Title: Is Political Identification Key for Political Animosity?

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Draft date: 30 March 2023

Abstract

Political animosity is a key factor in polarization. It is often thought to be an outgrowth of people's tendency to belong to groups and find value in their group memberships. The more people identify with a political party or ideological label, the more they dislike and distrust people from other parties and people who adopt opposing partisan and ideological labels. This core idea, however, has recently been challenged in recent studies that reduce identity salience, yet fail to reduce political animosity. One interpretation of these studies is that political animosity has other sources. We review these possibilities, but ultimately conclude that the demise of political identification has been overstated. We identify recent social psychological work that use longitudinal designs to highlight the importance of political identification. This work finds that political identification is key for social perception and judgement, and that fluctuations in identification are associated with fluctuations in political animosity. Political identification appears to be an important ingredient in political animosity and contributes to polarization.

Is Political Identification Key for Political Animosity?

Identity divides,
Labels fuel emotional fires,
Polarization thrives.

Hearts once beating strong,
Now pulled apart by discord,
Polarized feelings.

-Haikus about affective polarization written by OpenAI's ChatGPT

This is a chapter on polarization and political animosity. At this point, so much has been written on the topic that it is not clear what new can be said. Academic publications on polarization have risen tremendously since 2012 (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021), with our chapter here contributing to the trend. We could tell you that polarization causes problems. Or that people dislike polarization. Or we could stress that political systems strain under the burdens of polarization. That is all old news because despite the attention paid to it, polarization just. keeps. on. going. A central idea, since the beginning of the literature on political animosity, is that it emerges from people's political identities (Iyengar et al., 2012, 2019). This central idea, however, has recently been challenged. Exploring this challenge is the purpose of our chapter.

Our discussion focuses on the US American case. This is because much of the research on polarization and political animosity has happened in this context (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). However, in most cases we expect the broad psychological principles to be relevant in a broad range of contexts. Notably, evidence of political animosity emerges in many countries (Areal, 2022; Boxell et al., 2022; Gidron et al., 2020; Reijan, 2020; Westwood et al., 2018). Although the extent it rises or falls varies from country to country, its existence emerges everywhere it has been studied (Areal, 2022; Boxell et al., 2022; Gidron et al., 2020; Reijan, 2020; Westwood et al., 2018).

Polarization and Political Animosity

It is common to read that America is divided and increasingly so. The answer to whether people have actually politically polarized in recent decades depends, however, on how the concept of polarization is defined and measured.[1] When polarization is defined as increasing *extremity* on substantive policy positions (e.g., Levendusky, 2009; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Di Maggio et al., 1996) there is little evidence of polarization. An examination of the patterns of responses to the five policy questions included in every wave of the ANES between 1984 and 2004 showed that people became more polarized on only one question, and only slightly so (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). Between 1984 and 2004, the number of Americans who agreed that the government was responsible for providing jobs and a basic standard of living increased by three percentage points, while the number of Americans who disagreed with the statement increased by four percentage points (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). There was no evidence of polarization on any of the other four questions. Similarly, research by Pew finds that the average difference between partisan Democrats and Republicans on 40 questions only increased by four percentage points between 1987 and 2007 (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008).

When the question is reframed as whether *partisans* (i.e., people identifying with a political party) rather than people overall have polarized, the answer to the question becomes murkier. Although partisans haven't necessarily become extreme in their issue positions or ideological

[1] We are psychologists and so typically our interest is on the psychology of the typical person, the type of person a political scientist might refer to as part of the masses or as a citizen. Polarization also takes place among political elites, but this is less central to our interest (although arguably more consequential).

identifications, partisans have become better sorted by ideology. This is seen as a consequence of elites being more polarized and clarified party brands (Levendusky, 2009). Democrats increasingly identify as liberals and Republicans increasingly identify as conservatives (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Levendusky, 2009). Similarly, while the typical person hasn't necessarily polarized on the issues, elites have and this clarification in the parties' positions has led to increased levels of constraint (if not extremity) among the rank and file (DiMaggio et al., 1996). Partisans have also sorted in terms of identity. Christians, Whites, rural voters, and men increasingly identify as Republicans, and women, members of minority racial and ethnic groups, and urban voters increasingly identify as Democrats (Mason, 2018). Thus, political identities, issue positions and important social identities are aligning to form separate political clusters and replacing the previous trend of people holding a variety of cross-cutting identities and issue positions.

