DO POLARITIES ATTRACT? EXPLORING BELIEFS ABOUT AND PREFERENCES FOR PARTY POLARIZATION IN SWEDEN BASED ON SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

Elvis Bisong Tambe, Department of Political Science, Linnaeus University
E-post | elvisbisong.tambe@lnu.se

Olof Reichenberg, Department of Social Studies, Linnaeus University
E-post | olof.reichenberg@lnu.se

Abstract: We describe citizens' beliefs and preferences for party polarization in Sweden with Survey 2020. For methods use graphical exploratory analysis (descriptive, multiple dimensional scaling, simple correspondence analysis). Our first result suggests that most citizens respond that differences exist between parties. Nevertheless, citizens respond that differences have slightly decreased. Consequently, most citizens prefer greater polarity between parties. The second result suggests that the Sweden Democrats supporters feel that the polarization between parties have increased over time. Whereas the Left Party find that the party polarization has decreased. Consequently, Left Party supporters prefer greater party polarization, whereas the Sweden Democrats supporters prefer less party polarization. Our third result suggests that citizens that belief that parties differ prefer less polarization. Finally, our result suggests that social class differences exist and to a lesser extent education.

Introduction

On July 15, 2021, Sweden suddenly found itself the topic of global news – following the PM Stefan Lofven lost a confidence vote following a rent control dispute (BBC, 2021). The fact that Sweden Democrats and Swedish Left Party triggered this vote of confidence went against the scholarly narrative about increasing political polarization in western democracies.[1]

Previous research has studied the trend of opinion polarization within nations using ideology, a variable often used to measure parties' political positions. Others focus on studying the consequences of polarization (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008; Fiorina et al., 2005). Firstly, party polarization helps citizens to distinguish between candidates and parties. Thus, party competition helps citizens to choose a party to vote for. Secondly, party polarization allows the winning party in government to enact policy programs presented to voters during the election campaign (Jacobson, 2000; Crotty, 2001; Dalton, 2008). However, researchers disagree if polarization has increased (Baldassarri and Bearman, 2007; Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008) or decreased between either citizens or parties (Fiorina et al., 2005; Fiorina and Abrams, 2008).

However, we know less about citizens' beliefs and preferences for party polarization. A few studies exist on majority rule (e.g., USA, UK), but research has neglected proportional rule such as Sweden. At the same time, we know that party rule conditions politics and public opinion.

Thus, we contribute to the study of citizens' beliefs and preferences of party polarization in Sweden. First, we study whether the citizens' belief about issue differences between parties. Second, we study citizens' beliefs about the distance between parties has increased or decreased. Third, we study if citizens prefer greater differences between the parties. Finally, we explore how beliefs and preferences vary by party, class, and education.

Such insights instruct us about: (a) parties in public opinion, (b) party competition, (c) social categories in politics, (d) citizen-party relations, and (e) citizens' knowledge about party politics. Incidentally, the insights may help us understand the parliamentary crises in Sweden.

Purpose

We aim to explore citizens' beliefs and preferences for party polarization in Sweden with Survey 2020 (Hagevi, 2020).

What characterizes citizens' beliefs and preferences about party polarization?

How do citizens' beliefs and preferences about party polarization correspond to party identification?

How do citizens' beliefs about party polarization cluster with their preferences for party polarization?

How do citizens' beliefs about party polarization cluster with their preferences for party polarization map on to social categories (class, education)?

For clarity, beliefs and preferences correspond to "opinions" (Weakliem, 2020). "Preferences" refer to: wants, wishes, desires, or aspirations (Boudon, 2017; Freese, 2009; Elster, 2015). "Beliefs" refer to perceptions, interpretations, or judgments that can be true or false (Boudon and Bourricaud, 2002; Elster, 2015). Ideology refers to normative beliefs (Boudon, 2017).

We organized the remainder of the text as follows. First, we motivate our choice of Sweden. Second, we review previous research and theories. Third, we report the data and variables in the method section. Fourth, we report and explore the data. Finally, we posit our conclusions and discuss implications for theory and previous research.

Why study citizens in Sweden?

As we mentioned above, the recent parliamentary crises that took Sweden by "surprise" cast doubt on the current narrative about the surging polarization among the elites, parties and even the general public.[2]

Recently, researchers have proposed that polarization has increased in Sweden. Specifically, researcher suggest that Sweden has become less polarized on economic issues and more polarized on cultural issues. On the one hand, all the parties have moderated their position on economic position and class voting has declined. On the other hand, the parties polarize on the cultural issues (Oscarsson et al., 2021; Hagevi, 2022). For example, Oscarsson et al. (2021) argues that the cultural dimension that deals with integration, religion, culture, and immigration polarize Swedish parties and citizens. Specifically, (Oscarsson et al., 2021) reveal an increasing ideological distance between the parties, notably multiculturalism, migration globalization, and ethnic identity. For instance, taking the case of the current refugee influx, the report reveals parties, notably the Left Party, Green and Center Party, have become more generous. In contrast, other parties such as the Liberals, Moderates, Christian Democratic have become more restrictive.

However, except for a few studies notably those of Hagevi (2022) and Loxbo (2014), previous research has overlooked to consider citizens' belief and preference about differences in party politics. Thus, our study we explore what citizens in Sweden belief and preference about differences in party politics.

Previous Theories and Research

In the following, we discuss previous theories and research. Thereafter, we provide a criticism and propose an alternative explanation. Finally, we turn to our own theoretical framework.

Research on politics has been dominated by the issue of political polarization. Skeptics have championed the, so called, "party cartel hypothesis", i.e., legislators agree in Parliament (Katz and Mair, 2009). Meaning that the hypothesis predicts the decline of ideological or opinionated differences. Researchers on legislators have shown that variation in polarization inferred from votes such as ballots, hand, voice, or rising (a.k.a. "roll-call data" e.g., "yea" and "nay" votes).

Do polarities attract?

Similar results hold when surveying party representatives (Hare and Poole, 2014). By using "spatial methods", researchers have shown that legislators votes' cluster according to ideology. For example, legislators vote cluster either by liberal-conservative or left-right dimension (Armstrong II et al., 2014). Sweden follows the same pattern. Researchers have noted polarization among parties and questioned claims of "the party cartel hypothesis" (Loxbo and Sjölin, 2017).

Like parties, citizens have become increasingly polarized (DiMaggio et al., 1996; Baldassarri and Bearman, 2007; Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008; Weakliem, 2020). Evidence suggests that the polarization of citizens' opinion have increased among parties (Diermeier and Li, 2019). Thus, parties react to citizens.

However, all do not agree (Fiorina et al., 2005; Fiorina and Abrams, 2008). Disagreement has often been attributed to differences in measurement. Specifically, measuring polarization with a single scale left-right or liberal-conservative can be misleading (Armstrong II et al., 2014).

