

The Psychological State: How Psychology Conceives a Individual and Societal Relation

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Abstract

The conduct, and contents, of the ordinary individual's everyday life is invariably shaped by the influence of structures larger than themselves- specifically the social and political structures. Disciplines of social science deeply investigate this relationship between 'person' and 'polt,' but little attention is given to psychology's contributions to conceptualizing this individual-society relation. Here in response, four separate research chapters articulate psychological approaches to understanding the relations between the individual and the social-political apparatus, specific to the United States. First, review of the historical relation between psychology and 'ideology' illustrate the legitimacy of empirical psychological studies on general 'ideology,' and distinguish broader interrelated qualities of psychology and 'ideology.' Second, analysis of how contemporary psychologists understand and assess the individual's relation to and with the U.S. political structure decidedly reveals a need for future research to consider the role of partisanship and social identity. Third, the current issue of political polarization is assessed through a psychological lense, and psychologically based solutions proposed. Finally, reflective conclusions are drawn from the presented research. .

Keywords: ideology, political ideology, partisanship, political polarization, political psychology

Chapter One: The Historical Relation of Psychological and Ideological Study

Since its initial conception as a term, ‘ideology’ has consistently invoked controversy and confusion regarding its meaning and significance (Freeden et al., 2013). Throughout its history ‘ideology’ has dynamically changed its conceptualizations, used in (at times drastically) different ways by a variety of academic disciplines (Freeden, 2003). Presently, the term has yet to secure a universally shared definition- testament to its conceptual disorganization. Despite its evident ambiguity, the subject of ‘ideology’ has curiously received a substantial amount of interest from psychologists, starting from the second half of the twentieth century (Knight, 2006). Within the past two decades, research interest in the psychological underpinnings of ideology has surged (Feldman & Johnson, 2014; Jost et al., 2008).

Contemporary political psychologists regard ideology as a central point of research inquiry (Kalmoe, 2020). Evidently, classical and current empirical psychological study regard ‘ideology’ as an authentic concept of research interest. Be this as it may, ideology’s precursing conceptual obscurity casts doubt over its accuracy and relevance as an object and direction of psychological research- arising the question of if ‘ideology’ can legitimately be studied via psychology. Examining the historical relationship between both ideology and psychology reveal the questionable validity and limitations of present ideological, psychological research. Contemporary psychology's study of ideology is shaped by a history of empirical approaches to understanding ideology, but examining the conceptual relation between psychology and ideology reveal empirical and theoretical limitations to psychologically studying ‘ideology.’

Historical Origins of Psychological Approaches to Political Ideology

The historical origins of U.S psychologist’s usage and conceptualization of ‘ideology’ reveals the shaky conceptual foundations underlying psychology’s examination of the concept.

As of 1900 ideology was used as a value-neutral term, scarcely used in social scientific literature except in minor reference to political philosophy (Freeden et al., 2013; Knight, 2006), evident of its' failing to capture the interest of social scientific study. This lack of U.S scholarly interest in 'ideology' in the early 20th century is in part due to negative connotations and theoretical debates surrounding the term during the 18th and 19th centuries (Jost et al., 2008; Stone & Schaffner, 2012). Ambiguity and philosophical discourse proved incompatible with the growing experimental and empirical focuses of social sciences and psychology in the U.S, causing scholars to dismiss ongoing theoretical debates surrounding 'ideology' (Freeden, 2003). This rejection of ideological theoretics allowed room for psychologists to adopt a singular, simple definition of the term- one which could be subjected to empirical study and experimentation (Feldman & Johnson, 2014). As the twentieth century progressed, 'ideology' as a term came to be connected with distinct political practices and thought traditions (such as communism, liberalism). By 1930, social scientists considered 'ideologies' to be belief systems which could be 'scientifically' measured and categorized (Freeden, 2003). By the 1940s and 1950s U.S social scientists used 'ideology' to reference politically oriented and socially organized systems of belief (Jost et al., 2013).

