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# Fragmented foes: Affective polarization in the multiparty context of the Netherlands

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#### ABSTRACT

Affective polarization, or antipathy between the supporters of opposing political camps, is documented to be on the rise in the United States and elsewhere. At the same time, there are limits to our understanding of this phenomenon in multiparty contexts. How do citizens draw the line between 'ingroups' and 'outgroups' in fragmented contexts with multiple parties? Answering this question has been hampered by a relative lack of data on citizens' views towards compatriots with opposing political views outside the US. This study is based on original data collection, measuring citizens' evaluations of various political and non-political outgroups among a population-representative sample of 1071 Dutch citizens. These data allow to study the extent and configuration of affective polarization in the highly fragmented context of the Netherlands. The analysis shows that respondents do distinguish between parties and partisans. They report more dislike towards political outgroups than towards almost all non-political outgroups. Rather than disliking all out-partisans equally, evaluations grow gradually colder as ideological distance towards a group increases. Affective polarization is especially strong between those who disagree on cultural issues, and between those who support and oppose the populist radical right. The article discusses how these findings enhance our understanding of affective polarization in multiparty systems.

## 1. Introduction

Affective polarization – or antipathy between citizens with opposing political views – affects democracies around the globe (Boxell et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2019; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2020). Affective polarization can erode citizens' willingness to engage with opposing political views and to accept each other's democratic claims (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015; Strickler, 2018). Taken to its extremes, affective polarization can spur dehumanization (Tappin and McKay 2019; Martherus et al., 2019) and lower the bar for political violence (Kalmoe and Mason 2018). While a functioning democracy can cope with – and even requires some degree of – passionate disagreement, excessive affective polarization erodes the norms that underpin peaceful democracies (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; McCoy et al., 2018).

While recent studies have vastly increased our understanding of affective polarization (for an overview, see Iyengar et al. 2019), there is still a relative scarcity of research on affective polarization in multiparty systems. Westwood et al. (2018) successfully operationalized the concept in Spain, Belgium and the UK using trust games, showing that affective polarization in these contexts overtakes mutual hostility across

linguistic or regional lines. Wagner (2020), Gidron et al. (2020), Reiljan (2020) and Boxell et al. (2020) studied affective polarization comparatively, showing the concept to travel across borders. While these studies confirm that polities with more than two parties often experience just as much affective polarization as the US (or even more), there remain empirical and theoretical challenges to our understanding of affective polarization in multiparty systems. This paper aims to address these.

Empirically, the study of affective polarization in multiparty systems has so far been hampered by a relative lack of measurements of dislike towards fellow citizens, which lies at the core of the definition of affective polarization. Virtually all studies on affective polarization outside of the US (e.g. Gidron et al., 2020; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2020) rely on respondents' evaluations of parties, usually on a 'like-dislike' scale. While such sympathy towards political parties is obviously related to evaluations of these parties' supporters, the two are conceptually and empirically different (see Druckman and Levendusky 2019). To explore the ways in which politics is driving a wedge between citizens, 'horizontal' measures are needed of citizens' feelings towards each other. This study reports the results of data collection of exactly such items: feeling thermometers towards various political and non-political outgroup members.

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These were fielded among a Dutch population-representative sample (N=1071). They can shed light on the extent and configuration of affective polarization in a context that experiences among the lowest levels of affective polarization according to Reiljan, 2020. If I find evidence – using these more explicit measures – that dislike between political opponents trumps other sources of division among the Dutch, such antipathy might well be equally – or even more – pronounced in other multiparty contexts that lack the political fragmentation, low levels of partisanship, and historically consensus-oriented political culture of the Netherlands.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the ongoing discussion regarding the way affective polarization operates in multiparty systems. After all, in countries with a multiplicity of parties, there is no clear-cut 'ingroup' and 'outgroup'. Positive affect is not likely to be confined to the supporters of just one party; nor is it likely that citizens dislike all outpartisans equally (Wagner 2020). I investigate whether Dutch citizens divide their fellow citizens into distinct political in- and outgroups based on partisans blocks, or rather feel gradually 'cooler' towards more ideologically distant compatriots. After all, political identities (and hence political enemies) are defined not exclusively by party affiliation, but also by broader ideological markers (such as being a 'Left-winger'; see Devine 2015) and concrete issue positions (see Hobolt et al., 2020). Among these, cultural issues have been argued to be more affectively divisive than others (Gidron et al., 2019). To test whether some issues indeed create more tension between citizens than others, I study affect not only towards partisan outgroups (such as Green voters or Populist Radical Right voters), but also ideological outgroups ('Left-wingers' and 'Right-wingers') and economic and cultural issue outgroups (e.g. 'those supporting [opposing] taking in more refugees').

In short, this study examines the extent and configuration of affective polarization in the multiparty context of the Netherlands by answering four interlocking questions. First, do citizens make a distinction in their evaluations between parties and their supporters? I show that respondents' evaluations of partisans indeed correlates imperfectly with their sympathy towards the respective parties. Moreover, their 'residual' antipathy towards political opponents - the part that is not explained by evaluations of parties – is systematically related to variables that should theoretically foster outgroup bias. Second, is such antipathy towards political opponents larger than dislike along non-political lines? Although comparisons remain tentative, I show that - even in the less-likely case of the Netherlands - respondents report more negative affect towards political outgroups than non-political outgroups defined by region, urbanity, education, and ethnicity. Third, how do citizens define political inand outgroups in a fragmented system? In line with Wagner (2020), I find that citizens do not show exclusive positive affect towards supporters of one party while feeling negative towards all others. Instead, such feelings get gradually cooler as ideological distance grows. Fourth, do some issues or parties create more affective polarization than others? As expected, I find more affective distance, net of all other factors, between citizens who think differently about cultural (rather than economic) issues, as well as between supporters of populist radical right parties and the rest.

As I will discuss in the Conclusion section, these findings help to shed light on the complex patterns of affective polarization in multiparty systems.

#### 2. Theory

Below, I discuss each of the four questions mentioned above in turn. Each of these is accompanied by one or two expectations. Although these are embedded in theoretical considerations, I opted not to formulate them as formal hypotheses because some require a more exploratory analysis rather than a single formal test.

## 2.1. Do citizens evaluate partisans differently than parties?

Citizens' political preferences can constitute a social identity, or "that

part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a group [...] together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership" (Tajfel and Turner, 1979: 63). In other words, we tend to see like-minded people as 'one of us'. A salient social identity fosters favoritism towards ingroup members and depending on intergroup dynamics and context - a negative bias towards the outgroup (Brewer 1999). The latter phenomenon - bias towards citizens who are perceived as outgroups based on their political views – is the core of the concept of affective polarization. Indeed, the term affective polarization was coined by Iyengar et al. (2012) to describe such horizontal evaluations: "the tendency of people identifying as Republicans or Democrats to view opposing partisans negatively and copartisans positively" (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015: 691). In this study, I focus on the former part of this definition: political outgroup derogation. In the academic and public debate, it is this phenomenon (rather than ingroup favoritism) which has been the object of most attention and concern.

Outside the US, Westwood et al., (2018) conducted trust games and thermometers to gauge evaluations of a number of partisan groups in Belgium, the UK and Spain. Helbling and Jungkunz (2020) use vignettes and trust games to study social distance towards several partisan groups compared to non-partisan outgroups in Austria and Germany. Both studies show that outpartisans are generally judged more negatively than other outgroups. At the same time, neither of the two studies sets out to study affect towards the full range of partisan identity groups available, which can be quite extensive in multiparty contexts.

As a result, most of our comparative insights on the configuration of affective polarization are based on so-called sympathy ('like-dislike') scores towards *political parties* (Boxell et al., 2020; Gidron et al., 2020; Huddy et al., 2018; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2020; Ward and Tavits, 2019). While these studies have yielded important insights, it is important to scrutinize the dependent variable used in these studies. As Druckman and Levendusky (2019) show, when asked about 'parties' in the abstract, respondents tend to think of elite actors – i.e., politicians and organizations. While party sympathy measures have the advantage of being widely available retroactively and across countries, there are also potential downsides to using party evaluations as proxies for affect between citizens.

