

# Uncivil Agreement

How Politics Became Our Identity

LILLIANA MASON

The University of Chicago Press  
Chicago and London

CONTENTS

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

© 2018 by The University of Chicago

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles and reviews. For more information, contact the University of Chicago Press, 1427 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637.

Published 2018

Printed in the United States of America

27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-52440-5 (cloth)

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-52454-2 (paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-52468-9 (e-book)

DOI: 10.7208/chicago/9780226524689.001.0001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mason, Lilliana, author.

Title: Uncivil agreement : how politics became our identity / Lilliana Mason.

Description: Chicago ; London : The University of Chicago Press, 2018. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017046162 | ISBN 9780226524405 (cloth : alk. paper) |

ISBN 9780226524542 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780226524689 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Party affiliation—United States. | Political parties—United

States. | Political activists—United States. | United States—Politics and

government—21st century.

Classification: LCC JK2271 .M312 2018 | DDC 324.273—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017046162>

© This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

*Acknowledgments / vii*

ONE / Identity-Based Democracy / 1

TWO / Using Old Words in New Ways / 17

THREE / A Brief History of Social Sorting / 24

FOUR / Partisan Prejudice / 45

FIVE / Socially Sorted Parties / 61

SIX / The Outrage and Elation of Partisan Sorting / 78

SEVEN / Activism for the Wrong Reasons / 102

EIGHT / Can We Fix It? / 127

*Appendix / 143*

*Notes / 159*

*References / 165*

*Index / 177*

Center for Political Studies, the Indiana University Center on American Politics, the Georgetown American Government Seminar, and the University of Maryland American Politics Workshop.

For being reliable and kind colleagues, I thank my mentors Antoine Banks, Mike Hammer, and Frances Lee, as well as the rest of the extremely supportive Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland.

To Bill Bishop, my fairy godfather, you found my research out in the wilds of academic scholarship and helped me spread the word.

For one surprise email early on in this process, I thank Morris Fiorina, who helped me believe that this whole idea was worthwhile.

To my parents: you are the reason I chose academia, and your continuing encouragement and support make every day possible. To my brothers, Joe and Keith: your talented ears helped me write this book in my own voice.

And beyond all others, I thank the people who truly sacrificed their time and my attention. To my family—Dave, Penny, and Mabel: you are the reason I write and the reason I can. This book is dedicated to you. To my daughters in particular: your curiosity, endless enthusiasm, and faith give me hope for the next generation of Americans. It's up to you to fix this. I can't think of anyone more qualified.

## ONE

# Identity-Based Democracy

In the summer of 1954, the social psychologist Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues recruited twenty-two fifth-grade boys from Oklahoma City and sent them to two adjacent campsites in Robbers Cave State Park. The boys were carefully selected to be nearly identical to each other in social, educational, physical, and emotional fitness. They were all white, Protestant, and middle class. None had ever met the others before. They were carefully divided into two equal-sized teams, designed to be similar to each other in every possible way. The two teams came to call themselves the Eagles and the Rattlers, and without knowing it they participated in a three-week-long psychological experiment.

During the first week, the teams were kept separate. The boys on each team grew to know each other and to form, from scratch, a sense of being a group. In the second week, each team learned of the other's existence. Having never laid eyes on the other team, the boys on each side immediately began referring to the others as "outsiders," "intruders," and "those boys at the other end of the camp." They grew impatient for a challenge. The experimenters arranged a tournament between the Eagles and the Rattlers. When they came into contact for the very first time—to play baseball—a member of the Eagles immediately called one of the Rattlers "dirty shirt." By the second day of the tournament, both teams were regularly name-calling and using derogatory terms such as *pigs*, *bums*, and *cheaters*, and they began to show reluctance to spend time with members of the other team. Even boys who were compelled to sit out the competitions hurled insults from the sidelines.

In the next few days, the relations between the teams quickly degraded. The Eagles burned the Rattlers' flag. The Rattlers raided the Eagles' cabin in the middle of the night. The Eagles raided the Rattlers' cabin in the middle

of the day. Boys from both sides began to collect rocks to use in combat, fistfights broke out, and the staff decided to "stop the interaction altogether to avoid possible injury" (Sherif et al. 1988, 115). They were sent back to their separate camps. By the end of the second week, twenty-two highly similar boys who had met only two weeks before had formed two nearly warring tribes, with only the gentle nudge of isolation and competition to encourage them.

By the start of the third week, the conflict had affected the boys' abilities to judge objective reality. They were given a task to collect as many beans off the ground as possible. Each boy's collection was viewed by both groups on an overhead projector for five seconds. The campers were asked to quickly estimate the number of beans collected by each child. Every boy estimated more beans for their own teammates than for the children on the opposing team. The experimenters had shown them the same number of beans every time.

The Robbers Cave experiment was one of the first to look at the determinants and effects of group membership and intergroup conflict. It inspired years of increasingly precise and wide-ranging research, looking into exactly how our group memberships shape us, affect our relationships with outsiders, and distort our perceptions of objective reality. The following chapters will discuss many of these results. But the simplicity of the Robbers Cave experiment is itself telling. The boys at Robbers Cave needed nothing but isolation and competition to almost instantaneously consider the other team to be "dirty bums," to hold negative stereotypes about them, to avoid social contact with them, and to overestimate their own group's abilities. In very basic ways, group identification and conflict change the way we think and feel about ourselves and our opponents.

We, as modern Americans, probably like to think of ourselves as more sophisticated and tolerant than a group of fifth-grade boys from 1954. In many ways, of course, we are. But the Rattlers and the Eagles have a lot more in common with today's Democrats and Republicans than we would like to believe. Recently, the presidential campaign and election of Donald Trump laid bare some of the basest motivations in the American electorate, and they provide a compelling demonstration of the theory underlying this book.

The Trump phenomenon is particularly rooted in identity and intergroup competition—something that Trump himself often highlights. In September 2015, then-candidate Trump told a crowd, "We will have so much winning if I get elected that you may get bored with the winning" (Schwartz 2015). Trump's ultimately successful rhetoric, while often criticized for its crudeness and lack of ideological coherence, is consistent in its most important message: we will win. The "we" that is promised to win is a crucial ele-

ment for understanding the election of Donald Trump and, more broadly, recent politics in the American electorate as a whole.

The election of Trump is the culmination of a process by which the American electorate has become deeply socially divided along partisan lines. As the parties have grown racially, religiously, and socially distant from one another, a new kind of social discord has been growing. The increasing political divide has allowed political, public, electoral, and national norms to be broken with little to no consequence. The norms of racial, religious, and cultural respect have deteriorated. Partisan battles have helped organize Americans' distrust for "the other" in politically powerful ways. In this political environment, a candidate who picks up the banner of "us versus them" and "winning versus losing" is almost guaranteed to tap into a current of resentment and anger across racial, religious, and cultural lines, which have recently divided neatly by party.

Across the electorate, Americans have been dividing with increasing distinction into two partisan teams. Emerging research has shown that members of both parties negatively stereotype members of the opposing party, and the extent of this partisan stereotyping has increased by 50 percent between 1960 and 2010 (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). They view the other party as more extreme than their own, while they view their own party as not at all extreme (Jacobson 2012). In June 2016, a Pew study found that for the first time in more than twenty years, majorities of Democrats and Republicans hold *very* unfavorable views of their partisan opponents (Pew 2016). American partisans today prefer to live in neighborhoods with members of their own party, expressing less satisfaction with their neighborhood when told that opposing partisans live there (Hui 2013).

Increasing numbers of partisans don't want party leaders to compromise, blaming the other party for all incivility in the government (Wolf, Strachan, and Shea 2012), even though, according to a 2014 Pew poll, 71 percent of Americans believe that a failure of the two parties to work together would harm the nation "a lot" (Pew 2014). Yet, as a 2016 Pew poll reports, "Most partisans say that, when it comes to how Democrats and Republicans should address the most important issues facing the country, their party should get more out of the deal" (Pew 2016).

Democrats and Republicans also view objective economic conditions differently, depending on which party is in power (Enns and McAvoy 2012). In the week before the 2016 election, 16 percent of Republicans and 61 percent of Democrats believed the US economy was getting better. In the week after the election, 49 percent of Republicans and 46 percent of Democrats believed the economy was improving (Gallup 2016).

These attitudes are all strikingly reminiscent of the relations between the Rattlers and the Eagles. Those boys desperately wanted to defeat each other, for no reason other than that they were in different groups. Group victory is a powerful prize, and American partisans have increasingly seen that goal as more important than the practical matters of governing a nation. Democrats and Republicans do not like each other. But unlike the Rattlers and the Eagles, the Democrats and Republicans today make up 85 percent of the American population.<sup>1</sup>

This book looks at the effects of our group identities, particularly our partisan identities and other party-linked identities, on our abilities to fairly judge political opponents, to view politics with a reasoned and unbiased eye, and to evaluate objective reality. I explain how natural and easy it can be for Democrats and Republicans to see the world through partisan eyes and why we are increasingly doing so. Just like the Rattlers and the Eagles, American partisans today are prone to stereotyping, prejudice, and emotional volatility, a phenomenon that I refer to as social polarization. Rather than simply disagreeing over policy outcomes, we are increasingly blind to our commonalities, seeing each other only as two teams fighting for a trophy.

Social polarization is defined by prejudice, anger, and activism on behalf of that prejudice and anger. These phenomena are increasing quickly—more quickly, in fact, than the level of our policy disagreements. We act like we disagree more than we really do. Like the Rattlers and the Eagles, our conflicts are largely over who we think we are rather than over reasoned differences of opinion.

The separation of the country into two teams discourages compromise and encourages an escalation of conflict, with no camp staff to break up the fights. The cooperation and compromise required by democracy grow less attainable as partisan isolation and conflict increase. As political scientist Seth Maskett wrote in December 2016, “The Republican Party is demonstrating every day that it hates Democrats more than it loves democracy” (Maskett 2016). That is, the election of Donald Trump and the policy and party conflicts his campaign engendered has revealed a preference for party victory over real policy outcomes that has only been building over time.

### The First Step Is to Admit There Is a Problem

In 1950, the American Political Science Association (APSA) assembled a Committee on Political Parties that produced a report arguing for a “responsible two-party system” (American Political Science Association 1950). As

they argued, “popular government in a nation of more than 150 million people requires political parties which provide the electorate with a proper range of choice between alternatives of action” (APSA Report 1950, 15). Parties, therefore, simplify politics for people who rightly do not have the time or resources to be political experts. In fact, E. E. Schattschneider argued in 1942 that “political parties created democracy and that modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties” (Schattschneider 1942, 1).

Sean Theriault, in his 2008 book on congressional polarization, described the context of the APSA report this way:

When the report was released (the 81st Congress, 1950), the average Democrat in the House was less than 3 standard deviations away from the average Republican. In the Senate, the distance was less than 2.25 standard deviations. Little changed in the ensuing 25 years. . . . As a result of both polarization between the parties and homogenization within the parties, by the 108th Congress (2003–4), the average party members were separated by more than 5 standard deviations in the House and almost 5 standard deviations in the Senate. . . . Now, political scientists, in claiming that party polarization has drastic consequences, are offering reforms to weaken the party leadership inside Congress. . . . Although polarized parties may be ugly for the legislative process, they were the prescription for a responsible electorate. No longer are constituents forced to make the complicated vote choice between a liberal Republican and a conservative Democrat. Additionally, voters need not wonder whom to credit or blame for the way that Congress operates. (Theriault 2008, 226)

Political parties are indeed important elements of democracy. Parties simplify the voting decision. The vast majority of American citizens are not, and cannot be expected to be, political experts. They do not read legislation; many do not even know which party is currently in the majority. But most voters have a sense of party loyalty. They know, either through a lifetime of learning, from parental socialization, from news media, or through some combination thereof, that one party is better suited to them. This acts as a heuristic, a cognitive shortcut that allows voters to make choices that are informed by some helpful truth. According to Schattschneider (1942), this is a crucial element of representative democracy.

Even better, when people feel linked to a party, they tend to more often participate in politics, just like sports fans attend a game and cheer. Partisanship, then, is one important link between individuals and political action. It encourages citizens to participate and feel involved in their own democracy.

So why write a book about the problems generated by partisan identity? It should be clarified at the start that this book is not opposed to all partisanship, all parties, party systems, or even partisan discord. There has been, and can be, a responsible two-party system in American politics. Instead, this book explains how the responsible part of a two-party system can be called into question when the electorate itself begins to lose perspective on the differences between opponents and enemies. If the mass electorate can be driven to insulate themselves from their partisan opponents, closing themselves off from cordial interaction, then parties become a tool of division rather than organization. Parties can help citizens construct and maintain a functioning government. But if citizens use parties as a social dividing line, those same parties can keep citizens from agreeing to the compromise and cooperation that necessarily define democracy.

Partisanship grows irresponsible when it sends partisans into action for the wrong reasons. Activism is almost always a good thing, particularly when we have so often worried about an apathetic electorate. But if the electorate is moved to action by a desire for victory that exceeds their desire for the greater good, the action is no longer, as regards the general electorate, responsible.

In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate how partisan, ideological, religious, and racial identities have, in recent decades, moved into strong alignment, or have become "sorted." This means that each party has grown increasingly socially homogeneous. It is not a new finding. Matthew Levendusky (2009) wrote a thorough review of how partisan and ideological identities, in particular, have grown increasingly sorted. Alan Abramowitz (2011) wrote a full summary of the polarization of various demographic groups in the American electorate. Both authors note the increasing divide in the electorate but generally come to the conclusion that, on balance, this sorting or demographic polarization could be read as a source for good, as it has simplified our electoral choices and increased political engagement.

I take a more cautious, even cautionary, view of the effects of the social, demographic, and ideological sorting that has occurred during recent decades. In line with Bill Bishop's (2009) book *The Big Sort*, I argue that this new alignment has degraded the cross-cutting social ties that once allowed for partisan compromise. This has generated an electorate that is more biased against and angry at opponents, and more willing to act on that bias and anger.

There is a very wide line between a political rally and an angry mob. At some point, however, there must be an assessment of how closely a responsible party can or should approach that line. When parties grow more so-

cially homogeneous, their members are quicker to anger and tend toward intolerance. I argue here that, despite clearer partisan boundaries and a more active public, the polarizing effects of social sorting have done more harm than good to American democracy.

