excluded citizens of Northern Ireland). Participants completed the trust games in November 2013.

For the U.S. study, we drew two samples, both from the SSI national online panel. In the first sample (N=814), we oversampled Republicans so that there were an approximately equal number of Democrats and Republicans in the sample. This study compared allocations based on partisanship and race. We excluded Independents from the sample and grouped leaners with partisans. The sample was also stratified by race, age, region and income so that the distribution of these background variables approximated census data.⁸ The second sample (N=1,252) added a control condition and allows comparisons between in-group and

⁸We fielded the studies in Fall and Winter 2013. The permanent state of modern political campaigns (Ornstein and Mann 2000) and the persistence of partisan bias over time (Iyengar et al. 2012) suggests that proximity to the 2012 campaign is a valid but likely insignificant concern. Our results also replicate a pretest fielded in July before the start of the conventions.

out-group allocations and a neutral control.

Participants for the Belgian study were drawn from the online panel maintained by SSI, weighted to approximate national demographics. A total of 763 partisan participants, drawn evenly from the two major regions, completed the study. Respondents from Flanders completed the study in Dutch, those from Wallonia did so in French. The study was fielded in late June and early July of 2014.

The Spanish study—conducted exclusively in Basque Country—was administered by the market research firm Nice Quest. They drew a representative sample of adult residents of Basque Country between January and February 2015. A total of 412 partisans (including leaners) completed the survey.⁹

Results: The Primacy of Partyism

Parties serve as principal agents in the ongoing contest between social groups for policy benefits. Consistent with our expectations, we find that the partisan divide exceeds the social divide in its impact on trust. Figure 3 graphs the difference in trust game allocations between in-group and out-group members for the partisan (pooling across parties) and social divides in each country.¹⁰ Despite the vast differences in political and electoral institutions, and levels of social discord, party affiliation consistently polarizes individuals and to an extent greater than prominent social cleavages. Contrary to our expectations, partisan polarization dominates social polarization to the same extent in the deeply divided societies of Belgium and Basque Country as in the more integrated cases of the U.S. and U.K.¹¹ Also contrary to expectations, the scope of the partisan divide is no different across the four nations (all at nearly 1 unit of currency). The social divide in three of the four cases (U.S., Belgium and

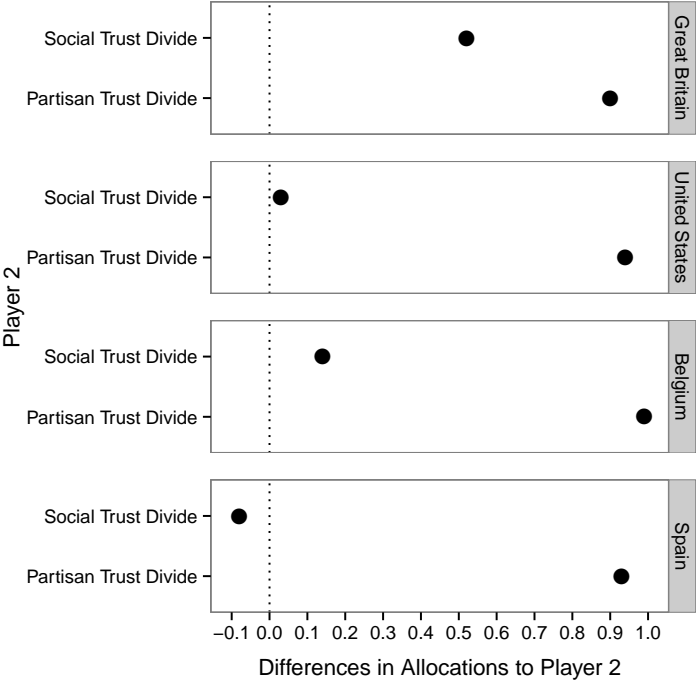
⁹Unaffiliated partisans were excluded from the sample.

¹⁰The results from Spain are marginal fitted means from experiments that crossed the social and political identities of Player 2. The U.S. social divide results are from an experiment where race was crossed with party. The U.S. partisan divide data are from a second experiment where race was not manipulated.

¹¹These results are consistent with differences in in-group and out-group feeling thermometers, reported in Figure 1 of the Supporting Materials.

Spain) is indistinguishable from zero, while the social divide (involving religion) in Great Britain is considerable—amounting to 57% of the partisan divide. Contrary to assumptions that Britain is a homogeneous society, the Christian-Muslim divide in the U.K. is stronger than the White-Black, Flemish-Walloon, or Basque-Spanish divides. In the following sections we examine the patterns of partisan and social polarization in greater detail within each nation, separating favoritism toward the in group and in party from prejudice against the out group and out party.

Figure 3: Partisan and Social Trust Divides



Difference in mean allocations for in-groups and out-groups.

We present the trust results sequentially beginning with the relatively integrated societies of Great Britain and the United States, then considering the intermediate case of Belgium, and ending with the most divided case of Basque Country. Within each case we distinguish between the effects of in group favoritism and out group prejudice. In Belgium and Great Britain we also document the relationship between ideological proximity and partisan affect.

