Everyone's Doing It: Polarization is Inflated by Social Pressure

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Abstract. Today's political climate is charged with intense affective polarization and partisan-ideological sorting that has grown immensely over the last four decades. I argue that social pressure drives some of these two types of polarizations—that a strong culture of political polarization (such as the one we have today) motivates those especially attuned to social contexts to exaggerate reports of polarization. My argument is tested with a set of analyses of 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) data. Findings indeed suggest that affective polarization and ideological sorting among the public are partly driven by social pressure. Further, they imply a "snowball effect" of political climates—a culture of polarization, for example, will produce more polarization.

*Prepared for 2019 Toronto Political Behavior Workshop

Introduction

Today's political climate is often characterized by affective polarization and partisan-ideological sorting (Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Mason 2015, 2018). I argue that for those who are willing to associate with a political party, reporting polarization is socially desirable. In particular, I argue that a culture of political polarization drives those who are both partisan and especially attuned to social contexts to exaggerate reports of polarization—or, that social pressure can inflate affective polarization and ideological sorting among both strong and weak partisans.

Social contexts can influence individuals' political attitudes, values, and expressions of partisanship (Connors 2019; Carlson and Settle 2016; Klar 2014; Klar and Krupnikov 2016). People's tendency to adjust themselves to fit with their environment is often driven by self-presentation desires, leading people to morph themselves to fit into socially desirable contexts (Berinsky 2004).[1] Building on this research, I argue that this desire to fit in can exaggerate reports of polarization—that is, that is, because partisans perceive that everyone else is polarized, they are motivated to match this and thus report polarization.

At first glance, my argument may seem to contradict findings that those who wish to impress others will report political independence (e.g. Klar and Krupnikov 2016). To the contrary—my approach adds a broader perspective to these findings. While the desire to present oneself well does indeed increases the general likelihood of reporting political independence (Klar and Krupnikov 2016), in this manuscript I take this argument a step further and consider how these same self-presentation desires influence those who are ultimately *willing* to identify as partisan.

[1] Other research, however, demonstrates the influence of social contexts through simple information—rather than self-presentation—effects (see Huckfeldt et al. 2013). While the mechanisms of these two types of effects differ, both are considered social influence. In this piece, however, I only examine self-presentation—rather than information—effects.

Note that those who are willing to identify as partisan likely receive different social pressures than those who refuse to identify as partisan, likely ultimately leading to these divergent trends. In other words, people who want to impress others care about the audiences they play to, and those who are willing to identify as partisan are playing to an audience of partisans. This group of Americans—those who have a desire to present themselves well *and* associate with a party—want to be perceived as a good partisan. In today's climate, that means a partisan who is ideologically sorted, hates the other party, and likes their own.

I test this argument with a set of analyses of 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) data. Findings suggest that affective polarization and ideological sorting are indeed partly driven by social pressure. The consequences of these findings are both optimistic and pessimistic, depending on one's perspective and their interpretation of the results. If we believe the results demonstrate artificially inflated polarization, the findings suggest that we are not as polarized as we thought we were. If we believe the results demonstrate a *spreading* of polarization, the findings suggest that political cultures have a snowball effect—that, for example, a culture of political polarization will lead to more political polarization. Both of these outcomes can be perceived as either positive or negative (again, depending on one's perspective). However, if we are agnostic about the normative implications of these findings, the consequences of the results on their own are important for empirical research, as they speak to the measurement and understanding of an important construct: political polarization.

Political Polarization & Social Influence

Political Polarization. The American public is intensely politically polarized, and this polarization has dramatically increased over the past 40 years (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Iyengar and

Westwood 2015; Mason 2015, 2018; Westwood and Lelkes 2018). These levels of political polarization can lead to consequential life choices, such as who to talk to (Mutz 2002; Barbera 2014), where to live (Bishop 2008), who to marry (Iyengar, Konitzer, and Tedin 2018), and who to wants one's child to marry (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). As Iyengar and Westwood (2015) explain, "Partisans discriminate against opposing partisans, doing so to a degree that exceeds discrimination based on race." This state of the nation is concerning, as polarization among the public can lead to political stalemates, unwillingness to compromise, partisan bias, anger, the election of extreme candidates, and even violence (see Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra and Westwood 2019).

Scholars offer different definitions of political polarization. We can consider these definitions in three categories: issue polarization, partisan-ideological sorting, and affective polarization. Issue polarization—or what was originally termed ideological polarization—is the type of polarization that we often observe among elites, where extreme attitudes are dominant (Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005, 2008; Iyengar et al. 2019; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). In the electorate, this similarly means a decline in moderate attitudes (Abramowitz 2012; Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Webster and Abramowitz 2017).

A second definition of polarization—partisan-ideological sorting—may seem similar, but focuses less on issues and more on partisan and ideological identities (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Mason 2015). People are ideologically sorted when they are Democrats who identify as extreme liberals or Republicans who identify as extreme conservatives (Fiorina et al. 2005; Levendusky 2009). That is, their partisanship and ideology align perfectly. Lastly, the third definition of polarization—affective polarization—is an offshoot of these partisan and ideological identities (Iyengar et al. 2019). Affective polarization deals with

emotions towards in-partisans and out-partisans: people are affectively polarized when they feel positively towards in-partisans and negatively towards out-partisans (Iyengar and Westwood 2015).

What adds a wrinkle to the literature on polarization is that while these three different measures of polarization are correlated to some degree, they do not necessarily go together.[2] People are not affectively polarized and ideologically sorted because they seem to disagree on issues—in fact, people abide by these emotional and identity-based polarizations *even when they agree with each other* (Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2015). As Mason (2015) explains, America "agrees on many things but is bitterly divided nonetheless." That is, Democrats hate Republicans and Republicans hate Democrats not just because they disagree on political issues—they hate each other because Republicans are Democrats' outgroup and Democrats are Republicans' outgroup (Green et al. 2002; Huddy et al. 2015; Mason 2015).

In this piece, I propose one important consequence of this polarized state of America: that it leads people to report polarization because there is a social pressure to do so.[3] For the segment of the public who is both motivated by self-presentation desires and willing to associate with a party, there is social pressure to report polarization (or even behave in a polarized manner), because it strikes them that everyone is doing it. Indeed, even though it is *not* the case that everyone is polarized (in fact, I argue that this is not the case), the public perceives much more polarization than actually exists (Levendusky and Malhotra 2016b). In the eyes of the public, who hears an overblown account of the levels of polarization among the public from the media, vast proportions

[2] But see Abramowitz and Webster (2016), who examine connections between these types of polarization.
[3] For a comprehensive discussion of other various consequences of polarization, see Iyengar et al. 2018.

of Democrats and Republicans *do* hate each other.[4] In turn, for those who care to fit into social contexts, they (as Democrats or Republicans) should hate each other as well. In surveys, this segment of the public may seem to be the ideologically-sorted partisans who hate out-partisans and love in-partisans, but the motivation for reporting at least some these attitudes may be driven by social pressure.