If Americans disagree now about the same amount as they disagreed before, why is it so common to read that America is increasingly divided? When polarization is defined instead as dislike and distrust of the out-party, Americans are very clearly polarized (e.g., Druckman et al., 2022; Iyengar et al., 2012). On this metric, there is clear evidence that Americans are divided and have become increasingly polarized since the 1980s (Hetherington, 2001; Iyengar et al., 2012). This type of polarization is often called affective polarization, a term we use in addition to the term political animosity (cf. Hartman et al., 2022). Increases in political animosity have emerged on a number of different measures, but affective polarization is most commonly operationalized by subtracting feeling thermometer ratings of the out-party from feeling thermometer ratings of the in-party (for a detailed discussion of the pros and cons of this approach see Druckman & Levendusky, 2019). Feeling thermometer ratings towards the in-party have remained relatively constant since the 1970s, while ratings of the out-party have plummeted, dropping more than 15 points on a 100-point scale (Iyengar et al., 2012; Finkel et al., 2020). We visualize this in Figure 1 using data from the American National Election Survey (American National Election Studies, 2022).

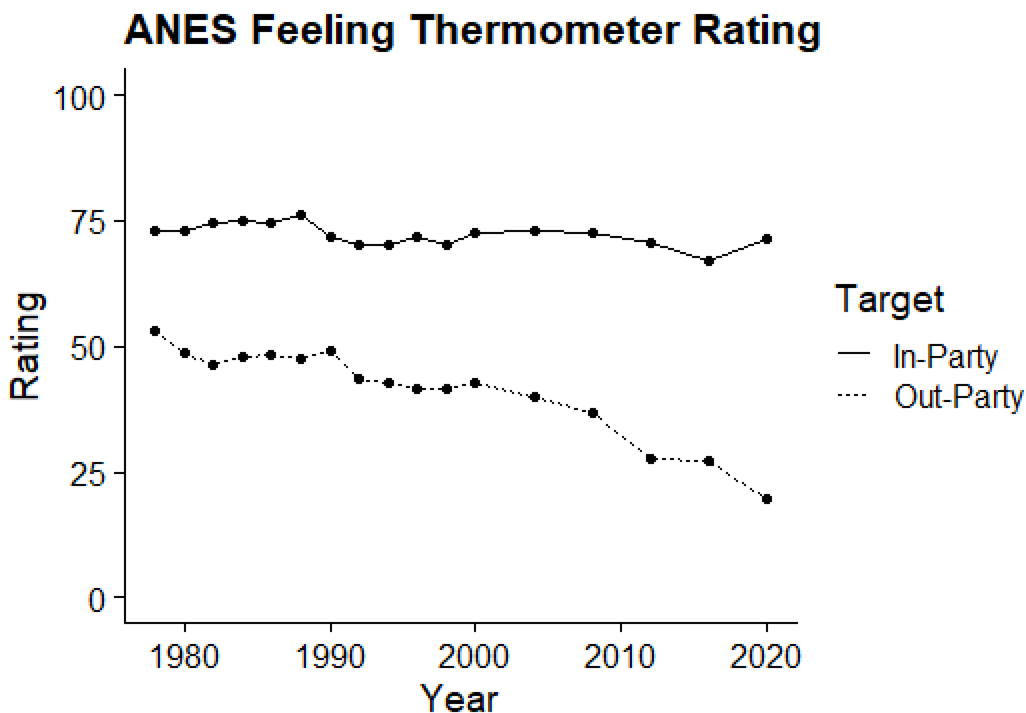

Figure 1. *This figure plots feeling thermometer ratings towards the In-Party and the Out-Party between 1978 and 2020. Feelings towards the In-Party have remained relatively constant, whereas feelings towards the Out-Party have plummeted.*

It is, of course, possible that political animosity is not consequential. People have strong feelings about many things (e.g., Is a hot dog a sandwich? Should nuts be in brownies? Is cereal a soup?) and there are few consequences for these feelings. However, the social and political consequences of partisan animosity are troubling. Political animosity is now a more powerful predictor of vote choice than favoritism towards the in-party (Finkel et al., 2020). We aren't voting for people we like, but rather against the people we dislike. At the same time, people show loyalty to their preferred party across a wide range of domains, voting for them more consistently (Jacobson, 2015) and forgiving their own party more quickly following scandals (Costa et al., 2020).

Socially, Americans today are more likely than in the past to say they would feel uncomfortable with their child marrying a member of the out-party (Iyengar et al., 2012), something that is also reflected in their own choices of who to date (Easton & Holbein, 2021; Huber & Malhotra, 2017). Between 1960 and 2008, the extent to which the in-party was rated higher on intelligence increased from .06 to .48 and the extent to which the out-party was rated higher on selfishness increased from.21 to .47 on scales ranging from 0-1 (Iyengar et al., 2012). People have also been found to express more discrimination and prejudice on the basis of party affiliation than on the basis of race (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Westwood et al., 2018; but see Huber & Malhotra, 2017 for the opposite finding in dating markets), or other consequential social divisions (Spanish vs. Basque ethnicities in Spain, Flemish vs Francophone linguistic groups in Belgium, Christian vs Muslim identities in the United Kingdom, Westwood et al., 2018). People dehumanize political outgroups (Martherus et al., 2021) and discriminate against them for jobs (Gift & Gift, 2015). They're even more willing to harm the political ingroup rather than help a political outgroup (Gershon & Fridman, 2022).