First of all, many of the *normative* concerns regarding affective polarization stem explicitly from the way it impacts interactions *between citizens*. Strong political outgroup bias makes citizens less likely to engage with those with opposing views, less responsive to information from the other side, more likely to discriminate against political opponents in non-political domains, and more inclined towards political intolerance or even violence (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016; Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015; Kalmoe and Mason, 2018; Martherus et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2018; McCoy et al., 2018; Strickler, 2018; Tappin and McKay, 2019). These outcomes often concern the way citizens relate to each other, rather than merely governing their interactions with parties or candidates as elite actors. If we want to know how politics divides societies, we need measures of such horizontal evaluations.

Secondly, there are theoretical reasons (and empirical evidence) to expect that citizens' evaluations of the two types of objects might

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The word 'polarization' has been used to refer to *levels* (i.e. a state of division) or *processes* (the increase of this division); see Lelkes 2016. I use the word in the former sense. Polarization can thus be increasing, decreasing, or stable.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> While these problematic outcomes are plausible enough to warrant worry about excessive affective polarization, it is important not to paint affective polarization in an exclusively negative light either. There is some evidence that affective polarization spurs political engagement and participation (Ward and Tavits 2019; Wagner 2020), and it might well constitute a justified reaction to real injustices or norm breaking by political opponents.

diverge. To be sure, citizens' evaluations of groups of partisans are obviously related to their views of the respective party. If citizens dislike a particular party, they are ceteris paribus more likely to also dislike the citizens who support that party. This is confirmed empirically by Iyengar et al. (2012), who note that sympathy scores towards parties and partisans correlate at r=.69. Still, this correlation is far from perfect. Druckman and Levendusky (2019) experimentally varied the object of sympathy from Democratic or Republican 'voters' to 'candidates and elected officials' and found different levels and correlates. All of this suggests that some citizens are more likely than others to translate dislike towards a party in dislike towards its supporters, and hence that knowing somebody's views of a party does not automatically tell us what they will think of its respective partisans. Indeed, strong santipathy between social identity groups is not always a given. Rather, its strength depends – among other things – on the relative salience of the political identity (Hogg 2003; Banda and Cluverius 2018), the existence or absence of cross-cutting identities (Mason 2016), and the mental representation people have of outgroup members (Roccas and Brewer 2002). As a result, even if two citizens equally dislike a particular party, it is possible that one of them is much more unforgiving about its supporters than the other.

In short, given its roots in social identities, it is plausible that affective polarization between citizens behaves in part independently from the way citizens evaluate political elites. At the very least, it is an empirical question to what extent affective polarization can be meaningfully assessed using party evaluations. If evaluations of partisans are shaped by mechanisms that partly differ from those shaping evaluations of parties, the correlation between the two should not be perfect. In addition, the divergence between the two measures should be systematically related to features of both the 'subject' and 'object' of evaluation. Among the 'objects' (the evaluated groups), some parties might be systematically more disliked than their respective partisans (or vice versa). Among the 'subjects' (the evaluating citizens), some citizens will be harsher towards fellow citizens of an opposing political camp, net of their views of the respective party. This should especially be the case among those for whom the political identity is very salient (as captured by factors such as ideological polarization, partisanship, and political interest).

**Expectation 1:** citizens make a (systematic) distinction in their evaluations between parties and partisans.

#### 2.2. Does politics trump non-political divisions?

Druckman and Levendusky (2019) find that citizens are substantially more negative towards parties than their respective partisans. As a result, party evaluations are less suited to assess how deep affective polarization runs compared to other societal divisions. Measures that directly capture views towards fellow citizens do allow for such comparisons. Evidence in the United States suggests that politics is now more divisive than other social divisions such as class, religion, and perhaps even race (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015). Using trust games, Westwood et al. (2018) show 'partyism' overtakes antipathy across longstanding linguistic or regional divisions in Spain, Belgium, and the UK. They argue that "the intensely competitive nature of democratic representation encourages parties to demonstrate overt hostility toward their opponents – hostility that is un-tempered by the social norms of respect and tolerance that regulate competition between most social groups" (idem: 334). Helbling and Jungkunz (2020) show this is also the case in Germany and Austria using vignette experiments and trust games.

The Netherlands can be considered a less likely case to find rampant affective polarization. At the 2021 legislative elections, 17 parties obtained representation in parliament, the largest of them with merely 22% of the votes (Kiesraad 2017). The political landscape is thus extremely fragmentated. Furthermore, Dutch citizens have relatively weak, although not absent, 'expressive' partisan identities (Bankert et al., 2017; Huddy et al., 2018). The need for coalitions of usually three

or four parties (and the absence of two clear alternating governing 'blocks') means that an enemy today might be a coalition partner in the future. This resonates with the Dutch political culture, which has historically been highly consensus-oriented (Lijphart, 1968). Dutch politics moreover appears to have *depolarized* ideologically (Adams et al., 2012). It is therefore unsurprising that Reiljan, 2020 shows that the Netherlands are the least affectively polarized country in Europe (based on party evaluations). On the other hand, the factors that have been theorized to foster affective polarization, such as the rise of 'high choice media' (Iyengar et al., 2019), negative campaigning by politicians (Iyengar et al., 2012) or the salience of cultural issues (Gidron et al., 2019) has affected most societies, including the Dutch (e.g. Walter and Van der Brug 2013; De Vries 2018). In other words, affective polarization in the Netherlands likely differs by degree but not by nature.

At the same time, the Netherlands does not appear to stand out in terms of the nature or extent of its *non-political* divisions, being characterized by some (historical as well as contemporary) politicization around – among others – religion, ethnicity, and region, while espousing none of the deep fault lines of, say, Northern Ireland or Belgium. All of this makes the Dutch case interesting to benchmark the divisiveness of politics by comparing it to other social divisions. If we were to find that political divisions run as deep as non-political ones in the Netherlands, this might well be true to a greater extent in less consensual systems, except perhaps for those countries with very deep ethnic, religious or regional fault lines. To make such comparisons, I also included measures of respondents' views of outgroups in terms of religion, ethnicity, region, urbanity, and education, all of which are either historically or currently relevant divisions in Dutch society.

Of course, respondents' answers to such questions will be affected by social desirability: as noted in the quote above by Westwood et al., (2018), some might deem it less appropriate to dislike people based on non-political criteria. At the same time, in the Dutch context regional, ethnic and religious identities have in recent years been politicized, too, which begs the question whether they are (still) governed by much more prohibitive antiprejudice norms than do political oppositions. At any rate, the possibility that social norms are less preclusive of prejudice towards political opponents might be of substantive, not only methodological, interest, as it potentially explains why affective polarization can emerge quickly and unimpededly (idem: 336).

In short, it is relevant to compare the divisiveness of politics compared to 'classic' non-political divisions in society. Studies in other contexts have suggested that politics has come to trump other divisions. I expect this also to be the case in even the less likely context of the Netherlands.

**Expectation 2:** dislike towards political outgroups equals (or even overtakes) dislike towards non-political outgroups.

## 2.3. Who constitutes the outgroup in a fragmented landscape?

As noted before, affective polarization in the United States has been defined as "the tendency of people identifying as Republicans or Democrats to view opposing partisans negatively and copartisans positively" (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015: 691). The two-party supply side creates a relatively straightforward dichotomous opposition that resonates with large swaths of the population (Iyengar et al., 2019). The situation in multiparty systems is more complicated. Citizens in multiparty systems do often have meaningful partisan identities, but generally weaker ones (Bankert et al., 2017; Greene, 2004; Huddy et al., 2018), and many citizens feel positive towards multiple parties (Garry 2007). This raises the question *how* citizens define boundaries between ingroups and outgroups (Wagner 2020). While most Green party supporters will experience affective distance towards a Populist Radical Right voter, their feelings towards Social Democratic supporters are probably much milder or even positively friendly.

