Affective polarization across parties: why do people dislike some parties more than others?

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Abstract

Affective polarization, or dislike between citizens with opposing political identities, has received increasing attention as a driver of political attitudes and behavior. However, as this research has mainly examined the case of the US, little attention has been paid to how such dislike varies based on the out-group party, as Republicans and Democrats each only have one out-group party. In multiparty systems, the patterns of dislike become more complex, as do the causes underlying them. To study this question, we use almost thirty years of monthly data from the German Politbarometer surveys. We expect that dislike of particular parties will be driven by three factors: the make-up of partisan groups; the issue content of intergroup conflict; and information signaling. Our results help us to understand when citizens dislike other parties and thus provide insights into how affective polarization varies over time, across parties and between citizens.

Introduction

Affective polarization, or dislike between citizens with opposing political identities, has a powerful impact on democracies around the globe. Research has greatly expanded our understanding of the mechanisms behind affective polarization (Iyengar et al. 2019, Westwood et al. 2018, Mason 2018, Lelkes and Westwood 2017, Levendusky 2018). Research on affective polarization has also confirmed that affective polarization is subject to significant over-time dynamics: it is more prominent under some conditions than others. The attention in the public and academic debate suggests that political antipathy is uniformly on the rise. Indeed, in the United States, a relatively steady increase in affective polarization is visible since the 90s. 'Thermometer ratings' towards political outgroups have decreased, and to a stronger degree than such ratings towards political ingroups. Social distance measures paint a similar picture (Iyengar et al. 2012).

While important, research examining determinants of affective polarization has been severely hampered by the existing focus on the United States, which is almost unique among Western democracies in having only two major parties. Because of this, researchers have tended to examine affective polarization at only two levels: the country and the individual. In other words, there is extensive research examining factors that infuse *all* of politics in a country with added toxicity, such as cable news and the internet (Iyengar et al. 2019, Boxell et al. 2020), 'culture wars', or economic inequality (Gidron et al. 2018). In addition, individual-level explanations focused on when and why different individuals – be they Democrats or Republicans – particularly dislike out-group partisans, such as having a strong party identity, being socially sorted, or having an extreme ideology.

However, this approach misses out on a key additional level of analysis, that of the *party*. We start from the simple assertion that some parties will be more likeable than others, while other parties are particularly disliked (Gidron et al. 2019, Knudsen 2020). In the United States, such differences are hard to detect: there is only one out-group party individuals can dislike, so it is challenging to disentangle individual-level from explanations that vary by party. Alternatively, the party level is also subsumed under country-level factors: there are always just two parties in the system, so that, for example, party positions are inextricable from overall party polarization. In the United States, the question of how much individuals dislike out-group parties is thus always difficult and sometimes impossible to separate from the question of how affectively polarized individuals or the country are overall.

This collapse of levels disappears when studying affective polarization in multiparty systems, which are the norm almost everywhere apart from the United States. Where more than two parties compete, the party level becomes relevant, even essential, for understanding affective polarization. The question then becomes how much each of the various out-parties is disliked by individuals. We set out to theorize why this could be the case, and test this on two unique datasets spanning decades.

We argue that three sets of explanations follow from putting the party level central. They should govern levels of dislike towards parties.

- First, it matters *who makes up the partisan groups*. Social Identity Theory (SIT) stresses that the nature and implications of social identities depend on perceptions of group membership and composition: it matters *who* makes up your ingroup and outgroup. We expect more tension between partisan groups that are ideologically or socially sorted, as the alignment of partisan, ideological and social divisions makes outgroups more identifiable (or stereotypical) and reduces cross-cutting experiences.

- Second, it matters *what the conflict is about*. This follows from the assumption that some issues and issue dimensions are more heated than others. We expect that out-parties that emphasize cultural issues, which resonate more strongly with moral intuitions and might not easily allow for compromise, will be disliked more. We also expect that populist parties (of the left and right) draw a unique dislike from their opponents, because of their emphasis on the moral failings of the political mainstream.

- Third, it matters *what signals voters receive about parties* from fellow voters and trusted elites. Voters are known to be susceptible for social signals, and for those from trusted elites in particular. We therefore expect that larger parties – which enjoy greater public 'endorsement' – will be more likeable (even controlling for ideological distance). We also expect that coalition partners will be liked more (to be coded for future iteration of this paper).

We are of course not the first to examine affective polarization in a multiparty context. A recent number of studies confirms affective polarization to exist in other societies too, but the degree to which it does varies greatly between countries (Reiljan 2019, Helbling and Jungkunz 2019, Wagner 2020, Gidron et al. 2019). Boxell et al. (2020) provide trends in party sympathy scores for several countries, showing AP to vary over time. Recent work by Gidron et al. (2018, 2019) is particularly related to our study, as they examine the determinants of affective polarization between pairs of parties. However, our approach is unique as we decompose affective polarization into its three component parts, focus on out-party factors

that affect voter perceptions and demonstrate how each contributes to changes in overall levels of affective polarization.