The left-right or liberal-conservative scales fails to differentiate between economic and cultural issues. Recall, that polarization refer to clustering between issues (Weakliem, 2020). Such clustering may be either cultural (e.g., abortion, immigration, religion, crime, environment) or economic (e.g., taxation, public spending, trade, banking, privatization, subsidies). Thus, parties may conform to single dimensions (left-right or liberal-conservative). Instead, citizens place themselves along a two-dimensional space: cultural versus economic. The rise of Trumpism, Tea Party movement, new environmentalists' movements (e.g., extinction rebellion), feminist movement, animal rights activism, xenophobic parties demonstrate how citizens demand attention to cultural issues.

Consider some examples from Sweden. The Green Party evolved from the environmentalist movement as a reaction to the left-right politics (e.g., environmental concerns). Likewise, the Christian Democrats evolved from the Pentecostalist movement in reaction to left-right politics (e.g., abortion concerns). Eventually, the parties adapted to the left-right scale. Later, the Pirate Party and Feminist Party gained representation in EU politics based on cultural issues (e.g., gender pedagogy in schools, Internet privacy) followed by the Sweden Democrats in the parliament. Researchers have suggested that Social Democrat supporters among the working classes switched their loyalty to the Sweden Democrats as a consequence of cultural issues (Oskarson and Demker, 2015). Indeed, one might suspect that the appeal to nostalgic (traditional) and anti-establishment issues contributed to the shift (Elgenius and Rydgren, 2019) diffused through social medias (Törnberg and Wahlström, 2018).

Thus, demonstrating the citizens demand for cultural issues. In the UK, one may consider the success of UKIP (UK Independence Party) and Brexit as a consequence in primacy of cultural issues in politics. Indeed, the "Leavers" scored higher on authoritarian values regardless of party identification (Labor or Conservative) than the "Remainers". Where the average "Remainers" consisted of older, less well educated, and lower classes than the average "Leaver" (Perrett, 2021).

However, citizens seldom commit to political ideologies (liberalism, environmentalism, conservatism etc.). Instead, ideological positions occur as an unintended consequence of correlated opinions (Converse, 2006; Boudon, 1989). For example, citizens opinions about "abortion laws", "gay marriage", and "gun laws" may cluster or correlate. Readers might wonder why do clustered opinions occur. First, the average citizen vote for the same party as their parents (Weakliem, 2020). The average parents educate the child in what issues contribute to welfare of the country, town, or neighborhood. However, citizens "adapt" to their parenting rather than accepting it (Boudon, 1989). Second, our peers influence our opinions. We meet with people of the same education, occupation, region, lifestyles, and opinions (DellaPosta et al., 2015; Weakliem, 2020), e.g., "Latte Liberal". Thus, we adapt similar opinion to our peers. Third, political communication can be distorted due to difference in diffusion, exposure, interpretations, and attention (Boudon, 1989).

Consider one example of distortion and diffusion in politics: Fox News, Tea Party movement, and Trumpism. The American example indicates how political communication contributed to polarization among citizens on "cultural issues". The example also illustrates how "ideological" polarization emerged due to the popularity of an ideology of the American South: "Trumpism" (i.e., correlated beliefs about nostalgia, anti-establishment specific to the South). In Sweden, selective exposure to communication increased polarization on cultural issues (Shehata et al., 2022). Fourth, life events matter (e.g., migration, education, unemployment, marriage, parenting, bribes etc.) (Boudon, 1989). For example, if one has reached a financial and educational standard, then one often shift their opinions (Inglehart, 2018). Specifically, the likelihood of shifting stance on "cultural issues" increases (Inglehart, 2018).

Although, we know much about polarization among parties and citizens, research has failed to account for the mutual influence of parties and citizens on polarization. Parties react to opinion polls. Citizens react to parties. Although research has demonstrated that electorates opinions and votes reflect a greater polarization, the average citizen may or may not agree. As citizens opinions evolve, their interpretation of the parties' signals may shift or even be distorted. Thus, the left-right scale has often been critiqued for failing to correct for ideological shifts. Political methodologists have demonstrated that the left-right scale like the liberal-conservative scale fail to capture ideological shifts (Armstrong II et al., 2014). We take a different approach and focus on the association between citizens opinions about party polarization. In other words, we seldom address the issue of beliefs about other people such as citizens beliefs about parties (Boudon, 1989). We also question the over-emphasis on psychological aspects ("bias", "limited information", "information cost" or "political sophistication") as explanations treating citizens as unintelligible (Mason, 2016; Dalton, 2016; Goren et al., 2009). Instead, we have to consider how the average citizens act intelligible depending on their interpretation of the social situation (as discussed below).

Theoretical Framework

We contend that the explanation must consider how parties signals (i.e., communicate (Gambetta, 2009)) their positions to the citizen. First, parties can adopt different position on political issues

to signal differences in manifestos (e.g., "toughness on crimes", "environmental concerns"). Second, party legislator can cast their votes to signal differences (e.g., motion of no confidence, passing laws, tax-reliefs). Third, parties can form collation to signal unity and rivalry (e.g, party block politics) (Weakliem, 2020). Fourth, parties have leaders and activists that can engage in political communication, e.g.,: news papers, national television, rallies, door knocking, marshes (e.g., labor day), magazines, news feeds, tweets etc. to signal positions on political issues (Weakliem, 2020). Citizens interpret the signals of the parties and signal their support, e.g., preferences in opinion polls, banners on the lawn, badges on the car, or votes.

In our study, we theorize that citizens' party identification contributes to differences in citizens' beliefs and preferences about party differences. First, citizens react to parties and parties react to citizens (Weakliem, 2020). Second, party supporters converse, persuade, and diffuse beliefs or preferences about party signals (Weakliem, 2020). On average, citizens have higher frequency of face-to-face contacts with similar party identification (or social categories) (Weakliem, 2020; McPherson, 2004). Although, parents cultivate citizen's commitment to a party during childhood, contacts between citizens of the same party (or social categories) make our commitments durable (Weakliem, 2020). Thus, party identification conditions citizens' responses to parties. Supporters will observe, notice, and interpret different aspects, .e.g., in the news, social media, encounters, campaigns, or conversations. As our attention and subsequent beliefs vary by social category (Weakliem, 2020; Evans, 2000). Finally, loyal supporters tend to be more attentive to their party leaders. Thus, the party leader becomes an "opinion leader" to which signals supporters adapt to (Weakliem, 2020). By implication, citizens' party identification form their beliefs and preferences as well as their clustering (Weakliem, 2020; Boudon, 1989).