The latter example suggests that an underlying *ideological* dimension matters for affective polarization between two given citizens. It might do

so in a more dichotomous or continuous way. Citizens might identify themselves, broadly, as 'left-wing' or 'right-wing' and hence see people who see the world likewise as 'people like me' (Malka and Lelkes 2010; Devine 2015; Lelkes 2019). This might lead citizens to assess their fellow citizens as belonging to either of two blocks. Indeed, Huddy et al. (2018) document affective polarization (measured through party sympathy) towards 'in-coalition' and 'out-coalition' parties in Sweden, which tend to overlap with ideological camps. The existence of distinct blocks would preserve a relatively dichotomous ingroup-outgroup distinction. At the same time, the authors show Swedes still prefer in-parties over coalition partners by a substantial degree. Indeed, it is known that citizens are capable of locating parties as being closer or further away from them ideologically (Dahlberg 2009). That makes it likely that affective distance is correlated, in a gradual rather than dichotomous way, to ideological distance.

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In short, it is an open question whether citizens dislike all outpartisans equally or perhaps divide them into two 'blocks'. Given the Dutch fragmented landscape, and because political identities draw from multiple sources (such as party preferences, ideology, and/or issue positions), it is plausible that they gradually dislike fellow citizens to the extent that these appear more distant in terms of ideology or issue positions.

**Expectation 3**: dislike towards an outgroup increases with ideological distance.

#### 2.4. Do some issues and parties create more negative affect than others?

The role of ideology brings up an additional complication. The political space citizens need to navigate is not only fragmented but also multidimensional, in the Western European context including (at least) an economic and cultural dimension. 4 Some pairs of parties take similar positions on economic issues but very different ones on cultural issues; for others the reverse is true. It has been argued that distance on cultural issues fosters more affective polarization than distance on economic issues (Gidron et al., 2019; although cf. (Iyengar et al. (2012): 442). This rests on the assertion, frequently voiced in the public debate, that 'culture wars' are somehow more divisive (see e.g. Fukuyama 2018). Indeed, cultural (or in the US context, 'social') issues have been shown to align more closely with deep moral convictions or intuitions (Johnston and Wronski, 2015). While economic issues, too, often reflect very deeply held convictions, they arguably allow more easily for a morally acceptable middle ground. For these reasons it could be that citizens are especially loathing of fellow citizens who think differently about issues such as immigration, national identity, or gender roles.

On the other hand, the seeming heatedness of cultural issues might be confounded by the controversial role played by one of their primary instigators: Populist Radical Right (PRR) parties. These parties mobilize almost exclusively on cultural issues, especially nativism, combined with populism (Mudde 2007). The latter emphasizes the moral failings of all elites and the need to put into practice the 'general will' of the

'true' people. This moralization of politics likely affects both populist supporters and their opponents, realigning and crystallizing the 'main-stream' into an anti-populist camp opposing the populist camp (Moffit 2018) which look upon each other disfavorably. Furthermore, PRR parties' host ideology of nativism is seen by many to overstep the boundaries of social and legal norms regarding prejudice (Blinder et al., 2013), and as a result these parties – and likely by extension their voters – tend to be 'stigmatized' by large swaths of the population (Harteveld et al., 2019). Indeed, Gidron et al. (2019) find evidence for such 'radical right exceptionalism' in affective polarization.

In short, some issues might be more divisive then others; in particular, people might dislike citizens with opposing views on cultural issues more than those with opposing views on economic issues. However, if so, this might be confounded by the antipathy between Populist Radical Right supporters and all others. To disentangle these, the data collection reported here included not only ingroups and outgroups on partisan basis, but also towards ingroups and outgroups along general ideological (Left and Right) and issue (regarding welfare, immigrants, and gender roles) lines.

**Expectation 4:** distance on cultural issues is associated with more dislike than distance on economic issues.

**Expectation 5:** populist radical right voters both receive and radiate more dislike than others.

#### 3. Design

#### 3.1. Data and measures

The measures developed for this study were fielded as part of the Dutch *Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences* (LISS) panel<sup>6</sup> in August 2019. The LISS panel is drawn from a true probability sample of households (see <a href="https://www.lissdata.nl">www.lissdata.nl</a>). Of the panel participants, 1245 were randomly selected to fill in the affective polarization battery, and of these, 1071 (86%) completed the questionnaire.

The new questionnaire consisted of a *vote choice* question and a *feeling thermometer* battery. The remaining variables were obtained from the LISS panel's *Politics and Values* module which was fielded between January and March of the same year. This creates a time lag of about half a year between these items. This makes it more likely that respondents independently assess the two types of objects (parties and voters) rather than feeling forced to provide similar answers out of consistency. Because voters might have switched their political allegiance in between the waves, the correlation analysis will be replicated among those who did not change their preferred party. Descriptive statistics of all items can be found in Appendix A.

**Vote choice.** The respondents were asked which party they would vote for if 'elections were held today'. This is taken to signify the respondents' 'in-party'. Respondents were presented with all parties that obtained representation in parliament; alternatively, they could indicate they voted for an 'other' party, would not vote, or would vote blank.

Feeling thermometer. Respondents were asked to express their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Compared to Sweden, coalitions in the Netherlands do historically not follow distinct Left and Right blocks; instead, they usually consist of a centrist party (or parties) with either a mainstream left- or right-wing party and perhaps one or two very small parties. Because coalition partners are not as stable, nor necessarily ideologically allies, it seems less likely to find affective polarization along coalition lines to the same extent as Huddy et al. (2018) observed in Sweden. Of course, elite signals might nevertheless positively shape views of (voters of) coalition partners, and I therefore include a coalition partner dummy and discuss this in the results section.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The cultural dimension is often further dissected into the 'old' dimension about moral issues (i.e. traditionalism vs libertarianism) and the 'new' dimension on globalization issues (i.e. cosmopolitanism vs nationalism).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> A second, more contingent, argument is that cultural issues are currently the defining feature of politics in Western democracies and therefore matter more for how people define themselves politically.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University). See www.lissdata.nl.

 $<sup>^{7}</sup>$  Given its importance in the (earlier) US literature on affective polarization, the survey also included a social distance question with the aim to pilot these in the Dutch context. It consisted of a battery similar to the one used by Iyengar et al. (2012) in the US and the UK, stating: "Imagine a son or daughter of yours would get married. How would you feel about the following situations?" (answer scale ranging from 'very unhappy' to 'very happy'), describing the marriage partner as a partisan outgroup member (based on least like party), a welfare issue position outgroup member, and a immigration issue position outgroup member in turn. Druckman and Levendusky (2019) show that in practice the social distance item correlates relatively poorly with thermometers. Indeed, I found this correlation to be r=0.33, suggesting it to be a suboptimal measure of affective polarization. Replication of the main analyses in this paper using the social distance items produces largely similar, but weaker, results.

**Table 1**Overview of feeling thermometer items.

Identity dimension	Items
Party (8 items)	"People who vote for"
	Eight main parties were listed: conservative liberal VVD,
	populist radical right PVV, Christian democratic CDA, social
	liberal D66, Green GroenLinks, radical left SP, social democratic
	PvdA, populist radical right FvD.
Ideology (2 items)	"Left-wing people" and "Right-wing people"
Issue (6 items)	Refugees: "People who want to take in more refugees" and
	"People who want to take in fewer refugees"
	Welfare: "People who want to lower the general benefits" and "People who want to raise the general benefits"
	Gender roles: "People with a traditional views of the role of
	women" and "People with feminist views of the role of women"
Non-political (11 items)	Education: "Lower educated people" and "People who studied at university"
	Ethnicity: "People with a Moroccan immigration background" and "People without an immigration background"
	Religion: "Christians", "Atheists", and "Muslims"
	Region: "People from the Randstad" and "People from outside the Randstad"
	Urbanity: "People who live in a back city" and "People who live in the countryside"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup> I opted for 'Left' and 'Right' rather than 'Progressive' and 'Conservative' (or a variation thereof) because the former terms arguably remain dominant in everyday conversations on politics in the Netherlands.

feelings towards various groups on a continuous scale from 0 ("cold and negative"), through 50 ("neither warm nor cold"), to 100 ("positive and warm"). This 'feeling thermometer' is widely used in research in the United States and has been shown to correlate with more elaborate measures of outgroup affect (see Iyengar et al., 2018). The main advantage of this measure is that is allows, with relatively concise batteries, to establish and compare affective ingroup-outgroup distance based on several identities. Respondents judged the groups listed in Table 1 (presented to them in a randomized order).