Disentangling these factors requires data with variation at all levels. In particular, it requires sufficient variation on the level of parties, and ideally of the same parties studied over time to increase causal leverage. This is beyond the reach of most data sources employed to study affective polarization, as these tend to rely on single surveys, or repeated cross sections at limited intervals (such as elections). We present an analysis based on *monthly* data from the German *Politbarometer* data (and, in future iterations, yearly data from the Swedish SOM project). Both Sweden and Germany have experienced a weak *decline* in AP over the long term, but with very substantial over-time variation (Boxell et al. 2020). They have repeatedly experienced episodes of both more and less polarization than is currently the case. The short intervals allow to distinguish variation in AP on the individual, party, and system level, and to obtain sufficient observations to conduct a within-party analysis. In this data we operationalized the potentially relevant party featured mentioned above, as well as relevant drivers on the individual and system level.

This study contributes to the literature on affective polarization in two ways. First, we further the understanding of AP by disentangling the mechanisms on three levels. By introducing the party level, we clarify how AP emerges and how it varies over time. Second, we contribute to the theorizing and study of the role of AP in multiparty systems, which is still limited (Wagner 2020, Reiljan 2019, Westwood et al. 2018, Knudsen 2020). Theories developed for the unique US two-party system need to adapted to a multiparty context. Moreover, we show that overall affective polarization can remain stable while the underlying party-level affective distance shifts considerably.

Affective Polarization: One Concept, Three Analytical Levels

Citizens' partisan and ideological preferences can constitute a *social identity* (Campbell et al. 1960, Greene 1999, 2002, Huddy et al. 2015). We tend to see people who *agree with us* as *one of us*: members of a group we identify with. Like any other social identity (even the most trivial ones; Tajfel 1979), such identification has affective and behavioral implications, among them a disposition to like and favor the in-group ('us'). (Positive) party identification has long been studied as one form of social identity.

The flip-side of in-group identification is out-group bias. Thus, under certain conditions, in-group identification might also involve dislike towards the out-group ('them'). If the latter conditions occur, this creates a pronounced gap in affect towards the partisan-ideological outgroup and the partisan-ideological outgroup. Hence, citizens may also develop out-party bias. While having an in-group party may foster such biases, out-party dislike by no means depends on having a positive party identification (Wagner 2020).

Adding these two elements together produces affective polarization, that is, the gap between in-group identification and out-group bias. The greater this gap, the greater the affective polarization. However, one especially confusing aspect of the concept of affective polarization is that it is a concept that can be used at different levels of analyses: affective polarization can describe a country, a set of parties or an individual.

To explain, we will start with the simple example of a two-party system such as the United States, which has been the focus of most research on affective polarization. There, we can distinguish three types of affective polarization, at the individual, group and country level. Each type of affective polarization becomes more complex in multiparty systems.

First, individual-level affective polarization is the extent to which an individual dislikes the out-group party, often studied relatively to their support for an in-group party. Here, the set of individuals examined is restricted to those with a positive partisan identification. Thus, a citizen exhibits strong affective polarization if they have strong positive affect for one party and its partisans and strong negative affect for the other party (Iyengar et al. 2019). For such individual-level affective polarization it may be more appropriate to speak of affective distance or out-party dislike and prejudice (Lelkes and Westwood 2017). In multiparty systems, individual-level affective polarization is more complex as people will have greater affective distance towards some out-group partisans than to others (Reiljan 2019, Wagner 2020). For example, a supporter of a center-left party may dislike a center-right party supporter more than a Green party supporter.

Second, group-level affective polarization towards the outgroup refers to how affectively polarized Democrats or Republicans are on average. We can then speak of strong affective polarization between two parties if partisans of party A strongly dislike partisans of party B and vice versa (Gidron et al. 2018). In multiparty systems, outgroup parties will be disliked to different degrees by other partisans. For example, center-left party supporters may dislike Green party supporters less than center-right party supporters.

Finally, country-level affective polarization refers to how affectively polarized a country is on average, that is, how much individuals on average dislike out-group partisans. In two-

party systems, this is just the average dislike of Republicans for Democrats and vice versa, but in multiparty systems one needs to average across all outgroups (Reiljan 2019, Wagner 2020).

In each case, then, understanding and assessing affective polarization is more complex in multiparty setting as several out-groups exist for each individual or ingroup. In contrast, the US two-party system removes the need to consider such party-level differences as there is only one outgroup for each individual or ingroup. Moving from two- to multiparty systems is important theoretically and methodologically. For our theoretical understanding of affective polarization, examining party-level variation in affective polarization casts the spotlight on previously underexamined factors. As elaborated on below, these includes characteristics of the in- and out-group and characteristics that capture their relationship. Methodologically, the ability to examine party-level variation means that we can disentangle characteristics of the perceiver (the inparty) from the perceived (the outparty).

In this paper, we therefore focus on how in- and outparty characteristics as well of characteristics of their relationship influence affective dislike and how these effects vary by individual-level attributes.

Before we do so, we first briefly asses how existing work has thus far focused on factors affecting individual- and country-level affective polarization. (For a recent overview of the same, see Iyengar et al. 2018.) We will revisit some of the underlying mechanisms in more detail in the next section.