Reflecting on this historical context, scientific psychological investigation into political ideology then occurs in 1950 due to two factors: (1) general acceptance of ideology as a reference to political belief systems, and (2) the rise of interest and importance of social and political psychology as products from World War Two (Jost et al., 2013). Due to social science's reaching of a shared, simple definition of political ideology, psychologists now had a finite concept of ideology which easily translated to suit the confines of empirical study. While a simple, shared conceptual definition serves as a beneficial foundation for psychology's empirical

review, this was not reason enough to encourage ideolog's empirical study. Psychological interest in ideology went from dormant to high-demand product from the socio-political context during and shortly following WWII (Jost et al., 2013). After the Second World War, scholarly references and interest in political ideology increased substantially (Knight, 2006). Jointly, the study of political psychology emerged as a study discipline, producing theories and methods based on scientific experimentation (Jost et al., 2013; Staekle, 2015). Social psychology gained heavy public and scholarly interest as the pressure to explain the events of WWII grew (Freeden et al., 2013). Not only did public and scholarly interest in ideology grow, the methodological and disciplinary resources of social and political psychology advanced (Staekle, 2015). Combined, these contextual factors laid the foundation necessary for psychologists to study political ideology.

The empirical psychological investigation of 'ideology' begins with the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950). The book's central project assesses an individual's susceptibility to political ideologies, and devise the psychological basis of fascism, anti-Semitism, and racial prejudice (Martin, 2001). Using a combination of clinical interviews inspired by psychoanalysis and attitude surveys, Adorno et al. (1950) proposed the 'authoritarian personality type' theory; which contended that a certain personality profile moderated an individual's political ideological affiliation. This 'authoritarian personality' is assessed using Theodore Adorno's main contribution to the project: the F-Scale (Fascist Scale) (Cichocka & Dhont, 2018; Stone & Schaffner, 2012). The F-Scale assesses personality traits which theoretically indicate a person's susceptibility to Fascist propaganda (Martin, 2001), the personality traits modeling from the Frankfurt School's interpretation of the Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The theoretical and empirical propositions contained in *The Authoritarian*

Personality began and animated a historical and contemporary research tradition of studying political ideology via psychology (Jost & Sidanius, 2004)

Approaches and Criticisms of Psychological Ideology Studies

Notably, psychological empirical research on political ideology serves as the only identifiable manifestation of psychology's and ideology's *experimental* historical relation. Following World War II, psychologists set out to examine how political ideology influences people's political and social actions, seeking to determine the underlying processes individuals use to form ideological beliefs (Feldman & Johnson, 2014; Zmigrod, 2020). This identifiable research tradition of psychological examination of political ideology uses a variety of different research thematic approaches (Augoustinos, 1999). Yet, critical analysis of the empirical study of political ideology reveals flaws and limitations.

Short History of Empirical Research

The first discernable, empirical psychological approach to understanding political ideology was the examination of personality. The personality approach to political ideology examines the interplay between personality traits and political systems, working from the assumption that individual personality differences affect the individual's choice relation to a political ideology (Huddy et al., 2013). Inspired by Adorno et al. (1950), Milton Rokeach published *The Open and Closed Mind* (1960), continuing the study of the correlates between individual personality and receptivity to certain political belief systems.

Enysecck's *The Psychology of Politics* (1955) marked the start of psychologist's use of genetics as explanation for political attitudes and political ideological identification (Lewis, 2016). Enysecck argued genetically disposed personality attributes determined the individuals' political ideological preference (Stone & Schaffner, 2012). Marking the emergence of cognitive

approach to understanding ideology, Tetlock's (1983) study *Cognitive Style and Political Ideology* investigated if a person's political ideology moderated their cognitive styling. Tetlock (1983) found that conservatives and liberals' cognitive styling significantly differed from one another- and present political psychology research continually finds differences between the cognitive profiles of liberals and conservatives in the U.S. (Amodio et al., 2007).

A core assumption first presented by Adorno et al. (1950) persists within contemporary research on political ideology: individual differences, such as personality characteristics, predispose people to certain ideological affiliations. Modern studies of the psychological underpinnings of ideology use individual differences as their theoretical core (Cichocka & Dhont, 2018).

Critical Limitations of Psychological Research on Ideology

Psychologists have historically taken a variety of approaches to understanding political ideology, which continue to be implemented in contemporary research. However, this historical and contemporary trend of empirical study is imbued with conceptually, methodologically, and foundationally flawed research traditions- bringing the current validity of psychological study of political ideology into question.