Social Influence. This argument that polarization is inflated by social pressure relies on the vast literature on the politically-consequential effects of social influence, which stems from the assertion that people practice politics in a social world. Thus, the *social* motivation to impress others (Cosmides and Tooby 1992), present a positive "face" (Goffman 1967), and work at this type of "self-presentation" almost constantly (Holtgraves 1992) naturally extends to how ordinary people practice *politics*. The social, in essence, is in the political. Thus, to present oneself well, people misreport political attitudes (Kuran 1997; Zaller and Feldman 1992); conform their political views and behaviors to follow elites (Zaller 1992), to fit into their group (Huckfeldt et al. 2013; Mutz 1998), or to follow the general norms (Cialdini et al. 1990); change how they describe their partisan identities (Klar and Krupnikov 2016); suppress unpopular or contentious opinions (Carlson and Settle 2016; Klar 2014); and endorse their party's political values (Connors 2019). They are, to borrow terminology from Carlson and Settle (2016), political chameleons.

The tendency to misrepresent oneself to fit into socially desirable settings can be tracked by an individual-level trait: self-monitoring (Berinsky 2004; Berinsky and Lavine 2012; Gangestad

[4] As Levendusky and Malhotra (2016a) explain, "The discussion of political polarization has increased dramatically since 2000. Furthermore, the mass media depict polarization as widespread, occurring across many issues, and accompanied by incivility and dislike of the opposition, not simply issue-based disagreement…When citizens read or watch stories about polarized politics, they observe individuals who are divided and take extreme positions, who eschew compromise, and display incivility toward one another."

and Snyder 2000). Self-monitoring measures one's desire to impress others, where higher levels of self-monitoring indicate greater self-presentation desires. That is, high self-monitors are most likely to misrepresent themselves and low self-monitors are least likely to misrepresent themselves. Within the context of my argument—that polarization is exaggerated by social context—the likelihood of reporting (or overreporting) polarization should increase with higher levels of self-monitoring. For partisans who are high self-monitors—i.e., those who are especially attuned to changes in social contexts and who respond by acquiescing—a culture of political polarization means a strong social pressure *to present oneself as being politically polarized*.

Argument. In sum, I argue that affective polarization and ideological sorting may be, at least in part, inflated by social pressure—that information about political polarization creates a social environment which motivates partisans who are especially attuned to social contexts (i.e., high self-monitors) to exaggerate reports of the measures that produce affective polarization and ideological sorting.

My argument builds on a foundation of previous research that suggests information about polarization can affect people's responses to survey questions. Levendusky and Malhotra (2016a), for example, examine the effects of media coverage of polarization on political attitudes. They find that media coverage of polarization increases affective polarization, while at the same time decreasing issue polarization. Giving participants a polarized treatment increased negative emotions toward out-partisans (or, towards the exemplar of an out-partisan). This same condition, however, also increased negative emotions towards *in-partisans* (or, towards the exemplar of an

in-partisan), but to a lesser degree.[5]

The gap between the movement in negative affect toward out-partisans and in-partisans in Levendusky and Malhotra's results suggests that there are likely different segments of the public that react differently to a culture of polarization. Some, as Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan (2018) suggest, are likely turned off by polarization and thus react negatively to *both* in-partisans and out-partisans. Others, those who reacted negatively towards out-partisans only, are likely the segment of Americans I discuss—those who are encouraged by reports of polarization to exaggerate their *own* levels of polarization because they want to be a good partisan. And, as Levendusky and Malhotra explain, "While the subjects respond negatively to *both* same-party and opposite-party exemplars, the effects are substantially larger for the opposite party"—because, as I contend, there is a segment of the American public that hears about polarization and, given social motivations, acts polarized as well.

Expectations and Empirical Approach

My argument is tested with a set of analyses of 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) data, a nationally representative dataset that also includes my main variable of interest: self-monitoring. Based on my theoretic premises, we should observe that partisans who are most likely to change themselves to impress others (i.e., high self-monitors) would also be the most likely to offer responses that map onto affective polarization patterns—including lower feeling thermometers towards out-party members in comparison to feeling thermometers towards in-party

[5] Note, though, that Levendusky and Malhotra (2016a) suggest a different mechanism than the one proposed here, arguing that coverage of polarization is unflattering for partisans and makes out-partisans seem less similar to the respondent. Unfortunately, their research cannot distinguish between the mechanism that they suggest and the mechanism proposed here.

members and likes and dislikes about out-party members in comparison to those about in-party members (a measure that can be thought of as quasi-behavioral; see Iyengar et al. 2019).

These premises also suggest that partisans who are high in self-monitoring would report higher levels of ideological sorting. That is, if it is the case that reports of the measures that form affective polarization and ideological sorting are inflated by social pressure, we should see that partisans who are most susceptible to social pressure (i.e., high self-monitors) are also those most likely to report affective polarization and ideological sorting. Or, that the likelihood of reporting the components that form affective polarization and ideological sorting increases with higher levels of self-monitoring among partisans.

As previously mentioned, however, scholarship proposes three definitions of polarization. Thus far, I have hypothesized that in two of these—affective polarization and ideological sorting—we will see evidence of the effects of self-monitoring. However, I offer no direct hypothesis about issue polarization. This is because theoretic reasoning points to two different expectations for this measure. There are theoretical reasons to suggest, on the one hand, that issue polarization will follow the same trend as the other two types of polarization. That is, that high self-monitors will also be more likely to report issue polarization because to be a good partisan they take extreme positions on everything, including political issues.

On the other hand, though, there is ample research to suggest that issue polarization is an entirely different concept from affective polarization and ideological sorting—that the latter are about identity (see Mason 2018), something that issue attitudes are not as highly tied to. Given that issue polarization mostly lacks this identity component, we would not expect that those hoping to present themselves well would do so through their issue attitudes. In other words, this research

would suggest that while self-monitoring is positively correlated with affective polarization and ideological sorting, it is not so with issue polarization.

Further, issue positions are simply more complex (i.e., "harder") than reports of ideology, likes and dislikes, and feeling thermometers, which are simpler (i.e., "easier"; see Carmines and Stimson 1980). That is, it may be easier for someone trying to be a good partisan to pick up affective polarization and ideological sorting through cues, but more difficult to pick up the "correct" issue positions. This would also suggest that while self-monitoring is positively correlated with the former two, it is less correlated with issue polarization.

Measures. I have four main dependent variables of interest: two measures of affective polarization, one measure of ideological sorting, and one combined measure of issue polarization. The first measure of affective polarization relies on two feeling thermometers asked about Democrats and Republicans. Giving respondents a 0 to 100 scale, where ratings from 50 to 100 indicate favorable feelings and ratings from 0 to 50 indicate unfavorable feelings, ANES asked respondents how they felt about (among others) the Democratic and Republican Parties. This is an often-used measure of affective polarization (see Iyengar et al. 2019).