Party sympathy. The LISS panel includes a yearly battery that records respondents' sympathy towards all relevant parties (mentioned in the abstract) on a 0 (dislike) to 10 (like) scale. This variable will be labelled Party sympathy. This standard battery allows to compare respondents' sympathy towards parties to their views of these parties' supporters. The answer scales for the two sets of objects differ (consisting of a 11 and 101 point scale, respectively), but this does not preclude assessing their correlation.

Economic and cultural distance between parties. To (indirectly) assess how ideologically apart supporters of different parties are on economic and cultural issues, I rely on the ideological distance between the respective parties according to the 2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), a regular expert survey on party positions. The distances between two parties on economic issues is calculated based on the 'Economic left-right position' indicator. The distance on cultural issues is based on the indicator 'Position on immigration', because this issue – and the wider cosmopolitan-nationalist divide it stands for – has been central to the Dutch cultural debate in the last decades (De Vries 2018). The analysis will be replicated using the broader 'GAL-TAN' measure, which includes a broader set of cultural issues, some of which are currently not as salient in Dutch politics. The measures were first z-standardized (to allow for a better comparison between the economic

and cultural dimension) and then the absolute distance between each dyad of parties was calculated. Because parties that are most distant on cultural issues might also have the most socially different voters (in terms of education, urbanity, religion, etcetera), I include a robustness check in which I control for dislike towards non-political outgroups.

*Other variables.* As proxies for the salience of politics for respondents, I rely on three indicators: ideological extremity as measured through a *Left-Right position* on a 0–10 scale (classified as 0-2 = Far Left; 3-4 = Center Left; 5 = Center; 6-7 = Center Right; 8-10 = Far Right); whether the respondent has a *Party identity* (1 if the respondent indicates to be either 'attracted to' or 'an adherent of' a party; 0 if neither); and self-reported *Political interest* (being Low, Middle, or High).

### 4. Results

The results section proceeds in four steps, following the four questions identified above. I first test the relation between support for *parties* and their respective *partisans*. Do respondents provide the same answers to both? And to the extent that they do not, can this difference be explained by factors that should foster affective polarization independently? I then move to a comparison between different identity dimensions, both political and non-political. Finally, I move to a more detailed analysis explaining feelings towards partisan outgroups.

#### 4.1. Do citizens evaluate partisans differently than parties?

Appendix B reports the average dislike towards all parties and their partisans. This shows that the *average* dislike towards parties correlates well with *average* dislike towards their respective *partisans*:  $^{10}$  the correlation is r=.95. Hence, they explain (.95 $^2$  \* 100 =) 90% of each other's variance. This suggests that party evaluations can be used to accurately assess which partisan groups are generally most disliked, and which less so, in a particular context.

On the individual level, however, the picture is different. The correlation between respondents' views towards parties and partisans is only r=.66. (Incidentally, this correlation is remarkably similar to the r=.69 found in the United States for the equivalent association by Iyengar et al., 2012). This means that only  $(.66^2 * 100 =) 44\%$  of the variance in respondents' evaluations of partisans can be explained by views of the respective parties. (If only evaluations of *out*parties and *out*partisans are considered, the correlation is even lower at r=.62, implying a mere 38% explained variance.)

Of course, part of the divergence between the items might be noise due to unfamiliar scales, differences in answer confidence, or the lag between the two items. It is impossible to establish the degree of noise with certainty. However, a replication among the 78% of the sample who did not change party preference between waves (eliminating arguably the largest source of noise) only marginally increases the correlation from r=.66 to r=.70. Plausibly, some respondents indeed 'punish' fellow citizens more harshly for their political views than others, creating a divergence in their answers on the two items. <sup>11</sup>

To put this assumption to a test, I analyze the divergence between the two items. Is this systematically related to features of the parties or respondents? To find out, I predict the feeling thermometer towards each partisan group by ideology, partisan identification (yes/no), political

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The introduction to the question was: "We would like to know your feelings about different groups. We want to ask you to judge these groups on a so-called 'feeling thermometer'. Scores between 50 and 100 mean that you have positive and warm feelings towards the groups. Scores between 0 and 50 mean you feel cold and negative about the group. A score of 50 means you feel warm nor cold about the group."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Green, Alternative, Libertarian vs Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Calculated among non-supporters of the party.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Moreover, the correlations split out by party, available in Appendix B, shows that correlations range between 0.57 (for the far left SP) and 0.68 (for the Greens), meaning that the predictive power of *Party sympathy* is not constant between parties, making the latter a better proxy for a affective polarization for some parties than others.

interest ('high' vs all others), and dummies for the out-partisan groups. I do so in a stacked ('long') dataset in which the observations are dyads of each respondents' evaluation of each partisan outgroup. <sup>12</sup> Crucially, in a second step the model *controls for party sympathy*. If views of partisans reflect views of parties plus some noise, adding this control should remove their correlation with the other predictors.

Fig. 1 shows the regression coefficients of these two regression models. The dummies for Evaluated party denote the partisan outgroup the respondent rated on the thermometer scale; the other variables are individual-level characteristics of the respondent themselves. The figure shows that, as expected, Party sympathy (the bottom coefficient) is a strong predictor of Partisan sympathy: an increase of 1 on the sympathy scale makes their supporters 5° more sympathetic. This replicates the correlation noted earlier. As is also to be expected, controlling for party sympathy substantially reduces the effects of the other variables. However, importantly, even in such a model, the remaining variation in Partisan sympathy is not entirely random. It depends, most clearly, on the partisan group that is being evaluated. Supporters of Populist Radical Right parties (and to some extent the Radical Left SP) are systematically more disliked than would be predicted based on people's sympathy towards those parties. Indeed, the literature suggests these groups of voters are strongly held accountable for their political preferences (Harteveld et al., 2019). Supporters of centrist parties, by contrast, are evaluated more positively than would be predicted by sympathy towards those parties. This means citizens might dislike these parties but not necessarily judge the citizens supporting these parties.<sup>1</sup>

Moving to the individual level, *Partisan sympathy* furthermore remains correlated (but not always significantly so) with variables that reflect the salience of politics for an individual. The variable *Left-Right* suggests that being more ideological extreme is associated with harsher evaluations of out-partisans (net of *Party sympathy*), although the only remaining significant difference is between the far and center left. Partisan evaluations are also more negative among those that report a *Party identity*: people who are *not* attached to any particular party are 1.5° more positive (again net of *Party sympathy*) towards fellow citizens than those who do have a partisan identity. There is some evidence that dislike remains higher, although not significantly so, among those who are highly interested in politics. All of this suggests that some groups in society – especially the politically engaged – are more affectively polarized than we could infer from their party evaluations.

All in all, the patterns are in line with Expectation 1. Citizens in the Netherlands distinguish, to some degree, in their evaluations of parties and partisans. While the average partisan sympathy correlates strongly with average party sympathy, on the individual level several patterns emerge that suggests that some Dutch citizens are more judging of political opponents than others. Affective polarization as a 'horizontal' evaluation is thus a distinct phenomenon with distinct causes, and hence relevant to study on its own. Below we continue to do so.

## 4.2. Does politics trump non-political divisions?

Citizens judge each other for their worldview, but how deep does this run? To explore whether affective distance towards political outgroups is comparable in extent to affective distance towards non-political outgroups, Fig. 2 maps the average thermometer rating towards ingroups and outgroups along all political and non-political identity dimensions. In each case, the ingroup score is the highest score handed out within a particular identity dimension (for instance, the most liked of all listed party supporters, or the most liked of the different religious groups); the outgroup score is the lowest score handed out within the same dimension (e.g., the least liked partisan or religious group). <sup>14</sup> In case there are more than two groups in a dimension (that is, the 8 partisan groups and 3 religious identities), the figure in addition shows the mean score assigned to all non-ingroup positions. The identity dimensions are presented in an ascending order of the lowest score assigned to the outgroup.