Robert Kagan, a prominent neoconservative, wrote in spring 2016, "Here is the other threat to liberty that Alexis de Tocqueville and the ancient philosophers warned about: that the people in a democracy, excited, angry and unconstrained, might run roughshod over even the institutions created to preserve their freedoms" (Kagan 2016).

As American partisans find themselves in increasingly socially isolated parties, it is worth examining what kind of effects this social isolation may have on their political behavior and sense of civic responsibility.

### Cross-Pressures

For decades, political scientists have understood that the effects of partisanship are mitigated by what are called "cross-cutting cleavages." These are attitudes or identities that are not commonly found in the partisan's party. If a person is a member of one party and also a member of a social group that is generally associated with the opposing party, the effect of partisanship on bias and action can be dampened. However, if a person is a member of one party and also a member of another social group that is mostly made up of fellow partisans, the biasing and polarizing effect of partisanship can grow stronger.

Since the earliest studies of political behavior, scholars have found that those with "cross-pressures" on their partisanship would be less likely to participate in politics. In 1944, Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues and, in 1960, Angus Campbell and his colleagues suggested that partisans who identify with groups associated with the opposing party would be less likely to vote (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Campbell et al. 1960). Lipset ([1960] 1963) went so far as to call these cross-pressured voters "politically impotent," suggesting that "the more pressures brought to bear on individuals or groups which operate in opposing directions, the more likely are prospective voters to withdraw from the situation by 'losing interest' and not making a choice" (211). Further research found that these voters would be less strongly partisan (Powell 1976), and that these "cross-cutting cleavages" would mitigate social conflict (Nordlinger 1972).

Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954), in their seminal book *Voting*, wrote, "For those who change political preferences most readily are those who are least interested, who are subject to conflicting social pressures, who

have inconsistent beliefs and erratic voting histories. Without them—if the decision were left only to the deeply concerned, well-integrated, consistently principled ideal citizens—the political system might easily prove too rigid to adapt to changing domestic and international conditions” (316).

While the traditional view of cross-pressured voters is that they are generally uninvolved and uninterested, some of the foundational literature of political behavior suggests that those with cross-cutting social identities are an important segment of the American electorate. Democracy needs these voters. Berelson and colleagues found them to be an important source of flexibility in American policy responses to changing conditions. Not only are cross-pressured voters a source of popular responsiveness, they are also a buffer against social polarization.

Cross-cutting religious, racial, and partisan identities tend to allow partisans to engage socially with their fellow citizens and partisan opponents. On the other end of the social-sorting spectrum, those with highly aligned religious, racial, and partisan identities are less prepared to engage with their partisan opponents.

But we don't have to go back to 1954 to find positive references to cross-pressured partisans. More recently, Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012) described another group of responsive voters, looking directly at what happens when a partisan holds some negative opinions about their own party. They call this “partisan ambivalence.” In line with prior research, they find that these ambivalent partisans are in fact more likely to defect from the party in voting and, further, that they tend to think more carefully about their political decisions, rather than taking partisan identity as a simple cue. These voters are far more like what is normatively desirable in a voter—they are open to new information. Unfortunately, they are also less likely to participate.

The ambivalent, however, are not the voters I focus on in the current study. Here, rather than looking at a clash between partisans and their evaluations of their own party, I look at the relationship between partisan identities and other social identities that are to greater or lesser degrees associated with the party.

The reason I focus on the clash of identities, rather than the clash between party and attitudes, is that social identities have a special power to affect behavior. First, scholars Betsy Sinclair (2012) and Samara Klar (2014) have found that social environments can dramatically affect partisanship and political behavior. Partisans are responsive to the identities and ideas of the people around them.

Second, and more central to the theme of the book, the identities them-

selves have psychological effects of their own. Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002) make a strong argument for the social elements of partisan identity but explicitly reject the psychological theory of social identity. I believe that this rejection misses out on a wealth of information provided by the social identity literature. I therefore follow in the footsteps of Steven Greene (1999, 2002, 2004), who has repeatedly made the case for using the psychological definition of a social identity to better understand partisanship and political behavior. This is, in fact, the key to truly taking advantage of the cross-cutting-cleavage literature from decades ago. The power of cross-pressures (or the lack thereof) is far easier to see when social-psychological theory is employed to explain it.

This explanation must begin with a look, first, at the psychological effects of holding a single social identity.

### The Origins of Group Conflict

That was the first time we got together and decided we were a group, and not just a bunch of pissed-off guys.

—Mick Mulvaney, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, founding member of the Freedom Caucus (quoted in Lizza 2015)

Humans are hardwired to cling to social groups. There are a few good reasons for us to do so. First, without a sense of social cohesion, we would have had a hard time creating societies and civilizations. Second, and even more basic, humans have a need to categorize (Tajfel et al. 1971). It is how we understand the world. This includes categorizing people. Third, our social categories don't simply help us understand our social environment, they also help us understand ourselves and our place in the world. Once we are part of a group, we know how to identify ourselves in relation to the other people in our society, and we derive an emotional connection and a sense of well-being from being group members.<sup>2</sup> These are powerful psychological motivations to form groups.

However, simple social cohesion creates boundaries between those in our group and those outside it. Marilyn Brewer has argued that as human beings we have two competing social needs: one for inclusion and one for differentiation. That is, we want to fit in, but we don't want to disappear within the group. If we create clear boundaries between our group and outsiders, we can satisfy our needs for both inclusion and exclusion (Brewer 1991). This means that humans are motivated not only to form groups but

to form exclusive groups. The exclusivity of group identities isn't necessarily based in animosity. As the psychologist Gordon Allport described in 1954, people automatically tend to spend time with people like themselves. Much of the reasoning for this is simple convenience. He explains, "it requires less effort to deal with people who have similar presuppositions" (Allport [1954] 1979, 17). However, once this separation occurs, we are psychologically inclined to evaluate our various groups with an unrealistic view of their relative merits. This is true of nearly any social group that can exist. One famous experiment makes this abundantly clear.

#### *Minimal Group Paradigm*

In the late 1960s, a social psychologist named Henri Tajfel wanted to know more about the origins of conflict between groups. He grew interested in the work of Muzaffer Sherif, who, based on his research at Robbers Cave and other experiments, had formed a theory that discrimination between groups naturally arises out of a simple conflict of interest between them. Tajfel and his colleagues wanted to know whether the conflict of interest was necessary for creating discrimination between groups, or whether intergroup discrimination grew out of something even simpler. They ran a number of experiments in order to find a baseline intergroup relationship in which there were two distinct groups with so little conflict between them that they did not engage in discrimination or bias. The design and outcome of these experiments became known as the minimal group paradigm.

The original baseline condition required that subjects in the experiments remain isolated in a laboratory, unaware of who was in their ingroup or in their outgroup, unable to even see or hear any of the other subjects. The groups were designed to be meaningless and value-free—no group was objectively superior to the other. In one experiment, subjects were shown a number of dots on a screen, and asked to estimate the number of dots. Some were then told they were overestimators, some that they were underestimators. In a second experiment, the subjects were shown a number of abstract paintings and asked to choose their favorites. Some were told that they preferred the paintings of Klee, others that they preferred the paintings of Kandinsky. These group labels were, in fact, randomly assigned.

After being informed of their group label, the subjects were then asked to allocate money to other subjects (not to themselves), each identified only by a subject identification number and a group label. They allocated money by writing numbers on a sheet of paper. In one experiment, they were explicitly invited to choose between two scenarios: (1) everyone receives the

maximum amount of money; or (2) the subject's own group receives less than the maximum, but the outgroup receives even less than that. They still had never seen another subject's face. They did not stand to gain any benefit themselves.

Tajfel did not expect to find intergroup discrimination in these experiments. He was looking for a design that generated no discrimination and hoping to slowly add conditions until discrimination was achieved (Turner 1996). He expected that with no conflict, no value differences, no contact, and no personal utility gained from group cohesiveness, the group names would not matter in determining the amount of money allocated at the end of the experiment. He expected the common good of the whole to be more attractive than turning the teams against each other. He was incorrect in this expectation.

Even in the most basic definition of a group, Tajfel and his colleagues found evidence of ingroup bias: a preference for or privileging of the ingroup over the outgroup. In every conceivable iteration of this experiment, people privileged the group to which they had been randomly assigned.<sup>3</sup> Ingroup bias emerged even when Billig and Tajfel in 1973 explicitly told respondents that they had been randomly assigned to two groups, because it was "easier this way." The ingroup bias still appeared, simply because the experimenters distinguished two groups. These respondents were not fighting for tangible self-interest, the money they allocated went to other people, not themselves. They simply felt psychologically motivated to privilege members of their own imaginary and ephemeral group—a group of people they had never met and would never meet, and whose existence they had only learned of minutes earlier. People react powerfully when they worry about a group losing status, even when the group is "minimal."

The ingroup bias that results from even minimal group membership is very deeply rooted in human psychological function and is perhaps impossible to escape. Adults, children, and even monkeys have automatic negative associations with outgroup individuals (Greene 2013). Simply being part of a group causes ingroup favoritism, with or without objective competition between the groups over real resources. Even when there is nothing to fight over, group members want to win.

Tajfel points out that one of the most important lessons of the minimal group experiments is that when the subjects are given a choice between providing the maximum benefit to all of the subjects, including those in their own group, or gaining less benefits for their group but seeing their team win, "it is the winning that seems more important to them" (Tajfel et al. 1971, 172). This is a crucial discovery for understanding American partisan politics



today. The privileging of victory over the greater good is a natural outcome of even the most meaningless group label.

These natural, even primal human tendencies toward group isolation and group comparison open the door to group conflict. The human inclination is to prefer and privilege members of the ingroup. The primary result of group membership is simply to hold positive feelings for the ingroup, and no positive feelings toward outsiders. Even this difference can cause discrimination, but it is not distinctly hostile. Under circumstances of perceived threat or competition, however, the preference for the ingroup can lead to outright hostility toward the outgroup, particularly when the competition is a zero-sum game (Brewer 2001a). The Rattlers and Eagles were involved in a zero-sum competition, as are Democrats and Republicans every election. Only one team can win, and the other team loses. This threat of loss will prove to be an essential ingredient in modern polarization.

### Physical Evidence of Group Attachment

It is important to be clear that group identities are not simply factual memberships. Emerging research is finding repeated instances of physical effects of group membership on human bodies and brains. Avenanti, Sirigu, and Aglioti (2010) showed respondents video of hands being pricked by pins. People tended to unconsciously twitch their own hand when watching these videos, except when the hand belonged to a member of a racial outgroup.

Scheepers and Derks (2016) explained that it is possible to observe changes in brain activity within 200 milliseconds after a face is shown to a person, and that these changes depend on the social category of the face. Furthermore, they found that people who identify with a group use the same parts of their brain to process group-related and self-related information, but a different part of the brain to process outgroup-related information.

People learn differently depending on whether an ingroup member or an outgroup member is observing them. Hobson and Inzlicht (2016) found that when learning a new task, a person will learn more slowly if he or she is being observed by an outgroup member.

You can find evidence of group membership in saliva. Sampasivam et al. (2016) found that when people's group identity is threatened, they secrete higher levels of cortisol in their saliva, indicating stress.

Even our emotions are neurally connected to our groups. People's brains respond similarly when people are sad and when they are observing a sad ingroup member, but when they are observing a sad outgroup member, their brains respond by activating areas of positive emotion. As Scheepers

and Derks (2016) explain, "favoring the ingroup is not a conscious choice. Instead, people automatically and preferentially process information related to their ingroup over the outgroup" (8).

This is an important point for all of the analyses that follow. Group-based reactions to events and information are not entirely voluntary. A person cannot simply turn off his or her preference for the ingroup. It should not be considered an insult to point out the inherent ingroup bias shared by all humans. Ingroup bias is deeply rooted in the physical body as well as the thoughtful mind, and no person is immune.

### Invented Conflicts

Social identities can alter the way people see the world. Zero-sum conflict between groups is easily exacerbated and can be based in both real and invented conflicts. During the Robbers Cave experiment, the boys from both teams began accusing each other of sabotage that had never occurred. The Rattlers accused the Eagles of throwing trash on their beach (they had forgotten that they themselves had left the trash behind the day before). The Eagles erroneously accused the Rattlers of throwing ice and stones into their swimming hole after one of them considered the water to be colder than the day before, and another stubbed his toe.

Allport ([1954] 1979) explains that group members "easily exaggerate the degree of difference between groups, and readily misunderstand the grounds for it. And, perhaps most important of all, the separateness may lead to genuine conflicts of interest as well as to many imaginary conflicts" (19). Allport's words were meant to describe the conflicts between racial, religious, or class-based groups. The previous passage, however, is almost eerily prescient in its descriptions of the current conflict between Democrats and Republicans in American politics. Partisan conflict today is characterized by an exaggerated and poorly understood difference between the parties, based in both genuine and imaginary conflicts of interest.

Political psychologists Milton Lodge and Charles Taber in 2013 wrote a comprehensive review of the effects of motivated reasoning on voters. Motivated reasoning is the process by which individuals rationalize their choices in a way that is consistent with what they prefer to believe, rather than with what is actually true. Lodge and Taber (2013) write that "political behavior and attitudes are very much a function of the unconscious mechanisms that govern memory accessibility" (1). Motivated reasoning is not exactly "inventing" conflicts, but it is the brain's way of making preexisting attitudes easier to believe. This occurs not by choice, but at a subconscious level in the

brain, where the things a person wants to believe are easier to locate than the things that contradict a person's worldview. In this way, imaginary and exaggerated conflicts are very difficult to remedy. The human brain prefers not to revise erroneous beliefs about opponents. Eric Groenendyk (2013) suggests that these often-elaborate justifications in defense of the party can occasionally be broken down by reminding partisans of civic values and a desire for accuracy. The tendency toward motivated reasoning, however, remains prominent.

American politics has always been characterized by real differences between the two parties and by true conflicts of interest. As the APSA committee on responsible two-party government explained, the parties should be distinguishable and unique. They should represent real differences in governing philosophy, so that citizens can choose between them. A partisan's natural inclination, once he or she has chosen sides, is to engage strongly in claiming victory for his or her own side. In fact, politics, along with religion, has long been one of the most famous dinner-party topics to avoid if you want the discussion to remain polite. None of this is the major problem with American political identities today.