Finally, we benchmark the strength of the partisan divides within each nation against the social divide so as to contextualize the magnitude of partisan mistrust. We present figures for all results and discuss the key findings. Full models and tables corresponding to each figure are included in the supporting materials.

The Divisiveness of Party Affiliation

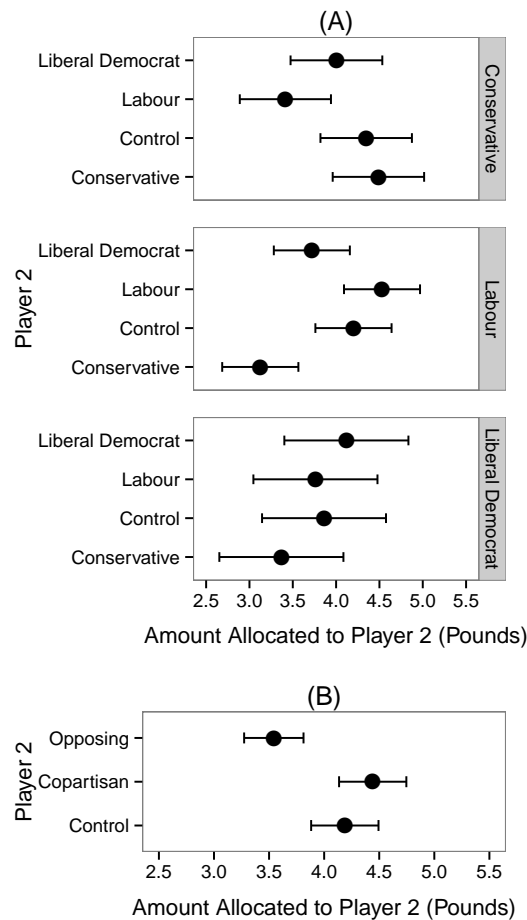
Great Britain

Britons discriminate to a significant extent against opposing partisans in the trust game (see Figure 4A). The pattern of discrimination is not symmetric in that there is minimal evidence of co-partisan favoritism. Prejudice against partisan opponents far exceeds in-group favoritism. Conservatives were least trusting of Labour members (mean=£3.41, 95% CI [£2.89, £3.94]) and most trusting of fellow Conservatives (mean allocation of £4.49, 95% CI [£3.96, £5.02]). Compared to the control condition (no partisanship associated with Player 2), Conservatives awarded a co-partisan bonus of approximately 3% but imposed an out-partisan penalty nearly ten times larger (approximately 28%). Labour supporters behaved similarly; they were most generous toward other Labour supporters (mean=£4.53, 95% CI [£4.09, £4.97]) and least generous with Conservative supporters (mean=£3.13, 95% CI [£2.69, £3.56]). In comparison with the control (non-partisan) condition, the co-partisan bonus for Labour supporters amounted to 8% while the out-party penalty imposed on Conservative supporters was four times larger (approximately 34%). Thus, for both major parties the out-group penalty proved dramatically larger than the in-group bonus.

The ideological location of the parties significantly influenced the pattern of allocations. In multi-party systems, where parties position themselves across a wide ideological space, ideological proximity is likely to weaken out party animus; supporters of parties with similar ideologies will express greater trust in each other. At the time of our study, the Liberal Democrats were aligned with the Conservatives in a governing coalition. Despite their partic-

ipation in the coalition, however, Liberal Democrats are generally recognized as ideologically more proximate to Labor (Sanders et al. 2011). The relative proximity of Liberal Democrats does appear to moderate the behavior of Labor supporters; they are less prone to discriminate against a Liberal Democrat than a Conservative supporter. Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, appear torn between ideological proximity and the logic of realpolitik; they penalize both Conservative and Labor supporters. Compared to their allocations in the control condition, Liberal Democrats penalized Conservative supporters by 19% on and Labour supporters by 9%. For their part, Conservatives were significantly more trusting of Liberal Democrats than Labor supporters.

Figure 4: Great Britain - Trust Allocations



Means and 95% CIs.

The general pattern in Great Britain is clear: partisanship represents a strong basis for distrust. Partisans discriminate against their political opponents to a significant degree, but are disinclined to act in a manner that favors their co-partisans. Figure 4B shows the relevant aggregate allocation bonuses and penalties observed in Great Britain. The average co-partisan bonus amounted to £.25, while the average opposition penalty was £.65.