The first striking feature of Fig. 2 is that almost all political identity dimensions are associated with greater affective distance than non-political identities. This is a remarkable finding in the historically concensus-oriented political context of the Netherlands. The exception is religion: religious outgroups generate more affective distance than opposites on the Left-Right divide (although still less than all other politically defined outgroups). This important role of religion is due to the category 'Muslim', which receives very low feeling thermometer scores among citizens on the far right: around  $20^{\circ}$ , compared to  $\sim 50^{\circ}$  on the center left and  $\sim 40^{\circ}$  on the center right.

The latter pattern suggests that hierarchies of outgroup bias differs between groups. While a complete analysis of these moderators is beyond the scope of this paper, Appendix D provides an exploration. It shows that among those who are somewhat or very interested in politics, political divisions do trump all non-political ones, including religion. While the politically interested are significantly less sympathetic towards political outgroups, they are more so towards non-political outgroups. Splitting the patterns by ideology shows that far left-wing (and to some extent far right-wing) citizens are generally most critical of political outgroups, whereas dislike towards non-political outgroups is often highest on the mainstream and far right.

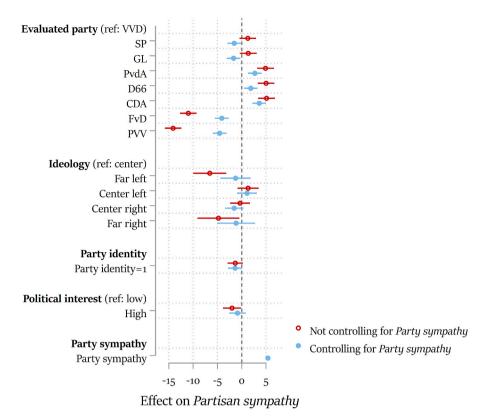
In short, in line with Expectation 2, Dutch citizens report more negative affect towards political outgroups than towards almost all nonpolitical outgroups. There are two caveats to consider. First, the size of the outgroups matters (Wagner, 2020). If a small party gaining few votes is disliked vehemently, while citizens are mild towards all other partisan groups, it would be a stretch to conclude that society as a whole is strongly polarized along political lines. Indeed, the below-20° scores for out-parties documented in Fig. 2 often refers to a small party (in the case of the Populist Radical Right, which is mentioned most often as the least liked partisan group, their vote share at the most recent legislative election at the time of data collection did not exceed 15%). However, it is important to note that, at 40°, the mean score towards all out-parties is still lower than the scores handed out towards all non-political outgroups except religious ones. Similarly, the issue outgroups on gender, refugees and welfare (which score at 30° and lower) were defined in rather general terms, and arguably refer to vast segments of society.

Second, as discussed in the Theory section, the political primacy suggested by Fig. 2 might reflect social desirability. The impact of social desirability is hard to ascertain using observational data. Still, it is relevant to note that other studies have also observed such political primacy in both the US (Iyengar et al., 2019) and Europe (Helbling and Jungkunz, 2020; Westwood et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is an open question whether social desirability really (still) applies as strongly to categories such as religion, region and education, which have become politicized everywhere in Western Europe, including the Netherlands. While this assertion requires replication with experimental designs or

 $<sup>^{12}</sup>$  This means there are repeated observations for respondents: one for each evaluated party. The total number of observations is therefore  $N_{\rm respondents}$  X  $N_{\rm parties}$ . The model includes a random intercept for respondents and dummies for each evaluated party. This allows to predict evaluations by characteristics of both the evaluated party and the respondent. Only evaluations of parties the respondent does not vote for are included.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> It is possible that evaluations of supporters and parties are non-linearly related. In an alternative specification I therefore replicated this analysis while controlling for party sympathy and its square term. The does not substantially affect the results.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Of course, this already assumes that respondent are most positive towards fellow ingroup members. An alternative way is to define ingroups and outgroups based on their objective characteristics, like the party they voted for, whether they are for or against immigration, etcetera. The two methods yield no substantive differences.



Note: Coefficients with 95% confidence interval. Observations are respondent-outparty dyads. Dependent variable is feeling thermometer score towards partisans. The model contains a random intercept for respondents. 'Evaluated party' refers to the outparty in the dyad; the other variables to characteristics of the respondent. Full regression models in Appendix C. Source: LISS

Fig. 1. Predicting Partisan sympathy, excluding and including Party sympathy.

implicit measures, I tentatively conclude that political identities are across the board at least as divisive as most other socio-demographic ones even in the less likely case of the Netherlands. This is a relevant assertion, because prior studies relying on party sympathy scores could not make such comparisons.

Finally, Fig. 2 suggests that cultural issues – refugees and gender roles – are indeed more affectively divisive than economic ones (welfare), as predicted under Expectation 4. However, the differences should not be overstated either: while the issue of gender stands out, the differences in average distance between refugees and welfare are minor. I study the 'culture wars effect' more extensively below.

## 4.3. Who constitutes the outgroup in a fragmented landscape?

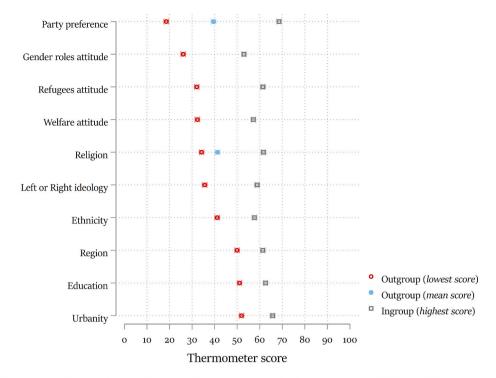
We can now turn to the question *how* citizens distinguish ingroups and outgroups in a fragmented multiparty system like the Netherlands. To find out, Fig. 3 reports, for each ingroup party, how its supporters feel towards the supporters of each of the other parties (visualized through both the size and the color of the square, small and blue denoting colder and large and red denoting warmer feelings). The parties are ordered by their general left-right position according the *Chapel Hill Expert Survey*.

Unsurprisingly, voters like the supporters of their own party – the scores on the diagonal – most. But they do not dislike all out-parties equally; and neither do two clear 'blocks' emerge. Rather, evaluations turn gradually cooler as the ideological distance to a partisan group grows. For instance, left-wing parties are positive to mildly negative

about the supporters of other left-wing parties, somewhat more negative about centrist voters, still more negative about right-wing voters, and the most negative about far right voters. The same is roughly true, in reverse, for right-wing voters. In short, in line with Expectation 3, ideological distance is a predictor of affective distance. This suggests that in multiparty systems, citizens do not identify dichotomous ingroups and outgroups, but rather make a more gradual distinction in their evaluations.

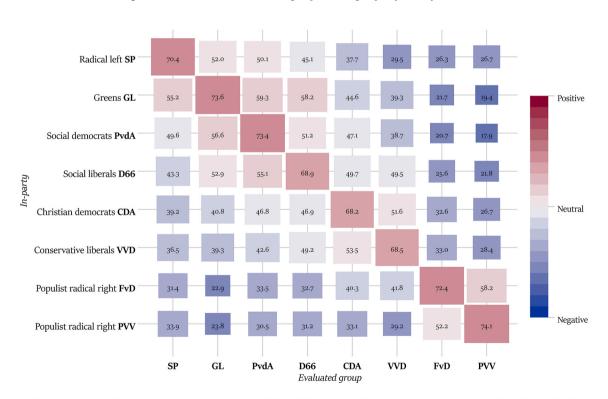
At the same time, one particular division comes close to a dichotomous fault line: the opposition between Populist Radical Right (PRR) supporters and the rest. Mainstream party voters are relatively uniform in their dislike of PRR parties (PVV and FvD): although this dislike is highest on the mainstream left ( $\sim$ 18-22°), even the mainstream right is more negative about PRR voters ( $\sim$ 28-33°) than they are towards mainstream left voters (high 30°'s/low 40°'s). In return, especially supporters of the oldest PRR party *Party for Freedom* (PVV) hardly distinguish in their scores between voters of the mainstream left and right. <sup>15</sup> In other words, PRR and mainstream supporters are not only strongly negative towards each other, they are also more homogeneously so, suggesting the emergence of highly moralized PRR vs. non-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Supporters of the newer PRR party FvD are more positive towards mainstream right supporters than towards left-wing supporters. This might reflect the fact that, at the time of data collection, many FvD votes had recently switched away from these mainstream right parties.