Political animosity extends beyond groups explicitly tied to politics to outgroups that are not explicitly political. People have shown a trend towards politicizing non-political groups and entities (Hetherington & Weiler, 2018; Rudolph & Hetherington, 2020). Consistent with this, people express prejudice towards non-political groups who are merely associated with ideological outgroups (Brandt et al., 2014; Brandt & Crawford, 2020; Crawford & Brandt, 2020; Koch et al., 2020; Woitzel & Koch, 2022). The extent ideological identification or partisan identification is related to prejudice can be accurately predicted just by using the perceived (i.e., stereotyped) ideology of the target group (Brandt, 2017; Brandt & Crawford, 2020).

Why do People Express Political Animosity?

One key explanation for political animosity is social identification. Specifically, people's identification to political parties or ideological labels have been implicated in the expression of political animosity (Iyengar et al., 2012, 2019; Mason, 2018). Social identification captures the influence of the emotional attachment people feel towards certain groups to which they belong on how they think about their selves (Brewer, 2001; Tajfel, 1981). It reflects one's perceptions of how important the group is to the self and the self is to the group. These group-relevant cognitions emerge early in life (Baron & Dunham, 2015). Because of the significance of certain group memberships to the sense of self, it has been theorized and found that people privilege the ingroup and express animosity and derogation towards outgroups (Balliet et al., 2014).

Group identification in the context of politics has proven to be important. Political attachments can also develop early in life (Lay et al., 2022). These partisan and ideological

attachments have been identified as drivers of political animosity (amongst other social group attachments; Iyengar et al., 2012, 2019; Mason, 2018). For example, people who are high on political party identification are also significantly higher on affective polarization across a range of operationalizations, including support for co-partisans, attitudes about out-partisans, emotions towards out-partisans, and action tendencies towards out-partisans (Brown & Hohman, 2022). Other work has found partisan identity to be the principal mechanism of affective polarization (Dias & Lelkes, 2022; see also Woitzel & Koch, 2022). The authors compared the effect of partisan identification to that of policy similarity. They found that people felt more warmly and expressed more desire for social closeness towards co-partisans than out-partisans, an effect pronounced among strong partisans. Policy disagreement reduced this effect of shared partisanship only when policies signaled partisan identity (e.g., gun accessibility) and did not reduce the effect of shared partisanship when policies were unrelated to partisan identity (e.g., whether mobile carriers should sell customer data). Together, these results suggest that social identification with political groups is an important and independent (from policy disagreement) driver of political animosity. This identification with the political ingroup is so powerful it leads to ironic outcomes. People go so far as to hurt their own political ingroup if the other alternative is helping the outgroup. This is because helping the outgroup is perceived as making them a worse group-member and undermining their own identity (Gershon & Fridman, 2022)

The centrality of political identities to political animosity emerges for both partisan identities (i.e., identification with parties) and ideological identities (i.e., identification with ideological labels like liberal and conservative). For example, Mason (2018) found that "liberal" and "conservative" identification was associated with more political animosity towards ideological outgroups (see also a review by Brandt & Crawford, 2020). The effect of identity emerged when controlling for liberal and conservative stances on issue positions. These findings suggest that people's dislike of political outgroups is not merely the outcome of disagreement, but rather differences in identification. Although political identification is often thought of as a good proxy for political belief, this disconnect is consistent with work finding that identification with "liberal" and "conservative" labels is not perfectly aligned with endorsing ideologically-consistent issues (Conover & Feldman, 1981; Malka & Lelkes, 2010; Devine 2014). All in all, these results on ideological and partisan social identification point to political identification as central to political animosity over and above other factors like policy disagreements.

The Demise of Identification?

Despite the enthusiasm for the role of identity in political animosity, scholars have begun to question this assumption. Part of the skepticism arises because of the inherent challenge of studying the effect of identity on anything. People's identities, including their political identities, are really really stable (Brandt & Morgan, 2022). This means that it is difficult to experimentally manipulate people's identities and study their causal effects. This has led scholars to adopt other research designs that might speak to the role of identity in political animosity.