The trouble arises when party competitions grow increasingly impasioned due to the inclusion of additional, nonpartisan social identities in every partisan conflict. The American political parties are growing socially polarized. Religion and race, as well as class, geography, and culture, are dividing the parties in such a way that the effect of party identity is magnified. The competition is no longer between only Democrats and Republicans. A single vote can now indicate a person's partisan preference *as well as* his or her religion, race, ethnicity, gender, neighborhood, and favorite grocery store. This is no longer a single social identity. Partisanship can now be thought of as a mega-identity, with all the psychological and behavioral magnifications that implies.

American citizens currently believe that they are in a partisan competition against a socially homogeneous group of outsiders, sometimes to an exaggerated degree (Ahler and Sood 2016). At a dinner party today, talking about politics is increasingly also talking about religion and race. They are wrapped together in a new way. Social sorting is not simply a score on a scale, it is a general trend of partisan homogenization. Ironically, politics and religion may be increasingly acceptable topics at a dinner party today, because most of our dinner parties include mainly socially and politically similar people. When we limit our exposure to outgroup individuals, the differences we perceive between parties grow increasingly exaggerated, and imaginary conflicts of interest rival genuine ones.

## Why Does This Matter?

In this binary tribal world, where everything is at stake, everything is in play, there is no room for quibbles about character, or truth, or principles. If everything—the Supreme Court, the fate of Western civilization, the survival of the planet—depends on tribal victory, then neither individuals nor ideas can be determinative.

—Charles Sykes, "Charlie Sykes on Where the Right Went Wrong"

Unlike the Rattlers and the Eagles, the Democrats and Republicans aren't fighting over a simple trophy. Their job, as the only two governing parties, is to enact real policies that benefit or harm real people. When winning becomes as important as or more important than the content of those policies, real people feel the consequences.

As American social identities grow increasingly party linked, parties become more influential in American political decision-making, behavior, and emotion. Two separate factors drive these changes. The first is the effect of partisanship on policy opinion itself. Policy opinion is defined here as the collection of attitudes that an individual holds about how the government should (or should not) address particular public problems. It could be argued that partisanship encourages more consistency in political attitudes and that this helps democracy.<sup>4</sup> However, in the extreme this consistency can also be a signal that American voters are no longer thinking independently, that they are less open to alternative ideas.<sup>5</sup> In the latter case, the policy opinions of Americans become a reflexive response to party cues, and deliberation or reasoned disagreement grows increasingly difficult.

The second effect is the main concern of this book, and that is the power of social identities to affect party evaluations, levels of anger, and political activism, *independently of a person's policy opinions*. When megaparties form, social polarization increases in the American electorate. Both social and issue-based polarization have recently been shown to decrease public desire for compromise (Wolf, Strachan, and Shea 2012), decrease the impact of substantive information on policy opinions (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013), increase income inequality (Bonica et al. 2013), discourage economic investment and output, increase unemployment, and inhibit public understanding of objective economic information (Enns and McAvoy 2012), among other things. Polarization is generally not considered to be a helpful political development.

The increase in social and issue-based polarization has been blamed on elected officials, the primary system, gerrymandering, the partisan media, and a host of other influences. This book takes account of these generally

structural and outward-looking explanations for social polarization but adds to the discussion the possibility that one source of our polarized politics is a psychological motivation that most Americans share. Social polarization is an increasingly intense conflict between our two partisan groups. It is based in the same impulses that drive racial and religious prejudice. And just as in the case of racial or religious prejudice, there are institutional, outward-looking explanations, as well as individual psychological explanations. These inner sources of social polarization are less visible, but they are Americans' responsibility to observe and understand.

As citizens, we may not be able to change the primary rules, or tone down the partisan media, but we can begin to understand how much of our political behavior is driven by forces that are not rational or fair-minded. This book lays out the evidence for the current state of social polarization, in which our political identities are running circles around our policy preferences in driving our political thoughts, emotions, and actions. I explain how this came to be, illustrate the extent of the problem, and offer some suggestions on how to bring American politics back to a state of civil competition, rather than a state of victory-centric conflict.

## TWO

## Using Old Words in New Ways

The goal of this book is to examine the effect of social sorting on social polarization. In the social-scientific study of politics the term *polarization* traditionally describes an expansion of the distance between the issue positions of Democrats and Republicans. The process of polarization is defined by Democrats acquiring more extremely liberal issue positions and Republicans acquiring more extremely conservative issue positions. In the same vein, *sorting* is usually defined as an increasing alignment between party and ideology, where *ideology* indicates a set of issue positions or values. The process of sorting is traditionally understood as Democrats holding more consistently liberal issue positions and Republicans holding more consistently conservative issue positions.

In this book, one major goal is to make the point that each of these terms—*polarization*, *sorting*, and *ideology*—include within them both a social meaning and an issue-based meaning. The social definition focuses on people's feelings of social attachment to a group of others, not their policy attitudes. The issue-based definition is limited to individual policy attitudes, excluding group attachments. The fact that these two elements can be separated from each other at all is the basis on which this entire argument rests. In the following pages, I examine literature that supports this division, but for now it is simply important to understand that social attachments and policy preferences, while related, are not the same concept, and can have different downstream effects on political behavior.

Following this principle, I discuss two types of polarization, one that is social (or affective) and one that is issue based. *Social polarization* refers to an increasing social distance between Democrats and Republicans. This is made up of three phenomena: increased partisan bias, increased emotional reactivity, and increased activism. *Issue-based polarization* is closer to the tra-

## The Outrage and Elation of Partisan Sorting

Trump has gotten voters who are so angry that they are willing to put their ideological concerns aside. We have never seen voters do that to this extent. They're saying, "We're so ticked off that that's the only message that matters."

—Patrick Murray, pollster, 2016 (quoted in Goldmacher 2016)

In April of 2014, the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) attempted to round up and repossess a herd of cows belonging to a man named Cliven Bundy. Bundy grazed his cattle on federal land in Nevada, for which he was legally required to pay grazing fees. He had refused to pay these fees since 1993, claiming ownership of the land. By 2014, the BLM estimated that Bundy owed the federal government \$1 million. As members of the BLM began to round up Bundy's cattle, some members of Bundy's family began protesting and confronting federal officials. Within days, a protest camp formed at Bundy's farm with a sign at the entrance reading "MILITIA SIGHN IN" (Fuller 2014). Hundreds of self-identified members of armed militias gathered on Bundy's land, preparing for a violent battle against the federal employees. They dressed in paramilitary gear, set up illegal checkpoints, aimed their weapons at law-enforcement officials and federal employees, and threatened to bomb and kill people at local businesses (MacNab 2014). The story exploded in the national media, with conservative news sources praising Bundy as a hero, and liberal news sources calling him a terrorist and a "big fat million dollar welfare dead beat" (Vyan 2014).

Conservatives were outraged at the federal government's treatment of Bundy. And, with guns drawn, hundreds of militiamen joined Bundy in expressing their anger, if not outright rebellion, against the government. An attorney named Larry Klayman wrote in support of Bundy:

Before these government goons do come back, let this message go forth. Barack Hussein Obama, Harry Reid and the gutless Republican establishment leaders in Congress who roll over to and further this continued government tyranny, We the People have now risen up and we intend to remove you legally from office. This country belongs to us, not you. This land is our land! And, we will fight you will [sic] all legal means, including exercising our legitimate Second Amendment rights of self-defense, to end your tyranny and restore freedom to our shores! (Klayman 2014)

The case of a local rancher who hadn't paid his taxes was quickly turned into a national fiasco, and a source of potent outrage among conservatives. How did Cliven Bundy so quickly become a national conservative icon? The answer—as Paul Waldman (2014) put it in the *Washington Post*—was that "when conservatives looked at Bundy . . . everything about him told them he was their kind of guy."

Bundy checked off many of the boxes that make up the Republican Party. A strong conservative, a white man, a rural southerner, he represented the convergence of the social identities that hold the Republican Party together. This convergence of identities made it much easier for Republicans to get angry on his behalf, and for Democrats to get angry at him. Conservatives, as they defended Bundy, did focus on a policy aspect of the conflict—the overreach of the federal government. But for many conservatives, particularly under Democratic president Barack Obama, the federal government, as Larry Klayman decried, had become more of an enemy—a set of "goons"—than the foundation of a policy position.

This sort of intense anger is not rare in modern American politics. In 2009, when Congress was debating what would eventually become the Affordable Care Act, town hall meetings across America erupted with angry outbursts. *Politico* reported, "Screaming constituents, protesters dragged out by the cops, congressmen fearful for their safety—welcome to the new town-hall-style meeting, the once-staid forum that is rapidly turning into a house of horrors for members of Congress" (Isenstadt 2009). At the same time, members of the Tea Party held angry protests in Washington. In 2011, in New York City, a liberal group calling themselves Occupy Wall Street protested against a number of economic, political, and social injustices. The New York protests spread to dozens of other cities and were described by the *New York Times* as "Countless Grievances, One Thread: We're Angry" (Lacey 2011). Turn on almost any cable news station during the last ten years, and you can find a political pundit expressing anger at a new political development.

Perhaps the pinnacle of all of this anger has been the unexpected success of the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump. According to a 2016 Pew poll, the Americans who expressed anger at the government tended strongly to be Trump supporters. Trump is a fascinating case because, as a candidate, his policy positions were well known to be quite flexible, if not nonexistent.

In a 2016 *Washington Post* article, Philip Rucker and Dan Balz wrote, "Donald Trump fits no simple ideological framework. The presidential candidate collects thoughts from across the spectrum. Added together, however, his ideas represent a sharp departure from many of the Republican Party's values and priorities dating back half a century or more. . . . Trump's presidential candidacy has been described as a hostile takeover of the Republican Party. In reality it appears more a movement that threatens to subsume the GOP behind a menu of ideas and instincts that might best be described as 'America Wins.'" In this sense, the Trump candidacy distilled perfectly what Tajfel found in his minimal group paradigm experiments. Winning grows increasingly important as identities grow stronger. To this point, Trump's support was also strongest among those voters who shared multiple Republican-linked identities (Mason and Davis 2016). These particularly include white and Christian identities. Trump's campaign did not tear the Republican Party apart; he spoke directly to the social groups that have aligned with the Republican Party in recent years, and he did so with little real policy content.

The alignment of multiple social identities can directly affect the degree of anger with which individuals respond to identity threats. As identities have moved into alignment in recent years, levels of anger at outgroup candidates have also increased. Though these are simply correlational trends, they serve to set up the story to come.

One crude way to examine average levels of anger over time is to look at one question asked by the American National Election Studies every year beginning in 1980. The item asks respondents whether each presidential candidate "has—because of the kind of person he is, or because of something he has done—made you feel angry." I coded this item so that it refers only to people's feelings of anger toward the outgroup candidate. The numbers in figure 6.1 represent the percentage of people who have reported feeling angry at the outgroup candidate in each presidential election year.<sup>1</sup>

This is a rough measure and fluctuates widely depending on the context of the election. For example, Barack Obama's 2008 Yes We Can campaign was generally oriented toward hope and change and was the first election

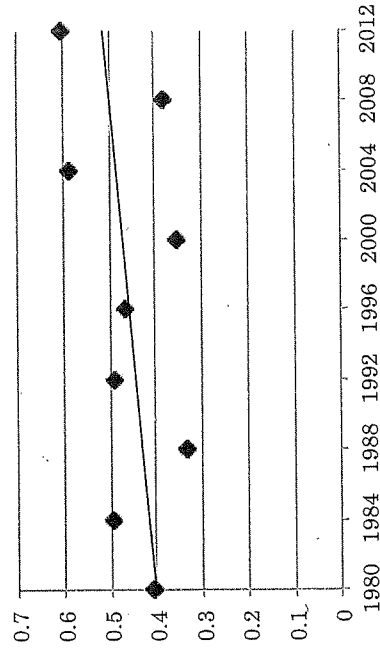


Figure 6.1. Anger toward the outgroup presidential candidate

Note: Data drawn from the weighted ANES cumulative data file, 1948–2012. Numbers represent the percentage of people who reported feeling angry at the outgroup presidential candidate, coded as a presidential candidate of the party that the respondent does not belong to. Question was first asked in 1980. Pure independents are excluded.

in which an African American was elected president. Republicans (those for whom Obama was the outgroup candidate), had little to openly express anger about. Not only did social norms against racism briefly tamp down open partisan rancor, but it was, after all, a Republican president who had only months before presided over one of the greatest financial disasters in national history. Republicans may have been angry, but in that moment they were not angry at the relatively unknown Barack Obama. (That would come later.)

In the same election, John McCain, the Republican, had a reputation as a centrist, party-bucking politician who could be relied upon to make compromises. Democrats (those for whom McCain was the outgroup candidate) therefore had little to hold against him personally. Their ire was reserved for the sitting president, George W. Bush, who held some of the lowest approval ratings of all time.

An earlier drop in anger had registered in the election of 2000, when voters famously saw little difference between the two major party candidates. But these relatively low-anger elections did nothing to reduce anger in the following elections. If anything, the low-anger elections worked as slingshots, pulling levels of anger down, only to shoot them back up in the following elections to unprecedented levels. Voters in recent years, when they do feel angry, feel angrier. In both 2004 and 2012, levels of anger reached 60

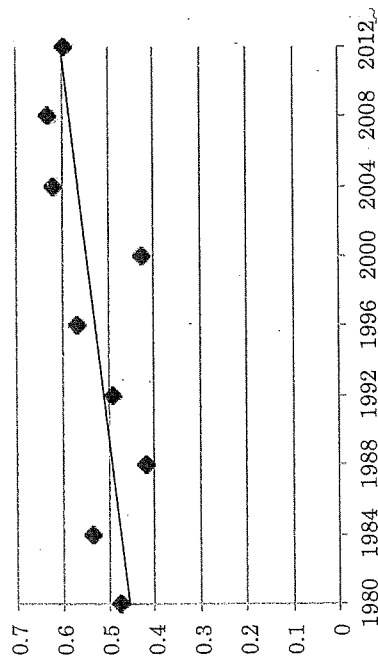


Figure 6.2. Enthusiasm for the ingroup presidential candidate  
 Note: Data drawn from the weighted ANES cumulative data file, 1948–2012. Numbers represent the percentage of people who reported feeling proud of the ingroup presidential candidate, coded as a presidential candidate of the party that the respondent does belong to. Pure independents are excluded.

percent of the partisan population for the first time since the measure was introduced in 1980.