Note: Average thermometer scores handed out towards ingroup and outgroup members, with 95% confidence intervals. Source: LISS

Fig. 2. Thermometer scores towards ingroups and outgroups, by identity dimension.



*Note:* Average feeling thermometer scores (on a 0 to 100 scale) handed out by the supporters of each party (rows) towards the supporters of their own and other parties (columns). The size of the blocks is proportional to the feeling thermometer score. *Source:* LISS

Fig. 3. Average feeling thermometer ratings towards partisan outgroups.

PRR 'blocks' (see also Moffitt, 2018). The mechanisms behind this 'PRR exceptionalism' will be explored further below.

An additional pattern that emerges is that, again, affective distance appears somewhat stronger along cultural than economic lines. For instance, dislike between liberal-conservative VVD and radical left SP, two opponents on the economic dimension, is less heated than that between the cultural opposites *Forum for Democracy* (FvD) and the Greens (*GroenLinks*). However, this comparison might be confounded by 'PRR exceptionalism'. To disentangle the role played by these partly overlapping factors, I turn to a multivariate analysis below.

#### 4.4. Do some issues and parties create more dislike than others?

To study whether some issues or parties receive more negative affect, I predict respondents' evaluations of each party (except their inparty) in a regression model. To this end, I return to the stacked ('long') dataset behind Fig. 1 (with observations consisting of dyads of each respondents' evaluation of each partisan outgroup). I first predict thermometer scores by dummies for the respondent's inparty and dummies for the parties that are being evaluated. In a second model, the ideological distance between the inparty and outparty on both economic and cultural issues (based on the Chapel Hill Expert survey) is added. This allows to assess whether cultural issues create more affective distance and whether effects of party dummies - especially those of the 'exceptional' Populist Radical Right - remain even under control for ideological distance. In a final model, Party sympathy is added as a control variable. As in Fig. 1 above, this removes all variance explained by views towards parties. The remaining effects thus tell us how each variable directly explains dislike uniquely towards partisans. This can be thought of as a 'direct' effect that is exclusive for *outpartisan* dislike on top of the 'indirect' effect channeled through outparty dislike, and that would not be captured using Party sympathy alone. All models contain random intercepts for respondents. Fig. 4 shows a coefficient plot of the results (the full regression tables can be found in Appendix E). Negative (positive) numbers indicate that a variable is associated with lower (higher) scores on the feeling thermometer.

The party dummies in the first model confirm the pattern of Fig. 3: PRR parties (especially the oldest PRR party, PVV) both send and receive the most negative scores, as predicted by Expectation 5. The second model adds ideological distance to test whether there exists any additional 'culture wars effect'. While both coefficients have a negative effect, cultural distance indeed creates more negative affect than economic distance. This is in line with Expectation 4: cultural issues do seem more 'heated'. The PRR dummies are only marginally affected by including ideological distance, suggesting that dislike by and towards the far right goes beyond ideological distance.

The third model controls for sympathy towards the party, which means that the remaining variation concerns affect towards supporters in particular. As could be expected, this greatly reduces many of the coefficients, showing these effects on *Partisan sympathy* are largely mediated by *Party sympathy*. Still, in this model too, conditional effects remain. Populist radical right party supporters are still prime recipients of dislike. Effects of ideological distance remain too, and cultural distance is still more strongly associated with dislike than economic distance.

Robustness checks. I conducted three robustness checks, all of them reported in Appendix F. First, the final model behind Fig. 4 was replicated using the 'GAL-TAN' rather than 'Immigration' indicator of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. GAL-TAN distance has a weaker effect on Partisan sympathy than immigration distance, and as a result the difference with economic distance is not very pronounced either. It suggests that of the various cultural issues included in GAL-TAN, 'globalization' topics are the most divisive. However, this might be specific to the Dutch case, where the cosmopolitan-nationalist subdimension has played this primary role on the political agenda for over two decades, probably at the expense of issues of traditionalism vs libertarianism (such as LGBT

and gender equality).  $^{16}$  Second, to investigate whether patterns are confounded by warmer feelings towards coalition partners, I replicated the full model with an additional dummy for coalition partnership.  $^{17}$  While sharing a coalition is bivariately associated with  $5^{\circ}$  warmer feelings, this effect disappears in the full model (b=-.5, p=.89). Thus, there is no 'sympathy bonus' towards fellow citizens voting for coalition partners, beyond the fact that these tend to be ideologically closer. Third, to assess to what extent cultural issue distance between two groups of voters picks up on affective distance along other (non-political) dimensions, I included indicators for affective distance towards all *non-political* outgroups as controls to the model. This does not significantly affect the impact of either issue distance variable. This shows that cultural issue distance matters on its own, and its primacy is not confounded by a broader social distance between the cultural Left and cultural Right.

In short, the data confirm the existence of *both* a 'culture wars effect' and 'PRR exceptionalism'. Affective polarization is strongest towards opponents who disagree on cultural issues, as well as towards those who are on the other side of the PRR vs. non-PRR divide. This means that if cultural issues become more salient and/or PRR parties grow, levels of affective polarization can be expected to rise in tandem.

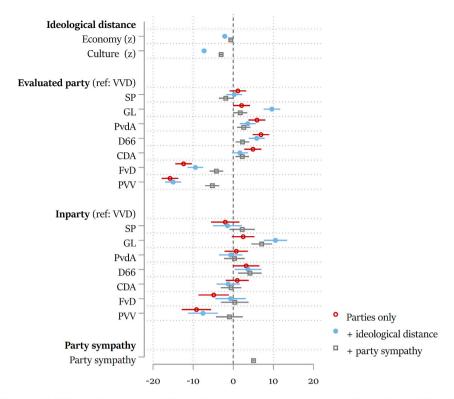
#### 5. Conclusions

While the growing literature on affective polarization has vastly increased our understanding of political discord around the world, most theoretical and empirical efforts have concentrated on the United States (but with notable exceptions, e.g. Westwood et al., 2018; Wagner 2020; Reiljan, 2020). This study set out to better understand affective polarization in the multiparty context of the Netherlands. Whereas almost all previous work on affective polarization outside the United States has relied on citizens' evaluation of *political parties*, this study employed survey data on respondents' views ofv their *fellow citizens*, spanning a broad array of political outgroups defined by party preference, ideology, and issue positions, as well as a range of nonpolitical outgroups. These data allowed me to draw four conclusions about the extent and configuration of affective polarization in the highly fragmented multiparty system of the Netherlands.

First, the data show that Dutch citizens do distinguish 'vertical' evaluations of political parties from 'horizontal' evaluations of their fellow citizens. At the individual level, the correlation between the two is moderate at best, and the ways in which they diverge are telling. Views of political opponents are systematically colder, even net of party sympathy, among some citizens than others, especially among those for whom politics is more salient. Those who care most about politics are especially inclined to extend their dislike of parties to citizens supporting said parties. At the same time, on the aggregate level, the correlation between average party and partisan evaluations is strong. This means that the advisability of using explicit 'horizontal' (inter-citizen) measures, rather than relying on 'vertical' (citizen-elite) proxies, depends on the goal of the study. Party sympathy can be accurately used to study aggregate patterns of affective polarization, for instance to assess which partisan groups are most disliked (and which less so) in a particular context. To study which citizens are most affectively polarized, relying on party sympathy might overestimate affective polarization among some groups of citizens (for instance those who care little about politics) and underestimate it among others.

 $<sup>^{16}</sup>$  At the same time, this will depend on the exact formulation of such issues, as Fig. 2 above found similar levels of dislike towards issue outgroups defined by refugees or gender roles.

 $<sup>^{17}</sup>$  That is, whether both the inparty and evaluated party were both in the coalition (1) or not (0). The coalition parties at the time of data collection were VVD, CDA, D66 and CU (the latter was not included in the feeling thermometer).