This measure—*feeling thermometers*—is coded as the absolute difference between feeling thermometers of the in-party versus out-party, where greater numbers indicate greater affective polarization. I recode this variable as binary and estimate logistic regression so that 1 indicates the most extreme polarization and 0 indicates otherwise (Klar et al. 2018), but also conduct robustness checks on this measurement (see Appendix, Table 1). It is important to note that because of the measure of the dependent variable—as well as the argument motivating this research—only those who associate with a party (i.e., weak and strong partisans) are included in the analysis.

The second dependent variable of interest—and measure of affective polarization—is based on respondents' reporting of likes and dislikes of the in-party and out-party (i.e., *likes, dislikes*; see Levendusky and Malhotra 2016a). Rather than just rely on measures towards the out-party, which measure negative partisanship rather than affective polarization (see Klar et al. 2018), I incorporate *both* measures of the in-party and out-party. Using this, I create a scale that is coded as 1 when respondents have the most extreme affective polarization (i.e., when they report likes of the in-party but no likes of the out-party, as well as dislikes of the out-party but no dislikes of the in-party). It is coded 0 otherwise (i.e., when respondents report liking *both* the in-party and the out-party or disliking both the in-party and the out-party; see Appendix, Table 2 for robustness checks). Again, only partisans are included in this analysis.

The third dependent variable of interest is *ideological sorting*—or reporting being extremely liberal when one is a Democrat or extremely conservative when one is a Republican (see Mason 2015). Thus, this variable is coded as 1 with this most extreme ideological sorting and 0 otherwise (i.e., when one reports being liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely liberal but Republican, or extremely conservative but Democrat). Again, only partisans are included.

The final dependent variable of interest is *issue polarization* and, again, this analysis is more exploratory than a test of a directional hypothesis. To examine this, I measure issue polarization by coding 21 partisan issues with responses as Democratic or Republican. If respondents aligned their issue attitudes with their partisanship, this was coded as congruent, but if respondents did *not* align their issue attitudes with their partisanship (i.e., had an out-party view or opted out of picking a side) this was coded as incongruent (see Appendix for list and coding of issues and Appendix, Table 4 for robustness checks). These 21 partisan issues were then combined

into a binary variable where 1 indicates complete congruence with one's partisanship and 0 indicates any deviation from this (Cronbach's alpha = .68). Again, only partisans are included in the analysis.

The main independent variable of interest is *self-monitoring*—or individual variance in susceptibility to social pressure. This trait was measured using Berinsky's (2004) 3-item questionnaire, which has been validated and used in political science research (e.g., Berinsky and Lavine 2012; Connors 2019; Connors et al. 2019). As is typical, the 2008 ANES population was skewed towards low self-monitors, with a mean of .31 and standard deviation of .21 on a recoded scale from 0 (low) to 1 (high). Again, as is typical, the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .67.

The same controls were included in each of the models, except for the *ideological sorting* dependent variable which naturally removes *liberal, extremity,* and *Democrat* as controls. These controls were: *media consumption* (sum of TV news, Internet news, print news, radio news, recoded from 0—never consume news—to 1—consume all news 7 days a week); *political interest* (recoded from 0—not at all interested—to 1—extremely interested); *partisan strength* (recoded to 0 as weak partisan and 1 as strong partisan); *liberal* (recoded as categorical with 0 as conservative, 1 as moderate, and 2 as liberal); *extremity* (recoded from 0—moderate—to 1—extreme ideologue); *education* (recoded from 0—grade school—to 1—advanced degree); *male* (0=female, 1=male); *age* (recoded continuous from 0 to 1); *income* (recoded continuous from 0 to 1); *white* (0=non-white, 1=white); *black* (0=non-black, 1=black); and *Democrat* (0=Republican, 1=Democrat).

Results. As predicted, self-monitoring is positively correlated with a greater likelihood of reporting extreme affective polarization in terms of feeling thermometers (p=.002; see *Table 1* and *Figure*

1—top left) and likes and dislikes (p=.037; see *Table 1* and *Figure 1*—bottom left),[6] as well as with ideological sorting (p=.012; see *Table 1* and *Figure 1*—top right). It is *negatively* correlated, however, with issue polarization (p=.055; see *Table 1* and *Figure 1*—bottom right). That is, as self-monitoring increases, reported affective polarization and ideological sorting increase, but issue polarization *decreases*. High self-monitors are more affectively polarized and ideologically sorted, but *less* polarized on issues.

These findings suggest that indeed a culture of polarization can drive exaggerated reports of affective polarization and ideological sorting, as those who are most willing to alter their preferences to impress others are also those most likely to report both affective polarization and ideological sorting. We see from the analyses that those who are both willing to associate with a party and care to make a good impression aim to be a good partisan by being an extremely liberal Democrat who hates Republicans or an extremely conservative Republican who hates Democrats.

[6] Note that self-monitoring does *not* predict reporting likes or dislikes on their own (see Appendix, Table 2). Only when these are coded as liking the in-party and disliking the out-party does self-monitoring matter.

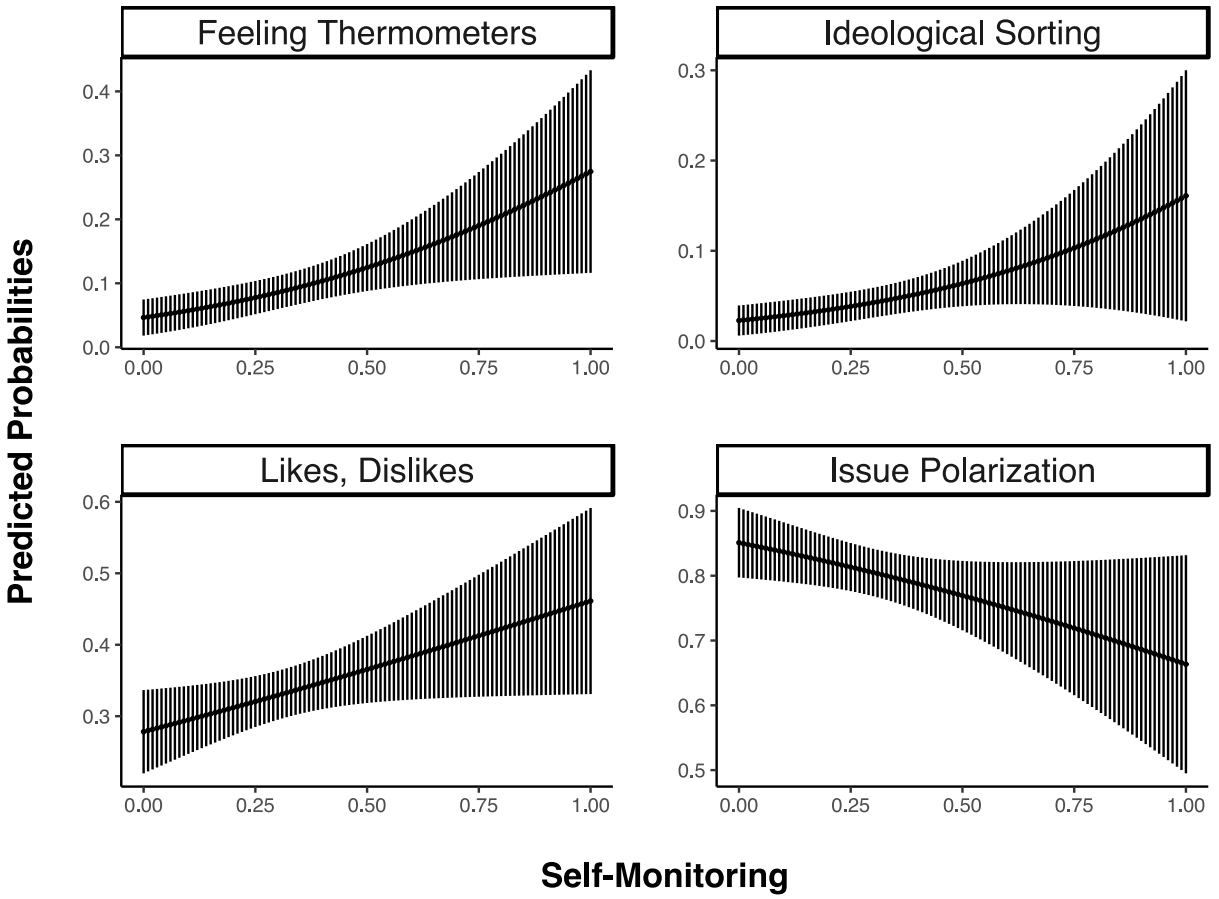
Table 1. Predicting Affective Polarization (Feeling Thermometers, Likes and Dislikes), Ideological Sorting, and Issue Polarization by Self-Monitoring