The primary strategy is to find or create situations where the salience of people's political identities are weakened. In such a case, people's political identities ought to be less consequential for their expressed political animosity. For example, in a two-wave panel design, people reported stronger political identities and more political animosity immediately before an election than after it (West & Iyengar, 2022). Although both partisan identity and affective polarization went down after the election, their declines were substantially mismatched in magnitude. While the partisan identity dropped considerably (44% of a standard deviation), the decline in political animosity was much smaller (between 8% and 14% of a standard deviation). The authors state that this calls "into

question whether political salience and the strengthening of partisanship as a social identity are the sole drivers of affective polarization" (West & Iyengar, 2022, p. 819).

Situations of reduced identity salience have also been induced experimentally. In these studies, experimenters typically randomly assign people to complete a self-affirmation experimental condition compared to a control condition. The idea is that self-affirmation helps people detach from their political identities by focusing them on their own individuating characteristics (McQueen & Klein, 2006; Steele, 1999). Despite successful manipulation checks, across multiple large-scale experiments, there is no evidence that these experiments reduce political animosity (Levendusky, 2018; Lyons et al., 2022; West & Iyengar, 2022). This is true when focusing on all participants, or focusing on particular subgroups (e.g., party supporters, levels of identification strength). Null results are notoriously difficult to interpret. However, in this case we have experimental manipulations that affect the manipulation check as expected, we have large, high-quality samples (more than 4000 participants in total), and we have valid and reliable measures. We think these null results should be trusted. Self-affirmation doesn't reduce political animosity.

If identification isn't key for political animosity, what is? There are a few alternatives. One key alternative is that people are less concerned about whether or not they share an identity with a target, but whether they share political policies with the target (Orr & Huber, 2020; cf. Bai, 2020). In these studies, when a target shares policy positions with a participant, political animosity is lower even if the target and the participant do not share a political identity. This would be consistent with the long-standing idea that people like people who share their attitudes and dislike people who do not share their attitudes (Byrne, 1969). Other work suggests that affective polarization might not be about identities per se, nor attitudes per se, but rather a particular kind of attitudes: moral attitudes. This work finds that people who moralize politics express more political animosity (Garrett & Bankert, 2020; cf. Skitka et al., 2005).

Identifications Demise is Overstated

But is identifications' demise overstated? Testing if identity is key for affective polarization is a challenge because it is very difficult to credibly manipulate people's political identifications. However, when the typical methods for resolving this challenge fail to reveal evidence for the role of identity, it might be due to limitations of the methods, rather than a limitation of identity. For example, self-affirmation is a light-tough intervention and so may not be a sufficient method for reducing social identity salience, despite what the manipulation checks might indicate. Manipulating characteristics of a target group (e.g., shared identity, shared issues) is sensible, but it cannot show if a person's *own* identity is playing a role.

In our own work (Brandt & Vallabha, 2022), we took a different strategy. We used a year-long, 26-wave panel study in the United States and a 6-month-long, 12-wave panel in the Netherlands to test how fluctuations in people's identities are related to fluctuations in affective polarization. By using a panel study, we are able to avoid common problems with cross-sectional surveys that are often used in this literature (e.g., Brown & Hohman, 2022; Mason, 2018). Most scholars easily recognize the inability of cross-sectional surveys to establish causality. However, an overlooked problem is that cross-sectional surveys cannot estimate within-person associations between constructs. That is, cross-sectional surveys are often used to infer that changes in variable X are associated with changes in variable Y, but cross-sectional surveys cannot be used to make this inference because they do not have the necessary information to track a person's changes (Brandt & Morgan, 2022; Hamaker, 2022). This is a problem because (most) psychological theories make predictions about what happens within people.

In political psychology, cross-sectional surveys tend to map onto between-person associations (people who are higher on X tend to be higher on Y; Brandt & Morgan, 2022). For example, people who tend to support gun control also tend hold racial egalitarian attitudes. This can be useful for mapping the divisions in society, but it is a different question than the questions in typical psychological theorizing. In particular, theories surrounding identity and political animosity predict that if a person were to change their political identities, then they would also change their levels of political animosity. This theorizing is at the within-person level. To make inferences at this level of analysis it is necessary to use data that can map changes within people.[2] Our panel studies can do just that.

We use our two panel studies to investigate two types of identity change. First, testing the typical hypothesis in the political animosity literature, we test if increases in identity strength are associated with within-person increases in political animosity. If increases in identity strength are associated with increases in political animosity, this would provide support for the idea that identification is important for (or at least a part of) understanding political animosity. However, if increases in identity strength are unrelated to political animosity, it would provide more evidence that identity is not necessary for understanding political animosity.