*Note:* Coefficients with 95% confidence interval. Observations are respondent-outparty dyads. Dependent variable is feeling thermometer scores towards partisans. Includes a random intercept for respondents. 'Evaluated party' refers to the outparty in the dyad; the other variables to characteristics of the respondent. Full regression models in Appendix F.

Fig. 4. Predicting Partisan sympathy.

Second, respondents generally reported more antipathy towards outgroups along political lines than towards non-political outgroups defined by education, ethnicity, urbanity, or region. (An important exception was the religious group of Muslims, who were judged more unfavorably than ideological opponents by a sizeable right-wing share of the sample.) To be sure, this primacy of politics should be confirmed using (implicit) measures that are less sensitive to social desirability. Still, the data presented here strongly suggest that political divisions run as deep as others even in the less likely case of the Netherlands, despite its fragmentation, consensus-oriented political culture, and low levels of affective polarization according to Reiljan (2020). Still, future studies should explore other cases to understand to what extent this primacy holds in countries with deeper fault lines around religion, language or region (e.g. Westwood et al., 2018).

Third, respondents did not rigidly distinguish between one partisan ingroup and all other voters, and neither did two 'blocks' emerge. Rather, dislike of fellow citizens tends to grow with ideological distance. This confirms voters are generally capable of evaluating the political offer on the basis of ideological positions (Dahlberg 2009). This conclusion is not incompatible with the fact that on the aggregate level ideological and affective polarization are only weakly, if at all, correlated (Lelkes 2019). While (ceteris paribus) ideological distance breeds affective distance, there are also additional mechanisms at work that impose a given ideological distance with much more antipathy in some

instances than others.

Fourth, the analysis provided evidence for two such factors: a 'culture wars effect' and 'populist radical right exceptionalism'. First of all, in contrast to Iyengar et al. (2012) but in line with Gidron et al. (2019), cultural issues tend to create more antipathy than economic issues. Respondents give somewhat lower thermometer scores to people who disagree with them on the issues of refugees or gender roles than on economic issues. Moreover, when predicting the level of affect between the supporters of two parties, disagreement on cultural issues (according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey) was associated with more affective distance than disagreement on economic issues. Secondly, Populist Radical Right (PRR) supporters stand out in the dislike they express and receive. Consistent with the party line (Mudde 2007), PRR supporters have a strong and relatively homogeneous dislike for the supporters of mainstream parties, even controlling for ideological distance and party sympathy. This resonates with the moralizing and homogenizing 'anti-mainstream' core of populist ideology. In return, PRR supporters were disliked to an even greater extent by mainstream voters. This provides evidence that for many citizens these are parties 'one does not vote for' (Harteveld et al., 2019). As a result, PRR parties induce a 'double boost' of antipathy to the system by being both the object and subject of unique antipathy, in addition to boosting the salience of cultural issues. In time, the populist moralization of politics might even spill over into the relations between other voters, charging politics as a

whole. This remains an open question that calls for longitudinal data.

Several topics remained outside of the scope of this study. For instance, there are more factors on the individual level that plausibly shape affective polarization, including information and media environment (Hutchens et al., 2019) and social sorting (Mason 2016). These factors might further predict which citizens are most likely to extend dislike of parties towards their supporters. Furthermore, the relative importance of politics vis-à-vis other divisions in society, as well as the relative divisiveness of some issues over others, will differ between groups in society - for instance depending on political interest, ideology, and political socialization in a particular cohort. Moreover, experimental and implicit designs should be employed to validate some of the conclusions presented above. Still, the findings of this paper invite me to formulate three recommendations. First, the study of affective polarization outside the US - especially regarding its individual-level determinants - could benefit from further devising and fielding measures that capture antipathy between citizens. Second, our understanding of affective polarization in multiparty systems would benefit from further theorizing about the gradual distinctions citizens make towards various politically defined groups in society, rather than starting from a party-based 'ingroup-outgroup' dichotomy. Third, there is a need for more theoretical and empirical work that links micro mechanisms to macro patterns. How can individual-level patterns, such as the role of ideological distance, the primacy of cultural issues, and PRR exceptionalism, account for the waxing and waning of affective polarization over time and between countries? This should shed more light on the prospects of affective polarization in two-party and multiparty systems alike.

## Data availability

Replication materials are available at https://doi. org/10.7910/DVN/ANL7OL

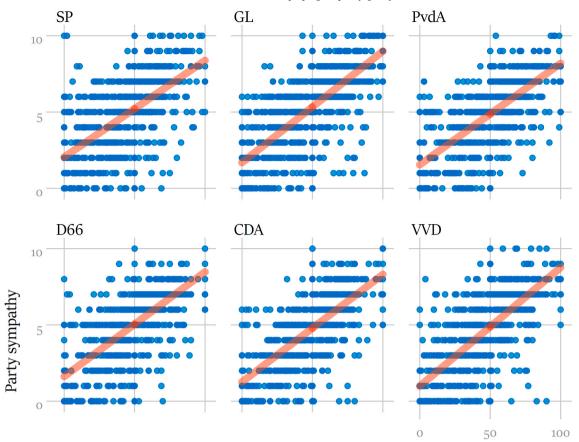
### Acknowledgments

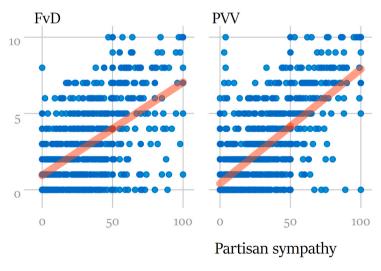
This research was supported by the *Dutch Research Council* (016. Veni.195.159) and the *Swedish Research Council* (2018–01468).

Appendix A. Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Average or proportion	SD	Min	Max
Feeling thermometers					
VVD	1072	45.40578	21.09032	0	100
PVV	1072	31.12873	24.20084	0	100
CDA	1072	48.38433	19.13605	0	100
D66	1072	47.48974	19.72983	0	100
GL	1072	46.0709	23.0243	0	100
SP	1072	44.14086	20.76438	0	100
PvdA	1072	49.01586	20.30695	0	100
FvD	1072	33.37313	23.93722	0	100
Left-wing people	1072	70.80667	18.33861	14	10
Right-wing people	1072	48.90578	20.96459	0	100
People who want to take up more refugees	1072	44.83116	22.76606	0	100
People who want to take up fewer refugees	1072	48.63806	22.37674	0	100
People who want to raise general benefits	1072	50.01026	18.8232	0	100
People who want to lower general benefits	1072	39.50933	19.74184	0	10
People with feminist ideas?	1072	48.57276	21.19018	0	10
People with a traditional view of women?	1072	30.47668	20.96241	0	10
Lower educated	1072	56.15672	15.85979	0	10
People who studied at university	1072	57.4375	15.20878	0	10
Dutch with a Moroccan immigration background	1072	42.91231	18.99609	0	10
Dutch without an immigration background	1072	55.88433	17.9418	0	10
Christians	1072	54.40392	19.5789	0	10
Atheists	1072	48.98134	21.47192	0	10
Muslims	1072	40.76866	20.59753	0	10
People from the West of the Netherlands ('Randstad')	1072	52.51959	16.23502	0	10
People from outside the West of the Netherlands	1072	58.77612	16.06599	0	10
People who live in a big city	1072	54.23881	15.20157	0	10
People who live in the countryside	1072	63.38246	16.92101	0	10
Left-Right position	946	5.086681	2.230356	0	10
Education					
Low	1082	.3567468	.4792607	0	1
Middle	1082	.2449168	.4302367	0	1
High	1082	.3983364	.4897818	0	1
Age					
Below 36	1084	.1688192	.374765	0	1
36–50	1084	.2103321	.4077326	0	1
51–65	1084	.2869004	.4525234	0	1
65+	1084	.3339483	.4718392	0	1
Male	1084	.4483395	.4975536	0	1

Appendix B. Levels of, and correlations between, Partisan and Party sympathy, by party