Conceptualizations of ideology, particularly within political psychological study, paradoxically lack both specificity and nuance (Nesbitt-Larking & Kinnvall, 2012). Both 'ideology' and 'political ideology' are not strictly psychological (or even straightforwardly defined) concepts, yet psychologists continually attempt to discern processes, characteristics, and attitudes which compose political ideological beliefs. Empirical studies rely on the political conceptualization of ideology as their object of study (Amodio et al 2007; Jost et al., 2008; Martin, 2001). Yet, consistent with ideologies' apparent theme of eliciting academic chaos, what

psychologists label as ‘political ideology’ shifts throughout the historical course of its psychological study. Though psychologists share a general, remote acceptance of ideology’s political connotation, psychological literature uses political ideology as synonymous with ‘belief systems,’ ‘attitudes,’ ‘life philosophies,’ ‘worldviews,’ ‘political orientation,’ ‘life philosophy’ and on (Zmigrod, 2020). Regardless of method or approach, the reach of psychological study of ideology is limited to a scientific attempt to objectify ideological phenomenon- and ‘ideological phenomenon’ has no standard definition.

Psychological, ideological empirical research further suffers methodologically instability. A common theme of its experimental designs focus on comparing and contrasting individual differences (Zimgrod, 2020; Stone & Schaffner, 2012) This comparison is most often the contrast between a single dimension of ideological identification. The majority of ideological-psychological study depends on a singular dimension of left versus right (or liberalism versus conservatism) to differentiate individuals and their political ideology (Feldman & Johnson, 2014; Staerke, 2016). Psychological research assumes that political ideology can be accurately represented by this singular dimension. Despite their common usage as the starting point for research on the basis of ideology, one-dimensional models of political beliefs do not appropriately account for the variation of political beliefs today (Nesbitt-Larking & Kinnvall, 2012; Staerke, 2016). Current political psychologists work to incorporate multi-dimensional models to present studies of political ideology; the bulk of experimentation on political ideology uses this inaccurate one-dimension model (Kalmoe, 2020). However, all fail to receive widespread recognition and use, because psychologists continually debate the structure and contents of political ideological belief systems (Staerke, 2016).

The debate over the contents of ideology belief systems within psychology further emphasize the lack of conceptual clarity and strict methodology within political ideological study.

Plainly and exclusively, psychology's historical *empirical relation* to ideology is the traditional study of political ideology. As a partial response to the question of if ideology can be studied via psychology, reviewing psychology's empirical conceptualization and studies of ideology expose a series of internal dysfunctions and limitations. The final criticisms and limitations of psychology's study of ideology concerns the vast conceptual history of ideology that percursed psychology's political interpretation of the term. Broadening the scope of examination past internal empirical study, a unique *critical and theoretical* historical relation between psychology and ideology surfaces. This theoretical relation between psychology and ideology conclusively realizes the answer to if psychology should- or better, can- study ideology.

Limitations of Psychologically Studying Ideology from Theory

Historical and contemporary theory conceptualize ideology more far more complexly than ideology's commonly prescribed, narrow definition of 'a set of beliefs and systematic values.' Antoine Destutt de Tracy coined the term 'ideology' in 1796 as the name for his proposal of a new empirical, philosophical study of 'human ideas and beliefs' (Freeden, 2003). Inspired by empiricist philosophers John Locke and David Hume, de Tracy sought to establish an academic discipline synthesizing the time's studious pursuits in metaphysics and psychology (Freeden et al., 2013). De Tracy's '*ideologies*' quickly gained a negative connotation after Napoleon denounced ideology as a tyrannical attempt to undermine social and political order, (Jost, & Sidanius, 2004; Knight, 2006). Ideology re-emerged as a concept in Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx's *The German Ideology* (1845). Here, Engels and Marx instituted a longstanding conceptualization of

ideology as a component of critical social theory. Under traditional Marxism, ideology is conceived as a perception distorting, unconscious illusion that functions to conceal the harsh nature of social and material reality; a mechanism used to maintain social order (Augustinos, 1999; Elliot, 2019).

Contemporary Marxists accounts of ideology attempt to explain how ideology embeds everyday social life and practice (Augustinos, 1999). Of note, the conceptual relation between ideology and psychology is bi-directional. Psychology uses concepts of ideology, but historical ideologic critique and theory demonstratively take inspiration from psychology. Specifically, Freudian theory and psychoanalysis has vitally contributed to construction of contemporary social theories on ideology (Elliot, 2019). Ideological theory of Frankfurt School, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, and Slavoj Zizek use Freudian theory and the psychoanalytic framework in their conceptualizations of the function of ideology- and some of these thinkers are important historical figures of psychology (Elliot, 2019).