For example, the working class has less interest in political news. As the working class belief that the political news seldom address working class concerns and focus too much on "cultural issues" (e.g., migration, gender equality, environment) or "we are all middle class now" (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Evans, 2000). Thus, the emphasize on cultural issues (as in Sweden and other European Countries) should result in a lack of interest. In other words, parties supply of policies do not meet the demand of the low-educated or working class citizens (Evans and Tilley, 2012). Alternatively, low-educated and working class turn to xenophobic parties.

Beliefs can be true or false, e.g., "wishful thinking" (Boudon, 1989). However, citizens adopt beliefs and preferences for good reasons depending on their social situation (e.g., one's position compared to others and institutions (Boudon, 1989)). Citizens may also adopt false beliefs based on good reason due a "false premise"(Boudon, 1994).

First, we consider beliefs. Compared to Social Democrats, Sweden Democrats supporters' beliefs that parties differ because their party challenged the political elite. Compared to Social Democrats, the Left Party supporters believe that parties need to become less similar and prefer more radical left politics. Compared to other parties, Social Democrat supporters believe that their party makes a difference by protecting the generous welfare policies.

Second, we consider preferences. If party supporters adapt to the beliefs about dissimilarities (polarity) or similarities (homogeneity) between parties, they will adapt their preferences accordingly. Supporters that believe that a polarization exists between parties, will prefer less competition, and thus less polarity. Supporters that believe that parties have become too similar will prefer more competition and thus prefer more polarization.

Both beliefs and preferences result from: imitation, observing, and contacts between people. However, we thus treat beliefs and preferences as outcomes. Next, we turn to how beliefs and preferences correspond to social class and education.

In contrast to the sophistication hypothesis, we that highly educated citizens have a greater ability to distinguish between parties than low educated citizens. Instead, we do expect differences in beliefs and preferences for party polarization (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Laurison, 2016; Weakliem, 2020). Social categories have similar exposure to politics through observations, imitation, and contacts (Weakliem, 2020).

On average, low-educated and workers still favor the Social Democrats. Thus, low-educated and workers favor compromises across classes and thus parties (e.g., against the October or January deals). The employer classes favor the right parties and thus favor differences between parties.

The right parties have compromised their politics by collations and (e.g., block politics of the "Alliance") and later compromised to avoid the influence of the Sweden Democrats. Several of the deals struck signaled an advantage for the Social Democrats as they continued under minority rule. Thus, the employers have more to lose from political compromises. The intermediate classes tend to be distributed among various parties. However, we expect a slight tilt towards preferring polarization.

Finally, we note that lower social classes (d) may simply not converse as often about politics as do the intermediate or upper classes (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Laurison, 2016). Thus, differences in beliefs and preferences may not be due to sophistication but disinterest and lack political conversations that diffuse political information (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Laurison, 2016).

Data, Variables, and Strategies of Analysis

Our data comes from Survey 2020 which offer a simply random sample of 1360 citizens above 18 years of age (Hagevi, 2020). The Survey 2020 collects data on citizen's opinion such as politics as well as demographic data (e.g., age, gender, etc.). Here we focus on three survey questions asked.

We focus on three of the questions in Survey 2020 that indicate citizens' beliefs and preferences for party polarization. The first question asks: "*To what extent do you consider the political party in the parliament to substantively differ on political issues?*" The response options range from 1-to-4: "Strongly disagree" (=1), "Disagree"(=2), "Agree"(=3), and "Strongly disagree" (=4).The

second question asks: "*Thinking about the last 8-10 years, do consider the that the opinion between the political parties in the parliament has increased or decreased today?* " (0=decreased, increased=10). We conceptualize the questions as "beliefs" (Hedström, 2005).

The third question asks: "*when considering the political debates between political parties in the parliament nowadays in Sweden, would you want that the difference in opinions between parties to increase or decrease?*" (decrease=0, increase= 10). Like, Freese (2009), we use "prefer" as synonymous with "wants" and thus as treat the question as indicating preferences.

To understand differences in party polarization we consider the following variables. First, we consider *party identification*: the Social Democrats, the Moderates (liberal conservative), the Liberals (classic liberals),the Sweden Democrats (welfare chauvinist and xenophobic party), the Greens (environmentalists), the Center Party (agrarian liberals), the Left Party (socialists, former communists), and Christian Democrats (conservative). Supporters of "other" parties outside of the parliament represent a diverse category: e.g., Feminists, Animal rights activists, Marxists, Christian Conservatives, so forth.

Next, we in include class based on occupation: never worked, workers, intermediate (e.g., non-manual, supervisors, and self-employed), and employers (e.g., business owners or farmers with employees). Finally, we include education: low (primary-to-lower secondary), intermediate, high (higher education).

Our analysis focus on graphical exploration of the three survey questions (Gelman et al., 2002; Healy, 2018). We conducted the analysis in R (Team, 2013) using packages such as: MASS, ggplot2, dplyrand (Wickham and Grolemund, 2016; Wickham, 2016). We also used simple correspondence analysis from the ca-package (Greenacre, 2017) to describe the chi-square distance.

Results

In the result section, we devote one section to each of our three research questions.

Citizens' beliefs and preferences for party polarization

In Figure 1, most citizens respond that political parties differ from one another. However, a considerable proportion of citizens do disagree with differences between parties. Very few citizens respond no differences (strongly disagree). A minority of citizens strongly agree to differences between political parties. Thus, citizens in Sweden neither strongly disagree (= *SA*) or strongly disagree (= *SD*).

Next in Figure 1, most citizens position themselves at the middle of the scale concerning changes in party differences (= 5). If anything, the responses slightly favor a decrease in party polarization. However, a tiny minority suggests that there has been a clear increase in party polarization (= 10).