	Feeling Therm.	Likes, Dislikes	Ideological Sorting	Issue Polarization
Self-Monit	2.379	0.926	2.208	-1.166
	(0.781)	(0.444)	(0.877)	(0.608)
Media	-0.297	-0.0753	-0.681	0.620
	(0.973)	(0.672)	(1.109)	(0.736)
Interest	-1.295	-1.627	2.536	0.639
	(0.889)	(0.668)	(1.143)	(0.654)
Strength	1.739	0.582	0.559	0.480
	(0.522)	(0.208)	(0.472)	(0.281)
Liberal	-0.438	-0.358	-	-0.00368
	(0.514)	(0.296)	-	(0.400)
Extremity	0.686	0.857	-	0.817
	(0.980)	(0.517)	-	(0.779)
Education	1.702	-1.256	-0.481	1.338
	(0.869)	(0.447)	(0.967)	(0.663)
Male	0.209	-0.629	-0.0921	0.241
	(0.366)	(0.189)	(0.409)	(0.266)
Age	0.276	0.376	2.092	-0.587
	(0.972)	(0.547)	(1.145)	(0.769)
Income	-2.527	-0.670	0.593	-0.126
	(0.897)	(0.444)	(1.012)	(0.663)
White	0.455	0.178	1.096	-0.324
	(0.703)	(0.326)	(1.055)	(0.497)
Black	0.533	0.731	0.799	-0.435
	(0.726)	(0.351)	(1.095)	(0.555)
Democrat	1.399	0.727	-	1.055
	(0.616)	(0.300)	-	(0.364)
Constant	-4.755	-0.108	-7.989	-0.243
	(1.296)	(0.748)	(1.603)	(0.957)
N	443	634	600	418

Standard errors in parentheses. Only weak and strong partisans are included. ***Feeling Thermometers:*** *The dependent variable here is coded as the absolute difference between feeling thermometers of in-party versus out-party members—binary, with 1 as most extreme polarization and 0 otherwise. Logistic regression is estimated. See Appendix, Table 1 for other versions of the dependent variable coding and subsequent model estimations, which find the same general results. Self-monitoring also predicts simple negative affect towards out-party members and positive affect towards in-party members (see Appendix, Table 1). Note that because of the dependent variable measurement, only partisans are included.* ***Likes, Dislikes:*** *The dependent variable here is coded as binary with 1 as the most extreme polarization (reporting likes of in-party, but no likes of out-party, dislikes of out-party, but no dislikes of in-party) and 0 otherwise (reporting liking both in-party and out-party or reporting disliking both in-party and out-party). Because two of the controls (media and interest) are missing large amounts of data, they are held at their means for this model estimation. Note that because of dependent variable measurement, only partisans are included. Note as well that self-monitoring does not predict reporting likes or dislikes on their own (see Appendix, Table 2)—only when these are coded as liking the in-party and disliking the out-party does self-monitoring matter.* ***Ideological Sorting:*** *The dependent variable here is coded as binary with 1 as the most extreme ideological*

sorting (extremely liberal Democrat or extremely conservative Republican) and 0 otherwise (liberal, slightly liberal, moderate/middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely liberal Republican, or extremely conservative Democrat). Because of dependent variable measurement, only partisans are included and neither ideology nor democrat were included as controls. ***Issue Polarization:*** *The dependent variable here is coded as binary with 1 as most extreme issue polarization (being completely congruent with one's partisanship on 20 partisan issues) and 0 otherwise. Note that because of dependent variable measurement, only partisans are included in this analysis.* ***Self-Monitoring:*** *continuous from low (0) to high (1). Note that the liberal coefficient is in comparison to conservatives; moderates were included in the regression but not the table.*

Figure 1. Predicted Affective Polarization (Feeling Thermometers, Likes & Dislikes), Ideological Sorting, and Issue Polarization by Self-Monitoring



All figures show predicted probabilities of four different dependent variables based on logistic regression by levels of self-monitoring, from low (0) to high (1) with 95% confidence intervals. Controls included in all models: party dummy, media, interest, strength, ideology, education, male, age, income, white, and black (except for the ideological sorting model, which eliminates the party dummy and ideology controls). ***Top Left:*** *predicted affective polarization (feeling thermometers), measured as absolute difference between feeling thermometers of in-party versus out-party members—1 as most extreme polarization and 0 otherwise.* ***Bottom Left:*** *predicted affective polarization (likes and dislikes), measured as 1 with most extreme polarization (reporting likes of in-party but no likes of out-party and dislikes of out-party but no dislikes of in-party) and 0 otherwise (reporting liking both in-party and out-party or reporting disliking both in-party and out-party). Note that self-monitoring does not predict reporting likes or dislikes on their own (see Appendix, Table 2)—only when these are coded as liking the in-party and disliking the out-party*

*does self-monitoring matter. **Top Right:** predicted ideological sorting, measured as 1 with most extreme sorting (extremely liberal Democrat or extremely conservative Republican) and 0 otherwise (liberal, slightly liberal, moderate/middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely liberal Republican, or extremely conservative Democrat). **Bottom Right:** predicted issue polarization, measured as 1 with most extreme polarization (being completely congruent with one's partisanship on 21 partisan issues) and 0 otherwise.*

Robustness Checks. Various robustness checks were conducted on these results. First, I change the coding of the *feeling thermometer* variable from binary to continuous and find largely the same results (p=.034). I also split the in-party and out-party thermometers to see if one thermometer is driving the results. This does not seem to be the case, as self-monitoring increases the likelihood of respondents' reporting high in-party favorability (p=.000) *and* low out-party favorability (p=.022). See Appendix, Table 1 for results of these four analyses.