Classic explanations of affective polarization *at the individual level* all relate to the extent to which politics matters for an individual's group identification. First, *partisanship*. If citizens identify more strongly with one particular party, political outgroups are expected to be disliked more. Second, *ideological extremity*. To the extent that individuals take stronger stances, they can be expected to be less forgiving of outgroups. Third, *ideological constraint*, or the extent to which a person's views on various issues are all on the same 'side' of politics. If citizens' partisan and ideological identities overlap in this way, they experience fewer cross-pressures and will thus exhibit higher affective polarization. Fourth, *social sorting*. If citizens' political identities align with their non-political identities – e.g. if left-wing citizens are very consistently more educated, live in cities, have particular lifestyles – both the ingroup and the outgroup become more distant and homogeneous, fostering mutual dislike.

Country-level explanations consist of developments that raise the political stakes or imbue all of politics with a more negative tone. First, *the rise of high-choice media environments* (first cable television, then online media) is commonly alleged to erode the existence of a shared public space. It allows citizens to increasingly interact with their own

'bubble' and politicians to reach their potential voters unmediated. Second, the rise of *cultural issues* (pejoratively 'culture wars') is allegedly moralizing politics, making political personal and compromising harder. Third, *economic inequality* widens the social gaps that underlie politics and raises its stakes.

In what follows, we move to potential party-level explanations of affective polarization.

Determinants of Party-Level Affective Polarization

We focus is on party-level affective polarization, so how affective distance varies by party. As argued above, some parties, and hence their supporters, are disliked more than others. What are the factors that make particular political outgroups more dislikeable? We distinguish three sets of explanations: group composition; issue conflict; and signals.

However, before we do so, we set out a 'baseline' explanation that governs the views towards any party: *ideological distance*. Affective polarization is conceptually different from, but in various ways related to, ideological polarization. It is plausible that to the extent that citizens more strongly disagree with each other, they will dislike each other more.

However, the relation between ideological and affective polarization is not straightforward. To a certain extent, ideological and affective polarization are endogenous on the individual level: citizens will dislike ideologically distant partisans more, but also perceive disliked partisans as ideologically more distant (Lelkes 2018). A further complication emerges on the aggregated level in the United States: while affective polarization has grown, there is little evidence for ideological polarization. Regarding most topics, Americans' and Europeans' actual views have become less, rather than more, divided. Mason's (2015: 128) account of the United States rings true for many countries: "a nation that agrees on many things but is bitterly divided nonetheless". The evidence regarding the individual-level mechanisms is mixed too (Bougher 2017; Rogowski & Sutherland 2016).

Despite this mixed evidence, we expect that parties that are ideologically distant from an individual are more likely to be disliked. This also means that ideologically extreme parties should on average be more disliked than others, since they will on average also be further away from voters than more centrist parties, assuming that most voters are ideologically moderate.

H1: Dislike will be higher towards parties that are more distant from the individual.

Group composition: social and ideological sorting

Social Identity Theory teaches us that views towards outgroups depend strongly on perceptions of said outgroup's composition. In this respect its level of 'sorting', or 'alignment' with other identities, is crucial. The expectation is that outparties become more dislikeable if partisan identities overlap with ideological identities, as well as with non-political social divisions such as education, class, urbanity, lifestyle, ethnicity, or gender. The expectation is that if like-minded individuals live increasingly similar lives, in similar places, with similar types of experiences, they become less tolerant towards those with divergent views. The reason is that this simpler configuration increases *group entitativity* and reduces *cross-cutting experiences*, and therefore fosters outgroup bias.

The term "group entitativity" refers to the extent an outgroup is perceived as cohesive. Greater group entitativity heightens negative outgroup affect, i.e. prejudice (Gaertner and Schopler 1998). If outgroup parties are ideologically or socially homogenous, they are more likely to be perceived by others as forming a clear, united group. Hence, ideologically or socially homogenous parties should be disliked more than ideologically or socially diverse parties. Such sorting also dampens *cross-cutting divisions*, which have long been argued to mitigate social conflict. Indeed, Mason (2015; 2018) shows that Americans with aligned religious, racial and partisan identities (Christian, White and Republican versus Secular, Non-White and Democrat) show more hostility towards partisan outgroup, *regardless of ideological extremity.* In the US at least, such sorting has also been *increasing* (Mason 2018). Iyengar et al. (2019) point to the rise in politically homogeneous marriages. On the other hand, the extent of geographical sorting (partisans moving closer) in the US has turned out to be more limited (Mummolo & Nall 2017) than some claimed (Bishop 2009).

Given these mechanisms, we expect the following.

H2: Dislike will be higher towards parties that are more ideologically homogenous.
H3: Dislike will be higher towards parties that are more socially sorted.

Conflict content: culture wars and populist exceptionalism

Recent decades have witnessed an amplification of discussions on immigration, European integration, racism, Islam, gender, and other identity-related cultural issues. Of course, politics has long been guided by non-material issues such as religious strife or the postmaterial issues that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. However, globalization and postindustrialization have added issues to and reshaped the issues constituting this dimension,

and further boosted its salience (Kriesi et al. 2008; Kitschelt and Rehm 2014; Hooghe and Marks 2017). We expect this politicization of issues close to citizens' identities to strengthen affective responses, an idea implicit in the term 'culture wars'. Indeed, cultural issues in general have been found empirically to be more strongly shaped by personal values and moral foundations than economic issues, and hence elicit stronger, and more immediate, responses among a greater range of people (Johnson and Wronski 2015). Gidron et al. (2018) indeed find that cultural distance between two parties is indeed a stronger predictor of affective polarization than economic distance.