Second, we test a hypothesis more typical in the social psychological literature. We test if changes in ideological direction (e.g., more left-wing or right-wing) are associated with changes in political animosity. Some scholars predict that when people become more conservative or right-wing, they will report more political animosity (Ganzach & Shul, 2021). The idea is that liberals and conservatives have fundamental differences in their psychological processes. In particular, conservatives express more political animosity because a conservative identity is infused with epistemic motivations and values that increase hostility towards outgroups (for reviews see e.g., Jost, 2017; Kivikangas et al, 2021). Some scholars have found support for this idea using cross-sectional survey data (Ganzach & Shul, 2021). Other scholars suggest, however, that liberals and conservatives engage in largely similar psychological processes when it comes to group-based animosity (Brandt & Crawford, 2020; Crawford & Brandt, 2020). In particular, both liberals and conservatives are expected to care about defending their worldviews and political groups. Based on these ideas, scholars have suggested that ideological differences in political animosity is less likely (Brandt & Crawford, 2020; Woitzel & Koch, 2022).[3]

We are able to test these two hypotheses using multiple forms of political identification. In the US sample, we included both ideological (liberal vs conservative) and partisan (Democratic vs Republican) identifications. In the Dutch sample, we included both ideological (right-wing vs left-wing) and traditionalism (progressive vs traditional) identification. We also test the hypotheses using multiple measures of political animosity. In the US, we included measures of social distance for both ideological (liberals vs conservatives) and partisan (Democrats vs Republicans) groups. In the Netherlands, we included measures of social distance for voters from four parties (two right-wing

[2] Randomized experiments, like those testing self-affirmation that we previously described, can also estimate average within-person effects. This is despite using "between-subjects" experimental designs. This is because they are estimating the average effect of the treatment in the sample, which is the average of the estimated difference between the potential outcome for a participation if the participant were in the treatment compared to the potential outcome if the participant where in the control.

[3] We are limiting our discussion to more "everyday" expressions of affective polarization (e.g., dislike or social distance from political outgroups) that are the focus of nearly the entire literature. It is well known that identity strength is related to extreme behavior (e.g., Chinchilla et al., 2022). More recently, some scholars have begun to examine ideological differences in more extreme behavior, which seem to find evidence that in the contemporary era conservatives/rightists engage in more violence than liberals/leftists (Jasko et al., 2022; Kalmoe & Mason, 2022).

and two left-wing parties, two mainstream and two more extreme parties) and measures of feelings of sympathy for every party who was in the Dutch parliament at the time of the study.

So, what do we find? We find that increases in the strength of people's political identities are associated with increases in political animosity. In the United States, this was true for both ideological identification (strength of liberal/conservative identity, Figure 2A) and partisan identification (strength of Democratic/Republican identity, Figure 2B). In the Netherlands, this was true for ideological identification (strength of left/right identity, Figure 3A, 3C), but was less consistent for traditionalism (strength of traditional/progressive identity, Figure 3B, 3D). At the same time, changes in the direction of political identity had no impact on political animosity. When people became more conservative (Figure 2A), Republican (Figure 2B), right-wing (Figure 3A, 3C), or traditional (Figure 3B, 3D), they did not express more political animosity. The results for identity strength were consistent across measures of political animosity.