The dominant approach to ideology in psychology and social science views ideology as a coherent set of political beliefs or values attributable to a political party. This conception of ideology ignores most theoretical accounts of ideology- most specifically mainstaying, enduring Marxist accounts of ideology. Psychology's tradition of ideological interpretation fails to give consideration to social theories of ideology that acknowledge it's integration into the common person's everyday life, stripping ideology of it's arguably most essential conceptual point: the self-society relation (Augustinos, 1999). On a marco-conceptual level, psychology's study of ideology is limited by its lack of consideration toward alternative theoretical conceptions of ideology. A select few psychologists have attempted to bring alternative conceptualizations of ideology to mainstream research (see Jost, 1995; Sampson, 1981).

Ideological theorists Jaques Lacan and Louis Althusser both articulated critiques of psychology which illustrate a problematic relation between psychology and ideology (Pavón, 2019). At the time of Lacan and Althusser's writing, the broader science of psychology was widely considered a scientific discipline heavily influenced by positivist and modernist thought. Conceptually, psychology embodied positive, modernist principles of individualism, self-determination, experimental instrumentation, rationality, and mechanistic worldview (Cartwright, 1979; Jovanovic, 2019). Lacan rejected the modernized methodology of psychology, arguing that psychology was an objective procedure that only produced findings that served the social functions of exploitation (Pavón, 2019). Althusser further disapproved of modern psychological methodology, as he believed it sustained oppressive ideological apparatuses by assuming the existence of natural innate individual tendencies, and pathologizing variables that contradicts its findings. Specifically regarding a relation between ideology and psychology, Lacan and Althusser expressed that psychologists cannot freely determine the fundamental value dispositions of psychological theory and practice- as psychological science itself is bridled by ideological influence (Pavón, 2019). Psychologists, and psychology, obey societal ideals and service the maintenance of socio-political functioning- suffering logical restrictions imposed by socio-political imperatives (Pavón, 2019). Lacan and Althusser's rationale follows that if psychology is itself an 'ideological apparatus,' subjected to the constraints of socio-political influence, then psychology cannot objectively study ideology. Both ideological critiques of psychology are theoretical speculations- but the notions of Lacan and Althusser criticism allude to the following limitation of the psychological study of ideology: 'psychology' itself cannot objectively study 'ideology' as an empirical object, as psychology

itself is an 'ideological apparatus' (or at the very least, not independent from the influence of ideological bias).

To apply this critique to a hypothetical example: psychology's empirical study of political ideology occurred to service socio-political needs of the times of ideologic authorities (government, public institutions). The findings of these empirical studies gave explanation to human behaviors which- consciously or unconsciously- biasly reassured the time's social norms (like associating 'un american' peoples and practices with negative personality traits) to maintain ideological social structure.

Historical psychologists' accounts illustrate that psychology is especially susceptible to the influence of ideology (Schwebel, 1974). Under a Marxian conception of ideology, psychological theory serves as a means to provide scientific, rational basis to propagate the ideological social norms (Augustinos, 1999). Psychological theories are produced by experimentation conducted under a sociopolitical apparatus, based on observations of people, groups, and social structures- which are Marxian ideological structures themselves (Schwebel, 1974).

Returning to political ideology, Cartwright (1979) observed that social psychology's research agendas are heavily influenced by the political ideology of American society. Further, the theories of social psychology often formulated as responses to the social problems confronting the U.S. Continuing, Cartwright (1979) expressed the values of U.S democratic political ideology reflected in the concentrations of social psychological research topics. This historical account of social psychological research illustrates a literal way political ideology shapes the conduct of psychological research. Here, the critique of ideology illustrated by Lacan and Althusser appear to play out in historical accounts of psychological research. In this instance,

the United States ideological political democratic and public social structure- what Lacan and Althusser regard as 'ideological apparatus'- shows a direct influence on psychology as a science, and the ideologic limitation of its produced contents. Following, 'ideology' cannot be a studial pursuit of psychology independent from its own influence on science. Unless psychologists and psychology produce works including a self-awareness to ideology's influence, psychology's theoretical and conceptual relation to ideology obscure its progression, empirical findings, and broader application.