In figure 6.1, the general trend over time is drawn as a straight line, which is moving upward, toward more anger. In 1980, 40 percent of partisans felt anger toward the opposing presidential candidate, and by 2012 that number had increased to 60 percent. Even accounting for fluctuations, the trend line indicates a 10 percentage point average increase in the proportion of people reporting angry feelings at their party's main opponent since 1980. The anecdotes of partisan rancor and vitriol don't seem to be simply isolated events. There has been a modest but increasing trend toward angrier American politics.

This is not the entire story, however. Americans are not only angrier at their political opponents, they are also happier with their own team's candidates. Figure 6.2 shows trends in the percentages of Americans who claim they have felt "proud" of their ingroup presidential candidate.

Just as in the case of anger toward the outgroup candidate, pride for the ingroup candidate is steadily, if noisily, rising. The general trend from 1980 to 2012 is a mean increase in pride of 12 percentage points. In the three presidential elections since 2000, around 60 percent of partisans felt proud of their presidential candidate, compared to numbers hovering around 50 percent in the decades before. So, just as Americans are growing increas-

ingly angry at their opponents' candidates, they are growing increasingly enthusiastic about their own.

Combine this anger and pride in every presidential election, and we see a picture of an electorate that is increasingly emotionally reactive. As time progresses, American partisans are more likely to feel angry at their opponents and proud of their own candidates. We are priming the pump for a very energetic battle.

### Why Are We So Emotional?

Where is all this emotion coming from? In fact, anger and enthusiasm can be understood as very natural reactions to the group-based competition and threats that partisans face on a regular basis. As elections grow longer—and political media coverage explains governing as a constant competition between Democrats and Republicans—partisans are inundated with messages that their group is in the midst of a fight for superiority over the outgroup. Every vote in Congress, then, has the potential to feel like a threat to an attentive partisan. These party threats are capable of motivating significant levels of both anger and enthusiasm in party identifiers, driven not simply by a dissatisfaction with potential policy outcomes or a potential policy victory, but by a much deeper, more primal psychological reaction to group competition.

Intergroup emotions theory (an outgrowth of social identity theory) has found that strongly identified group members react with stronger emotions, particularly anger and enthusiasm, to group threats (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000). According to this theory, group-based partisan bias leads strongly identified partisans to believe (correctly or not) that their party is the generally favored party—that Americans like them the best. The sense that the party is strong, enjoying collective support, increases their ability to feel anger and engage in confrontational behavior. This is because when the ingroup is perceived to be stronger than the outgroup, anger results from intergroup competition, while the perception of a weak ingroup leads to anxiety in the face of group competition. These are natural psychological reactions to group competition, driven not by practical thoughts about the concrete outcomes of an intergroup competition but by evolutionarily advantageous reactions to group competition and threat. A strong group is in a powerful position to react to threat with anger and offense, while a weak group is not. A weak group is expected to react to the same threat with anxiety. Partisan anger therefore is not only driven from a loss of tangible

resources but also an outgrowth of natural offensive behavior that emerges from faith in the power of the ingroup and the aggressive tendencies that group allegiance allows.

Importantly, this emotional reaction depends on a threat to the status of the group. As identities grow stronger, anger only increases if the group is perceived to be under some kind of threat from the outgroup. Kevin Arceaux and Martin Johnson in their 2013 book remind us that personalities on cable news shows “raise their voice in outraged frustration, badger hostile guests, and hurl insults at the other side. . . . The apparent goal is to steel and energize the in-partisans while taunting the out-partisans” (75). These types of partisan threats are present on cable news shows, in political commercials, in print media, and even, during election seasons, in simple polls. Status threats are potent emotional catalysts. Pierce, Rogers, and Snyder (2016) found that, in the week following the Democratic presidential victory in the 2012 election, Republicans felt significantly sadder than they had the previous week. But they weren’t simply sad. They felt sadder than American parents felt in the week after hearing about the Newtown Shootings. They felt sadder than Bostonians in the week after the Boston Marathon bombing. Republicans, because their party had lost, reported feeling some extremely powerful negative emotions.

These negative reactions can, however, help to generate positive emotions as well. In 1994, Nyla Branscombe and Daniel Wann conducted a study in which they asked people to watch the movie *Rocky IV*. For some respondents, they altered the movie so that, in the end, Rocky is defeated by the Russian fighter, Ivan Drago. In this condition, those people who felt most closely identified with being American took severe hits to their own self-esteem. They felt very negatively about themselves after watching Rocky lose. But they were then given a chance to express their levels of distrust and dislike of Russians in general. Those who did this, who expressed many kinds of negative feelings about Russians, restored their self-esteem. These people felt better about themselves by making insulting judgments about their Russian outgroup. Imagine these effects, now, in terms of partisan competition. When partisans lose an election, they take a hit to their self-esteem, which is wrapped up in their partisan identity. One effective way of soothing this damage is to lash out at partisan opponents. It is this threat to self-esteem that drives partisan insults and rage, which lead to a consequent improvement in self-esteem. This is a cycle, in which threats to group status lead to angry and insulting reactions, which then lead to higher assessments of group status, which cause threats to have even larger effects. Our anger and enthusiasm are fueling each other.

Not only do strong identities push partisans to react to threats with anger and excitement but aligned identities add even more anger to every threat response. Sonia Rocas and Marilyn Brewer (2002) raised the possibility that those with highly aligned identities may be less psychologically equipped to cope with threats to group status. This is because a person with a highly sorted set of identities is more socially isolated and therefore less experienced in dealing with measured conflict. This can lead to higher levels of negative emotions when confronted with threat.

When multiple identities are strongly aligned, a threat to one identity affects the status of multiple other identities. The possible damage to a person’s self-esteem grows as more identities are partnered with the damaged group. While stronger identities motivate increased anger and excitement in the face of group threat, more sorted identities have an even larger effect. We have more self-esteem real estate to protect as our identities are linked together.

Although anecdotal stories of political anger and fervor appear to be provoked largely by issues such as health-care reform, gay marriage, abortion, and taxation, social sorting can powerfully drive emotion, contrary to the popular perception that only practical disagreements trigger higher levels of political rancor. Because a highly sorted set of identities increases an individual’s perceived differences between groups, the emotions that result from group conflict are likely to be heightened among well-sorted partisans, regardless of policy opinions.

### Why Do Emotions Matter?

Before delving into the evidence for the social roots of emotions, it is important to examine why emotions matter in the first place. Anger and enthusiasm seem like politically important emotions, but why? And why focus on these two emotions in particular?

The study of emotion in political science is relatively new, and only recently has it been studied using rigorous empirical methods. One of the better-known theories of emotion in politics is affective intelligence theory, introduced by Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000). This theory argued that it was not sufficient to study the simple difference between positive and negative (valence) emotions and that far more information could be obtained if researchers looked at different types of emotions within each category—particularly in the category of negative emotions. They determined that the difference between anger and anxiety was significant, especially when looking at political behavior. The two types of negative emo-

tions, in fact, can have opposite effects on judgment and action. Anxiety was found to lead to more thoughtful processing of information, while anger led to more reliance on easily available cues such as social identities. More recent research on anxiety by Albertson and Gadarian (2015) has found that anxious citizens do in fact search out more information, but they do so in a biased way, looking especially for threatening information. In any case, while anxious citizens tend to look for new information, angry and enthusiastic citizens do not.

A related body of research has found anger and enthusiasm to be particularly good at driving action. In 2011, Valentino and colleagues found that those who were angry were more inclined to sign political petitions, register other people to vote, participate in political protests, volunteer for a campaign, and donate money. Van Zomeren, Spears, and Leach (2008) discovered that a strong group identity increased collective-action tendencies via group-based anger. That is, when members of a social group (students) were presented with a threat (rising student fees), they reacted with anger, and this anger precipitated collective political action. Furthermore, Groenendyk and Banks (2014) found that feelings of enthusiasm increased citizens' likelihood of urging others to vote for a particular candidate, wearing a campaign button, attending political rallies, and donating to a candidate or party. Banks (2016) has found fascinating evidence that feelings of anger in white Americans push them to think in more racial terms. In other words, the anger that Banks observes is directly linked to (and occurs prior to) racial divisions into ingroup and outgroup categories. Nonracial anger pushes racially conservative individuals to think about race.

Combined with intergroup emotions theory, all of this research points to the idea that strong group identities and intergroup divisions facilitate increasingly angry and enthusiastic responses to group threats. While political enthusiasm is not usually thought of as problematic, it, along with anger, leads to increased political activity based not on policy goals but on knee-jerk identity-defense responses. The key point, for the purposes of this book, is that anger and enthusiasm are the primary emotional drivers of political action, and they are not drivers of thoughtful processing of information. The following chapter addresses the direct effects of social sorting on activism, but these emotions are important to examine on their own, as they are capable of provoking much of the action and judgment that contributes to current levels of social polarization. The difference between anxious and angry responses (though they are highly correlated in any given event) helps to explain how it is that partisans can grow increasingly divided even when

their policy positions do not diverge. Anger is a powerful emotion that can drive group identifiers apart, reflexively. It is therefore important to examine the group-based drivers of both anger and enthusiasm, the two emotions that lead to relatively thoughtless political action.

### Evidence from a Panel Study

Between 1992 and 1996, when partisan sorting was in flux, the ANES ran a panel study—interviewing the same people in 1996 that they had interviewed in 1992. In figure 6.3, I compare changes in anger at the outgroup candidate and issue intensity<sup>2</sup> among three groups of citizens—those whose level of partisan-ideological sorting increased, those whose level of sorting did not change, and those whose level of sorting decreased between 1992 and 1996.

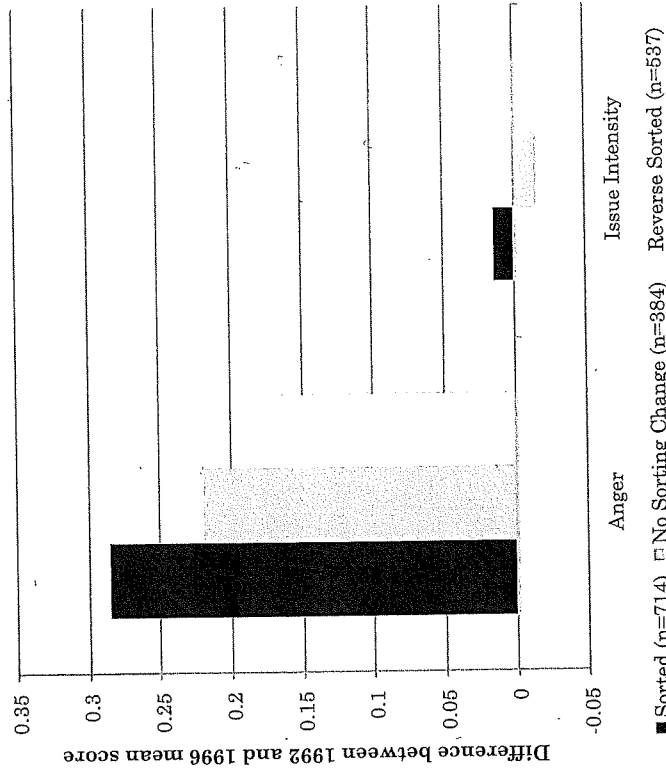


Figure 6.3. Change in anger and issue extremity between 1992 and 1996 by sorting. Note: Data drawn from the ANES 1992–1996 Panel Study. Demographic controls are not necessary as this is a reinterview of the same individuals. Sorting is limited to the partisan-ideological sorting measure, due to data limitations.



Among those people who became increasingly sorted between 1992 and 1996, reported anger at the outgroup candidate increased by 28 percentage points. In comparison, among those whose sorting did not change, anger increased by 22 percentage points, and those whose level of sorting decreased reported a 17 percentage point increase in feeling angry at the outgroup candidate. All three groups reported an increase in anger, which is at least partly contextual. In the intervening four years, Republicans had taken the majority of the House of Representatives for the first time in forty years, and a new partisan conflict between the Democratic president and the Republican House had heated up to the point of a government shutdown in 1995. There was a general feeling of mounting partisan discord. But, importantly, Americans didn't all get angry in the same way. The people whose partisan and ideological identities had moved into alignment were the ones whose anger increased the most. In comparison, when partisan and ideological identities had not moved toward alignment, people were less readily angered.

Was this anger all due to more potent policy attitudes among the increasingly sorted? Apparently not. Among the increasingly sorted, as their levels of anger increased by 28 percentage points, the intensity of their policy attitudes increased by only 1 percentage point. Not only did issue intensity remain essentially the same, its change was barely different from the issue-intensity changes of those whose sorting levels decreased. Those whose levels of sorting remained the same grew less intense by about 1 percentage point. The difference in anger between the sorted and reverse-sorted was 11 percentage points, while the difference in issue intensity between these two groups was less than 1 percentage point.

This pattern holds for both Democrats and Republicans. The only minor difference is that sorted Republicans grew more issue intense (increase of 0.12) than did Democrats (decrease of 0.05), but they also grew slightly less angered than Democrats did. Again, this does not support the idea that anger comes from issue intensity.

This is a picture of a nation whose partisan teams are raring to fight, despite an almost total lack of any substantive policy reasons to do so. It should be reiterated that the changes depicted here are changes among *the same people* over time. When a single person went through a process of aligning their partisan and ideological identities, they came out the other end angrier than they entered. More so than other Americans. Partisan-ideological sorting, without affecting policy extremism, generated significant changes in anger.