ObservationsLinear fit

Party	Average Party sympathy <sup>b</sup>	Average Partisan sympathy <sup>b</sup>	Correlation <sup>c</sup>
SP	4.70	42.66	0.57
GL	4.71	42.67	0.68
PvdA	4.56	46.37	0.62
D66	4.75	45.99	0.60

(continued on next page)

## (continued)

1.41	46.09	0.61
1.08	41.57	0.65
2.70	31.54	0.57
2.44	28.94	0.67
1	1.08 2.70 2.44	41.57 2.70 31.54

Appendix C. Explaining residual Partisan sympathy

	No control for Party sympathy	With control for Party sympathy
	b/se	b/se
Evaluated party		
SP	1.249	-1.543*
	(0.867)	(0.698)
GL	1.34	-1.681*
	(0.884)	(0.709)
PvdA	4.888***	2.700***
	(0.881)	(0.706)
D66	5.010***	1.861**
	(0.870)	(0.699)
CDA	5.100***	3.599***
	(0.880)	(0.706)
FvD	-10.988***	-4.101***
	(0.865)	(0.724)
PVV	-14.110***	-4.544***
	(0.865)	(0.710)
Ideology (ref: center)		
Far left	-6.580***	-1.262
•	(1.728)	(1.580)
Center left	1.311	1.082
•	(1.111)	(1.027)
Center right	-0.351	-1.544
ŭ	(1.039)	(0.959)
Far right	-4.789*	-1.157
· ·	(2.194)	(1.991)
Has a party identity	-1.328+	-1.358+
1 7	(0.800)	(0.738)
Political interest (ref: low/middle)	, ,	· · ·
High	-2.000*	-0.871
0	(0.950)	(0.866)
Party sympathy	<b>(</b> ,	5.382***
		(0.088)
Intercept	43.647***	21.034***
•	(1.095)	(1.049)
Variance (level-2)	84.151***	77.186***
• • •	(5.905)	(4.915)
Variance (level-1)	310.940***	191.536***
	(5.722)	(3.627)

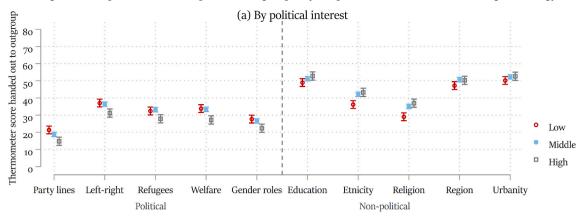
Source: LISS

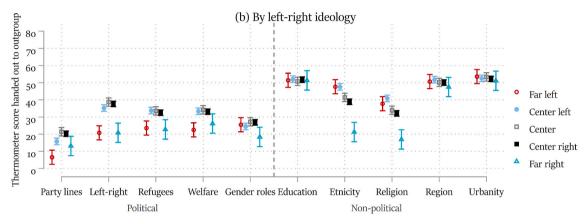
b Excludes supporters of the party.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>c</sup> Includes supporters of the party.

Note:  $N_{dyads} = 6841$ ;  $N_{respondents} = 938$ . \*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05; + p < 0.10.

Appendix D. Feelings towards political and non-political outgroups, by (a) political interest and (b) left-right ideology





Note: This figure presents affective distance

Appendix E. Predicting Party sympathy

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	
	b/se	b/se	b/se	
Outparty (ref: VVD)				
SP	1.148	0.223	-1.889*	
	(1.058)	(1.015)	(0.868)	
GL	2.065+	9.624***	1.721+	
	(1.087)	(1.049)	(0.906)	
PvdA	5.910***	3.611***	2.604**	
	(1.081)	(1.002)	(0.853)	
D66	6.898***	5.840***	2.296**	
	(1.064)	(1.008)	(0.860)	
CDA	4.894***	1.651	2.258**	
	(1.084)	(1.015)	(0.862)	
FvD	-12.398***	-9.439***	-4.212***	
	(1.054)	(0.988)	(0.873)	
PVV	-15.778***	-14.996***	-5.232***	
	(1.056)	(1.013)	(0.891)	
Inparty (ref: VVD)				
SP	-1.993	-1.445	2.219	
	(1.813)	(1.838)	(1.614)	
GL	2.461+	10.527***	7.080***	
	(1.435)	(1.471)	(1.302)	
PvdA	0.737	-0.658	0.288	
	(1.484)	(1.485)	(1.307)	
D66	3.200+	3.694*	4.140**	
	(1.687)	(1.702)	(1.497)	
		(c	ontinued on next page)	

	ued	

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	b/se	b/se	b/se
CDA	0.99	-1.269	-0.541
	(1.460)	(1.466)	(1.298)
FvD	-4.882*	-0.696	0.364
	(1.932)	(1.939)	(1.749)
PVV	-9.191***	-7.579***	-0.954
	(1.875)	(1.894)	(1.701)
Distance on economy (z)		-2.122***	-0.618*
-		(0.329)	(0.286)
Distance on culture (z)		-7.278***	-3.022***
		(0.338)	(0.307)
Party sympathy			5.040***
			(0.113)
Intercept	41.398***	41.883***	19.184***
-	(1.254)	(1.228)	(1.189)
Variance (level 2)	2.241***	2.279***	2.158***
	(0.041)	(0.038)	(0.038)
Variance (level 1)	2.900***	2.819***	2.635***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)

Appendix F. Robustness checks of Model 3 of Appendix E

	Using GAL-TAN	Coalition partner dummy	Including non-political thermometers	
	b/se	b/se	b/se	
Outparty (ref: VVD)				
SP	-0.611	-2.132*	-1.865*	
	(0.861)	(0.978)	(0.868)	
GL	0.774	1.543	1.764+	
	(0.903)	(0.964)	(0.906)	
PvdA	3.107***	2.391*	2.614**	
. , , , , ,	(0.858)	(0.940)	(0.853)	
D66	2.773**	2.274**	2.320**	
	(0.885)	(0.861)	(0.860)	
CDA	3.537***	2.276**	2.270**	
02.1	(0.880)	(0.863)	(0.862)	
FvD	-4.964***	-4.415***	-4.225***	
170	(0.872)	(0.950)	(0.873)	
PVV	-5.936***	-5.407***	-5.270***	
r v v	(0.892)	(0.948)	(0.891)	
Inparty (ref: VVD)	(0.892)	(0.940)	(0.891)	
SP	3.605*	2.368	2.265	
or .	(1.610)	(1.638)	(1.589)	
GL	6.108***	7.289***	6.339***	
JL				
D. 14	(1.299)	(1.358)	(1.297)	
PvdA	0.781	0.269	-0.058	
DCC	(1.311)	(1.308)	(1.295)	
D66	4.670**	4.324**	3.356*	
on .	(1.515)	(1.535)	(1.492)	
CDA	0.359	-0.518	-0.324	
	(1.308)	(1.299)	(1.284)	
FvD	-0.502	0.34	1.531	
	(1.750)	(1.750)	(1.751)	
PVV	-1.907	-0.947	0.167	
	(1.702)	(1.702)	(1.684)	
Party sympathy	5.185***	5.041***	5.018***	
	(0.112)	(0.113)	(0.113)	
Distance on economy (z)	-1.477***	-0.562+	-0.628*	
	(0.270)	(0.304)	(0.286)	
Distance on culture (immigration) (z)		-3.042***	-3.042***	
		(0.309)	(0.307)	
Distance on culture (GAL-TAN) (z)	-1.973***			
	(0.273)			
Coalition partner		-0.521		
		(0.962)		
Dislike towards non-political outgroups:				
Education			-0.016	
			(0.026)	
Etnicity			0.011	
			(0.023)	
			(continued on next page)	

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#### (continued)

	Using GAL-TAN	Coalition partner dummy	Including non-political thermometers	
	b/se	b/se	b/se	
Religion			-0.073***	
			(0.018)	
Region			-0.009	
			(0.029)	
Urbanity			-0.035	
			(0.027)	
Intercept	18.153***	19.310***	21.979***	
	(1.191)	(1.211)	(1.312)	
Variance (level-2)	8.668***	8.655***	8.414***	
	(0.326)	(0.325)	(0.321)	
Variance (level-1)	14.016***	13.946***	13.946	
	(0.156)	(0.155)	(0.155)	

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