This ideological conceptual limitation also manifests in the current political psychological debate. Today, political psychologists debate if studying political ideology actually produces valid scientific insights- the specific concern being if studying political ideology can occur devoid of bias or distortion (Jost et al., 2013; Staerkle, 2016). Psychologists respectfully but inevitably, hold their own political and ideological beliefs. More broadly, psychologist live under a dynamic socio political states. From the standpoint of broader ideological social theory, empirical observations- which later spurr studio investigation - made by psychologists are overtly taken from zeitguised attitudes, social occurrences, events of their socio-political contexts. Here, psychological observations are characteristic reflections of the constantly underlying social ideological apparatus.

Conclusion

Reviewing the independent historical and contemporary scholarship of both ideology and psychology show the two fields of study cross-contaminate with one another- indeed, there is a tangible relation between both psychology and ideology. This historical interrelation between psychology and ideology characterizes into two notions: (1) psychology and ideology interact through empirical research, and (2) psychology and ideology share a unique and abstract

interactive theoretical relation. Yet, an interactive historical relation is not sufficient grounds to conclude that the psychological study of ideology (empirical or theoretical) is a legitimate research pursuit. Examining the historical origins of psychology's study of ideology show that 'ideology' was a convoluted term, redefined by social scientists to satisfy usage in empirical research. Following, the historical and contemporary empirical psychological research on ideology is found flawed conceptually and methodologically. Regarding ideological theory, psychology as a science is denounced as a mechanism of ideology. On the theoretical level, psychology cannot legitimately study ideology, as psychology is a manifestation of ideology itself.

When used separately, both terms 'ideology' and 'psychology,' allude to extensively broad and umbrellistic disciplines of scholarly interest. Indeed, the academic disciplines of both ideology and psychology are afflicted by consistent (even radical) reconceptualization through both their respective histories. Though the empirical psychology study of ideology is proven as a flawed and illegitimate means of studying 'ideology', this finding does presume to extend to every facet of psychological and ideological study.

Chapter Two: The Social-Political Identity Revealed in Comparing Partisanship and Political Ideology

Social identity is contemporarily considered the individual's link to the greater social apparatus, examined to derive the interspace between the individual and society (Reicher et al., 2010). The particular aspect of social identity under investigation presently is political dynamics. The aim is to devise the primary social expression of United States citizens' use for interaction with their political structure via examining political identities. Political identities characteristic to the U.S include partisanship (party affiliation) and political ideologies. Partisanship refers to the individual's identification and self-selection of a political party (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). Ideology refers to the systematic belief systems representing the policies and values of a worldview (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). The assumed common goal of a representative democracy reliantly depends on citizens' engagement in politics to produce accurate representations of policy preference (Mason, 2018). Determining the present state of U.S. electorates' mechanisms of political engagement and their effects is necessary for understanding the social functioning of democratic proceedings. One finds that the individual's partisan affiliation is more effectively relevant to their interaction with the political structure, compared to the ideological policy- and social identity theory may provide beneficial insight into the underlying workings of U.S. partisanship. Social identity is related to current citizens' understanding of political ideology, partisan affiliations, and political practices. Psychological research on political ideology lacks sufficient investigation into the role of social identity theory, and incorporating social identity theory into political psychology is argued as the beneficial model for understanding and addressing the contemporary political relation between the individual and others.

Separating Political Ideology and Partisanship

First, ideology and partisanship must be differentiated. The difference between ideology and partisanship can be explained via the distinction between (1) identity-based ideology and (2) issue-based ideology: issue-based ideology refers to steady policy selection functioning with measurable patterns, while identity-based ideology is characterized by the individual's social connection to group labels (Mason, 2018). Experimental research measures assessing policy attitudes only service issue-based ideology (Mason, 2018). Identity-based ideology is assessed by measures distinguishing the intensity of an individual's attachment to a group- and may address more potent underlying motivators of an individual's political preferences than issue-based ideology (Mason, 2018). Political ideology is an expression of issue-based ideology, while partisanship is expressed by identity-based ideology. Prior conventional psychological testing has shown to overstate the effect of political ideology on the individual and that most people (aside from a compact knowledgeable group) demonstrate an actual political ideology embodiment (Kalmoe, 2020). Instead, partisan identity emerges as a vital predictor force of mass politics, and partisan identity remains effective on the majority of United States citizens (Kalmoe, 2020). However, the correlation between political ideology and partisanship is significantly high and has grown stronger in recent years (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). Therefore, despite partisanship's stronger predicting effect, partisanship requires disentanglement from political ideology.