H4: Dislike will be higher towards parties that emphasize cultural issues.

Recent decades also witnessed the rise of populist parties of both the left and the right. Populism emphasizes the division between 'the people' (good) and 'the elite' (bad or corrupt) (Mudde 2007). It does so by approaching politics as a Manichean, or highly moralized, struggle between good and evil (Hawkins 2017). Rather than merely being ideological opposites, populists accuse their competitors of being part of (or aligning with) morally compromised elites and selling out 'the people'. This accusatory stance likely affects the views of their supporters and opponents too. The strongly antagonistic and thereby polarizing nature of these messages makes it likely that populists' accusation of moral corruption of the mainstream can easily spill over to voters, and heighten the dislike between populists and the mainstream.

This dislike will be especially true towards populist parties of the radical right, because they are also stigmatized by many voters for their nativism. PRR parties are seen by many to approach, and sometimes cross, the boundaries of social and legal norms regarding prejudice (Blinder et al. 2013). As a result, these parties tend to be 'stigmatized' by large swaths of the population (Harteveld et al. 2019).

H5: Dislike will be higher between populists and mainstream parties and supporters.

Conflict signals: party size and coalition participation
TO BE DISCUSSED IN THE NEXT VERSION
H6: Dislike will be higher towards party with lower levels of popular support.
H7: Dislike will be higher towards parties that do not govern together.

Data and Measures

We use monthly public opinion data collected by the *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen*, a German polling organization. Since 1988, these polls have been conducted by telephone (landlines only). The sample size varies by month, but ranges from 908 to 7198.

Every month, respondents are asked what they think of the main parties currently competing. They are asked to imagine thermometer ranging from -5 to +5, with -5 as 'I think nothing of this party' and +5 as 'I like this party a lot'. Despite variation in scale length and labeling, this measure is very similar to the standard thermometer scales that have been used in US research (Iyengar et al. 2019) and to the like-dislike scales used in comparative research (Reiljan 2019, Wagner 2020). Existing research shows that these thermometer scales correlate to a convincing degree with more detailed measures of affective evaluations of parties and their members (Iyengar et al. 2015). Measures of sympathy towards the CDU, CSU, SPD, FDP, Greens and the PDS/Left party are included in every wave. The Republikaner are included in 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1994, the AfD from 2013 onwards; we treat the two parties as the same party in our models as both are radical-right competitors. Since the CSU and CDU compete in different parts of the country, we use whichever of the two scores is higher.

Our outcome variable, *Affective distance*, is measured as the difference between the thermometer score for party the respondent supports and the thermometer score for each of the various out-parties. Party support is measured using two questions: respondents are first assigned to the party they identify with, asked using the traditional format (Is there are party you feel close to?); if this is answered negatively, respondents are assigned the party they would vote for if there was an election on Sunday; if no party is provided here either, then respondents are assigned to the party they said they voted for in the last election.

To assess H1, *Left-right distance*, we measure the distance of the respondent on a 1-11 left-right scale from the wave-specific mean left-right position of supporters of the out-party.

To assess H2, the role of *Ideological sorting*, we calculate the ideological homogeneity of a party as the standard deviation in left-right positions of party supporters in each wave. Social sorting is measured by one minus the absolute residual of a model predicting the vote for a party by all socio-demographic variables (separately for each wave). In other words, the better a respondent fits the 'base' of a party (the lower the absolute residual), the higher the score on sorting.

To assess H3, we need a measure of *Social sorting*. This is calculated as follows: we run OLS models that include key socio-demographic variables (Age in ten categories, gender, education in three levels, urban-rural residence, class (working, middle, upper-middle), public sector, self-employment, confession). We then calculate the predicted probability for each respondent of supporting for the party they indeed support. We subtract this probability from 1, so high values indicate that the respondent has a high predicted probability, based on sociodemographic characteristics, of supporting the party they indeed support. We then calculate the social 'sortedness' of each party as the mean value of this variable among party supporters in each wave. To test H4, we interact individual-level sorting with out-party mean sorting.

To assess H4, the role of *Issue salience*, we measure the types of problem respondents find most important; this is coded as the proportion of topics mentioned that are related to cultural, second-dimension issues. The authors manually coded issues into cultural and non-cultural issues for this purpose. We take the means of this variable for the in- and out-party to measure their cultural issue attention.

To assess H5, the dislike of populist and radical-right parties, we examine the effects of dummy variables indicating the Republikaner/AfD and the Linke as out-parties.

To assess H6, the role of party support, we calculate current popularity of the in- and out-party, based on vote intentions in each wave of the survey.

[Tests of H7 to follow in future iterations.]

While our main interest lies with outparty characteristics, we calculate all party-level variables for both the inparty and the outparty, to be able to control for the former and thus estimate the effect of the latter.