United States

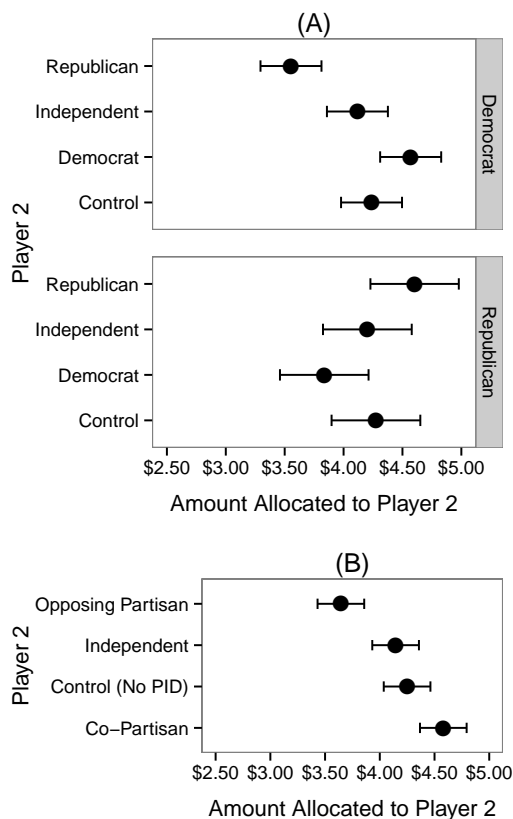
The U.S. also represents a case of relatively weak social divides (with the exception of race), but unlike the U.K., there is strong political polarization. In contrast to the ideological heterogeneity that characterized the parties in the 1950s and 1960s (leading scholars to characterize their behavior as “irresponsible”), the Democrats and Republicans have since developed distinct and opposing policy platforms.¹² While there is ongoing debate over the extent to which ideological polarization at the elite level has trickled down to the electorate, recent work (Huddy et al. 2015; Iyengar and Westwood 2014) documents that partisans treat their opponents very much as a disliked out group and that feelings based on party are stronger than those associated with other group memberships.

We find that American partisans behave equally harshly toward their opponents, but are more generous with co-partisans than their counterparts in Britain. Democrats (see Figure 5A) gave the most to fellow Democrats (mean=\$4.57, 95% CI [\$4.31,\$4.83]) and the least to Republican players (mean=\$3.55, 95% CI [\$3.29,\$3.81]). Conversely, Republicans gave the most to Republican players (mean=\$4.60, 95% CI [\$4.23,\$4.98]) and the least to Democrats (mean=\$3.84, 95% CI [\$3.46,\$4.21]). Compared to the control condition where no partisan information was offered for Player 2, the co-partisan bonus was approximately 8% for Democratic and Republican participants, while the penalty imposed on opposing partisans was nearly 16% for Democratic participants and nearly 10% for Republican participants.

¹²Explanations for the shift toward ideologically polarized parties in the absence of strong social cleavages include institutional developments, most notably, the adoption of primary elections to nominate candidates as well as the prolonged and often hostile tenor of American political campaigns (Iyengar et al. 2012; Lau and Pomper 2004; Ornstein and Mann 2000).

Allocations to Independents were closest to the allocations made to control Player 2s, whose political affiliation was unknown.

Figure 5: United States - Trust Allocations



Means and 95% CIs.

Overall, out-group animosity exceeds in-group favoritism for American partisans (see Figure 5B). The difference in allocations for co-partisans and opposing partisans is nearly \$1, with opposing partisans receiving only 79% of allocations made to co-partisans. Unlike the case of Great Britain where only the out-partisan penalty differed significantly from the allocation to a non-partisan, the co-partisan bonus and out-party penalty in the U.S. both differed significantly from the allocation in the control (non-partisan) condition.

Belgium

Belgium is a divided society where linguistic, geographical and cultural cleavages reinforce each other and create the three distinct regions of Flanders, Wallonia and bilingual Brussels. As we noted earlier, partisan divides are confined to each of the regions as there are no national political parties. There is a parallel left-right political divide within each region, but the left and right parties within each region have different platforms and positions. Dutch-speaking citizens can only vote for Flemish parties and Francophones must choose between Walloon (and Brussels) parties. Our design compares political parties both within regions (that differ by ideology) and between regions (that differ in terms of regional affiliation and ideology), which allows us to demonstrate that the party divide is more powerful than the regional divide. This design also allows us to test for the reinforcing effects of regional and political affiliation.

Belgians consistently behaved more generously toward co-partisans and discriminated against members of other parties (see Figure 6A).¹³ The total allocation to co-partisans proved remarkably similar across parties. Supporters of MR (Francophone right-wing liberal party) allocated the highest amount to fellow MR supporters (mean=€4.48, 95% CI [€4.11,€4.85]), supporters of N-VA (Flemish nationalist right-wing party), were most generous toward N-VA supporters (mean=€4.77, 95% CI [€4.48,€5.07]), PS (Francophone socialist party) voters gave the most to other PS voters (mean=€4.56, 95% CI [€4.14,€4.97]), and SP.A (Flemish socialist party) supporters allocated the highest amount to other SP.A supporters (mean=€4.85, 95% CI [€4.36,€5.35]). Unlike Britain where co-partisan bonuses were small and insignificant, Belgian participants treated co-partisans preferentially and to a degree greater than that observed in the U.S. The co-partisan bonus amounted to nearly 18% for MR, 17% for NV-A, 15% for PS, and 26% for SP.A. At the same time, and consistent with the British and U.S. cases, out-party penalties were consistently large.