Distinguishing the different levels of effect demonstrated by both ideology and partisanship is difficult to externally validate in an experimental psychological setting as the two are strongly correlated, but doing so is necessary for determining the role of social identity in politics. The election of President Donald Trump provided a unique opportunity for real-world

political science testing distinguishing partisan attachment from ideological issue commitment. No U.S. president or party leader has consistently shifted between liberal and conservative issue positions frequently while retaining party support (Baber & Pope, 2019). This presents a setting to externally validate citizens' relationship to ideology and partisanship and disentangle the highly correlated ideology and partisanship (Baber & Pope, 2019). Baber and Pope (2019) find that partisan identity is so effective that participants' self-identified ideology can directly contradict their expressed policy positions when cued by party leaders. Partisan individuals here show more value for group attachment over issue positions. Political ideology is disregarded entirely for social attachment. Here, social identification with ideology is found to reliably predict individual social distancing from ideological outgroups, this trend occurring with insignificant effect attributable to actual issue-based disagreement (Mason, 2018). Partisanship as a social affiliation is an overtly stronger predictor of political behavior than an individual's expressed political ideology and issue-policy stance.

Partisanship as a Social Identity

Partisanship is determined as a more effective predictor of political behavior, but to contend it as the primary facet of political expression for U.S. citizens, partisanship is established as a social identity. Social identities are characterized by their (1) relational function of comparing oneself with others, (2) it's sharing with other ingroup members (thus providing a basis for shared actions), and (3) it's providing of meaningful associations product from collective contexts (Reicher et al., 2010). To better understand how partisanship emerges as a social identity, partisanship is examined through the expressive approach. The expressive approach (Green et al., 2002) understands partisanship as a longitudinal political identity assessed via social affiliations to groups and their emotional attachments (Huddy & Bankert,

2017; Huddy et al., 2015). Examining the underlying and overt effects of partisanship on citizens today reveal that social identification with partisan groupings is shown to reliably predict the individual's social distancing from their perceived partisan opponents (Mason, 2018), U.S. citizens demonstrating a characterizable degree of social preference for their ideological ingroup over their outgroup.

Following social identity theory (SIT) from Tajfel and Turner (1986), the individual maximizes differences between ingroups and the oppositional outgroup, producing aggrandized differences between the social groups and positive preferencing of ingroup members. This function of SIT is demonstrated in the perceptual biases characteristic of political partisanship. Partisan social identification significantly relates to the individual's predisposition to hold favorable attitudes for their party and disfavorable attitudes for the party of its direct opposition (Greene, 2004). Greater social identification significantly relates to a greater perception of differences between the corresponding in-group and out-groups. Intergroup differentiation is directly linked to heightened preference levels within the individual's party (Greene, 2004). With political parties serving as a social group, ingroup party members are motivated to positively advance and protect party status (in this instance, electoral dominance). Additionally, as levels of social identification with partisanship increase, individual levels of partisan-oriented activities increase (Greene, 2004).

Implications of Partisanship as a Social Identity

The extent of how partisans treat one another as a stigmatized outgroup has steadily and significantly increased over the past few decades. This increase has risen to the point where party affiliation serves as a 'litmus test' for interpersonal relationships (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018). The rise of this phenomenon may underlay the current state of polarization characteristic of U.S.

society and therefore demonstrate partisanship as the primary extension of U.S citizens' political interaction. False polarization is when partisan affiliates have increasingly overestimated the ideological division between their party against its opponent. Individuals increasingly conclude that the ideological divide is more profound than actuality (Wilson et al., 2020). False polarization is presently on the incline and has been for the past several decades (Wilson et al., 2020). Further, affective polarization refers to the rising levels of distance and distrust of political opponents, otherwise understood as negative partisanship (Wilson et al., 2020). Affective polarization is not attributable to a party's collection of opinions and policies ideologies but the social attachment to ideological labels (Mason, 2018). Though partisan affiliations have evolved to become more ideologically consistent, party actions now more consistent with ideological policy values, ideological policies characteristic to political parties have not polarized to the same extent. Overtly, affective and false polarization are emerging products of the rise in partisanship across the U.S electorate, not attributable to a literal issue-based ideological divide among the U.S masses.