**Figure 1: Bar plots of proportions.**
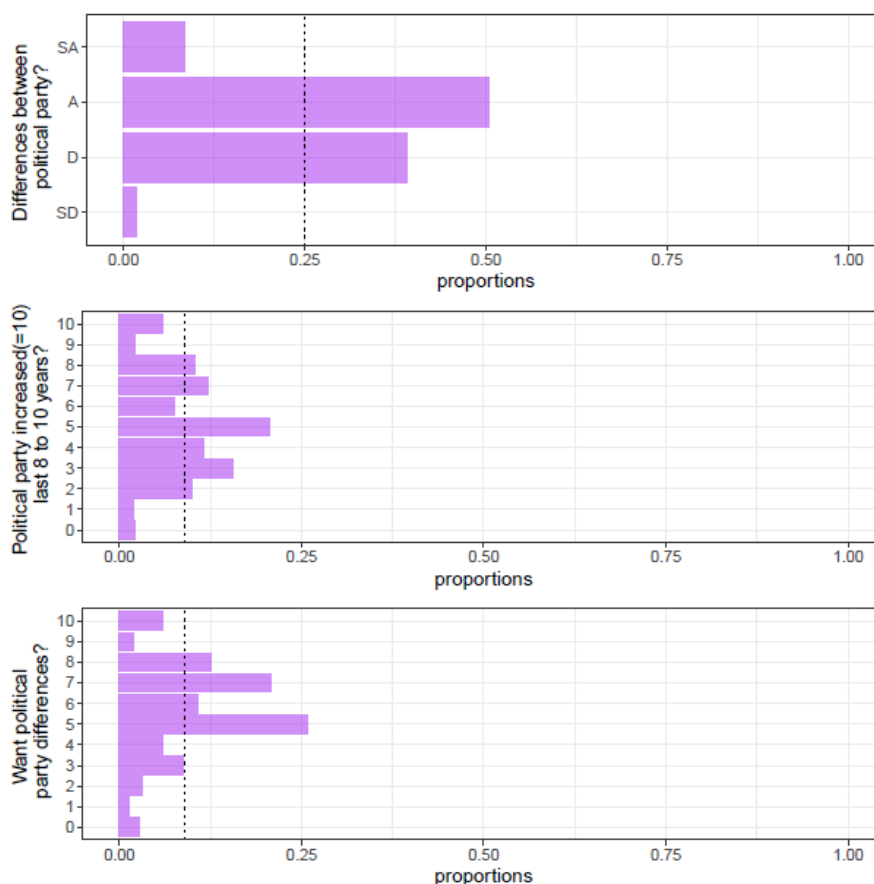
Finally, in Figure 1, most citizens favor the middle option when responding to if they prefer party differences (= 5). However, the distribution tilt toward a preference for greater party differences. Thus, if anything citizens prefer that parties become more polarized.

In summary, citizens' responses about parties differ, even though they believe that parties have moved to the middle. Thus, citizens tilt towards favoring greater party polarization. Perhaps the questions reflect how citizens respond to parliamentary compromises and block party politics. Next, we consider the relation between the questions.

Citizens' beliefs and preferences for party polarization by party support

Our first strategy to understand citizens' beliefs and preferences about party differences would be to graph responses by party support. In Figure 2, party supporters outside of the parliament voice the greatest discontent with party differences. We expect as much, as citizens that do not identify with a parliamentary party should logically not find their interests represented. Next, we note that the Sweden Democrats supporters agree about differences between the parties with the largest proportion strongly agreeing (*SD*).

Figure 2: Bar plots with proportions and averages by party
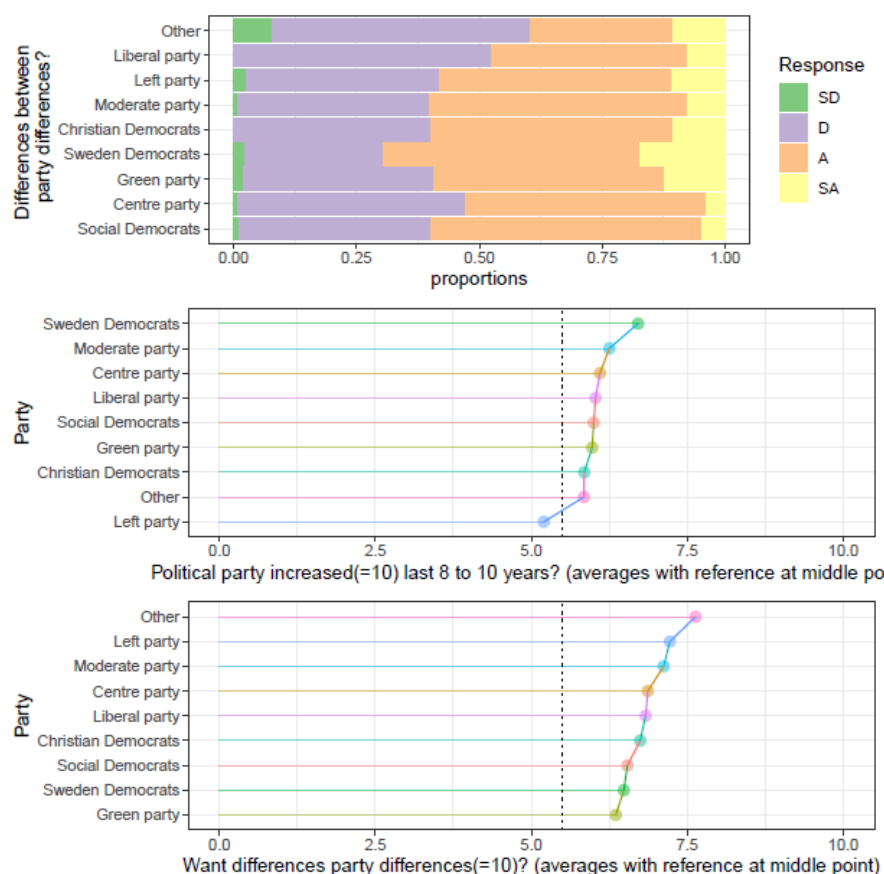
We know that no perfect way to graph categorical data by ordinal data with a large number of response options exist (Friendly and Meyer, 2015). Ideally, we prefer to graph proportions/percentages of categorical data. However, the sparseness of data complicates the visualization. One alternative would be cumulative proportions (a.k.a. "ridits") to treat the response options as unequal or graph the box plots. However, sometimes the simpler option works (Agresti, 2010). Thus, we plotted the averages.

Most party supporters favor the middle responses. However, the Social Democrats show the greatest dispersion next to the Left Party. Apparently, the Left Party supporters seem to have the strongest divergent beliefs and respond that there has been a slight decrease.

Other parties and the Left Party supporter prefer greater differences between parties. However, the Left Party and other party supporters have a considerable dispersion. The Greens, the Social Democrats, and the Sweden Democrats do not prefer greater polarization. However, the Sweden Democrats have a lager dispersion.

To summarize the strength in the associations we compute Cramer's V (which ranges from 0-to-1) based on the Chi-square distance. Here we consider the relation between the party identification. To reduce sparseness that can bias the Chi-square, we first merged option 1 and 2 for re-coded beliefs about party polarization and second recoded it to a 1-to-3 scale (1 = *SD or D*, 2 = *A*, 3 = *SA*). The association between party support and beliefs about party polarization accounts for 13% (*V* = .13). We interpret the strength of the association as weak. Whereas party identification support and preferences about party polarization account for 12% of the intensity (*V* = .12). However, note that the test does not account for zeroes which can be problematic.

How citizens' beliefs correspond to their preferences for party polarization by party support

Next, we turn to a correspondence analysis and treat the variables as unordered. We interpret the following graphs vertically or horizontally for distance between points (based on the Chi-square distance). For example, two points that have small distance to one another suggests a stronger correspondence or clustering.