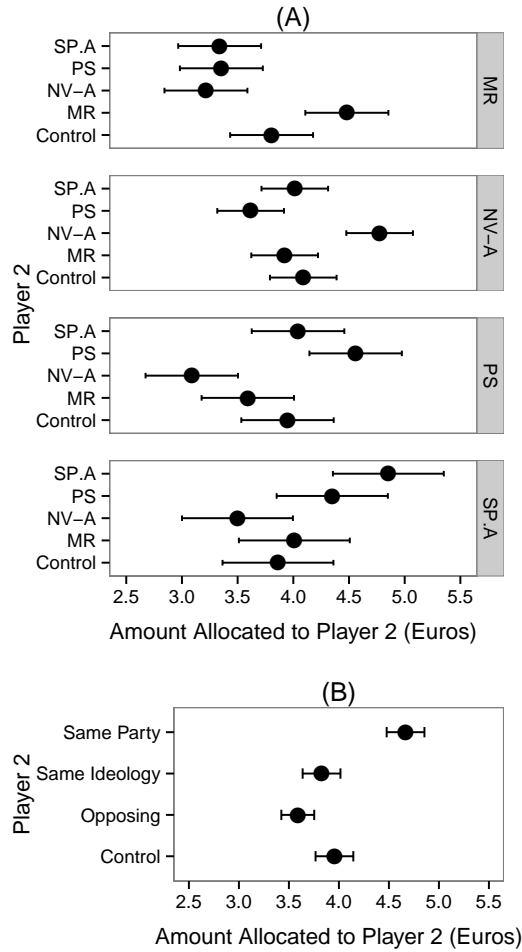
¹³We compare allocations made to Player 2s with party identities to Player 2s where party support was not indicated.

Belgium's political structure is unique because there are parties at similar points on the left-right divide in both regions. We can therefore look at both partisan and ideological affinity between participants and each of the Player 2s. Since participants were paired with a second player representing either of the two regions, we can separate the effects of ideology and region on allocations. In general, Belgians always allocated the least amount to players who support a party other than their preferred party. In two out of four cases supporters of the opposing ideological party from *across* the regional divide received the smallest allocation. N-VA (right-wing, Flemish) supporters discriminated most against PS (left-wing, Francophone) supporters, and PS supporters reciprocated by making their smallest allocation toward N-VA supporters. This pattern suggests increased polarization when region and party reinforce each other. Alternatively, the high distrust between PS and N-VA supporters may reflect the fact that their interactions in the media and in Parliament are probably the most hostile of all possible party dyads in Belgium.

NV-A voters also came in for harsh treatment from MR partisans despite their ideological similarity suggesting that for the MR, region trumps ideology as a basis for identity. In the case of SP.A (left-wing, Flemish) supporters, who also singled out supporters of N-VA (right-wing, Flemish) for harsh treatment, the distrust is based on ideology alone given their common regional affiliation. This particular instance of pure ideological animosity is understandable as the N-VA, during the 2014 electoral campaign preceding our survey, pledged in advance that it would not enter into a coalition with socialists and that it would do its utmost to keep the socialists out of power. Thus, in Belgium the confluence of ideological and regional cleavages as well as short-term factors related to the election campaign amplify distrust across the party divide. The differences in allocations to supporters of non-preferred and preferred parties proved significant. However, differences in allocations between each of the three non-preferred parties are not significantly different.

When we group parties based on their ideology, we find that participants are consistently more trusting of individuals who support more proximate parties (see Figure 6B). Leftists

Figure 6: Belgium - Trust Allocations



Means and 95% CIs.

give more to fellow leftists and rightists give more to fellow rightists, regardless of Player 2's regional/ethnic identity. For example, PS and SP.A supporters (both left-wing but on opposing side of the regional border) donate the most to their sister party supporters from the other region. The penalty for players from ideologically proximate out parties is smaller than the penalty for supporters of ideologically distant out parties, though this difference itself is not significant.