Conclusively, the primary political identity used by U.S citizens as a manifestation of their relationship to the greater political apparatus is partisanship, not political ideology. When partisanship is understood as a social identity, the importance of partisanship as a significant predictor of political action becomes clear. Due to the present issue of the polarization afflicting the U.S political environment, further research understanding the role of partisanship as a social identity is necessary to distinguish potential solutions to the negative implications inherent of intense states of polarization. Partisan identity has increasingly risen in correlation to other individual facets of identity, such as gender, race, age, religion, and culture (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018). Further, partisan hostility towards the individual's out-party has increased

(Mason, 2018). Thus, understanding partisanship as a social identity may indicate as to why partisanship has risen significantly in past years, why partisanship serves as the most significant predictor of an individual's political behavior, and how present issues of the U.S political environment (such as false and affective polarization) may be addressed.

Chapter Three: A Psychological Approach to the Issue of Political Polarization

The current level of political polarization in the United States is immensely high. Political polarization refers to the political, ideological divide between parties. This phenomenon occurs at both the individual and societal levels. It is worth addressing the various forms of polarization, these being (1) ideological, (2) affective, and (3) false (Wilso et al., 2020). Ideological polarization is a partisan divide based on policy issues, and in the U.S, this divide has been increasing moderately over time. Affective polarization refers to the levels of dislike, distrust, and social distancing a partisan directs at their opposing party. A current phenomenon of interest is evidence suggesting that partisans have increasingly come to believe the ideological divide between political parties is greater than the reality- called false polarization. The present aim is to approach the issue of political polarization from a psychological perspective. The negative consequences of political polarization are illustrated, and potential paths of a solution to this contemporary issue are proposed.

Political polarization should not be entirely dissolved, as disagreement within the American political structure aids in better-representing electorate diversity (Wilson et al., 2020). Ideological polarization has always been characteristic of U.S politics- but within the past two decades, political parties have shifted to become more ideologically divided than ever (Pew Research, 2021). This means that political parties, such as Democrats and Republicans, are increasingly diametrically opposed regarding policy issues and values. Such ideological polarization indicates that political parties are increasingly partisan- identification with a political party is increasingly becoming a more strict adherence to either strictly liberal or conservative policy stance. As a result, the political-ideological overlap between the two most prominent parties of the U.S, Democrat, and Republican, is increasingly (if not entirely) diminished (Pew

Research, 2021). Yet, this notion of strict party adherence to a set political ideology (ideological uniformity) is not accurate or representative of the ideological stances of the majority of U.S citizens. Political polarization among the political elite thus negatively impacts the central functioning of representative democracy. Furthermore, experimentation demonstrates that the U.S electorate often votes with the party, instead of policy, in mind (Rollwage et al., 2019). For example, a Republican party affiliate will vote for a position that may be a liberal ideological policy, simply based on party affiliation. This phenomenon of endorsing parties regardless of policy is exacerbated under conditions of political polarization. Observational data indicate that increases in ideological extremity are associated with strengthening an individual's identification with their partisan (party) identity (Iyengar et al., 2019). With this state of ideological polarization and the establishment of strictly divided political groupings, the primary concern now is if animosity between partisan individuals impacts their actions and behaviors beyond politics- the question of social relations and everyday life are negatively impacted by the political sphere. Upon review of the research, it becomes sadly apparent.

A new division among the American public has recently emerged, this being the affective polarization mentioned. Heightened levels of distrust and disliking towards the individual's party opposite are increasing- this phenomenon being what political scientists refer to as 'negative partisanship' (Pew Research, 2021). Political, social distancing practices, such as only marrying in-party, or dissatisfaction with friend and family association with out-party members, have increased significantly within the last 50 years (Iyengar et al., 2019). This increase in political, social distancing is predominantly only witnessed in the United States compared to practices observed in similar democracies such as the United Kingdom. The level of animosity experienced between U.S political parties is both rising and concerning, as inter-party hostility

could lead people to dogmatically accept their political party stances (regardless of the contents) due to pure disliking of the opponent party (Wilson et al., 2020). Yet, this animosity is increasingly found to be a product of an illusion- the party's distancing and disliking of their opposition may be aggravated by a misconception.