## Sorting or Party Identity?

Is it possible that these effects of sorting on emotion can be explained by the effects of partisan identity alone? Not likely. Figure 6.4 looks once again at strong partisans in the cumulative ANES data, predicting their probability of feeling angry using logit models (see originating models in the appendix). Among these intense partisans, those who have cross-cutting ideological identities are certainly angry at the outgroup candidate. There is a 66 percent probability that a cross-pressured but strongly committed partisan will report feeling anger. However, once that strong partisanship is accompanied by a strong and well-aligned ideological identity, there is an 86 percent probability that they will report feeling anger. These are substantively and statistically significant differences.<sup>3</sup>

In an emotionally charged election, a simple change in the alignment of partisan and ideological identities has the power to increase the potential for anger by 20 percentage points. These models also are drawn from regressions in which race, gender, education, age, southern origin, urban origin, church attendance, and issue extremity and constraint are all held constant. Without any change in any of these characteristics, and even among the

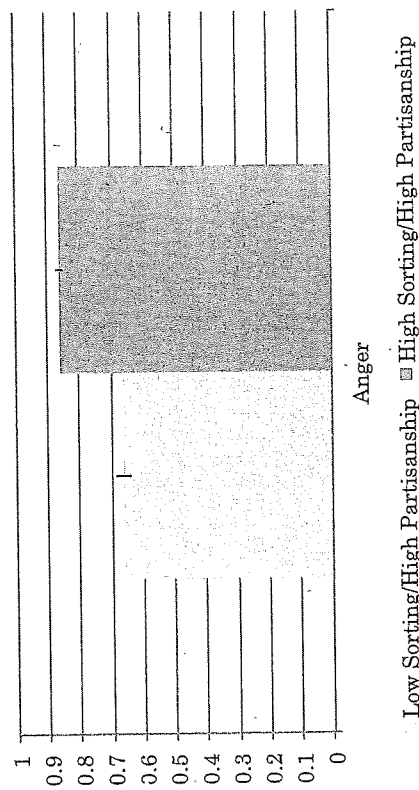


Figure 6.4. Predicted probability of feeling anger at the outgroup candidate. Note: Predicted probabilities drawn from a logit model using weighted ANES data from the cumulative file through 2012. Controls are included for issue-extremity and constraint (and their interaction), education, sex, race, age, southern location, urban location, and church attendance. Originating regression is shown in appendix table A.8. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals shown.

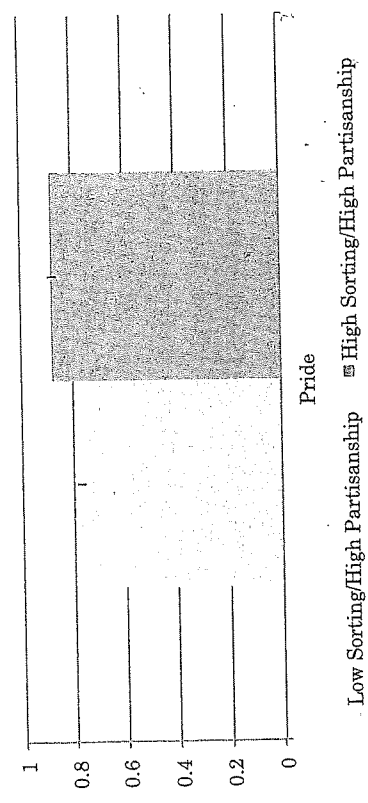


Figure 6.5. Predicted probability of feeling proud of ingroup candidate  
 Note: Predicted probabilities drawn from a logit model using weighted ANES data through 2012. Controls are included for issue extremity and constraint, education, sex, race, age, southern location, urban location, and church attendance. Originating regression is shown in appendix table A.8. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals shown.

strongest partisans, simply moving from a cross-cutting ideological identity to a sorted ideological identity can drive a significant increase in feelings of anger. This is a psychological response to the feeling that the party makes up a larger part of a person's social world. Once an ideological identity lines up behind a partisan identity, it becomes harder to understand opponents as reasonable people and easier to feel threatened and angered by them.

The effects on pride are smaller but still significant. Figure 6.5 presents the same strong partisans but predicts their probability of feeling proud about their own candidate. Among intense partisans with cross-cutting ideological identities, there is a 77 percent probability that they will feel proud of their ingroup candidate. However, once an ideological identity is strong and well aligned with this strong partisan identity, that probability increases to 88 percent. This difference, again, is statistically significant. Therefore, even while holding issue positions constant, simply aligning an ideological identity with a strong partisan identity is capable of increasing the likelihood of feeling proud of your own candidate by 10 percentage points.

Although the differences between cross-cut partisans and well-sorted partisans are relatively small in magnitude, they are significant, and they suggest something real about American politics. Even our strongest partisans have emotions that are kept slightly in check when their ideological identities are unaligned with their party. Once party and ideology move into alignment, as they have across large swaths of the American electorate, the likelihood

that partisans are feeling angry and proud increases significantly. Sorting is pushing us into emotional territory that partisanship alone cannot.

### Matching

Another way to examine the effect of sorting on emotion is to go back to the matched sample used in chapter 5. Using the same sample—comprising members nearly identical in ideological identity, issue extremity, education, age, sex, race, geographical location, and religiosity—I again split the sample into low and high levels of sorting. This time I looked at the differences between the groups in their reported levels of anger at the outgroup candidate. This is a challenging test because, although the people are constrained to be matched, the political context in each year is drastically different, causing a large variance in anger across the cumulative ANES sample, which spans from 1972 to 2012. Despite the contextual variation, these highly similar individuals, when averaged across time, tend to be significantly angrier at the outgroup candidate when their ideological identities are aligned with their partisan identities. This is true despite large confidence intervals. Figure 6.6 presents the results of this matching test.

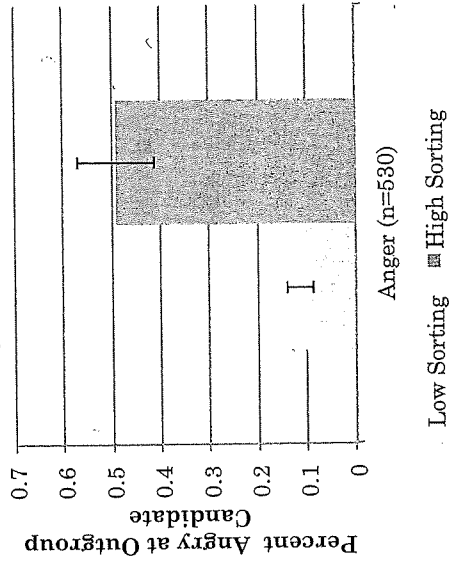


Figure 6.6. Percent angry at the outgroup candidate in matched sample  
 Note: Data drawn from ANES cumulative file through 2012. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals shown. Respondents matched on ideological identification, issue extremity, education, sex, race, age, southern location, and church attendance. Low sorting and high sorting are divided by cutting the sorting score at its median.

In this figure, ideologically matched people are significantly angrier at the outgroup candidate when their partisan identity is strong and aligned with their ideological identity. About 11 percent of people with cross-cutting partisan identities feel angry at the outgroup candidate, while 49 percent of the well-sorted sample reports feeling angry. This is a significant difference. Although they are quite similar in their characteristics, ideology, and political attitudes, those whose partisan identity is aligned with their matched ideologies are angrier, across the decades, than those whose partisan identities are unaligned with their matched ideologies. The alignment of these two identities is driving people to feel angrier, despite their agreement on policy outcomes and their similarity in every other measured way.

Looking at pride for the ingroup candidate offers a similar picture. In figure 6.7, the same matched sample is compared across levels of sorting. Once again, we see that across the years those individuals who are similar to each other in many ways, and differ in their level of partisan-ideological sorting, feel very differently toward their own party's candidates. Among those with cross-cutting partisan and ideological identities, only 14 percent report feeling proud of their own party's candidate. Move that party into alignment with ideology (again, an ideology matched across conditions), and 55 percent report feeling proud.

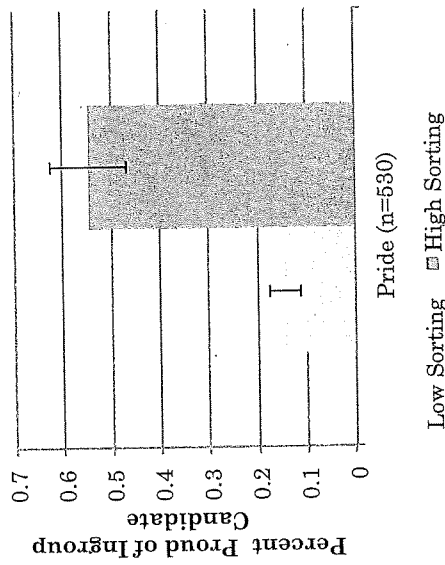


Figure 6.7. Percent proud of the ingroup candidate in matched sample  
 Note: Data drawn from ANES cumulative file through 2012. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals shown. Respondents matched on ideological identification, issue extremity, education, sex, race, age, southern location, and church attendance. Low sorting and high sorting are divided by cutting the sorting score at its median.

These differences are not only statistically and substantively significant, they are compelling because they occur among respondents that are as similar to one another as possible. Furthermore, though issue extremity is matched here, these models have been replicated using an issue-constraint measure instead, and the results support the same conclusions. Individuals who are similar on ideology and issue positions grow far more proud of their candidate when their party is well matched to their ideological identity, even though their beliefs do not differ. Partisan-ideological sorting is capable of encouraging an increasingly angry and enthusiastic electorate.

### Evidence from an Experiment

Up until now, the effects of sorting on anger have only been demonstrated in the case of partisan-ideological sorting. Furthermore, all of the models presented above have measured anger as a simple yes/no response to a question regarding anger at the outgroup candidate, which a respondent must recall from memory. According to social identity theory and intergroup emotions theory, a threat is necessary for group identities to activate anger. The outgroup candidate is a good representation of a threat to group status. He or she is, after all, the embodiment of the party whose victory will mean an inevitable defeat for a partisan's own party. However, more precision in measuring both anger and threat is possible.

In the 2011 YouGov survey, I included an experiment in which respondents were randomly assigned to one of five conditions. Some respondents were asked to read a message that threatened their party. They were told it was taken from a political blog, but in fact I fabricated it based on a number of blog comments I had collected, in order to make the messages as comparable as possible. For Republicans, this message read:

2012 is going to be a great election for Democrats. Obama will easily win re-election against whatever lunatic the Republicans run, we are raising more money than Republicans, our Congressional candidates are in safer seats, and Republicans have obviously lost Americans' trust. Our current Congress is proving to Americans that Republicans do not deserve to be in the majority, and Americans will make sure they're gone in 2012. Finally, we'll take the Congress back and won't have to worry about the Republicans shutting down government anymore! I'm glad that Americans have finally returned to their senses. Republicans should get used to being the minority for the foreseeable future. Democrats will hold our central place in the leadership of the country.  
 Obama 2012!!

For Democrats, the message read:

2012 is going to be a great election for Republicans. We're going to defeat the hardcore socialist Obama, we are raising more money than Democrats, our Congressional candidates are in safer seats, and Democrats have obviously lost Americans' trust. Our current Congress is proving to Americans that Democrats do not deserve to be in the majority, and Americans will make sure they're gone in 2012. Finally, we'll take the government back, and we won't have to worry about Democrats blocking us at every turn! I am so glad that Americans have finally returned to their senses. Democrats should not get used to running the government. Republicans will take back our central place in the leadership of the country. Defeat Obama in 2012!!

Other respondents were asked to read a "blog message" that threatened their party's cherished policy outcomes. For Republicans, this message read:

2012 is going to be a great election for responsible political ideas. After this election we can finally fix the economy using wise tax increases to pay for our indispensable social programs and infrastructure, so that we can create jobs instead of blindly throwing money to corporations and giving tax cuts to the millionaires who caused this mess. After this election we'll be able to improve the health care bill by adding a public option, make sure every woman has clear access to abortions, every child has a chance to learn evolutionary theory in school, and make it easier for all adults to get married if they want to, no matter who they are. Finally, our country will be on the right path again!

For Democrats, this message read:

2012 is going to be a great election for responsible political ideas. After this election we can finally fix the economy by enforcing personal responsibility, using a true free-market system to make sure people aren't handed more than they've earned. We'll be able to shrink the government and get it off our backs, and lower taxes so that hard-working people have a reason to work. After this election we'll be able to stop socialized medicine, prevent the abortions of innocent babies all over the country, bring God back into the public sphere, and make sure that we are a country that respects that marriage is between a man and a woman. Finally, our country will be on the right path again!

A fifth group did not read any message at all. The four messages were randomly assigned, so some Democrats would read the Republican threat

message and some Republicans would read the Democratic threat message. When this occurred, I coded this as a message of support for the party.

After reading one of the messages, respondents were asked how the message had made them feel. They could answer A great deal, Somewhat, Very little, or Not at all to the following emotion items: Angry, Hostile, Nervous, Disgusted, Anxious, Afraid, Hopeful, Proud, and Enthusiastic. I combined their responses to the Angry, Hostile, and Disgusted items to form a scale of anger ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ), and the Hopeful, Proud, and Enthusiastic responses to form a scale-of-enthusiasm ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ). In comparison to the yes/no anger responses measured above, this measure created a scale of emotion that ranges relatively continuously from 0 to 1, creating much more variation in the amount of anger or enthusiasm a person could report.

Figure 6.8 illustrates the main effects of each experimental treatment on emotion. As expected, in the threat conditions, anger is substantially stronger than enthusiasm, and in the support conditions enthusiasm is the main result. The party-threat conditions included language that had the potential to generate stronger emotions than the issue conditions, but, as the data show, emotional reactions to the issue threats are relatively similar to the main emotional effects of party threats.