Spain

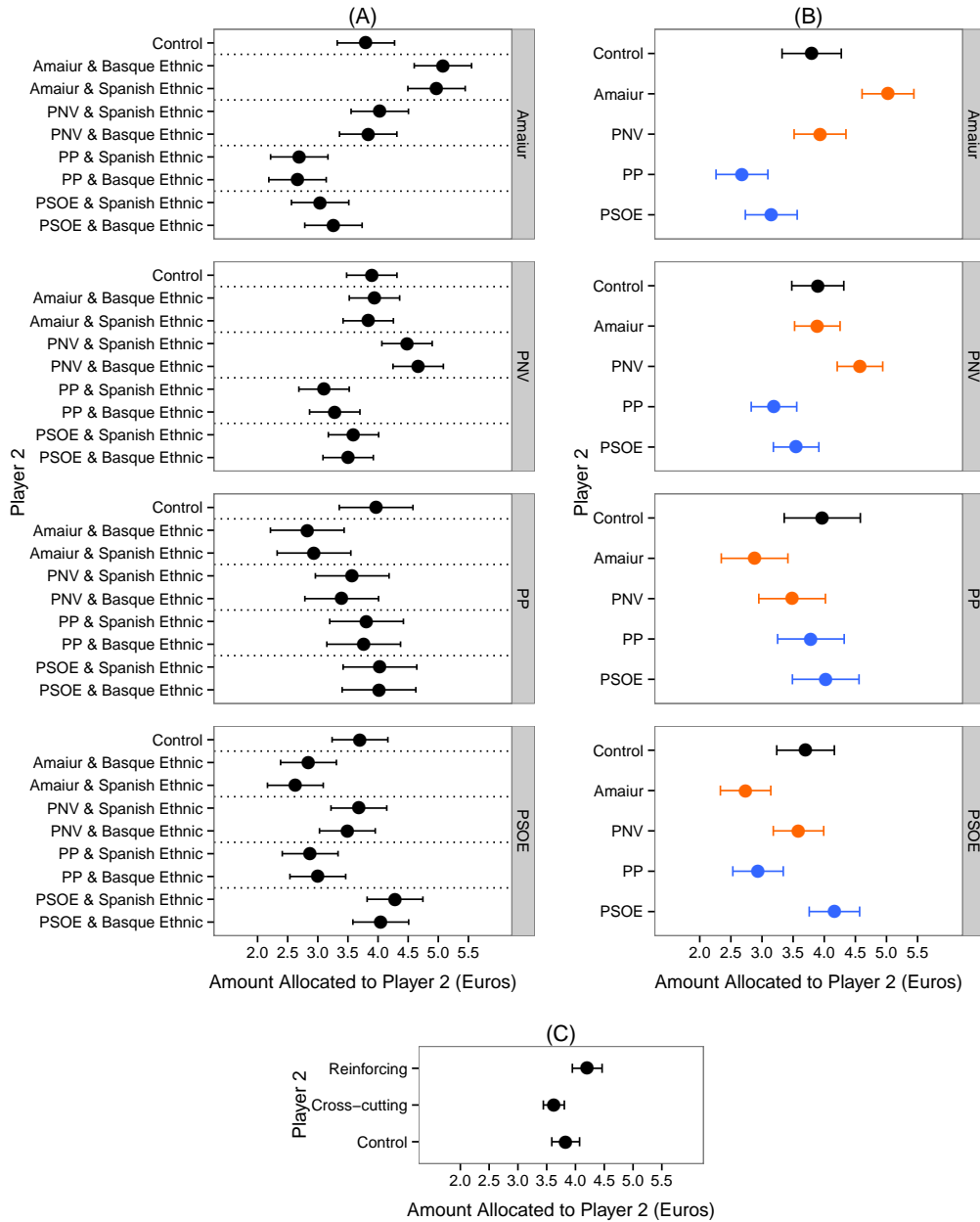
In the Basque Country, parties affiliated with the national Spanish parties compete with exclusively regional Basque parties. The most important dimension of electoral competition is the divide between those in favor of a unified Spanish state and full Basque independence. This dimension divides the regional wings of the Spanish national parties from the purely Basque parties. A second dimension divides leftist parties from rightist parties. Our design compares partisan divisions operationalized as the party supported in the last election with ethnicity operationalized in terms of Basque or Spanish surnames.¹⁴ Participants were therefore paired with a player 2 who was similar on either ethnicity or partisanship (cross-cutting condition), or similar on both attributes (reinforcing condition).

The results from the trust game reveal strong partisan biases in cash allocations. Despite the history of conflict between ethnic Basques and ethnic Spaniards, it is partisanship rather than ethnicity that exerts the largest effect on trust. For all four parties represented in the study, respondents treated a Basque co-partisan no differently than a Spanish co-partisan (Figure 7A). Participants did, however, allocate significantly more to co-partisans and less to opposing partisans in 3 of the 4 cases (the exception was PP supporters). (Figure 7B).¹⁵

¹⁴For example, Spanish ethnicity was cued with names like González and Rodríguez, while Basque ethnicity was cued with names like Urrutia and Etxebarria.

¹⁵We pooled the two observations for each party corresponding to Spanish surname and Basque surname as these conditions yielded equivalent results.

Figure 7: Spain - Trust Allocations



Means and 95% CIs. The left column (A) shows how participants allocate to Player 2s by reported ethnicity and party. The right column (B) pools over ethnicity. The panels (rows) show the party supported by the participant. Spanish national parties are colored blue and Basque parties are colored orange.

Basque party supporters consistently gave the most to fellow Basque party supporters, with a smaller amount given when the party was located on the opposing side of the left-right divide. Amaiur (leftist, Basque) supporters allocated the most to fellow Amaiur supporters (mean=€5.02, 95% CI [€4.61,€5.44]), with PP (rightist, Spanish) supporters receiving the least (mean=€2.68, 95% CI [€2.26,€3.09]). PSOE (leftist, Spanish) supporters received a similarly small amount. For their part, PNV supporters gave the most to fellow PNV supporters (mean=€4.57, 95% CI [€4.21,€4.94]) and gave the least to PP supporters (mean=€3.19, 95% CI [€2.83,€3.56]).

Spanish party supporters in the Basque region offered smaller rewards to co-partisans and smaller penalties to opposing partisans. PP supporters gave nearly the same to PP supporters (mean=€3.79, 95% CI [€3.25,€4.32]) than to supporters of fellow Spanish party PSOE (mean=€4.02, 95% CI [€3.49,€4.56]). PP supporters gave the least to supporters of the two Basque parties, with a slightly smaller allocation to Amaiur (mean=€2.88, 95% CI [€2.35,€3.42]). PSOE supporters allocated the most to fellow PSOE supporters (mean=€4.16, 95% CI [€3.76,€4.57]).