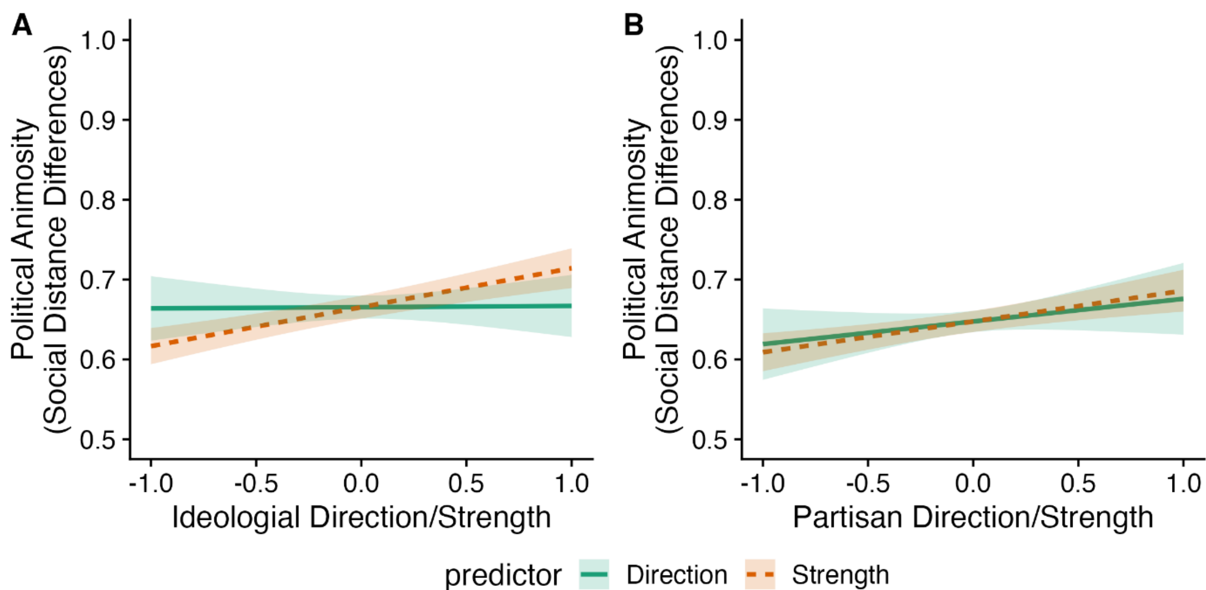

Figure 2. *Estimated within-person slopes of ideological (A) and partisan (B) direction (green solid lines) and strength (orange dashed lines) predicting ideological political animosity (A) and partisan (B) political animosity. Data is from the United States. Confidence bans are 95% confidence intervals. Both predictors were included as main effects in their respective models. Political animosity is social distance from the outgroup subtracted from social distance from the ingroup and then rescaled to range from 0 to 1. All estimates > .5 represent more animosity towards the political outgroup compared to the political ingroup.*