As in chapter 5, I measured sorting using the full social-sorting scale, including partisan, ideological, black, secular, evangelical, and Tea Party iden-

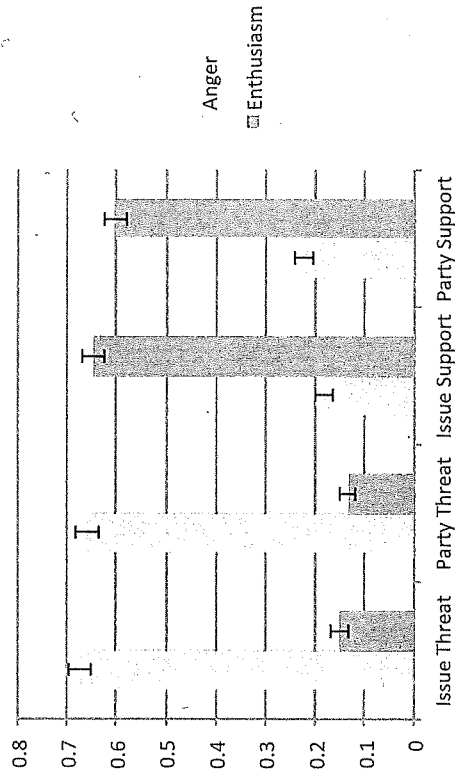


Figure 6.8. Main effects of experimental treatment  
Note: Ninety-five percent confidence intervals shown. Bars represent mean levels of each emotion in each treatment, across the entire sample.

ties, measuring each, if present, using the four-item social-identification scale. This creates a much fuller measure of sorting by including multiple social identities that may come into play in determining how angry or enthusiastic each partisan can be.

I expected the most socially sorted partisans to be the most emotionally volatile. I thought they would react to the party-based threats with the most anger and to messages of support with the most enthusiasm. I also expected to find somewhat smaller results for partisan identity alone, and much smaller effects among those with the most extreme issue positions. In other words, I expected to see that a conglomeration of identities is most emotionally responsive to threat (particularly group-based threat), that one identity is slightly less so, and that a set of extreme issue positions generates the smallest emotional response to threat.

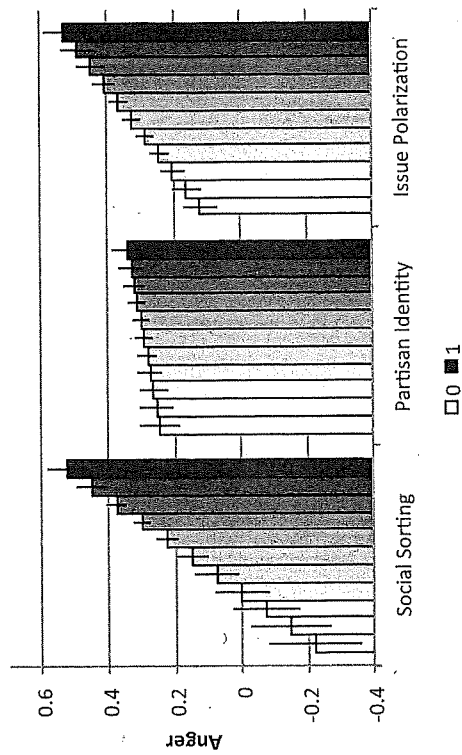
In order to give the issue positions a fair test, however, I included the threats that were devoid of partisan labels and only threatened policy outcomes. If anything were to anger those with strong issue positions, it should be these issue-based threats.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the issue measure used here accounts for not only issue extremity but also issue importance and issue constraint.<sup>5</sup> I refer to this measure as issue intensity, due to its inclusion of multiple elements of issue attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

### Experimental Results

What I found was relatively consistent with expectations but also slightly surprising. The results are presented in figures 6.9 and 6.10. In short, the intensity of issue positions does, indeed, generate significant emotional reactions to issue-focused messages. When issue positions are threatened (fig. 6.9a) or reassured (fig. 6.10a), those with the most extreme, consistent, and salient issue positions respond by growing angrier and happier, respectively. However, when party defeat (fig. 6.9b) or victory (fig. 6.10b) is promised, issue extremity has no significant emotional effects. Issue-focused citizens are different from their issue-moderate counterparts in the degree to which they are angered and excited by practical goals but not by status threats regarding their own parties.

Partisanship has a different influence on emotion. Strong partisans are significantly angrier than weak partisans when the party is threatened (fig. 6.9b) but not when policy success is threatened (fig. 6.9a). They also grow significantly more enthusiastic than weak partisans when party victory is discussed (fig. 6.10b) but not when policy victory is promised (fig. 6.10a). It doesn't really matter to partisans whether their policy positions are threat-

## Issue Threat (a)



## Party Threat (b)

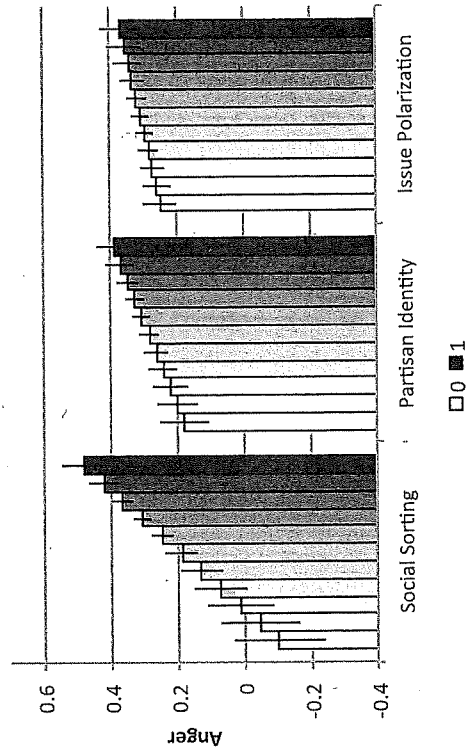
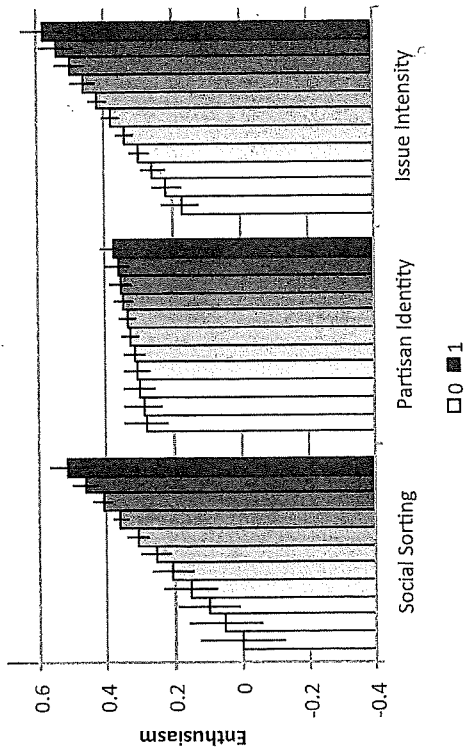


Figure 6.9. Predicted angry reactions to messages

Note: Bars represent the predicted values of anger at each level of issue extremity, partisan identity, or sorting. Originating regressions are shown in appendix table A.9. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals shown.

### Issue Support (a)



### Party Support (b)

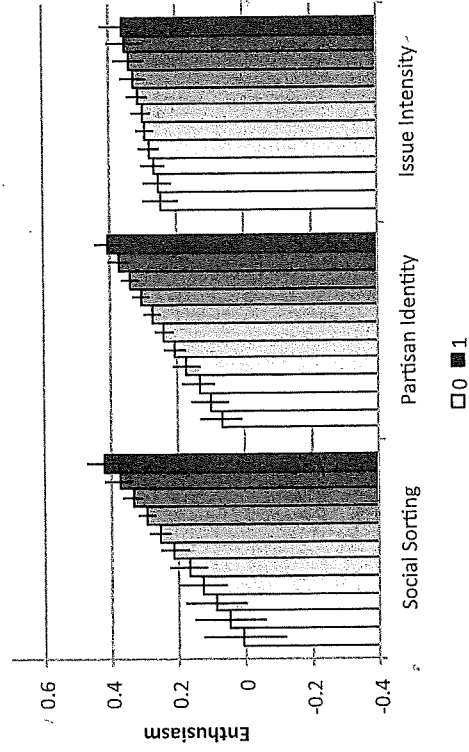


Figure 6.10. Predicted enthusiastic reactions to messages. Bars represent the predicted values of enthusiasm at each level of issue extremity, partisan identity, or sorting. Originating regressions are shown in appendix table A.10. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals shown.

ened. Strong partisans are emotionally engaged by messages of support regarding their party's status—but not by the actual policy outcomes of that status.

Sorting is the unique variable in this sequence, in that it is capable of affecting emotion no matter what kind of message is presented. But this occurs in an interesting way. In figure 6.9, social sorting does affect angry reactions to both issue-based and party-based messages of threat. Unlike either issue intensity or partisan identity alone, the difference between cross-cutting and well-sorted identities is apparent in response to both messages. However, one important point to note is that, in the issue-based threat condition, the highest levels of sorting do not generate anger that is significantly higher than the anger produced among the most issue intense. Similarly, in the party-based threat condition, the highest levels of sorting do not generate anger that is significantly higher than the anger produced among the strongest partisans. The main difference between the effects of sorting versus issue intensity and partisanship is found at the *low* end of the scale.

The people with the most cross-cutting identities respond to both types of threat with significantly *less* anger than either the least issue-intense or the least partisan individuals. In fact, for both types of threat, the cross-cut individuals respond with no anger in the case of party threat and with *negative* anger in the case of issue threat. In other words, when these cross-cut individuals read a threatening political message, they remain impassive. These data suggest that Americans are not growing increasingly angry because the best-sorted identities drive the highest levels of anger. They are growing angrier because the people who tend to respond without anger (those with cross-cutting identities) are disappearing. As the sorting seen in chapter 3 continues, the people who have the best chance of remaining calm in the face of political conflict are shrinking as a proportion of the electorate.

A similar phenomenon is seen in the case of enthusiasm, shown in figure 6.10. In the presence of an issue-based message of victory (6.10a), the most socially sorted individuals are predicted to report no more enthusiasm than those who are the most issue intense. In this sense, sorting is not increasing enthusiasm beyond what it would already be among the most issue intense. However, at the low end of the spectrum, those with cross-cutting identities are significantly *less* enthusiastic than the least issue intense. The 95 percent confidence interval for the least-sorted group in figure 6.10a crosses zero, suggesting that, once again, those with cross-cutting identities have no emotional response whatsoever, even to a positive message.

In the case of party-based messages of victory, the same basic pattern arises. People who are highly socially sorted are no more enthusiastic after

hearing a victory message than are the strongest partisans. In this one case, those with cross-cutting identities are statistically indistinguishable from very weak partisans. So the dampening effect of cross-cutting cleavages does not go beyond the dampening effect of simple weak partisanship. However, one difference does exist. The confidence interval around the predicted level of enthusiasm for those with the most cross-cutting identities includes zero, which means it is statistically probable that these people do not respond to encouraging messages with any enthusiasm at all. In comparison, the confidence interval for the weakest partisan's level of enthusiasm does *not* include zero (narrowly), and therefore, statistically speaking, a weak partisan is predicted to respond with some minimal level of enthusiasm.

Well-sorted citizens are broadly emotionally responsive. They get angry at any message of threat, and they get happy at any message of victory. Whether party-based or issue-based, highly sorted individuals react to political messages with emotional reactions that match those driven by the strongest partisans or the most issue-intense individuals. However, while the emotional reactions of highly sorted individuals match the maximum emotional reactions already found in the electorate, the reactions of cross-cut individuals are significantly less intense than the reactions of any other citizens measured here. Cross-cutting identities dampen emotional reactions to political messages, such that the most cross-cutting identities lead to a complete lack of emotional response. This lack of response exists only in the group of cross-cut citizens that are increasingly disappearing from the American electorate.

### Obstructive Anger

Emotional reactivity is obviously important when we are trying to understand why certain partisans react to politics with anger or excitement and others respond less emotionally. The more sorted we become, the more emotionally we react to normal political events, and the more cross-cutting our identities, the more calmly we respond. The anger on display at Cliven Bundy's ranch, at the 2010 town hall meetings over Obamacare, at the Occupy Wall Street protests, and at Donald Trump's 2016 rallies is fueled by our increasing social and partisan isolation. As Americans continue to sort into partisan teams, we should expect to see more of this emotional reaction, no matter how much we may truly agree on specific policies.

In examining intergroup conflict in other nations, Kahn et al. (2016) found that "hatred and anger, and the absence of positive intergroup sentiments and moral sentiments of guilt or shame, may be an important ob-

stacle both to the type of interest-based agreements that would benefit all concerned and to the type of relationship-building programs that can humanize adversaries and create the trust necessary for more comprehensive agreements. Indeed, trying to produce such agreement through careful crafting of efficient trades of concessions, without attending to relational barriers may be an exercise in futility" (83).

In other words, the anger that is driven by intergroup conflict and the gradual reduction of cross-cutting identities in the electorate is actively harming our ability to reasonably discuss the important issues at hand. The more people who feel angry, the less capable we are as a nation of finding common ground on policies, or even of treating our opponents like human beings. Our emotional relationships with our opponents must be addressed before we can hope to make the important policy compromises that are required for governing.

The increasingly prevalent well-sorted partisans are not only more intransigent in governing but also more active in politics, to make their intransigent inclinations known. Their emotional reactions to sorting can lead to a distinctly emotional type of political participation, in which partisans participate not only to make their policy positions known but, largely, because they're feeling particularly angry or elated.

## Can We Fix It?

our membership in a social group to which we feel socially and emotionally connected. Our actual opinions—the intensity of our attitudes—can't compel the same sort of political activism that our simple sense of social connection can. We take political action, potentially making real political changes, because we feel close to particular groups of people and want them (and therefore ourselves) to be winners.

This is partially why we see strong partisans out campaigning and voting even when they are nearly certain their candidate will win. They feel compelled to take political action not to achieve change but to express support for their team. It feels right to get out there and defend the team, even when the team is a guaranteed victor—possibly even more so when victory is imminent. There is a gleeful joy in participating in your own team's victory. The team doesn't need all of our votes and participation, but partisans gladly provide it anyway.

This group-based activism is unlikely to abate any time soon. Dinas (2014) found that not only does a strong partisan identity drive political action, including voting, but the act of voting also drives increasingly strong identification with the party. Therefore, the more we feel partisan, the more we vote, and the more we vote, the more partisan we feel. It is a self-reinforcing cycle. As our partisanship joins forces with many other social identities, this effect grows stronger. Our sense of social connection to other people is what drives us to take political action, not simply the intensity of our issue opinions.