Unlike supporters of the national parties, supporters of Basque political parties allocated a co-partisan bonus significantly above the allocation to players lacking a partisan affiliation. The bonus amounted to 32% for Amaiur supporters and 17% for PNV supporters. Out party penalties, however, proved consistent across the regional and national parties ranging between 12% for PNV supporters directed at PP supporters, and 29% for Amaiur supporters playing with PP supporters. These results indicate a stronger effect of ethnicity among Basques than Spaniards; although ideology matters to Basque ethnics, Basque partisanship matters more than left-right placement. In general, Spain represents a case where co-partisan bonuses and out-partisan penalties are both substantial.

Figure 7C shows how the effects of cross-cutting cleavages (playing with a player who is similar on either ethnicity or ideology, but different on the other) compare with the effects of reinforcing cleavages (playing with a player from the same ethnicity and ideology). Our

expectation, that reinforcing identities exacerbate distrust, was confirmed. When Player 2 resembled the participant on both ethnicity and ideology, she received a significant bonus. In the cross-cutting condition, where similarity between players occurred on only one attribute, Player 2 was penalized. Thus, polarization is strengthened when multiple identities converge and vice-versa.

Overall, we find that Spanish and Basque partisans are more trusting of co-partisans than opposing partisans, a pattern that is stronger for Basques. When partisan and ethnic identities conflict, partisanship proves more influential as a basis for trust. Participants give more to co-partisans regardless of the co-partisans' ethnic identity (i.e., a Spanish and Basque co-partisan are treated no differently). Partisans are similarly indifferent to the ethnicity of opposing partisans. For all but PSOE supporters, opposing partisans from the same side of the devolution debate are evaluated less harshly than partisans on the opposite side of the devolution debate. In sum, partisanship and agreement on devolution contribute far more than ethnicity to inter-personal trust in the Basque country.

Comparing the Strength of Partisan and Social Divides

To this point we have shown that partisanship significantly affects inter-personal trust in all four nations under investigation. But just how large is the party divide in comparison with other social divides? We find that partisan mistrust consistently exceeds mistrust based on a major social divide. Thus, the British discriminate more against opposing partisans than Muslims, white Americans are more mistrusting of out-party supporters than African-Americans, Belgians show greater partisan than linguistic polarization, and Basques and Spaniards alike display greater animus toward party opponents than each other.

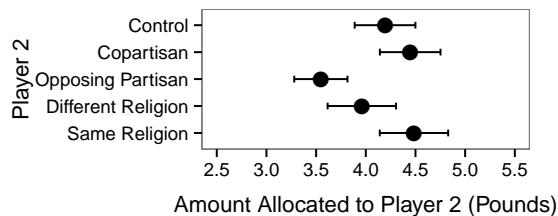
Great Britain

In Great Britain, given the weakened state of the class divide, we calibrated the strength of the party cleavage in the U.K. against a more recent social cleavage represented by reli-

gion.¹⁶ Survey data indicate that Muslims in Britain represent a disliked out group. In the 2008 British Social Attitudes survey, a majority (55 percent) of respondents reported they would feel “bothered” by the construction of a mosque in their community, while only 15 percent felt the same way about the construction of a church (McLaren et al. 2011). Depending on the condition to which they were assigned, our participants were given information about either the partisan (Labor, Conservative, Liberal Democrat) or religious (Christian, Muslim) affiliation of the person they had been assigned to play with.

As shown in Figure 8, Christians received the largest allocations, though this amount is indistinguishable from the amount allocated to co-partisans. Note, however, that the lowest allocation was directed not at Muslims, but players from a different political party. Compared to the control condition the *only* significant difference in allocations is the penalty for opposing partisans. Though allocations to Muslim players are statistically indistinguishable from allocations to partisan opponents, out-partisans received 11% less than Muslims.

Figure 8: Great Britain - Partisanship and Religion



Means and 95% CIs.

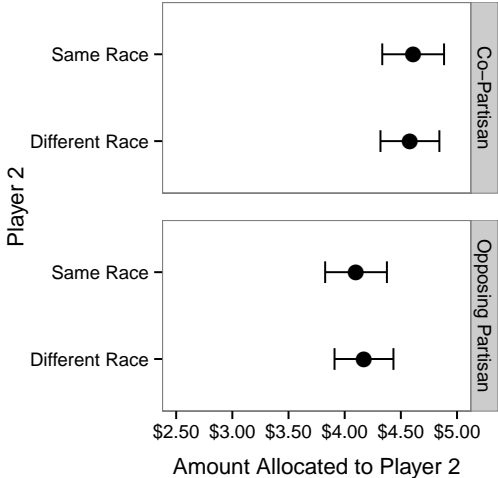
United States

Significant Muslim populations and the accompanying religious tensions in Great Britain are a relatively recent development. The United States, however, has a long and troubled history of racial prejudice. Despite this tradition, partisanship easily dominates race as a

¹⁶In the supporting materials we show the insignificant effects of education on allocations.

determinant of trust. Figure 9 shows the effects of partisanship and race on allocations. Unlike the case of partisanship, there is no bonus for co-ethnics or penalties for people from the racial out group. Instead, partisans donate approximately the same amount of money to opposing partisans of a different race and opposing partisans of the same race. Similarly, allocations to co-partisans of the same race are nearly the same as allocations to co-partisans of a different race. As a cue for evaluating trustworthiness, partisanship dominates race. Surprisingly, when race and party act as reinforcing cleavages (the typical outcome in the current environment), mistrust is no greater than when the party cleavage is considered alone.