The individual's perceptions of the social reality have a substantial influence on their cognitions, emotions, and behaviors- and indeed, perceptions of political polarization have a demonstrated effect on the individual's political actions (Westfall et al., 2015). People who hold a greater perception of a divide between Democrat and Republican parties are shown to be more politically active and engaged, even acting in harmful ways. Affective polarization profoundly impacts the individual's perception of ideological differences between parties (Moore-Berg et al., 2020). Strong partisans with greater affective prejudice toward their political out-group were found more likely to have stronger perceptions of ideological differences on political issues, despite the slightness of the ideological differences. Ideological differences spur strengthened senses of partisanship. Therefore, perceived ideological differences can increase partisanship and thereby further the perceived ideological divide (Moore-Berg et al., 2020). Overall, this creates a self-fueling cycle, the final product of which is extreme animosity between parties. The tendency to overestimate polarization occurs equally among both Democrats and Republicans, but the greater the level of partisan identification, the stronger the perceived divide becomes (Westfall et al., 2015). Importantly, Moore-Berg et al. (2020) find that this phenomenon of individuals' biased perceptions towards their opposing party is not produced by one party more than another. Therefore, this issue can be approached from a common ground psychological approach, not specific to a particular political party. Overall and evidently, political disagreement is increasingly transforming into political distancing, which is impairing social relations and

democratic functioning. Two solutions are proposed to address this issue of false and affective polarization.

First Proposed Solution: Education Dismantling Misconception

With the finding that misperceptions of the opposing political party aggravate the increases in the divide between political parties and partisan affiliates (Iyengar et al., 2019; Pew Research, 2021; Westfall et al., 2015) then potentially, providing means of correcting these misconceptions could help to reduce the trend of affective polarization. Iyengar et al. (2019) illustrate that experimental research from Ahler and Sood (2018) found that correcting an individual's misconceptions about political parties decreased the extremity of the individual's perceptions of an opposite political party. Therefore, the integration of educational programs intending to break down misconceptions, such as within schools, Human Resource departments, and community resources, may help propagate the diminishing of false polarization. However, as the current state of Media and political Elites actually serve as instigators of political polarization (Barber et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2020) and misperceptions between parties, one hesitates to propose they could serve as catalysts for breaking down polarizing misconceptions. Yet, if used appropriately, integrating educational agendas into the political elite and Media may be incredibly effective.

Second Proposed Solution: Amendments to Research Agenda and Contributors

Definitional and conceptual discrepancies concerning political polarization emerge in reviewing the psychological literature dedicated to examining political polarization. There is little to no research concerning understanding the mechanisms that produce affective polarization in the individual or determining the conditions that cause partisan animosity (Iyengar et al., 2019). To deliver effective programs and solutions combating the negative consequences of

polarization, one proposes that the future research agenda of political psychologists should be to ascertain a sub- and interdisciplinary shared model of the psychological processes involved in political polarization. Currently, the psychological grasp of political polarization is relatively limited. Indeed, the psychological processes of political polarization are hard to replicate in a laboratory setting (van Barr & FeldmanHall, 2021). Social psychologists have speculated the psychological processes underlying political polarization, citing aspects of Social Identity Theory or the function of bias formation, but a consensus has yet to be achieved. Van Barr and FeldmanHall (2021) argue that political polarization is studied either cognitively or contextually within psychology. However, polarization cannot be examined strictly by one approach over another; the two must be combined to best understand the issue at hand (van Barr & FeldmanHall, 2021). In line with this reasoning that political polarization cannot be examined through a singular approach, one argues that the psychological investigation of political polarization should further extend to occupational, educational, and vocational fields of psychological study. Additionally, the adoption of a cross-disciplinary lens may produce the development of stronger understandings of the current political polarization phenomena. Though political scientists have worked to demonstrate the existence of political polarization, perhaps in combination with economists, various branches of psychology, and sociologists can an effective model and understanding of political polarization be achieved.

Conclusion

Presently, the state and immense levels of political polarization experienced in the U.S require attention and possible alleviating solutions. Timely and essential issues of the 21st century, such as climate change, can only be effectively addressed when political parties (at the individual, group, and elite level) must cooperate. This division problem should and will (to be

cliche) be solved with two forms of unification. In combating misconceptions between parties, affective polarization may be reduced, diminishing the greater climate of polarization as a whole. Additionally, a shared interdisciplinary understanding of the processes underlying political polarization may benefit the further development of solutions to address this contemporary issue.

Chapter 4 redacted to remove personal reflections and any identifying information.

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