In Figure 3, we graph the beliefs about party polarization (dots) and beliefs of party polarization last 8-10 years (triangles). Note that we first merged option 1 and 2 for re-coded beliefs about party polarization and second recoded it to a 1-to-3 scale (1 = *SD or D*, 2 = *A*, 3 = *SA*). As can be seen, one's beliefs about party polarization in the last 8 to 10 years cluster with citizens' current beliefs about party differences. Ironically, the U shape suggests that citizens tend to be "polarized" in their beliefs about polarization around a single dimension (which explains roughly 78% of the "inertia"[1]). The pattern accounts for 25% of the dispersion of the association (*V* = .25). We interpret the strength of the association as moderate.

Next in Figure 4, a clear pattern emerges. Citizens that respond that parties do not differ also prefer greater differences between parties. For example, a high agreement with differences between parties cluster with response options 8, 9, and 10 in preference to party differences (*decrease* = 0, *increase* = 10). Meaning that beliefs about party polarization dictate citizens' preferences for party polarization. Again, the pattern seems U-shaped and thus indicates that a single polarized dimension dominates. The belief-preference association accounts for 22% of the dispersion (*V* = .22). Again, we interpret the strength of the association as moderate.

---

[1] This is analogous to explained variance in regression analysis

Figure 3: Distance between response option. Simple Correspondence Analysis.
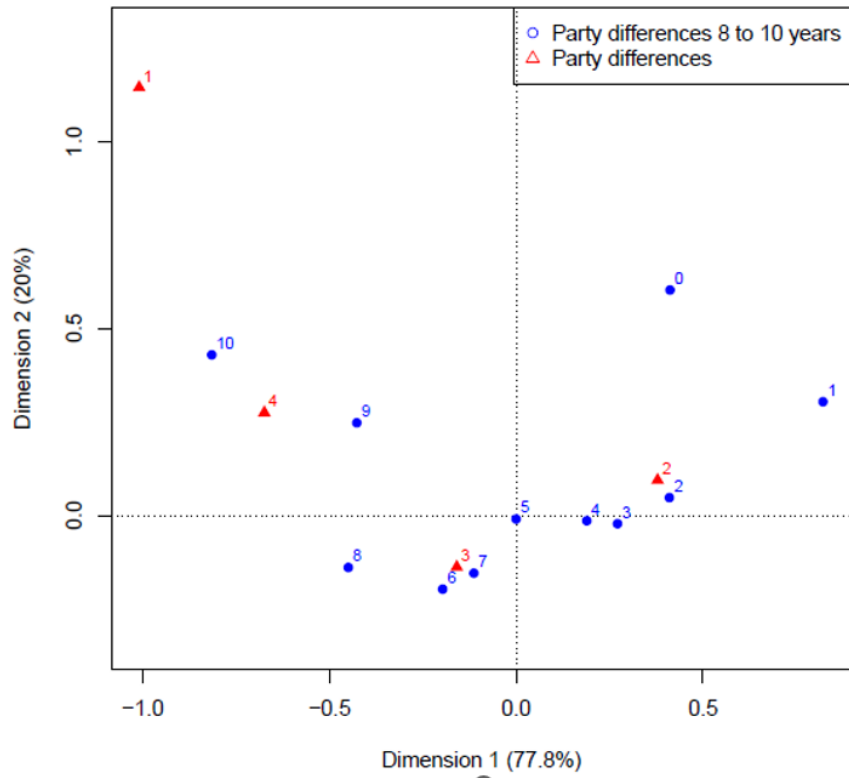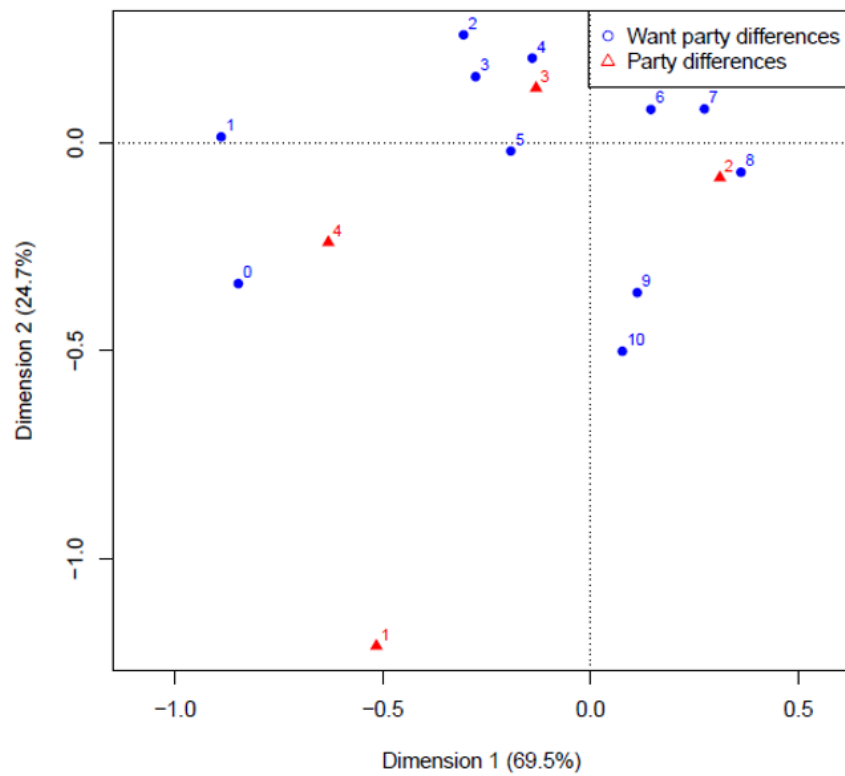

Figure 4: Distance between response option. Simple Correspondence Analysis.

How citizens' beliefs and preferences for party polarization depend on party identification and social categories (class, education)

Next, we consider the proposition that social categories condition the clustering. In Figure 5, Figure 6, and 7, we present a correspondence analysis of beliefs and preferences for party polarization with party, class, and education.