Figure 9: United States - Partisanship and Race



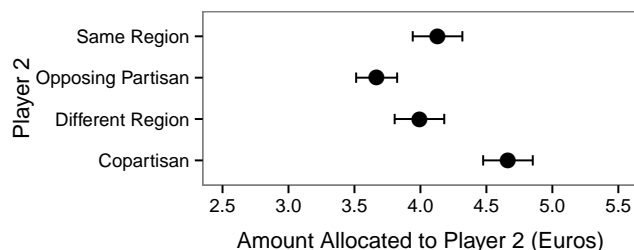
Means and 95% CIs.

Belgium

We use the linguistic divide as the baseline for assessing party polarization in Belgium. Consistent with the U.K. and U.S. evidence, Belgians are more distrusting of partisan than regional-linguistic opponents. The highest allocations offered by Belgians are directed at co-partisans and the lowest go to opposing partisans. Allocations to players from the same

language community are no different from allocations to players from across the language divide. Overall, group polarization based on partisan affiliation clearly dominates polarization based on linguistic-regional affiliation.

Figure 10: Belgium - Partisanship and the Linguistic-Regional Divide



Means and 95% CIs.

Spain

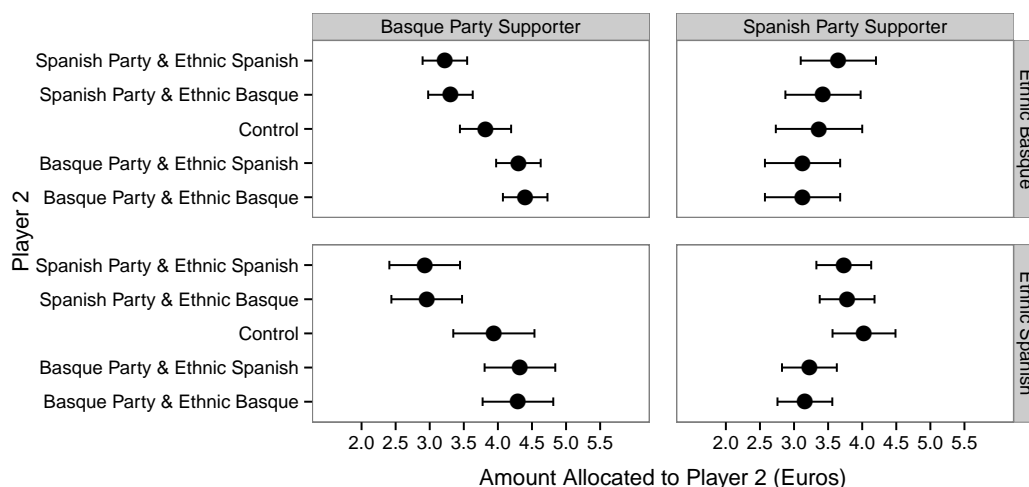
Finally, the Spanish case pits partisanship against ethnicity. Unlike the case of Flanders, Basque nationalism is based less on language and more on ancestral origin (Criado et al. 2015). All of the Basque population speaks Spanish and although half of the population understands Basque, only 20% use Basque as their primary language. In this sense, the key variable underlying ethnic dynamics in the Basque Country is not language but ancestry. The main Basque nationalist forces, PNV and ETA emerged as a protest to two important waves of immigration from the rest of Spain at the end of the nineteenth century and the 1960s, respectively.

We use ancestral origin as the baseline for assessing the extent of the party divide. More specifically, we divide our sample between those who have at least one Basque grandparent and those who have no Basque grandparents. This splits the sample into two equally-sized groups. The resulting division is correlated with subjective ethnic identification. Whereas less than 20% of those with no Basque grandparent report they feel more Basque than Spanish

or only Basque, more than 50% of those with at least one Basque grandparent feel they are more Basque or only Basque. Virtually nobody with at least one Basque grandparent feels more Spanish than Basque or only Spanish.

Participants with a reinforcing partisan and ethnic identity are most generous with corresponding co-partisans/co-ethnics. Conversely, for ethnic Basques who support Spanish parties (and ethnic Spaniards who support Basque parties), we find that the cross-cutting of identities weakens in group favoritism and out group prejudice. Figure 11 shows how reinforcing and cross-cutting identities affect allocation patterns in the Basque Country.¹⁷ Basque partisans are biased in favor of fellow Basque party supporters no matter their ethnic identity and Spanish party supporters are similarly biased in favor of fellow Spanish party supporters irrespective of their ethnicity. It is only when the ethnic and partisan identities collide that the bias against out partisans diminishes.

Figure 11: Spain - Partisanship and Ethnicity



Means and 95% CIs. The columns show the party and ethnic group supported by the participant. The rows show the ethnicity of the participant. The y-axis shows the combinations of ethnicity and party from our treatments.