We control for inparty affect as this might systematically increase affective distance, though we are interested mainly in outparty affect. Inparty affect is measured as the thermometer rating of the party the respondent supports. We also control for: political interest, measured on a 5-point scale (except for 1993, when it was measured on a 3-point scale); left-right extremism, measured as the distance from 6 on the 1-11 left-right scale; ideological sorting, measured as the proximity to the inparty mean left-right position. We finally control for standard socio-demographics (age in ten categories, gender, education in three levels, urban-rural residence, class (working, middle, upper-middle), public sector, self-employment, confession). At the system level, we control for the unemployment (monthly), growth (quarterly) and migration (yearly), collected from the Unemployment Office (unemployment)

and the Federal Statistics office (growth, migration). We also control for internet use and broadband access, with values for each year taken from the Quality of Government dataset.

The dataset we analyze is stacked by out-party, so each observation is a respondent by outparty 'dyad'. The number of observations therefore equals $N_{respondents}$ X $N_{parties}$ (see Dahlberg 2013). In all models, we include dummies for the respondent's in-party as well as the respective out-party. These capture overall differences in affective distance by in- and out-party. We run multilevel models that include random intercepts for respondents nested in waves. We include control variables sequentially: we begin with only indicator variables for in- and out-parties; then, we add socio-demographics and other individual-level variables; then, we add variables relating to the in-group; next, we in- and out-group variables; in a final model, we add country-level (time-variant) variables.

Results

Descriptives

How has AP developed in Germany? Figure 1 presents the trends in the average sympathy expressed towards the ingroup, towards the outgroups, and the distance between the two (*Affective distance*). Clearly, there is no universal increase or decrease in either trend, but rather a waxing and waning over time. Citizens' expressed dislike of outgroups has been lower, but also higher, in the past. Rather than a sign of the times, polarization is clearly shaped by context.
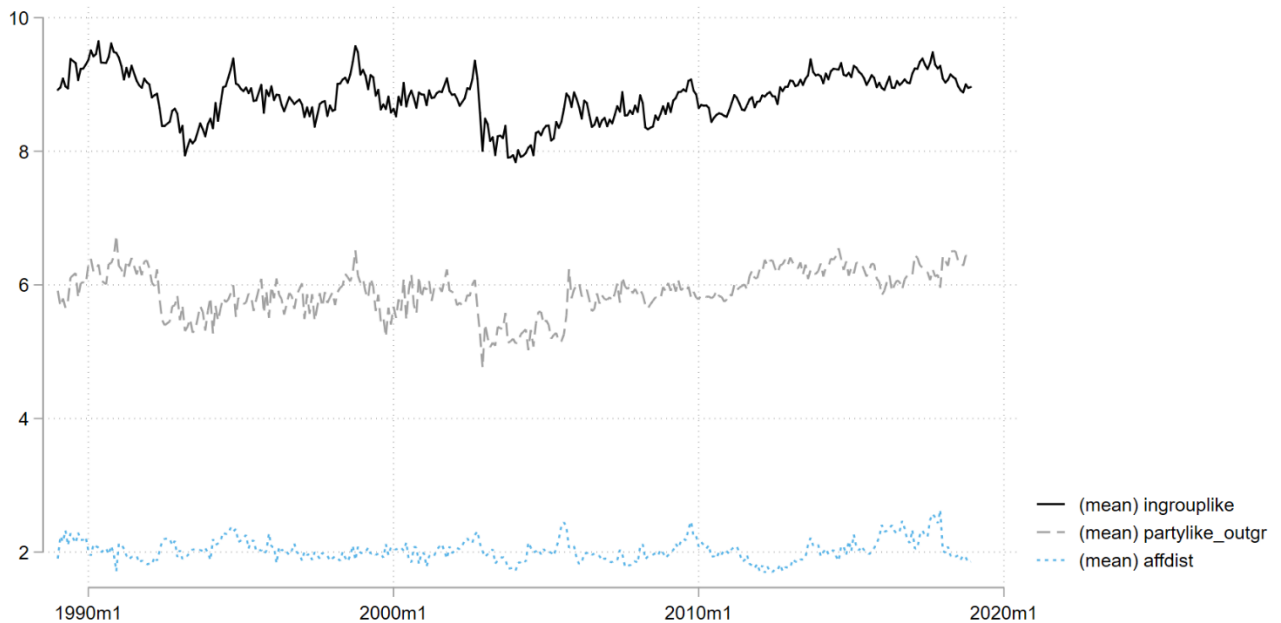
Figure 2 below reports *outgroup sympathy* by outparty. It shows a hierarchy of parties: some parties are more likeable than others. For instance, in line with our expectations the populist left (Die Linke) and populist right (AfD) are liked least. However, the general hierarchy is not fixed either: the mainstream parties change position in this regard. The grey vertical bars denote elections, and it becomes clear that these are important events re-grouping citizens' views of various outparties. This is understandable from our theoretical perspective: at and around elections, the group composition changes (voters entering and leaving parties), as does usually the conflict content (as campaigns focus on the issues of the day), and the signals voters receive (as parties grow or shrink, and enter or leave coalitions, after an election). In the next section we will test these factors more systematically.