In terms of the second dependent variable of interest—*likes, dislikes*—I conduct four robustness checks. To be sure that self-monitoring is not simply predictive of reporting likes or dislikes (i.e., that high self-monitors are simply more likely to give a response to this question), I examine if self-monitoring is correlated with likes of Democrats, dislikes of Democrats, likes of Republicans, and dislikes of Republicans. This is not the case—self-monitoring is far from significantly related to each of these four outcomes. That is, self-monitoring does not predict whether one lists likes or dislikes of the parties, but it *does* predict affective polarization using these variables. Only when they are coded as likes of the in-party but no likes of the out-party and no dislikes of the in-party but dislikes of the out-party (i.e., when this affective polarization measure is created) does self-monitoring matter. See Appendix, Table 2 for full results.

Lastly, I conduct the four primary analyses from the main text among Democrats and Republicans separately to see if they act differently. While the standard errors and thus significance changes, the coefficients are similarly sized and signed, suggesting Democrats and Republicans

act analogously in their self-presentation desires influencing their reports of affective polarization and ideological sorting. See Appendix, Tables 3a and 3b.

Issue Polarization. In terms of the fourth dependent variable of interest—*issue polarization*—I conduct the same analyses but with each issue separately. That is, I examine if self-monitoring is positively correlated with party-congruent attitudes on some of the particular issues included in the issue polarization measure. I find no evidence that this is the case (see Appendix, Table 4). In other words, we see for each issue separately that self-monitoring is still not positively correlated with issue polarization.

Thus, to begin to understand why we see such differing effects of self-monitoring with the two affective polarization measures and the ideological sorting measure as compared to the issue polarization measure, I make use of the education variable. As explained earlier, it is possible that while affective polarization and ideological sorting are easy to pick up, adopting one's party's "correct" issue positions is simply more difficult (Carmines and Stimson 1980). To examine this, I checked if education levels and self-monitoring were positively interacting—that is, if those with higher education levels follow the same trend of high self-monitors being more likely to report issue polarization.

Given the binary structure of the dependent variable, I create a marginal effects plot—illustrating the effect of self-monitoring on issue polarization *by* education levels (see Appendix, Figure 1). The figure gives us some insight—showing that indeed, as education levels increase, self-monitoring becomes more positively correlated with issue polarization. Examining it differently, we can also see that the positive effect of education on issue polarization is *only* significant for high self-monitors (.31, p=.023). For low self-monitors, the effect is slightly positive

but far from significant (.11, p=.350). This cursory analysis suggests an avenue for future research to better understand self-presentation desires' effect on issue polarization.

Self-Presentation Desires and Partisanship. As previously mentioned, at first glance my argument and results may seem to contradict findings that those who wish to impress others will report political independence (Klar and Krupnikov 2016). Yet, to the contrary, my argument aims to add a broader perspective to these findings. While previous research has examined the effect of self-presentation desires on *partisan identification* (Klar and Krupnikov 2016)—finding that these desires increase the likelihood of reporting political independence—this piece of research examines the effect of self-presentation desires *within those who have already identified with a party*. Both this piece and Klar and Krupnikov (2016) examine the effect of self-presentation desires, but among different populations—the latter is focused on the entire population (including independents) and the former is focused on partisans. Indeed, the analyses in this piece are limited to only those willing to associate with a party.

The 2008 ANES dataset can give us insight into this broader perspective. When including *all* levels of partisanship (including pure independents), self-monitoring predicts the likelihood of reporting pure independence at a marginally significant level (p=.052)—see Appendix, Table 5. Once pure independents are removed, though, self-monitoring predicts affective polarization and ideological sorting (*feeling thermometers* p=.002; *likes, dislikes* p=.027; *ideological sorting* p=.022). Note that we cannot see the effect of self-monitoring on these variables *including* pure independents, as the measure of these variables naturally removes pure independents.

What remains an open question is what differentiates those who choose to associate with a party and be *extra* partisan to present themselves well to others and those who choose to claim

political independence to present themselves well to others. Resolving this empirical question is, however, beyond the scope of this manuscript—future research is required to acquire this even broader view of self-presentation desires and partisanship.

The Public is Not Uniform. While these findings suggest that affective polarization and ideological sorting are partly driven by social pressure, they certainly do not suggest that affective polarization and ideological sorting are merely social constructs. It is important to consider these findings with a broader perspective in order to understand partisanship in America. To do so, it is helpful to imagine the public in a more nuanced way, with different segments of Americans each having their own reactions to the political world.

Rather than imagining one trend among the public (e.g., "Democrats hate Republicans" or "everyone is faking polarization" or "people hate politics"), let us imagine three overarching segments of Americans. The first group is outlined by Mason (2015, 2018) and Iyengar and Westwood (2015), among others—they are the genuinely polarized and sorted partisans. They are extremely liberal Democrats who hate Republicans and extremely conservative Republicans who hate Democrats. The second group is responding to this first group—they are turned off by these extreme partisans and thus are withdrawing from politics (Klar et al. 2018), or at least withdrawing from partisanship (Klar and Krupnikov 2016). The third group—the segment of the public of which I'm theorizing—is *also* responding to this first group, but in a different manner. Rather than withdrawing from politics or partisanship, this segment is becoming *more partisan*—or at least reporting to be so.

Discussion & Conclusion

Relying on a set of analyses of the 2008 ANES dataset—which included a measure of self-monitoring, an individual-level trait that measures susceptibility to changes in social context—this piece found that affective polarization and ideological sorting are inflated by social pressure. In particular, I argued and found that a strong culture of political polarization (such as the one we have today) drives those especially attuned to social contexts to exaggerate reports of the measures that build affective polarization and ideological sorting. These findings give us pause and motivation to better understand the measurement of political polarization, the context surrounding that polarization, and more broadly how social influence affects the expression of partisanship.

We are, however—as is typical with research—left with some lingering questions. First, in terms of future methods to help us better understand social influence and political polarization, experimental data would certainly help us get closer to claims of causality. Importantly, experimental data would help us to understand the argument proposed in this piece in comparison to the argument that high self-monitors are in more homogeneous social settings because they feel uncomfortable in disagreeing environments (Weber and Klar 2019). Similarly, over-time data spanning multiple decades would help us get a better picture of how changing political contexts influence the reporting of political polarization. Unfortunately, at this point, this second analysis is not possible, as the 2008 ANES dataset is the only ANES dataset that measures self-monitoring. Future research should, though, examine the first method, especially given the conflicting arguments.

In terms of lingering theoretical questions, two big stones are left unturned. First, as previously mentioned, we need a broader picture of how self-presentation desires influence partisanship and partisan expression. What differentiates the high self-monitor that becomes an

independent from the one who becomes an ideologically-sorted, affectively-polarized partisan? Secondly, we are left wondering about self-reports of affective polarization and ideological sorting. In particular, what do these self-reports *mean*? Are they cheap talk? Do they lead to political behavior that mimics these reports? A next step would be to examine this, testing the effects of both the self-monitoring trait and social pressure on political polarization *behavior*. Getting to this next step would help us to situate these findings better—we could see if people are essentially lying about how much they are polarized, or if they are instead following the social pressure to the extreme and adopting the same partisan biases that the genuinely polarized express.