Figure 5: Distance between response option. Correspondence Analysis. Party, class, and education.
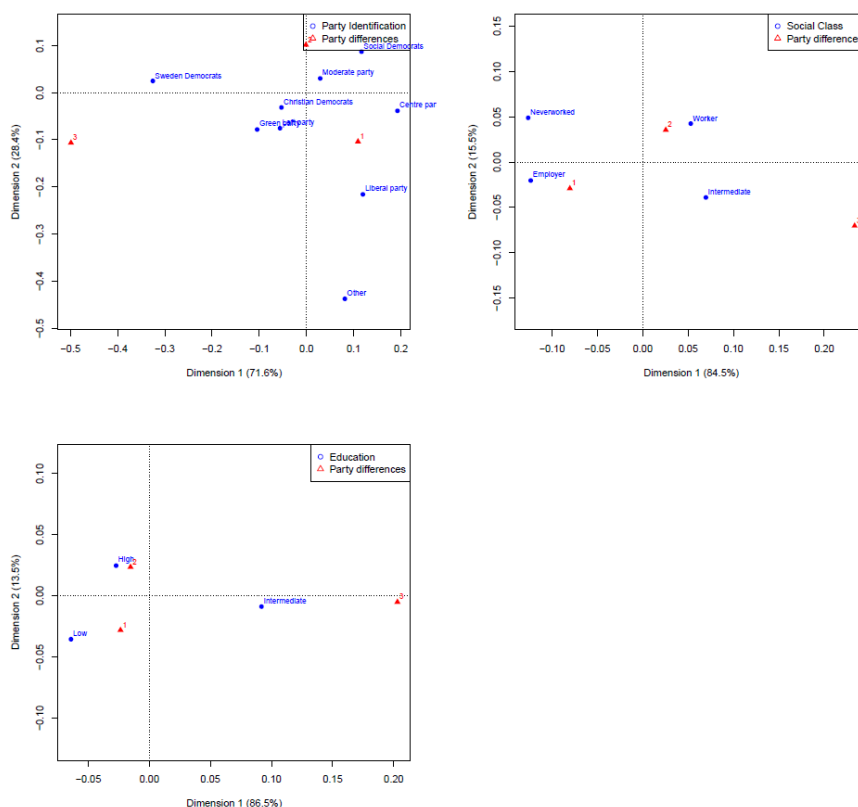
We find the Left Party and other parties with the strongest preferences for party polarization and weakest beliefs about party polarization. The right (Moderates, Liberals, Center Party, Christian Democrats [the former "the Alliance"]) respond that the differences between parties have somewhat decreased and thus prefer greater differences. The left (Greens, Social Democrats) falls into the third beliefs that differences have substantive decreased and thus prefer greater preferences for party polarization. However, we find that the Sweden Democrats have with the lowest preferences for party polarization and find that the differences between parties have increased.

We can see that education matters for preferences. The highly educated respond that difference has declined between parties and prefer greater differences. Whereas the low educated respond that differences increased between parties and thus prefer decreased differences. A Cramer's V indicates a weak association between education and preferences ($V = .13$), but a negligible one for beliefs ($V = .05$).

Figure 6: Distance between response option. Correspondence Analysis. Party, class, and education.
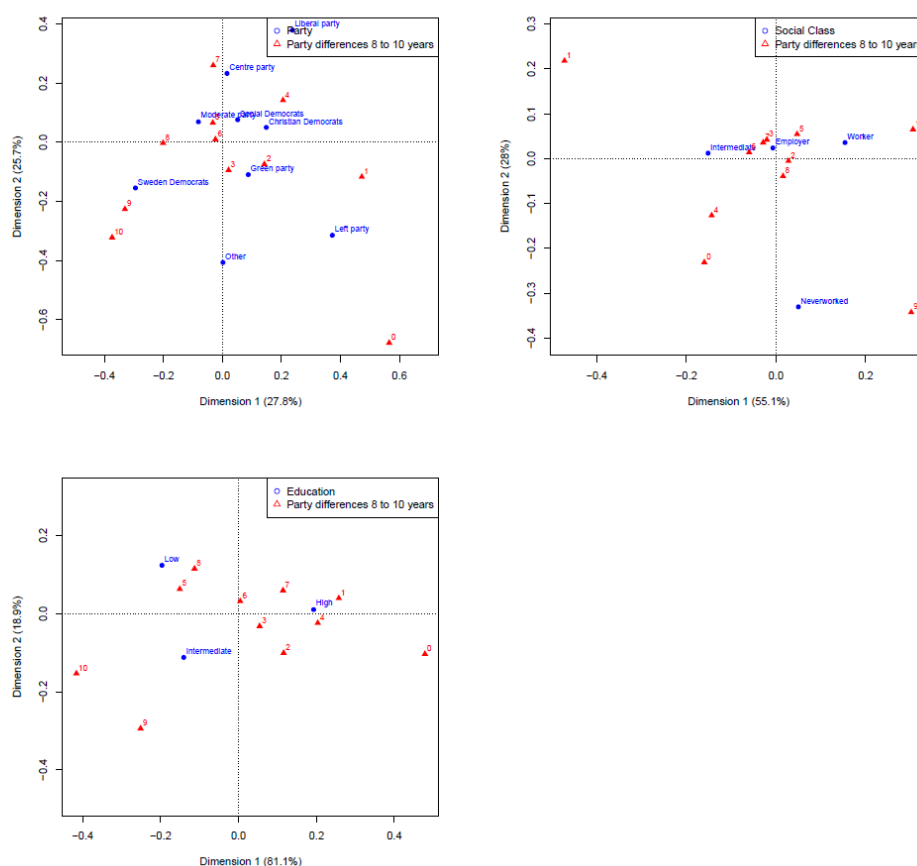

Discussion

Political polarization in public opinion and between parties has been argued to promote voter turnout. Thus, party polarization seems to strengthen electoral democracy (Moral, 2017) and contribute to partisan bonds (Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008). Although many scholars argue that we live in an era of political polarization (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008), others worry about the declining differences between political parties (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008). Most studies focus on polarization between legislator or in public opinion (Weakliem, 2020; Baldassarri and Bearman, 2007).

By contrast, we explored citizens' beliefs and preferences for party polarization in Sweden with Survey 2020 (Hagevi, 2020). Thus, we focus on how citizens respond to their parties' behaviors (Manza and Brooks, 2012).

Most citizens agree with differences between parties. However, citizens belief that the differences have slightly decreased. Thus, most citizens prefer greater differences (polarity) between parties.