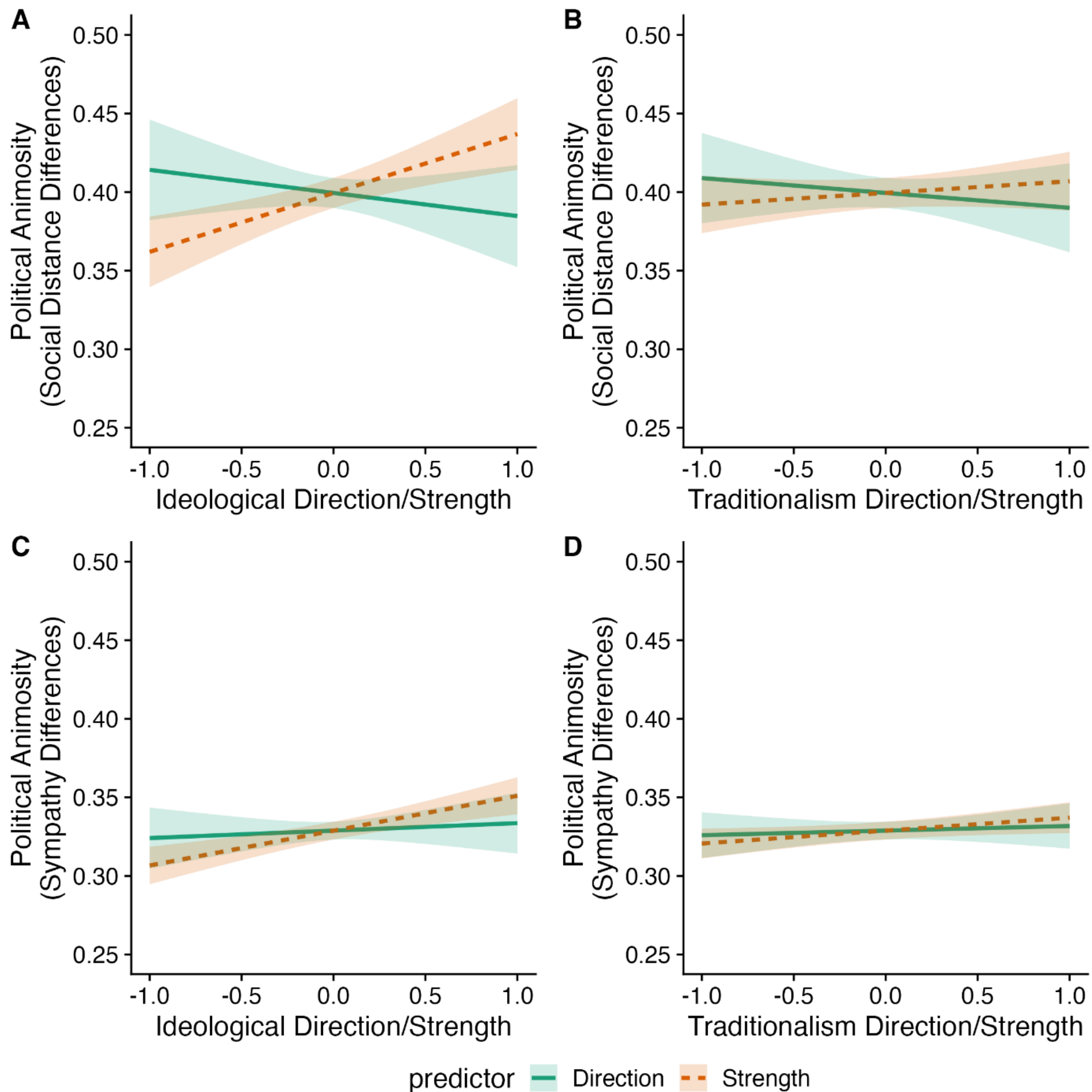

Figure 3. *Estimated within-person slopes of ideological (A, C) and traditionalism (B, D) direction (green solid lines) and strength (orange dashed lines) predicting political animosity based on social distance (A, B) and sympathy (C, D). Data is from the Netherlands. Confidence bans are 95% confidence intervals. Both predictors were included as main effects in their respective models. Political animosity is standard deviation of the animosity measures for each participant, capturing the spread of their ratings in this multiparty system. This measure is rescaled to range from 0 to 1. All estimates > 0 represent more differences in how participants evaluate the political groups.*

Some might ask if changes in political identities are just correlated with other types of changes that account for the effect. This is always possible, but we also comprehensibly tested a variety of other possible variables that could account for the identity effects. In particular, we controlled for people's positions on a variety of political issues, the extremity of people's views on a variety of political issues, worries about the economy, perceptions that the country's values are off track, feelings of tenseness, the fear of death, and political interest. All of these different other variables

were either *unrelated* to political animosity, or inconsistently related to political animosity. For example, becoming more extreme on economic issues was related to increases in political animosity in the partisan identity model in the United States. However, extremity on economic issues was not related to political animosity in the ideological identity model in the United States, or in any of the models from The Netherlands. Notably, including all of these control variables did not affect our estimates of political identity change on political animosity.

Taken together, we find that changes in political identity strength is consistently related to political animosity in two different countries. Changes in political identity direction is consistently unrelated to political animosity in two different countries. These two findings do not change when controlling for a host of alternative predictors of political animosity. This suggests that identification and political animosity are, in fact, linked. We can't say anything about the causal direction of these variables. Although some might use such panel data to estimate lagged effects of identity on political animosity, we did not take this route. This is because we are not confident that such processes take place over the two weeks between waves in our studies. Rather, we suspect that such causal associations are much more immediate and so not captured by lagged effects. Nonetheless, we believe that our findings show that the demise of political identity was premature and that other factors, such as issue positions, are not obviously linked to political animosity.

Open Questions

Factors in Addition to Identity?

Although here we have argued that political identification is central to the expression of political animosity, there are also likely other factors contributing to the phenomenon. Some suggest that outgroup hate does not consistently occur along with ingroup love, and that group memberships rooted in moral convictions contribute to an inherently threatening form of intergroup competition. When this happens, outgroup hate is argued to naturally dominate ingroup love (Parker & Janoff Bulman, 2013). Thus, this framework suggests that people experience animosity towards political outgroups to the extent that they view their political identities as relating to their core values and beliefs (Garrett & Bankert, 2020; Parker & Janoff Bulman, 2013; Skitka et al., 2020). While we suspect that in contexts where intergroup competition is clear, even identities that are not rooted in moral convictions can lead to animosity, moral convictions do likely increase this animosity. For instance, morally convicted attitudes have been linked to disregard for the consequences of one's actions, reduced interest in political compromise, and, most critically for our purposes, increased desire for social distance from morally dissimilar others (Garrett & Bankert, 2020; Ryan, 2019; Skitka et al., 2015).

One factor that contributes to political animosity that may be more independent of political identity strength are misperceptions. It turns out that people are mistaken about the demographic make-up (Ahler & Sood, 2018), extremity (Westfall et al., 2015), and group perceptions (Lees & Cikara, 2020; Moore-Berg et al., 2020; Ruggeri et al., 2021) of partisan groups. Although it's possible that misperceptions are not consequential (the first author has misperceptions of how his car works that have yet to be consequential in any way), a common finding is that misperceptions are correlated with political animosity (e.g., Ahler & Sood, 2018; Lees & Cikara, 2020; Moore-Berg et al., 2020; Ruggeri et al., 2021). Interestingly, interventions correcting such political misperceptions have proven to be quite successful at reducing political animosity (e.g., Lees & Cikara, 2020; Moore-Berg et al., 2020; Ruggeri et al., 2021; Voelkel et al., 2022). Although it's possible that correct misperceptions will reduce political identity salience, we think that this is unlikely. This is because the methods used to correct misperceptions also include mention of people's own political identities.

Reducing Political Animosity?