Further, this could help us understand the normative consequences of these findings. As discussed in the introduction, there are various interpretations of these findings—both optimistic and pessimistic. If it is indeed the case that these polarization reports are cheap talk, then we have evidence of arbitrary overreporting of polarization, which could be optimistic (i.e., we are not as polarized as we may seem) or pessimistic (i.e., people are lying about hating each other on surveys). If we find, however, that these reports actually lead to polarized political behavior (something that is possible, given the *likes, dislikes* measure can be thought of as quasi-behavioral; see Iyengar et al. 2019), we would have evidence of a "snowball effect" of political climates—the idea that a culture of political polarization will, on its own, produce more polarization.

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Appendix

Issues and coding used for issue polarization:

1. *Gun control* ("should the government it more difficult to buy a gun?" more difficult = Democratic, keep these rules about the same = neutral, make it easier = Republican)
2. *Spending on environment* (summary—increase or decrease spending on environment: increased a great deal / a moderate amount / increased a little = Democratic, kept about the same = neutral, decreased a little / decreased a moderate amount / decreased a great deal / cut out entirely = Republican)
3. *Defense spending* (summary—spend more, less, or same on defense: a lot less / somewhat less / slightly less = Democratic, about the same = neutral, slightly less / somewhat less / a lot less = Republican)
4. *Universal health care* (summary—favor or oppose universal coverage: favor a great deal / favor moderately / favor a little = Democratic, neither favor nor oppose = neutral, oppose a little / oppose moderately, oppose a great deal = Republican)
5. *Illegal immigration* (summary—favor or oppose illegal immigrant work period: favor a great deal / favor moderately / favor a little = Democratic, neither favor nor oppose = neutral, oppose a little / oppose moderately / oppose a great deal = Republican)
6. *Public school spending* (summary—increase or decrease spend on public schools: increased a great deal / increased a moderate amount / increased a little = Democratic, kept about the same = neutral, decreased a little / decreased a moderate amount / decreased a great deal = Republican)
7. *Welfare spending* (summary—increase or decrease spending on welfare: increased a great deal / increased a moderate amount / increased a little = Democratic, kept about the same = neutral, decreased a little / decreased a moderate amount / decreased a great deal / cut out entirely = Republican)
8. *Foreign aid spending* (summary—increase or decrease spending on foreign aid: increased a great deal / increased a moderate amount / increased a little = Democratic, kept about the same = neutral, decreased a little / decreased a moderate amount / decreased a great deal / cut out entirely = Republican)
9. *Spending on poor* (summary—increase or decrease spending on aid to poor: increased a great deal / increased a moderate amount / increased a little = Democratic, kept about the same = neutral, decreased a little / decreased a moderate amount / decreased a great deal / cut out entirely = Republican)
10. *Tightening the border* (summary—increase or decrease spending on border: increased a great deal / increased a moderate amount / increased a little = Republican, kept about the same = neutral, decreased a little / decreased a moderate amount / decreased a great deal / cut out entirely = Democratic)
11. *War on terror* (summary—increase or decrease spending on war on terrorism: increased a great deal / increased a moderate amount / increased a little = Republican, kept about the same = neutral, decreased a little / decreased a moderate amount / decreased a great deal / cut out entirely = Democratic)
12. *Lower emission standards* (summary—favor or oppose lower emission standards: favor a great deal / favor moderately / favor a little = Democratic, neither favor nor oppose = neutral, oppose a little / oppose moderately / oppose a great deal = Republican)

13. *Death penalty* (summary—favor or oppose death penalty: favor strongly / favor not strongly = Republican, oppose not strongly / oppose strongly = Democratic)
14. *Protect gays against job discrimination* (summary—favor or oppose laws protecting gays against job discrimination: favor strongly / favor not strongly = Democratic, oppose not strongly / oppose strongly = Republican)
15. *Gays serve in military* (summary—favor or oppose allowing gays to serve in the military: feel strongly should be allowed to serve / feel not strongly should be allowed to serve = Democratic, feel not strongly should not be allowed to serve / feel strongly should not be allowed to serve = Republican)
16. *Raise taxes* (summary—reduce deficit by raising taxes: favor strongly / favor not strongly / lean toward favoring = Democratic, do not lean either way = neutral, lean toward opposing / oppose not strongly / oppose strongly = Republican)
17. *Reduce military spending* (summary—cut deficit by reducing military spending: favor strongly / favor not strongly / lean toward favoring = Democratic, do not lean either way = neutral, lean toward opposing / oppose not strongly / oppose strongly = Republican)
18. *Cut programs* (summary—cut deficit by cutting other programs: favor strongly / favor not strongly / lean toward favoring = Republican, do not lean either way = neutral, lean toward opposing / oppose not strongly / oppose strongly = Democratic)
19. *Abortion* (summary—abortion when nonfatal health risk: favor = Democratic, neither favor nor oppose = neutral, oppose = Republican)
20. *Privatize social security* (summary—invest social security in stocks and bonds: favor strongly / favor not strongly / lean toward favoring = Republican, do not lean either way = neutral, lean toward opposing / oppose not strongly / oppose strongly = Democratic)
21. *Torture terrorists* (summary—favor or oppose torturing suspected terrorists: favor a great deal / favor moderately / favor a little = Republican, neither favor nor oppose = neutral, oppose a little / oppose moderately / oppose a great deal = Democratic)

Table 1. Continuous Affective Polarization, Inparty Thermometer, and Outparty Thermometer by Self-Monitoring

	Affective Cont.[7]	Inparty Therm.[8]	Outparty Therm.[9]
Self-Monit[10]	13.92	2.348	1.367
	(6.548)	(0.614)	(0.598)
Media	1.834	0.439	-0.443
	(7.000)	(0.706)	(0.713)
Interest	0.261	0.102	0.109
	(7.616)	(0.653)	(0.670)
Strength	20.39	1.389	1.002
	(2.915)	(0.320)	(0.316)
Liberal[11]	-5.351	-0.960	-0.131
	(4.900)	(0.390)	(0.390)
Extremity	18.19	0.0790	1.382
	(8.455)	(0.773)	(0.743)
Education	16.34	-0.136	1.251
	(6.893)	(0.624)	(0.607)
Male	2.780	-0.202	0.344
	(2.731)	(0.267)	(0.262)
Age	8.276	1.584	0.543
	(8.247)	(0.739)	(0.732)
Income	-16.63	-2.712	-1.403
	(6.681)	(0.662)	(0.642)
White	0.609	-0.342	0.200
	(4.165)	(0.450)	(0.469)
Black	-1.701	0.537	0.170
	(5.358)	(0.475)	(0.511)
Democrat	17.90	1.024	0.501
	(5.250)	(0.398)	(0.394)
Constant	105.4	-2.526	-4.103
	(9.073)	(0.940)	(0.943)
N	441	443	443

[7] The same as *feeling thermometer* in the main text, except coded continuously rather than binary, where higher numbers indicate greater affective polarization. OLS estimated.