Figure 7: Distance between response option. Correspondence Analysis. Party, class, and education.
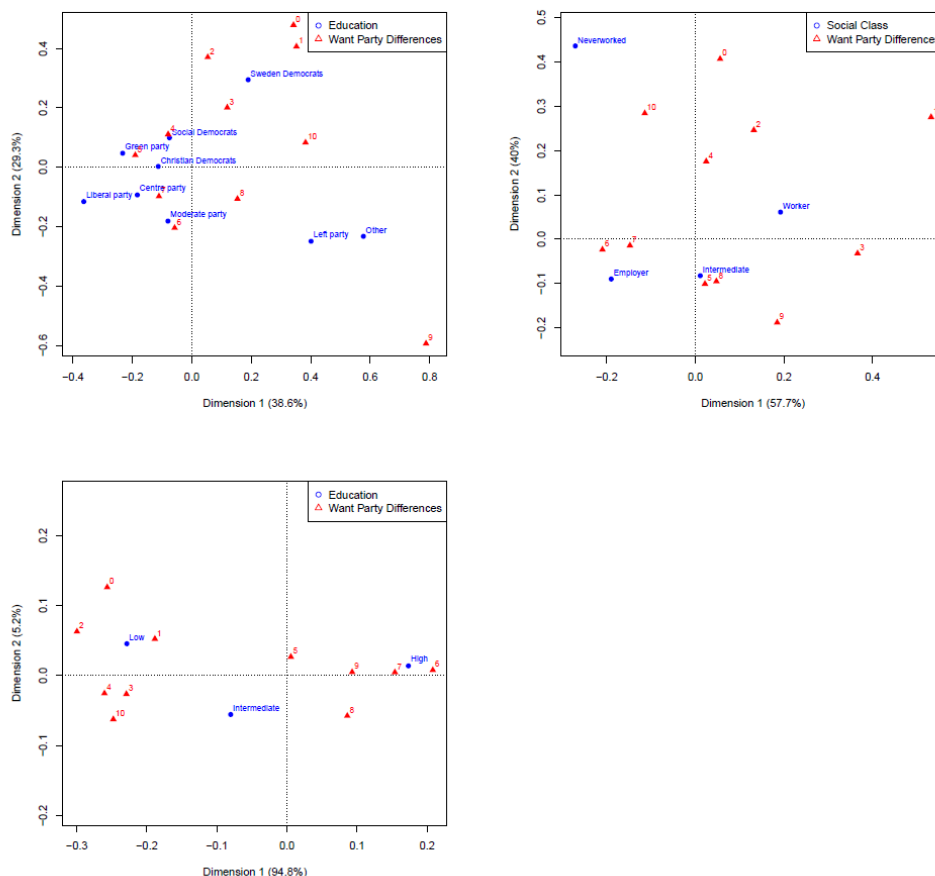
The Sweden Democratic supporters' belief that the differences between parties have increased the last couple of years. By contrast, the Left Party belief that the differences have decreased. Thus, the Left Party supporters prefer greater party polarization, whereas the Sweden Democrats supporters prefer less party polarization.

Citizens' beliefs about polarization cluster with their preferences for polarization. Those citizens that respond that parties differ do not prefer increased polarization. Social class and education contribute to differences in beliefs about and preferences for parties.

Previous studies have focused on either (a) polarization among legislators (a.k.a. elite polarization) or (b) polarization in public opinion in clusters of issues. Our study connects the two by showing how citizens conceptualize the distance between parties (e.g., policy positions of legislators). Although, our study stresses the importance of how citizens respond to the behavior of parties, we theorize a mutual relationship, i.e., a feedback between party behaviors and public opinion. Citizens respond to parties and parties respond to citizens' public opinions.

Do polarities attract?

First, our results offer implications for public opinion research. In agreement with previous research, we find that party support contributes to differences in beliefs about and to a lesser extent preferences for polarization between parties. Parties have been considered as pivotal determinants of opinions. We theorize that citizens' party identification matters because it indicates differences in citizens' encounters, conversations, and news (Weakliem, 2020; Evans and Tilley, 2017). Nevertheless, party support matters but it does not offer a complete account.

Second, our results agree with the importance of social categories for citizens' preferences. Citizens with the same position have more frequent contacts with one another and represent one's social category (Weakliem, 2020; Evans and Tilley, 2017). The explanation agrees with the importance of social class for preferences but not for beliefs. As such, we advance the proposition that frequent contacts and imitation along social categories (education, class) condition beliefs and preferences. Perhaps, the working class and low educated may be uninterested in parties politics in news due to the emphasize on cultural issues as opposed to class issues (Evans and Tilley, 2017). Thus, one beliefs and preferences depend lack of interest rather than sophistication. By implication, we find support for the importance of social categories (Evans and Tilley, 2017; Weakliem, 2020).

Third, our results also offer theoretical implications for political theory. We consider the party polarization as pivotal to bonds between party supporters. Political theories suggest that party polarization contributes to the democratic process because party polarization expresses competition (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008). Where party competition engages citizens to converse politics and vote at the election day. Our study supports the average citizens' beliefs about and preferences for increased party polarization. Thus, our study agrees with the importance of party polarization for citizens (Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008) but cast doubts on the proposition that citizens "fail" to observe differences between parties (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008). Supposedly, the left-right block politics in Sweden has helped citizens to differentiate parties on economic issues (e.g., taxes, social insurances, and public sector). Hypothetically, the entry of the Sweden Democrats has contributed to greater differences on so called cultural issues (e.g., immigration, crime, gender equality).

However, our study does not differentiate between "swing voters" and "party activists". Thus, we theorize that party support conceals a dispersion (i.e., heterogeneity). Specifically, we theorize that party activists may prefer greater polarization than "swing voters". For a "swing voter" a single policy issue can matter (e.g., subsidized childcare, prolong maternity leave).

Limitations and scope

We now consider the limitations and scope to better understand the conclusions. First, the current analysis has been exploratory and has not accounted for uncertainty or spurious correlations. Second, we analyze one country that may not be representative for other countries. Third, we analyze one point in time, but beliefs and preferences may change over time. Fourth, we analyze single issues than clusters of issues. Previous research has noted that studying pairwise correlations may be favorable (Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008). Thus, future studies may benefit from

analyzing party differences on multiple issues. Fifth, the association between party identification and beliefs or preferences for party polarization may vary by other social categories (e.g., ethnic origin, age) (Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008).

Acknowledgment

Notes

[1] In the following, we distinguish between two types of political polarization: (a) citizens' opinion polarization (a.k.a. mass polarization) and (b) party polarization (a.k.a. elite polarization).

[2] Sweden's multiparty system compromises seven political parties: the Left Party, the Social Democrats, The Greens, the Liberals, the Moderate party, Christian Democrats, and the Swedish Democrats.

References

Abramowitz, A. I. and Saunders, K. L. (2008) "Is polarization a myth?" *The Journal of Politics*, 70 (2): 542–555.

Agresti, A. (2010) *Analysis of ordinal categorical data*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

Armstrong II, D. A., Bakker, R., Carroll, R., Hare, C., Poole, K. T., and Rosenthal, H. (2014) *Analyzing spatial models of choice and judgment with R*. Boca Raton: Chapman and Hall/CRC Press.

Baldassarri, D. and Bearman, P. (2007) "Dynamics of political polarization." *American sociological review*, 72 (5): 784–811.

Baldassarri, D. and Gelman, A. (2008) "Partisans without constraint: Political polarization and trends in American public opinion." *American Journal of Sociology*, 114 (2): 408–446.

BBC (2021) Swedish government toppled in no-confidence vote. *BBC News* (2022-12-01: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57553238).

Boudon, R. (1989) *The analysis of ideology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Boudon, R. (1994) *The art of self-persuasion: The social explanation of false beliefs*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Boudon, R. (2017) *The origin of values: Sociology and philosophy of beliefs*. London: Routledge.