Knowing that political identity is important for political animosity is interesting, but does it have applied benefits? This is something that the field is just starting to figure out and has made substantial strides in, over the last few years (for a review, see Hartman et al., 2022). For example, a recent mega-study tested the extent 25 crowd-sourced interventions reduced affective polarization (Voelkel et al., 2023b). They found that 23 of the interventions reduced affective polarization, although the effect sizes were all relatively small (largest effect of d = .53). Do the successful interventions target people's political identities? It appears that they do. The most impactful intervention showed a video of pairs of people with different political identities who nonetheless work together and earn each other's respect. Other successful interventions highlighted common non-partisan identities (e.g., a common exhausted majority, common national identity). These interventions either highlight how different identities do not need to be a problem, or that there are other (potentially more important) identities that people can also bond over. The intervention work suggests that identities matter for political animosity.

The relatively small effects of individual level interventions may not be the key levers to reduce affective polarization. Changing individuals might help, but each individual level change may be too small to have detectable, societal-level effects. Indeed, for people concerned with polarized politics, the goal is cultural change. Linking individual-level interventions to situations and contexts that prompt cultural changes will be an important step for studying depolarization (Hartman et al., 2022). Even if we are able to reduce political animosity, it's not clear that this is the key target construct when trying to promote the political health of a society. This is because changes in political animosity are not necessarily associated with changes in support for democratic policies and norms (Broockman et al., 2022; Voelkel et al., 2023a). Further, it's not clear if or how the type of political animosity we measure is related to more extreme forms of political violence (cf. Jasko et al., 2022). Effective interventions on democratic norms and political violence are necessary as well (cf. Mernyk et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the mega-study of crowd-sourced interventions was less successful at reducing support anti-democratic politicians and norms in general, and the successful interventions for these constructs did not typically involve political identities (Voelkel et al., 2023b).

Is it Tribal?

Across different types of study designs from different disciplines, we find that political identities are important for understanding political animosity. Some scholars and commentators take these types of findings to proclaim that politics is tribal.[4] We think that this is a mistake. From a scientific perspective, tribal (or tribalism) is not defined independently from concepts already studied. For example, Clark and colleagues (2019, p. 591) define tribe and tribalism in this way, "By *tribe*, we simply mean a human social group sharing a common interest, and by *tribalism*, we mean tendencies to be loyal to and favorable toward one's own tribe (and less favorable toward other tribes)." This is, to be frank, just using different terms for well-known constructs like "group" and

[4] A representative Google Search, https://web.archive.org/web/20230323170932/https://www.google.com/web/20230323170932/https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=tribalism+politics&google_abuse=GOOGLE_ABUSE_EXEMPTION%3DID%3D01c2b5a440b4536b:TM%3D1679591372:C%3D%3E:IP%3D207.241.225.162-:S%3Dw1_mEoy42KRPyNPpofQT8w%3B+path%3D/%3B+domain%3Dgoogle.com%3B+expires%3DThu,+23-Mar-2023+20:09:32+GMT

for "intergroup bias". It is a clear case of the jangle fallacy. A cynical reader might be forgiven for thinking that the scholars adopted these terms for their marketing value, rather than their scientific utility. Using the term tribe or tribalism then only muddies the scientific waters. It has no added scientific value.

We fear that some might see our opposition to the use of these terms as political correctness. This is not the case. Our oppositions to these terms stems from our desire for scientists to use clear terms to communicate with both themselves and with non-scientists alike. Tribe and tribalism are not clear terms.

First, tribe has a specific legal definition in the United States and is used to recognize Native American groups. This is different from – and entirely unrelated to – the definition used by scholars to describe the politics of the United States as tribal.

Second, outside of the United States' legal code, tribe has no consistent meaning. Native American groups often choose to use the term "people" or "nation" rather than the word tribe. Because there is no consistent meaning, people infer a number of things from tribal that may or may not be relevant for the social psychological study of groups.

For example, some commentors note (e.g., Lowe, 2001; Premawardhana, 2020) that tribe/tribal invokes ideas about African people, primitiveness, and savageness. If we label the link between political identity and political animosity as tribal, then what are we implying? Are we implying that it makes people primitive? We hope not. These are contemporary problems and require contemporary solutions. Are we implying that it makes people more like African people? We hope not. The problems of political intergroup bias emerge around the world. Instead, it seems that scholars who use the word tribal are trying to imply that groups are important for people. For this we don't need new terms with ambiguous meanings.

Conclusion

Political animosity is an important challenge for democracies and aspiring democracies. Although research has cast doubt on the role of political identity and identification for understanding political animosity, we believe that it is not yet time to dismiss identity. Instead, we find that political identification matters for political animosity. When people reporter stronger levels of political identification, they also report for political animosity. This suggests that identity is (still) a key factor for understanding political animosity.

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