[8] From the *feeling thermometer* questions. Coded from 0 to 100, where higher numbers indicate more favorability toward the in-party and lower numbers indicate less favorability toward the in-party. OLS estimated.

[9] From the *feeling thermometer* questions. Coded from 0 to 100, where higher numbers indicate *less* favorability toward the out-party and lower numbers indicate *more* favorability toward the out-party. OLS estimated.

[10] Self-monitoring is continuous from low (0) to high (1).

[11] The liberal coefficient is in comparison to conservatives; moderates were included in the regression but not the table.

Table 2. General Likes and Dislikes by Self-Monitoring[12]

	Like Democrat[13]	Dislike Democrat[14]	Like Republican[15]	Dislike Republican[16]
Self-Moni[17]	0.596	-0.343	-0.269	0.287
	(0.475)	(0.388)	(0.424)	(0.392)
Media	0.0416	0.477	0.484	0.147
	(0.689)	(0.599)	(0.641)	(0.593)
Interest	1.075	1.811	0.631	1.282
	(0.635)	(0.574)	(0.593)	(0.546)
Strength	0.318	-0.0330	0.120	0.329
	(0.196)	(0.173)	(0.190)	(0.169)
Liberal[18]	0.475	-0.0404	-0.577	0.563
	(0.292)	(0.229)	(0.241)	(0.235)
Extremity	-0.149	-0.108	-0.543	-0.430
	(0.506)	(0.432)	(0.473)	(0.434)
Education	1.619	1.696	1.397	1.757
	(0.456)	(0.388)	(0.420)	(0.402)
Male	-0.0107	0.568	0.368	0.396
	(0.184)	(0.162)	(0.176)	(0.162)
Age	-0.218	0.190	-0.0166	-0.138
	(0.537)	(0.463)	(0.510)	(0.461)
Income	0.730	0.738	0.381	0.613
	(0.445)	(0.382)	(0.416)	(0.377)
White	0.0738	0.335	0.0922	0.347
	(0.318)	(0.254)	(0.280)	(0.263)
Black	0.109	-0.519	-0.0364	0.205
	(0.372)	(0.291)	(0.311)	(0.291)
Democrat	2.579	-0.944	-2.385	0.946
	(0.260)	(0.215)	(0.235)	(0.217)
Constant	-2.897	-2.266	0.354	-2.713
	(0.752)	(0.630)	(0.661)	(0.642)
N	845	838	844	841

Table 3a. Are Republicans and Democrats Acting Differently? ***Just Democrats***

[12] Because two of the controls (*media* and *interest*) are missing large amounts of data, respondents with this missing data are held at their means for these model estimations.

[13] Asked if there is anything respondent likes about the Democratic party, with 1 as yes and 0 as no. Logistic regression estimated.

[14] Asked if there is anything respondent dislikes about the Democratic party, with 1 as yes and 0 as no. Logistic regression estimated.

[15] Asked if there is anything respondent likes about the Republican party, with 1 as yes and 0 as no. Logistic regression estimated.

[16] Asked if there is anything respondent dislikes about the Republican party, with 1 as yes and 0 as no. Logistic regression estimated.

[17] Self-monitoring is continuous from low (0) to high (1).

[18] The liberal coefficient is in comparison to conservatives; moderates were included in the regression but not the table.

	Feeling Therm.	Likes, Dislikes	Ideological Sorting	Issue Polarization
Self-Monit	2.321	0.938	2.735	-1.342
	(0.884)	(0.511)	(1.255)	(0.796)
Media	-0.719	-0.0572	-0.0274	0.0152
	(1.104)	(0.823)	(1.605)	(1.082)
Interest	-1.468	-2.181	2.085	2.437
	(0.980)	(0.820)	(1.740)	(0.957)
Strength	2.304	0.607	0.894	0.229
	(0.661)	(0.257)	(0.820)	(0.432)
Liberal	-0.564	-0.470	-	0.578
	(0.545)	(0.348)	-	(0.522)
Extremity	0.200	1.356	-	0.288
	(1.067)	(0.665)	-	(1.092)
Education	1.773	-1.285	2.004	1.841
	(1.021)	(0.555)	(1.364)	(1.070)
Male	0.539	-0.508	-0.138	-0.554
	(0.419)	(0.235)	(0.614)	(0.399)
Age	0.125	-0.385	3.381	-3.044
	(1.097)	(0.694)	(1.675)	(1.167)
Income	-3.457	-0.574	-0.784	-0.838
	(1.055)	(0.531)	(1.583)	(1.055)
White	0.333	0.178	15.25	-2.338
	(0.733)	(0.363)	(2,235)	(1.103)
Black	0.357	0.759	15.65	-2.185
	(0.744)	(0.376)	(2,235)	(1.113)
Constant	-2.521	1.096	-24.58	3.479
	(1.316)	(0.874)	(2,235)	(1.530)
N	266	386	403	251

Table 3b. Are Republicans and Democrats Acting Differently? ***Just Republicans***

	Feeling Therm.	Likes, Dislikes	Ideological Sorting	Issue Polarization
Self-Monit	2.787	0.575	1.543	2.787
	(2.256)	(1.379)	(1.412)	(2.256)
Media	2.702	0.121	-1.587	2.702
	(2.729)	(1.336)	(1.754)	(2.729)
Interest	-2.999	-0.0710	3.558	-2.999
	(2.755)	(1.372)	(1.830)	(2.755)
Strength	2.534	0.942	0.284	2.534
	(1.665)	(0.569)	(0.614)	(1.665)
Liberal	-	0.108	-	-
	-	(1.306)	-	-
Extremity	14.29	0.906	-	14.29
	(5.745)	(1.547)	-	(5.745)
Education	5.624	-0.990	-3.786	5.624
	(3.138)	(1.145)	(1.847)	(3.138)
Male	-0.822	-1.126	-0.244	-0.822
	(1.353)	(0.507)	(0.612)	(1.353)
Age	-4.132	1.643	-0.174	-4.132
	(3.695)	(1.468)	(1.903)	(3.695)
Income	2.887	-1.385	0.721	2.887
	(3.403)	(1.197)	(1.401)	(3.403)
White	-	-0.323	0.440	-
	-	(1.251)	(1.166)	-
Black	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
Constant	-19.80	-1.227	-3.872	-19.80
	(6.905)	(2.071)	(2.052)	(6.905)
N	152	120	191	152

Standard errors in parentheses. **Feeling Thermometers:** The dependent variable here is coded as the absolute difference between feeling thermometers of in-party versus out-party members—binary, with 1 as most extreme polarization and 0 otherwise. Logistic regression is estimated. Note that because of the dependent variable measurement, only partisans are included. **Likes, Dislikes:** The dependent variable here is coded as binary with 1 as the most extreme polarization (reporting likes of in-party, but no likes of out-party, dislikes of out-party, but no dislikes of in-party) and 0 otherwise (reporting liking both in-party and out-party or reporting disliking both in-party and out-party). Because two of the controls (media and interest) are missing large amounts of data, they are held at their means for this model estimation. Note that because of dependent variable measurement, only partisans are included. **Ideological Sorting:** The dependent variable here is coded as binary with 1 as the most extreme ideological sorting (extremely liberal Democrat or extremely conservative Republican) and 0 otherwise (liberal, slightly liberal, moderate/middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely liberal Republican, or extremely conservative Democrat). Because of dependent variable measurement, only partisans are included and neither ideology nor democrat were included as controls. **Issue Polarization:** The dependent variable here is coded as binary with 1 as most extreme issue polarization (being completely congruent with one's partisanship on 21 partisan issues) and 0 otherwise. Note that because of dependent variable measurement, only partisans are included in this analysis. **Self-Monitoring:** continuous from low (0) to high (1). Note that the liberal coefficient is in comparison to conservatives; moderates were included in the regression but not the table.