FIGURE 2 TRENDS IN *OUTGROUP SYMPATHY*, BY OUTPARTY
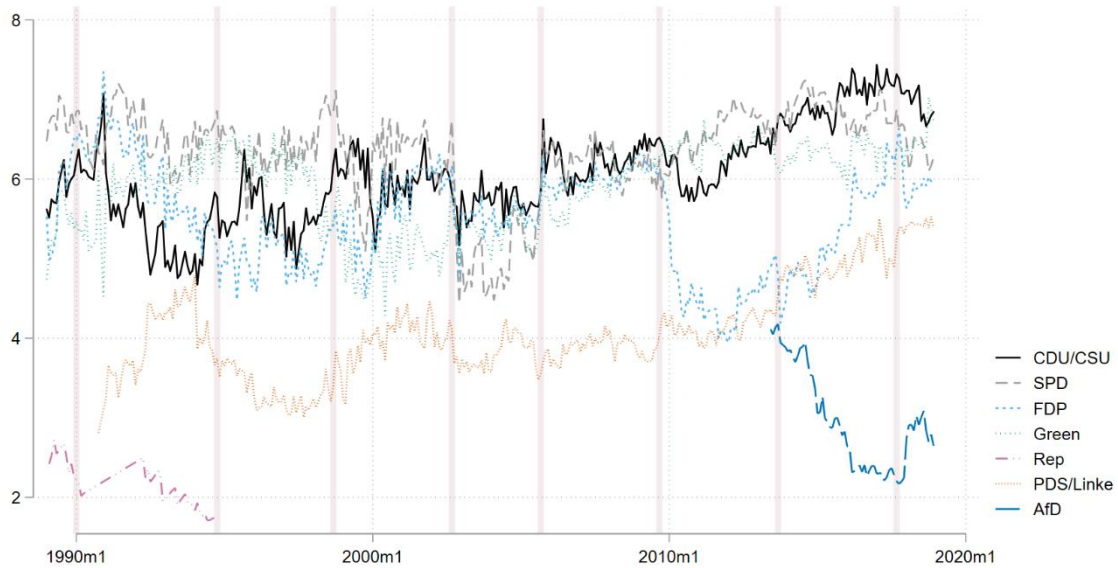
Predicting dislike

Table 1 in Appendix 1 presents the results of all stepwise models. For readability purposes, Figure 3 below presents the results of the full model visually. Because very few results in the full model change substantively compared to earlier models, we base our discussion mostly on this particular model.

Party level

We turn first to our primary level of interest: that of parties. We discuss both the outparty and inparty variables by mechanism.

Social composition. To recall, *Outparty ideological sorting* is measured as the reverse of the standard deviation of left-right ideology among partisans [will be changed in next version]. Its negative effect shows that ideologically homogenous (diverse) parties attract *less* (more) *affective distance*. This is the opposite of the prediction made by H2. The same is true, at about half the effect size, of *Inparty ideological sorting*. Both effects are significant but not very substantial, and in a direction that is the opposite of the one expected.

That is different for *Outparty social sorting*. This variable has a much larger effect on *affective distance*, and in the expected direction: 0.61 extra distance on the 0-to-10 scale for each standard deviation increase in social sorting. H3 is therefore confirmed. In contrast, social sorting with the inparty has no significant or substantial effect (depending on the