While activism is generally a desirable element of a functioning democracy, blind activism is not. These results demonstrate that American partisans are working hard to participate in politics, but the ones who are most active tend to be those who cannot be convinced to change their minds. They react to threat, anger, and the strength of a whole cohort of identities that are increasingly harmonized. When individuals participate in politics driven by team spirit or anger, the responsiveness of the electorate is impaired. If their own party—linked with their race and religion—does something undesirable, they are less likely to seriously consider changing their vote in the ballot booth. As people grow more sorted, they are less likely to split their ballots or to vote for outgroup partisans in addition to ingroup partisans (Davis and Mason 2015). Without voters who may be cross-pressured or otherwise likely to allow their vote to respond to events on the ground, government has the potential to be too rigid to respond to modern changing conditions.

Identity is what gets the blood boiling, what makes people do unspeakable things to their neighbors. It is the fuel used by agitators to set whole countries on fire.

—Ian Buruma, *The Blood Lust of Identity* (quoted in Kalyvas 2006)

How does American politics get back to the work of governing instead of focusing so much of our energy on partisan victory, conflict, and pride? Donald Trump won the presidential election of 2016. His ascent was bewildering to political scientists and pundits alike. One defining characteristic of his campaign was the effectiveness of his use of identity to anger and divide the electorate. By calling out distinct social groups, including women, Muslims, Mexicans, blacks, and a continuing list of others, Trump has made it clear that the American electorate can and should be divided into identity-based groups. While many conservatives lament his lack of consistently conservative policy positions, he remains remarkably popular with the base of the Republican Party to date, and this encourages establishment Republicans to fall in line behind him. This popularity does not come from his policy-based bona fides but from his use of the power of simple identity to rile up a significant portion of the American population.

Based on the research presented in this book, his success should not be surprising. Trump has taken advantage of a country whose parties have grown socially segregated. Threats to the status of any social group are linked to the status of other social groups as well, so that a single political threat has the ability to mobilize, anger, and bias large swaths of the electorate. The election of 2016 is the result of decades of social sorting, which has allowed a larger portion of the electorate to engage in politics out of defensiveness, judgment, anger, and a need to win. This is not a productive type of engage-



ment, it is one that only deepens the divide between racial, religious, and partisan groups. The 2016 election is a perfect example of what happens to a nation that has seen its citizens gradually isolated from those who are socially unlike themselves.

### What Happens to a Sorted Nation?

In the late eighteenth century, the term *party* was not meant to indicate the brittle, divided groups we have today. Robert Dahl describes the "original concept of parties as "a current of political opinion, rather than an organized institution." As parties began to organize into more factional groups, Senator Hillhouse of Connecticut declared in 1808 that "party spirit is the demon which engendered the factions that have destroyed most free governments" (Dahl 1967, 207). In fact, it isn't only party spirit that can damage governments.

In political research outside of American politics, the alignment of multiple social identities has had some powerful and even dangerous outcomes. Selway (2011) finds that cross-cutting identities significantly reduce the risk of civil war in a country, while the alignment of ethnic and religious identities speeds the onset of civil war. He writes, "ethno-religious cross-cuttingness makes civil war less likely because it reduces the saliency of out-group differences and thus makes it harder for potential rebel leaders to recruit by appealing to ethnicity" (Selway 2011, 112). In a 2012 study, Gubler and Selway find that civil war is twelve times less probable in societies where ethnicity is cross-cut by another social identity such as class, geography, or religion. Kalyvas in his 2006 book writes, "The intuition is that if a population is clustered around a small number of distant but equally large poles, it is likely to undergo violent conflict. . . . The underlying mechanism is dislike so intense as to cancel even fraternal ties, imagined or real" (Kalyvas 2006, 64).

Even in the context of American politics, Dahl (1981) explained America's own civil war by stating, "Never before or since in American history has the pattern of moderate conflict with crosscutting divisions been so fully transformed into the pattern of severe conflict and polarization" (321). Fisher (1997) described the American civil war experienced in Tennessee as a distinctly social rupture: "Dedication to the cause and party consciousness broke former bonds of friendship and kinship; there was a tendency to greet and be friendly towards members of the same group, whilst systematically avoiding the others. Quarrels, rivalry and hatred developed out of these es-

trangements. Each group had its cafe, its meetings and even its feast days, religious on the one side and secular on the other" (Fisher 1997, 85).

The American electorate today is not engaged in a civil war. However, it is difficult to read Fisher's account and not feel echoes of contemporary American political culture. I do not argue here that the social sorting of the American electorate is inevitably leading to violent political conflict. After all, as Marlynn Brewer states, "In various contexts, groups have managed to live in a state of mutual contempt over long periods without going to war over their differences" (Brewer 2001a, 32). In fact, Scarcelli (2014) clarified that highly aligned identities don't always lead to civil war, and that catalysts such as economic decline or "adverse regime change" are often needed to exacerbate intergroup tensions to the point of organized violence. This is something to be wary of, but it is by no means unavoidable.

It should be emphasized, still, that increasing trends of social sorting are not simply benign, ignorable reorganizations. There can be real consequences when cross-cutting identities give way to orderly, segregated political teams. The question, then, becomes, is there a way to reduce or reverse the trends of social sorting or the sociological and emotional effects of this sorting?

Of course, some partisan conflict is necessary for any successful democracy. Parties should disagree about policy, and partisans should care which side wins. When the parties become socially isolated from one another, however, the conflict between them becomes less about governing and more about the conflict itself. This type of conflict is the one that needs to be addressed.

There are a number of ways to approach this problem, so I explore each strategy in turn, considering its usefulness for American polarization in particular. First, there is a broad literature that examines how to reduce intergroup conflict. This research was designed to reduce racial or religious group conflict, but in many cases it can be applied to partisan conflict as well. Second, some research in social psychology has begun looking at the effect of manipulating self-esteem and self-affirmation on political polarization, and this is another possible avenue for conflict reduction. Finally, there is a possibility for an unsorting or dealignment of our partisan and social identities. This could occur through demographic trends or by the reappearance of a major rift in one party.

In the end, none of these solutions may be effective or likely. However, each may provide some further insight into the depth and nature of the problem at hand.

## How Social Science Deals with Intergroup Conflict

We do not need to disagree to feel connected to our social groups. The sense of well-being that we receive simply from being in the groups is reason enough to join them. And we do not need to dislike outgroups simply because we like our own group. It is possible to feel connected to social in-groups and not feel antagonism toward outgroups. In an ideal world, we would enjoy our own social-group identities without wishing harm upon others. Unfortunately, this is not how American politics works today.

Luckily, social scientists are not new to the concept of intergroup conflict. Since before the Rattlers and the Eagles set up camp, people have been trying to understand what makes us fight the people who aren't us. They have studied it in order to find ways to stop it. Considering the continuing existence of prejudice, none of these methods are absolutely effective. However, in the second half of the twentieth century there has at least been a reduction in the acceptability of expressing racial and religious prejudice in public, particularly among elected officials (with the troubling exception of Donald Trump). Perhaps some of these methods could prove useful in addressing the identity-fueled partisan prejudice that is currently so evident in American politics.

### Contact Theory

See that man over there?

Yes.

Well, I hate him.

But you don't know him.

That's why I hate him.

—Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*

The concept behind contact theory goes back to the work of Gordon Allport (1954) who specified that certain types of social contact can reduce prejudice between groups. This theory was so well accepted that it "provided the foundation for the Social Science Statement submitted to the U. S. Supreme Court in connection with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954," desegregating public schools (Brewer and Kramer 1985, 232). Optimally, according to Allport, this contact would meet four conditions. It would occur (1) among groups of equal status who (2) have common goals, (3) no competition between them, and (4) the support of relevant authorities. The contact between opposing partisans is blatantly lacking

conditions two and three. Luckily, later research by Pettigrew et al. (2011) found that Allport's conditions do help to reduce prejudice, but they aren't all absolutely necessary. They found that prejudice can be reduced in the presence of intergroup friendships, in the absence of anxiety, and in the presence of empathy. Even better, indirect contact can also reduce prejudice, such as contact through mass media or simply having a friend of a friend in the opposing group.

In terms of reducing American partisan prejudice, contact theory would send Democrats and Republicans into the same social arenas and ask them to simply see each other with a calm and friendly set of eyes. One way to accomplish this could be via media. Duckitt (1992) found that "the manner in which the media present and portray social and intergroup 'realities' can markedly influence the perceived salience of (a) intergroup distinctions, roles, and inequities; (b) negative stereotyping; (c) the social acceptability of prejudice; and (d) norms that govern intergroup behavior" (255). This approach would compel our partisan news media to present opposing partisans in more sympathetic ways, but would also add sympathetic partisans of both sides to simple entertainment-based television shows, including shows consumed mainly by partisans of each party. Recent research has shown that the gender roles portrayed in sitcoms have an effect on viewers' attitudes toward gender-based policies (Swigger 2017). Perhaps partisan portrayals could affect viewers' perceptions of who Democrats and Republicans are. In fact, since Democrats and Republicans reliably watch different types of television in a wide range of arenas, contact theory would suggest implanting sympathetic partisans of the opposing team into each party's television shows. Although this would be a welcome development, American partisans generally live in different social arenas and partisan television tends to pander to its own fans, making this development unlikely.

While exposure to opposing political ideas and individuals can moderate intolerance and polarization, this exposure is growing far less frequent. Furthermore, as Brewer and Kramer (1985) explain, attempts to locate the prejudice-reducing effects of contact have generated mixed results. In particular, when a group member comes into contact with a member of the opposing group, if she or he considers that member to be "atypical" of the opposing group the effects do not last beyond the moment of contact. Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, and Smith (2015) found that the people with the most bias against outgroups are not only less likely to have direct contact with outgroup members "but will also be less likely to have friends with outgroup friends." Therefore our most biased partisans will have little direct or even indirect contact with political opponents. In short, the amount of

contact between Democrats and Republicans is decreasing, and it is quite unlikely that this trend will reverse without some larger outside influence.

### Social Norms

Don't boo. Vote.

—President Barack Obama, 2016 Democratic National Convention

In 1994, Newt Gingrich sent members of the Republican Party a memo titled "Language: A Key Mechanism of Control." This memo came to be known as the GOPAC memo, and was meant to instruct Republicans on what types of words to use when describing their political opposition. As he wrote in the memo, "This list is prepared so that you might have a directory of words to use in writing literature and mail, in preparing speeches, and in producing electronic media. The words and phrases are powerful" (Gingrich 1994). Gingrich's list of recommended words to describe Democrats included betray, bizarre, decay, destroy, devour, greed, lie, pathetic, radical, selfish, shame, sick, steal, and traitors, among many others. To this day, this is the type of language used by party leaders to demonize opponents.

In 2015, Republican senator John McCain accused Democratic secretary of state John Kerry of being less trustworthy than the leaders of Iran, a known adversary of the United States. McCain and Kerry had once been friendly Senate colleagues. In response to McCain's comments, President Barack Obama announced, "That's an indication of the degree to which partisanship has crossed all boundaries. It needs to stop" (Coll 2015). Unfortunately, Obama was not the best person to make this argument. In fact, a prominent Republican would have presented the best chance for this message to have an effect, as the action that needed to be addressed came from within the Republican team.

One way that outright partisan prejudice may be addressed is for the parties themselves to establish new norms for partisan behavior. Putting aside for a moment how or why they would do this, scholars do know that "what group members think of what others are thinking may play a key role in influencing intergroup relations and perceptions" (Putra 2014). In other words, if group members believe that other ingroup members are tolerant of the outgroup, this can turn into a more broadly tolerant approach toward the opposing team.

In fact, Allport himself, back in 1954, argued that "the remedy for prejudiced opinion is not suppression, but rather a free-flowing counteraction

by unprejudiced opinion" (469). If the parties themselves had any interest in reducing levels of partisan prejudice, they could likely do so simply by encouraging the prominent flag-bearers of the party to loudly and freely discuss partisan opponents in an unprejudiced way. According to Hogg (2001), group leaders have power to influence group members because group members "cognitively and behaviorally conform to the prototype" of the leader.

What if the leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties decided to take on a tolerant rhetoric toward the opposing team? What if party prototypes started discussing real differences rather than demonizing their opponents? What if party opinion leaders (of both parties) started talking about politics by commending compromise and acknowledging the humanity and validity of the opposing team? What if there were a new, opposite version of the GOPAC memo, in which the demonizing words were discouraged rather than encouraged?

There is no reason to believe that this will occur in the near term, particularly in the Republican Party. Trump supporters at the 2016 Republican National Convention repeatedly called for the imprisonment of Trump's Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton. Trump himself repeatedly encouraged bias and intolerance. Furthermore, party leaders are incentivized to maintain conflict and incivility. It draws attention and votes. But if for some reason both parties were to stand up for norms of civil partisan interaction, it could reduce partisan conflict and prejudice in American politics in general. This, however, is highly unlikely without some secondary intervention.

### Superordinate Goals

Back in 1954, once the Rattlers and Eagles had reached a point of such violent conflict that they had to be separated, the experimenters decided to try to bring them back into friendly relations. They knew that superordinate goals, or goals that go beyond group boundaries and include both groups, had been theorized to help groups mend rifts between them. The experimenters presented the Rattlers and the Eagles with a number of challenges that could only be solved if the teams worked together. In one case, the experimenters cut off the water supply to the camp, and as the boys grew more and more thirsty, they were compelled to cooperate to find and solve the problem with the water supply. In a second case, the teams were asked to contribute money to fund a movie night at the camp. They were forced to decide together how much money each team would contribute to obtain this precious treat. Finally, a precariously angled tree that threatened the camp was chopped down and pulled away by both teams of boys work-

ing together. These superordinate goals allowed the boys a chance to see each other as human beings, and though they still identified as Rattlers and Eagles, the animosity between them began to subside. After these exercises, the boys remained partial to their own teams, but they did agree to ride home in the same bus at the end of camp. Prior to the exercises, both teams had refused to share a bus with the others.

A modern political example of this can be seen in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11. For a short time afterward, Democrats and Republicans came together, at least in their approval of the president, George W. Bush. However, the activation of a superordinate American identity did not heal the rift between the parties. In fact, the attacks spurred increasing disputes between the parties over how best to respond; and a drawn-out war further divided the parties. As of this writing, news of Russian tampering in the 2016 election may be another influence that can unite Democrats and Republicans in service to the same goal of protecting America, but already Republican public approval of Russian president Vladimir Putin has increased (Nussbaum and Oreskes 2016).