¹⁷A table with the results for all Player 1-Player 2 pairings is included in the Supporting Materials.

The over-arching pattern across all four cases is clear: partisanship outstrips salient social cleavages as a form of group identity. Out groups defined along party lines receive more harsh treatment than out groups defined by social cleavages. It is only when these identities compete that the primacy of partisanship is undermined.

Discussion

In divided and unified societies alike, citizens are more trusting of co-partisans and less trusting of opposing partisans; also, partisanship matters much more to trust than ethnic, linguistic and religious attributes. Partyism thus dominates other forms of out group prejudice.

The nature of the underlying social cleavages can either exacerbate or weaken partisan animosity. When social and partisan cleavages reinforce, partisans are especially distrusting of their opponents. Conversely, under cross-cutting cleavages, partisan hostility diminishes, as in the case of Basque Country. However, the nature of the underlying cleavages appears to alter only the intensity and not the existence of partisan hostility.

Despite their general tendency to act harshly toward out partisans, partisans moderate their behavior when political opponents signal ideological or policy similarity. Supporters of parties that are positioned closer to the partisan's favored party receive more equitable treatment (relative to co-partisans) than supporters of more ideologically distant parties. In multiparty states, therefore, the spectrum of mistrust depends on ideological distance.

Just what is it about the bond between voters and their preferred party that intensifies group polarization to a degree unmatched by other prominent cleavages? As we have already noted, unlike race, gender and other social divides where group-related attitudes and behaviors are constrained by social norms (Maccoby and Maccoby 1954; Sigall and Page 1971; Himmelfarb and Lickteig 1982), there are no corresponding pressures to moderate disapproval of political opponents. These same norms do not provide cover for supporters of

political parties. In fact, the rhetoric and behavior of party leaders suggests to voters that it is perfectly acceptable to treat opponents with disdain. In this sense, individuals have greater freedom to discriminate against out party supporters. Second, unlike social group affiliations, which are ascriptive or inherited at birth, partisanship is acquired by choice. People are therefore more likely to be held responsible and blamed for their party rather than any group affiliation based on immutable characteristics. Knowing a person's partisan preference is also a good diagnostic for who that person is, her values, and what she thinks. It is a much more informative measure of attitudes and belief structures than, for example, knowing what skin color she has. This is, of course, linked to the fact that partisan affiliation is voluntary. So, it seems logical that people express more animus against people whose world view they know.

Another potential contributing factor is the frequency of election campaigns and the steady encroachment of American-style campaign tactics in democracies everywhere. Personalization of the party appeal and the increasing use of communications that attack opponents may induce a similar negativity among party supporters. Exposure to campaign communication strengthens both in-party favoritism and out-party animus (see [Lelkes et al. 2014](#); [Iyengar and Westwood 2014](#)). Hostility in elite rhetoric and hostile attitudes among voters reinforce each other. Elections and party competition are inherently conflictual. For example, the 2015 elections in the U.K. and Israel were both characterized by periods of inflammatory rhetoric so typical of American campaigns. We suspect that as negative campaigning increases, partisan affective polarization will continue to rise.

This paper largely focuses on detecting the existence of partyism and the situations that exacerbate or attenuate the effects of partyism. But the normative implications of our results are clear. Party conflict divides citizens more than the social divides that parties were formed to represent. Parties exist both to act as agents for like-minded citizens and to elicit hostility between partisans and their opponents. Our results suggest that party affiliation represents a consequential source of bias and mistrust among citizens in representative democracies.

Although we cannot say that representative democracy and partyism are inseparable, the range of societies spanned by the cases investigated here and by other scholars (see Carlin and Love 2013) suggests that partyism is a common outcome in democracies.

Note that most of the potentially negative consequences of partyism depend on the visibility of party affiliation. Language and surname are observable signals of region and ethnicity in Belgium and Spain, but party affiliation is not as transparent and requires inter-personal interaction to be recognized. Of the four societies examined here, it is only in the U.S. that voters frequently display their political affinity through bumper stickers, yard signs and other campaign paraphernalia. In other societies, citizens' limited awareness of their fellow citizens' political affiliations is a factor that weakens the divisive impact of partyism.

In closing, we acknowledge that our findings are subject to several limitations. Lacking longitudinal data, we are not in a position to examine the persistence of partisan mistrust or compare election periods when partisanship is most salient with non-election periods when partisanship might wane (see Michelitch 2015). Our results are further limited to the major parties in each nation. In Belgium there are 11 parties, but we focused on only four. Similarly, in Spain we included only four of 13 parties.¹⁸ One reason we find stronger partisan affect in Belgium and Spain may be that we compare ideologically distinct parties on opposing sides of the left-right divide. Had we chosen centrist parties in Belgium or Spain the results might have been less stark.

Nevertheless, subject to the limitations noted above, our findings indicate that despite the long-standing importance of ethnic, linguistic, racial, and class-based divisions to electoral politics, these cleavages have been overshadowed by party affiliation as a form of group identity in its own right. Defined in terms of affect, voters' sense of partisanship seems to represent the dominant divide in modern democracies and the strongest basis for group polarization.

¹⁸Though it is the case we always selected the largest parties in each of the nations

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