model). Germans tend to dislike parties with very clear social bases more, but being part of such a party does not make them more disliking of outparties.
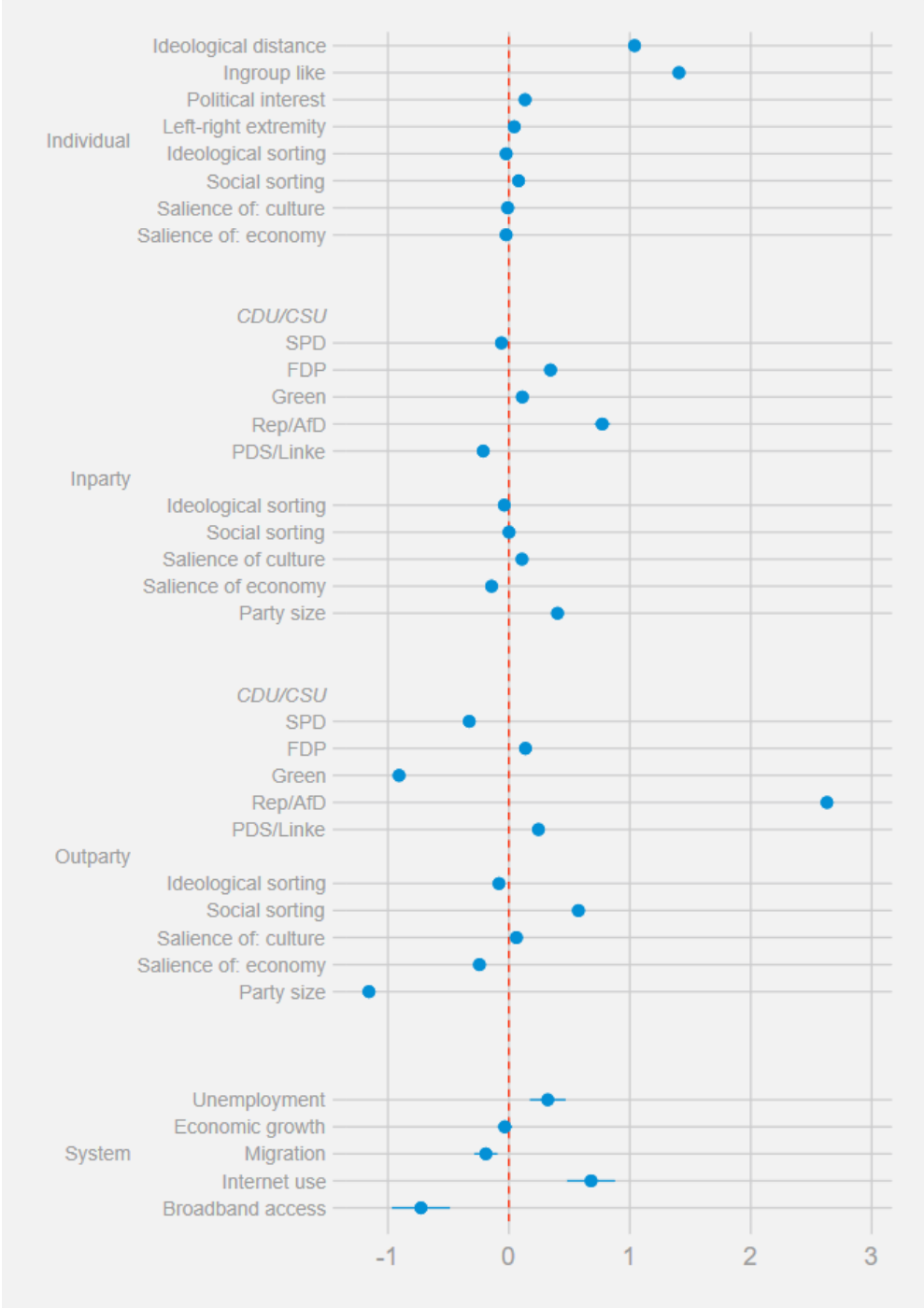
Issue salience. Parties that emphasize cultural issues attract somewhat more dislike (*b* = 0.056), whereas parties that emphasize economic issues attract substantively less dislike (*b* = -0.25). This confirms H4. This is in line with the 'culture war' argument. Parties that

emphasize cultural issues are systematically disliked more, and also have more disliking voters. A similar pattern is visible with regard to salience among the inparty.

Populist parties. We find that populist parties are disliked far more than others, even controlling for the whole range of control variables in our model. This is remarkable and confirms H5. This is especially true for the populist radical right AfD. Dislike for the Linke, another arguably populist party, is not nearly as strong. Even in models without any controls other than fixed effects, average dislike for the Linke is less than half that of the radical-right, though it is still the second-largest overall (see Figure 2). While populist messages draw dislike by many voters, it is the PRR's controversial nativist platform that makes for the strongest antipathy (Blinder et al. 2010).

Party signals. We expected parties that are larger to be less disliked, as they are deemed more socially acceptable by virtue of their mere size (H6). This is indeed what we find: _outparty size_ has a very substantive effect on _affective distance_. In contrast, _inparty size_ has no positive (and perhaps even a negative) effect. Large parties are likeable, but their voters are not necessarily milder.

Individual level

We move on that discussing variables on the individual level. First, H1 is confirmed: _ideological distance_ is a strong predictor of _affective distance_. Other variables are also important. Thus, a stronger partisan identity (_Ingroup like_) is associated with more _affective distance_, is more _political interest_ and _ideological extremity_. This confirms that outgroup derogation depends, to some extent, on the strength of the ingroup identity as well as its salience. Against expectations, _ideological sorting_ of a respondent reduces, rather than increases, _affective distance,_ whereas _social sorting_ is associated with more dislike, as expected. Both _cultural Salience_ and _economic salience_ are associated with _less_, rather than more, _affective distance_. All in all, the model confirms that ingroup identities and salience are key predictors, while sorting only matters in terms of social groups, and issue salience does not predict _affective distance_ on the individual level.

Macro level

Which factors make politics in a particular wave more affectively polarized than others? The last set of explanatory variables show a significant effect of all macro variables. Affective polarization is higher when there is more _unemployment_, less _growth_, and more _internet use_. This fits common expectations. Contrary to expectations, _immigration_ and _broadband access_

are associated with less affective polarization. While cultural issues might be extra heated, the actual level of immigration is apparently too indirectly related to its salience to bring about a positive correlation.

Conclusion (for now)

This paper shows that the party level is an important component of affective polarization that has hitherto received insufficient attention. This is partly because the main case studied to date, the United States, provides no variation in the outparty considered. Yet, the characteristics of the outparty and the characteristics of the relationship between in- and out-party should matter for how citizens perceive these parties and their supporters. The monthly data of the German *Politbarometer* provide a unique resource to test these expectations. In this first draft, we indeed find that outparty sorting, position and issue emphasis matter for affective distance. Party size also has an impact of affective distance. This sheds more light on polarization dynamics. Not only are some citizens, or some contexts, more polarized; in addition it matters what parties do, how they are composed, and what they talk about. Without theorizing the role of the party level, this remains under the radar.