Boudon, R. and Bourricaud, F. (2002) "Beliefs" pp 55-62 in *A Critical Dictionary of Sociology*, ed Hamilton, P. London: Routledge.

Converse, P. E. (2006) "The nature of belief systems in mass publics (1964)." *Critical review*, 18 (1-3): 1–74.

Crotty, W. (2001) "Policy coherence in political parties: The elections of 1984, 1988, and 1992", pp 122-137 in *American Political Parties: decline or resurgence?*, eds Cohen, J. E., Fleisher,R., Kantor, P. Washington, D.C. CQ Press.

Dalton, R. J. (2008) "The quantity and the quality of party systems: Party system polarization, its measurement, and its consequences." *Comparative Political Studies*, 41 (7): 899–920.

Dalton, R. J. (2016). "Party identification and its implications" pp 1-19 in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, ed William R. Thompson. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2022-12-01: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.72).

DellaPosta, D., Shi, Y., and Macy, M. (2015) "Why do liberals drink lattes?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 120 (5): 1473–1511.

Diermeier, D. and Li, C. (2019) "Partisan affect and elite polarization." *American Political Science Review*, 113 (1): 277–281.

DiMaggio, P., Evans, J., and Bryson, B. (1996) "Have American's social attitudes become more polarized?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 102 (3): 690–755.

Elgenius, G. and Rydgren, J. (2019) "Frames of nostalgia and belonging: The resurgence of ethno-nationalism in Sweden." *European Societies*, 21 (4): 583–602.

Elster, J. (2015) *Explaining social behavior: more nuts and bolts for the social sciences*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Evans, G. (2000) "The continued significance of class voting." *Annual review of political science*, 3 (1): 401–417.

Evans, G. and Tilley, J. (2012) "The depoliticization of inequality and redistribution: Explaining the decline of class voting." *The Journal of Politics*, 74 (4): 963–976.

Evans, G. and Tilley, J. (2017) *The new politics of class: The political exclusion of the British working class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fiorina, M. P. and Abrams, S. J. (2008) Political polarization in the American public. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11: 563–588.

Fiorina, M. P., Abrams, S. J., and Pope, J. C. (2005) "Culture war? The myth of a polarized America. New York: Longman.

Freese, J. (2009) "Preferences", pp 94-114 in *The oxford handbook of analytical sociology*, eds Hedström, P and Bareman, P. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Friendly, M. and Meyer, D. (2015) *Discrete data analysis with R: visualization and modeling techniques for categorical and count data*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.

Gambetta, D. (2009) "Signaling", pp 168-194 in *The Oxford handbook of analytical sociology*, eds Hedström, P and Bareman, P. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gelman, A., Pasarica, C., and Dodhia, R. (2002) "Let's practice what we preach: turning tables into graphs." *The American Statistician*, 56 (2): 121–130.

Goren, P., Federico, C. M., and Kittilson, M. C. (2009) "Source cues, partisan identities, and political value expression." *American Journal of Political Science*, 53 (4): 805–820.

Greenacre, M. (2017) *Correspondence analysis in practice*. Boca Raton: Chapman and Hall/CRC Press.

Hagevi, M. (2020) "Survey 2020: Teknisk rapport." *Surveyjournalen*, 7 (1): 26–50.

Hagevi, M. (2022) *Den svenska väljaren: En introduktion till politiskt beteende i allmänna val*. Stockholm: Santérus Förlag.

Hagevi, M. (2022) "Larger or Smaller Imter-Party Policy Differences? Wht Do Citizens and MPs Believe?" pp 107-122 in Parties, Institutions and Preferences: The Shape and Impact of Partisan Politics, eds Baltz, E, Kosanke, S, and Pickel, S. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Hare, C. and Poole, K. T. (2014) "The polarization of contemporary American politics." Polity, 46 (3): 411–429.

Healy, K. (2018) Data visualization: a *practical introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hedström, P. (2005) *Dissecting the social: On the principles of analytical sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Inglehart, R. (2018) *Cultural evolution: People's motivations are changing and reshaping the world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jacobson, G. C. (2000) "Party polarization in national politics: The electoral connection", pp 17-18 in *Polarized politics: Congress and the president in a partisan era*, eds Bond, J. R. and Fleisher, R. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Katz, R. S. and Mair, P. (2009) "The cartel party thesis: A restatement." *Perspectives on politics*, 7 (4): 753–766.

Laurison, D. (2016) "Social class and political engagement in the United States." *Sociology Compass*, 10 (8): 684–697.

Loxbo, K. and Sjölin, M. (2017) "Parliamentary opposition on the wane? The case of Sweden, 1970–2014." Government and Opposition, 52 (4): 587–613.

Loxbo, K. (2014). Voters' Perceptions of Policy Convergence and the Short-term Opportunities of Anti-immigrant Parties: Examples from Sweden. Scandinavian Political Studies 37: 239–262.

Manza, J. and Brooks, C. (2012) "How sociology lost public opinion: A genealogy of a missing concept in the study of the political." *Sociological Theory*, 30 (2): 89–113.

Mason, L. (2016) "A cross-cutting calm: How social sorting drives affective polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80 (S1): 351–377.

McPherson, M. (2004) "A Blau space primer: prolegomenon to an ecology of affiliation." *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 13 (1): 263–280.

Moral, M. (2017) "The bipolar voter: On the effects of actual and perceived party polarization on voter turnout in European multiparty democracies." *Political Behavior,* 39 (4): 935–965.

Oscarsson, H., Bergman, T., Bergström, A., and Hellström, J. (2021) *Demokratirådets rapport 2021: polariseringen i Sverige*. Stockholm: SNS förlag.

Oskarson, M. and Demker, M. (2015) "Room for realignment: The working-class sympathy for Sweden Democrats." *Government and Opposition*, 50 (4): 629–651.

Perrett, S. (2021) "A divided kingdom? Variation in polarization, sorting, and dimensional alignment among the British public, 1986–2018." *The British Journal of Sociology*, 72 (4): 992–1014.

Shehata, A., Ekström, M., and Tryggvason, P. O. (2022) "Selective Exposure and New Political Cleavages: Media Use and Ideological Reinforcement Over Time." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, (Pre-published online: https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221112003).

Team, R. C. (2013) *R A language and environment for statistical computing.* (2022-12-01: https://www.gbif.org/tool/81287/r-a-language-and-environment-for-statistical-computing).

Törnberg, A. and Wahlström, M. (2018) "Unveiling the radical right online: Exploring framing and identity in an online anti-immigrant discussion group." *Sociologisk forskning*, 55 (2-3): 267– 292.

Weakliem, D. L. (2020) *Public Opinion*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wickham, H. (2016) *ggplot2 elegant graphics for data analysis*. Cham: Springer.

Wickham, H. and Grolemund, G. (2016) *R for data science: import, tidy, transform, visualize, and model data*." Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media.