Table 4. Is Self-Monitoring Positively Related to Issue Polarization? (Issues Separated)

	SM Coefficient	SM Standard Error
Gun Control	-.360	.56
Spending on Environment	-.429	.60
Defense Spending	.170	.52
Universal Health Care	-.362	.51
Illegal Immigration	.258	.51
Public School Spending	-.380	.70
Welfare Spending	.429	.50
Spending on Foreign Aid	.269	.57
Spending on Poor	-.444	.63
Tightening the Border	.811	.64
War on Terror	.166	.54
Lower Emission Standards	.876	.56
Death Penalty	.160	.54
Protect Gays from Job Discrimination	.138	.58
Gays Serving in Military	-.309	.60
Raising Taxes	-1.05	.58
Reducing Military Spending	.260	.51
Cutting Programs	-.729	.67
Abortion	-.206	.49
Privatize Social Security	-.557	.50
Torture Terrorists	.166	.50

Table 4 illustrates the coefficients and standard errors of self-monitoring in the same logit regression with the same controls as in the main issue polarization model—*but* with the dependent variable as matching issue attitudes with respondents' partisanship (i.e., issue polarization) *for each issue separately*. The only dependent variable that shows self-monitoring as even marginally significant is raising taxes (p=.071), and given the multiple comparisons in these analyses, giving any substantive meaning to this result is not recommended.

Figure 1. Marginal Effect of Self-Monitoring on Issue Polarization by Education Levels

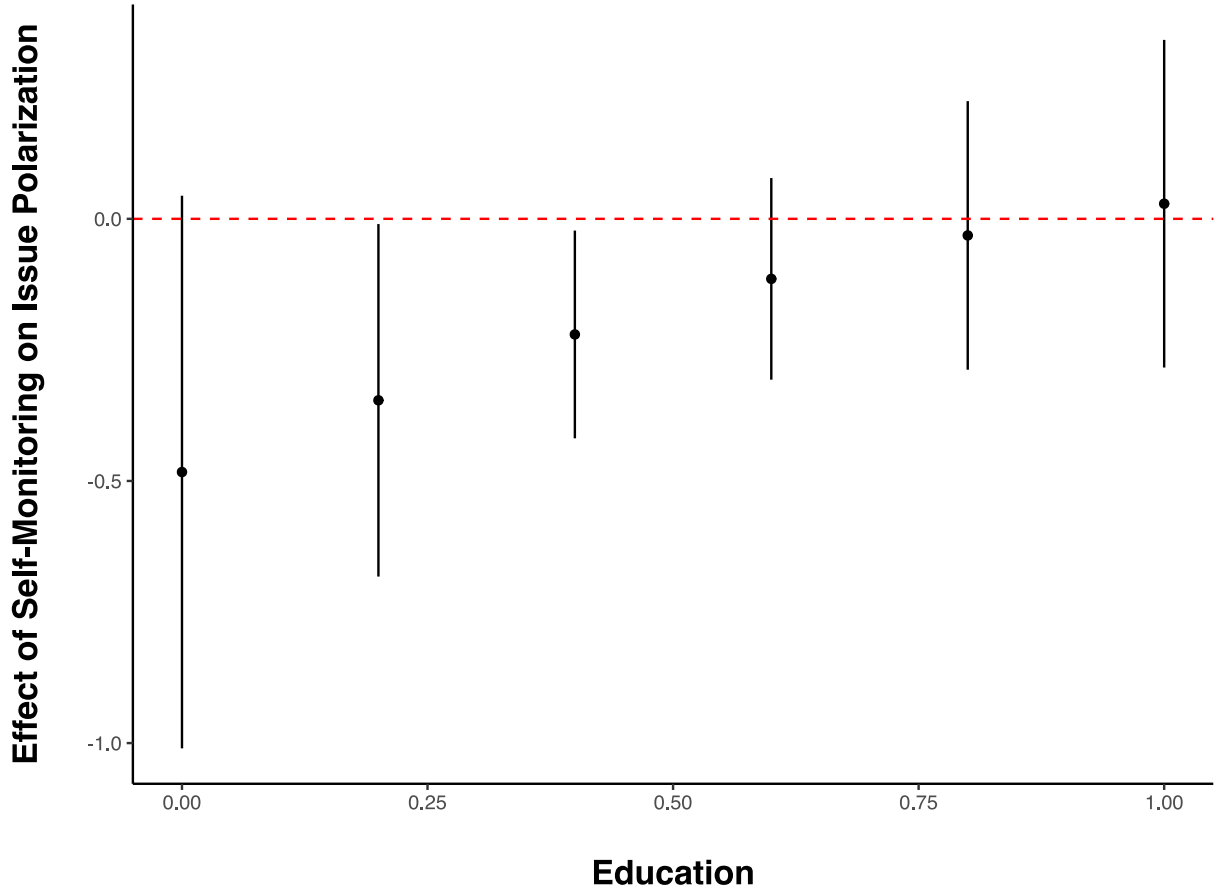

Figure 1 illustrates the marginal effect of self-monitoring on issue polarization by education levels, where 0=lowest education level (grade school) and 1=highest education level (advanced degree). Included in the logistic regression are the same controls from the other models.

Table 5. Self-Presentation Desires and Partisanship

	Pure Independence[19]
Self-Monitoring[20]	1.250
	(0.643)
Media	-1.155
	(0.736)
Interest	-1.166
	(0.638)
Liberal[21]	0.336
	(0.414)
Extremity	-0.311
	(0.975)
Education	-0.220
	(0.681)
Male	0.556
	(0.278)
Age	-0.934
	(0.815)
Income	-0.983
	(0.631)
White	0.591
	(0.421)
Black	-0.383
	(0.542)
Democrat	-
	-
Constant	-1.478
	(0.898)
N	690

[19] Dependent variable coded as 1 if respondent says they are a pure independent and 0 otherwise. Logistic regression estimated.

[20] Self-monitoring is continuous from low (0) to high (1).

[21] The liberal coefficient is in comparison to conservatives; moderates were included in the regression but not the table.