In future versions of this paper, we aim to integrate interactions between outparty characteristics and characteristics of the voter and of the in-party in our analysis. Hence, affective distance may not just depend on characteristics of the perceived party, but also on who 'does the perceiving'. In addition, we aim to include coalition governments at the national and regional level as predictors of affective distance to measure H7. Finally, we aim to asses how important developments on the party level are in shaping 'aggregated' affective polarization. After all, as Figure 1 shows, outparty dislike has waxed and waned over the decades in Germany. To what extent is this due to the fact that in some eras parties become more 'dislikeable' (for instance, by having become sorted or emphasizing cultural issues), or because disliked parties (such as populist) have grown in size?

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Appendix

TABLE 1 MULTILEVEL REGRESSION

	m1 b/se	m2 b/se	m3 b/se	m4 b/se
Ideological distance	1.010***	1.027***	1.019***	1.039***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Inparty (ref: CDU/CSU)				
SPD	0.055***	0.123***	-0.314***	-0.327***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)
FDP	1.095***	1.368***	0.128***	0.137***
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.020)	(0.021)
Green	0.295***	0.340***	-0.893***	-0.908***
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.016)	(0.017)
Rep/AfD	3.749***	3.899***	2.565***	2.630***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.021)	(0.023)
PDS/Linke	1.534***	1.533***	0.236***	0.245***
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Outparty (ref: CDU/CSU)				
SPD	-0.441***	-0.140***	-0.077***	-0.061***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.010)
FDP	-0.254***	0.347***	0.384***	0.344***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.024)	(0.026)
Green	0.018*	0.184***	0.167***	0.111***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.019)	(0.021)
Rep/AfD	0.342***	0.930***	0.899***	0.772***
	(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.030)	(0.033)
PDS/Linke	-0.356***	-0.234***	-0.165***	-0.212***
	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.020)	(0.021)
Individual				
Ingroup like		1.423***	1.413***	1.406***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Political interest		0.133***	0.133***	0.134***
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Left-right extremity		0.043***	0.044***	0.044***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Ideological sorting		-0.026***	-0.024***	-0.022***
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Social sorting		0.107***	0.081***	0.081***
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Salience of: culture		-0.009***	-0.010***	-0.009***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Salience of: economy		-0.021***	-0.020***	-0.022***
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Salience of: environment		0.002	0.002	0.002
		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age (ref: category 1)				
Cat. 2		0.202***	0.203***	0.205***
		(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Cat. 3		0.298***	0.297***	0.299***
		(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.018)
Cat. 4		0.334***	0.333***	0.336***
		(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Cat. 5		0.365***	0.366***	0.365***
		(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.017)
Cat. 6		0.396***	0.396***	0.397***
		(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Cat. 7		0.424***	0.425***	0.425***
		(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Cat. 8		0.370***	0.372***	0.369***
		(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Cat. 9		0.269***	0.276***	0.276***

		(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Cat. 10		0.118***	0.131***	0.143***
		(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Male		-0.146***	-0.143***	-0.145***
		(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Education (ref: low)				
High		-0.135***	-0.136***	-0.140***
		(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Middle		-0.098***	-0.098***	-0.099***
		(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Urban		0.002*	0.002*	0.002*
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Working class		-0.021***	-0.023***	-0.023***
		(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Publics sector employee		0.030***	0.035***	0.031***
		(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Self-employed		0.111***	0.115***	0.116***
		(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Upper middle class		0.035***	0.036***	0.036***
		(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Inparty				
Ideological sorting			-0.032***	-0.038***
			(0.005)	(0.006)
Social sorting			0.019*	0.002
			(0.008)	(0.009)
Salience of culture			0.148***	0.108***
			(0.014)	(0.015)
Salience of economy			-0.141***	-0.143***
			(0.014)	(0.015)
Party size			0.233***	0.402***
			(0.011)	(0.015)
Outparty				
Ideological sorting			-0.087***	-0.081***
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Social sorting			0.497***	0.575***
			(0.015)	(0.016)
Salience of: culture			-0.029*	0.063***
			(0.014)	(0.014)
Salience of: economy			-0.259***	-0.243***
			(0.014)	(0.015)
Party size			-1.083***	-1.157***
			(0.012)	(0.013)
Macro				
Unemployment				0.321***
				(0.075)
Economic growth				-0.034
				(0.030)
Migration				-0.191***
				(0.049)
Internet use				0.680***
				(0.101)
Broadband access				-0.727***
				(0.122)
Intercept	2.704***	2.207***	3.023***	3.014***
	(0.023)	(0.030)	(0.056)	(0.039)
Level 1 (dyad)				
Intercept	-0.864	-0.965	-0.24	-0.84
Level 2 (individual)				
Intercept	0.535	-0.106	-0.103	-0.091
Level 3 (wave)				
Intercept	0.834	0.82	0.815	0.816