In the best case, as Bert Klandermans wrote in 2014, "superordinate identity makes it possible for people to accept disadvantages done to their subgroup in the interest of the larger community. People trust authorities to make sure that next time their group will benefit. This implies that superordinate identity and trust in authorities are intimately related" (14). Unfortunately, lack of trust in outgroup authorities does appear to be preventing at least some of the potential benefit of the common American identity. As Hetherington (2015) explains, "Trust among those who identify with the party outside the White House is much lower than historical norms and, indeed, almost completely evaporated among Republicans during Barack Obama's presidency" (446). With the decline in trust of outgroup partisans, superordinate goals are possibly no longer powerful enough to bring the parties together. Brewer (2001a) points out that "when intergroup attitudes and relations have moved into the realm of outgroup hate or overt conflict, . . . the prospect of superordinate common group identity may constitute a threat rather than a solution . . . when intense distrust has already developed, common group identities are likely to be seen as threats (or opportunities) for domination and absorption. In this case, the prescription for conflict reduction may first require protection of intergroup boundaries and distinctive identities" (36). Brewer adds that the best way to protect distinctive identities is for a society to be divided along multiple lines, in a cross-cutting pattern. Social sorting is a barrier to the possible solution of superordinate goals.

The challenge, then, is to find any goal that could unify Democrats and Republicans and not simply cause more harm than good. The magnitude of this challenge is, in fact, what has been revealed in the multiple models described in this book. Despite a large number of common goals and essentially American problems, partisans have yet to find a way to unite in defense of outcomes rather than lashing out with partisan rancor regardless of the consequences. So far, Democrats and Republicans still won't board the same bus to go home.

### Self-Affirmation

It is the frustration of basic needs by instigating conditions that leads group members, whose individual identity is shaken, to turn to the group for identity, to focus more on their social identity, or to "give themselves over" to an identity group. This frustration also leads to scapegoating and the creation of destructive ideologies (which identify enemies), that turns the group against another group.

—Ervin Staub, "Individual and Group Identities in Genocide and Mass Killing"

A great deal of attention has been paid recently to uneducated, poor, white Americans, who are rising in prominence in American politics due to their increasingly visible racial prejudice, affiliation with Republican president Donald Trump, and their uniquely increasing rates of mortality due to drug and alcohol abuse (Case and Deaton 2015). Repeatedly, we see them described as feeling as if they have been left behind. As Trump reminded his supporters, "We got \$18 trillion in debt. We got nothing but problems. . . . We're dying. We're dying. We need money. . . . We have losers. We have people that don't have it. We have people that are morally corrupt. We have people that are selling this country down the drain. . . . The American dream is dead" (Frum 2016). This is not an uplifting message. In fact, it is a message that explicitly reminds these Americans that they should have higher status but unfairly do not.

According to a theory from social psychology, there is good reason to believe that these voters are suffering from damaged self-esteem, driven by either a lack of economic opportunity, a fear of a culturally changing country, or some combination thereof. Those with damaged self-esteem normally look for a way to enhance their self-image. One powerful place to find such a thing is a person's group identity, which provides an alternate way for individuals to feel highly esteemed.

The study of self-esteem and self-uncertainty has been ongoing in the

field of social psychology for some time. Recent research has examined the effects of self-esteem and self-affirmation on political variables. Self-esteem has been shown to affect ideological closed-mindedness (Cohen et al. 2007). American patriotism (Hohman and Hogg 2015), opinions about the Affordable Care Act (Bendersky 2014), evaluations of debate performances (Binning et al. 2010), and violence, extremism, and authoritarianism (Hogg, Kruglanski, and van den Bos 2013), among other things.

Hogg (2014) has argued that uncertainty about a person's own status can lead them to identify with more extreme positions and groups, while Hogg, Adelman, and Blagg (2010) have shown that this same uncertainty can lead to stronger religious identification. Other work based in social identity theory finds that when self-esteem declines, people attempt to improve it by using the status of their social groups as a buttressing agent, privileging ingroups and derogating outgroups (Crocker et al. 1987). In essence, when people feel badly about themselves they turn to their groups for self-affirmation, becoming more strongly affiliated with the group.

Furthermore, when self-esteem is threatened, people tend to prefer their social groups to be increasingly homogeneous (Jetten, Hogg, and Mullin 2000). When people feel self-esteem declining, they not only cling more strongly to their group identities but they "circle the wagons" of social identity, a process very much like social sorting, in order to keep their multiple identities as aligned (and therefore impervious to outsiders) as possible.

In the realm of American politics, this leads to the social polarization that emerges out of strong and aligned political group identities, as well as the increasingly aggressive activism that arises from these strengthened identities.

The good news is that Cohen et al. (2007) have found that simply reminding a person of their own self-worth, a technique called self-affirmation, can significantly reduce extremism and ideological closed-mindedness. To date, very little research within political science has taken advantage of the self-esteem literature to explain political attachments and/or political polarization in American politics, but future research may be able to use this information in a way that can safeguard economically disadvantaged white Americans from using their group identities to soothe their own sense of inadequacy.

Alternatively, an economic upturn or change in economic status for these and other Americans could reduce the intensification of outgroup loathing that is currently occurring among American partisans.

## Demographic Trends

Although we do not have reliable voter data from before the 1950s, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2008) have documented polarization in Congress going back to the Civil War. From these data, it is possible to see that the current levels of polarization, at least in Congress, are relatively close to what they were directly after the Civil War. So, considering that these levels of polarization significantly decreased between the Civil War and the 1950s, it may be possible to use some of the information from that period to help guide us toward a less polarized nation. In 2012, Hetherington and Haidt summarized for the *New York Times* multiple theories from political science that explain the depolarization period, including "shifts in the coalitions that composed each party, the shared experiences of war and economic calamity and very low levels of immigration, which allowed a stronger sense of national identity to form."

In all that this book has explored, it seems that the sense of national identity is one of the main victims of the social homogenization of the two parties. As the coalitions that make up Democrats and Republicans grow increasingly socially distant from one another, the superordinate identity of the nation grows less powerful and may even drive partisans apart.

In addition to this, we are witnessing a major change in the racial makeup of the American population. Roy Teixeira, William Frey, and Robert Griffin predicted in February 2015 that the United States eligible voting population would reach majority-minority status in 2052. Some states, such as New Mexico, have already reached that status, while other states, like Colorado would have to wait until 2060. A number of Red states, however, would turn majority-minority even sooner. Texas is predicted to be majority-minority in 2019, Georgia in 2036, and Louisiana in 2048. Mississippi, Oklahoma, Virginia, and North Carolina are predicted to reach majority-minority status during the 2050 decade. Furthermore, Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Utah are expected to reach at least 40 percent minority populations by 2060. They describe a "superdiversification" of American children, explaining, "In 1980, children were 25 percent minority; today, they are 46 percent minority. And diversification will not stop in the future: In 2040, children are projected to be 57 percent minority, and in 2060, children should be 65 percent minority" (Teixeira, Frey, and Griffin 2015, 11).

Unfortunately, decades of research, beginning with Allport, have found a positive relationship between the size of a minority group and levels of white

prejudice against minorities. Craig and Richeson (2014) found that, when white respondents were presented with these statistics about the *projected* population breakdown, they more strongly preferred to spend time with other whites than did respondents who were told about current population statistics. Craig and Richeson found that concern about the status of white Americans drives this effect. This means that the changing demographics of the American population are not leading toward racial tolerance, at least not soon. Furthermore, recent research that I have done with Leonie Huddy and Nechama Horwitz has found that Latinos are increasingly identifying with the Democratic Party and that this is partially driven by their sense of general discrimination against Latinos (Huddy, Mason, and Horwitz 2016).

In terms of social sorting, racial minorities<sup>1</sup> tend to identify with the Democratic Party, while whites identify as Republicans. The changes in the makeup of the American electorate suggest that, should current alignments persist, the Democratic Party will gradually grow to win increasing numbers of local, state, and national elections, despite having lost the 2016 elections across the board. According to social identity theory, group status matters a great deal to group members. When a group's status is low, as would be the case if Republicans began to lose elections in a consistent manner, a group member has three choices. A group member can (1) exit the group, (2) grow increasingly creative about how to describe group status, or (3) fight to change the group's status in society. Currently, strongly identified Republicans have been fighting, via activism, to maintain their group's status, just as Democrats have. If, however, the status or coherence of the Republican Party declines in the next few years or decades, it may be the case that increasing numbers of Republicans will choose to exit the group (likely becoming independents). If that occurs, it is possible that American partisans will experience a new realignment, which would reduce party homogeneity and therefore reduce social polarization.

### Rift in One Party: An Unsorting

Should Mr. Trump clinch the presidential nomination, it would represent a rout of historic proportions for the institutional Republican Party, and could set off an internal rift unseen in either party for a half-century, since white Southerners abandoned the Democratic Party en masse during the civil rights movement.

—Alexander Burns, Maggie Haberman, and Jonathan Martin, "Inside the Republican Party's Desperate Mission to Stop Donald Trump"

It is reasonable to argue that one major reason for the period of partisan dealignment in the 1970s and 1980s had a lot to do with the flight of southern conservatives from the Democratic Party. This era of dealignment, while messy, was also full of cross-cutting cleavages, which held levels of partisan rancor and social polarization lower than they are today. The Donald Trump phenomenon in 2016 was predicted by many to generate similar rifts in the Republican Party, though as of this writing few have appeared. Fred Malek, the finance chairman of the Republican Governors Association, was quoted by the *New York Times*: "There's no single leader and no single institution that can bring a diverse group called the Republican Party together, behind a single candidate. It just doesn't exist" (Burns, Haberman, and Martin 2016). Just as southern Democrats did not immediately join the Republican Party after 1964, it would take some time for any rifts in the Republican Party to realign into a new system of party coalitions. On the other hand, since the Republican victories in 2016, most party-infighting discussion has focused on the rifts within the Democratic Party.

Still, divisions in the Republican Party were emerging even before the appearance of Donald Trump. The rise of the Tea Party in 2010 and of the Freedom Caucus in the House of Representatives demonstrated genuine divisions between factions of the Republican Party. Ragusa and Gaspar (2016) found that the Tea Party and the Freedom Caucus have independently generated "party-like" effects in Congress, different from the Republican Party itself. Bode et al. (2015) analyzed Twitter posts and found that conservatives could be divided into three distinct groups. Since the widespread Republican victories in 2016, these various parts of the party must cooperate in governing. If the demographic trends toward racial diversity continue, and Republicans as a group begin to disagree on governing principles, it is distinctly possible that the party could reorganize itself into new sets of social groups. Social identities could be divided between factions of the party, which would generate the cross-cutting cleavages that suppress social polarization and social distance. This may be an unlikely scenario, but it is one way to imagine an unsorting of the American electorate, building, perhaps ironically, toward a more tolerant set of partisans on both sides.

### Where Does This Leave Us?

Nothing in politics is forever, and party alignments change and move over time. It just so happens that the current alignment of social identities within the two parties is promoting a greater focus on partisan victory than on the

good of the nation. This may be, in the context of the 2016 election, happening among Republicans more than Democrats. However, the social homogenization of the parties has made it difficult for partisans to learn to like, or even humanize, their partisan opponents. They are stereotyped, vilified, and rejected out of hand. The unfortunate truth of this, however, is that these deep social divisions are allowing opportunities for policy compromise to go unnoticed. A 2015 study found that there are multiple points of agreement across party lines, even on a polarizing topic like abortion (Vavreck 2016). Dozens of other studies have found the same regarding other issues, including gun control. Partisans of the two parties are capable of coming to agreement on many issues. But today, they will change their positions rather than agree with the other side.

As parties grow more sorted, the incentives for party identifiers to compromise with the opposition decline. As Tajfel found so many decades ago, when people are socially identified with a group, "it is the winning that seems more important to them." The social makeup of the two parties has real consequences for American politics. A more socially homogeneous set of parties generates an electorate that is unresponsive to external challenges. It reduces the portion of the population that can listen to political messages impassively. It generates prejudice between citizens who identify with differing parties but may otherwise get along.

Identity is a crucial component of American democracy. As I explain in chapter 2 and demonstrate in chapter 4, partisan identity can be separated from issue preferences, and the identity element can be a powerful motivator of human judgment, emotion, and behavior. Partisans have natural incentives to see the world through a partisan lens, and to privilege their own party over their opponents. They are naturally inclined to prefer to spend social time with members of their own party, and to interpret the actions and characteristics of the other party with bias.

Though political science has long understood the social power of partisan identity, or, separately, racial or religious identity, this book has shown that these identities are far more informative when they are examined in relation to one another. No single person holds one single identity. The convergence or divergence of multiple social identities has real consequences for political behavior, particularly when partisan identities are involved. As the Democratic and Republican parties have grown increasingly socially distinct from one another, as I document in chapter 3, the potential for compromise and cooperation have declined. In chapter 5, I describe the increased bias and social distance that is induced when partisan identities are aligned with other types of social identities. More than partisan identity

alone, socially sorted parties motivate a preference for ingroup partisans and prejudice in evaluating national figures and conditions.

Social sorting also does another very important thing. When parties are socially divided, their members react emotionally to political messaging, leading to behavioral consequences elaborated in chapter 6. But when partisans hold cross-cutting social identities, their emotional reactions are dampened. These emotional reactions are partial drivers of political activism, as chapter 7 shows. Therefore, when a nation changes from one made up of many cross-cutting identities to one built on socially segregated parties, the result is an electorate that is, on average, more angry, excitable, and active than it was before the social shift.

I have taken the position that the social sorting of the American electorate has been, on balance, normatively bad for American democracy. Many may disagree, thinking that an engaged and excited electorate is desirable. I maintain that an electorate that is emotionally engaged and politically activated on behalf of prejudice and misunderstanding is not an electorate that produces positive outcomes. The social sorting of American partisans has changed the electorate into a group of voters who are relatively unresponsive to changing information or real national problems. The voting booths are increasingly occupied by those who fiercely want their side to win and consider the other party to be disastrous. This effect exceeds that of bias based on partisanship alone. As long as a social divide is maintained between the parties, the electorate will behave more like a pair of warring tribes than like the people of a single nation, caring for their shared future.