

Partisanship Meets Social Networks: How Politically Heterogeneous Acquaintances and Close Relationships Buffer Partisan Animosity

Delia Baldassarri,^a Jona de Jong^b

a) New York University; b) Utrecht University

Abstract: Politically heterogeneous social networks have long been considered as a safeguard against political division. However, in today's polarized political climate, the effectiveness of cross-partisan interactions in mitigating animosity is increasingly questioned. Prior research emphasizes the importance of hearing-the-other-side through cross-partisan discussions with close ties. We confirm that these discussions still take place and are related to lower inter-partisan animosity. Moreover, we propose a complementary mechanism, seeing-the-other-side, according to which even brief interactions with out-partisan acquaintances serve to reduce distorted views of out-partisans, thereby lowering inter-partisan hostility. Using original data from the United States, we find that both close tie and acquaintance networks display significant political heterogeneity and this heterogeneity is associated with lower partisan animosity. Experimentally, we show that reducing misperceptions by increasing the salience of similarities between in-partisan and out-partisan acquaintances further reduces hostility. These findings highlight the continued relevance of everyday political diversity in tempering partisan divisions and nuance worries about partisan echo chambers.

Keywords: political polarization; social networks; close ties; acquaintance ties; affective polarization; echo chambers

Reproducibility Package: Data and related code necessary to produce the results are publicly available here: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/6ISNQQ>.

Citation: Baldassarri, Delia, Jona de Jong. 2025. "Partisanship Meets Social Networks: How Politically Heterogeneous Acquaintances and Close Relationships Buffer Partisan Animosity" *Sociological Science* 12: 409-430.

Received: March 17, 2025

Accepted: March 28, 2025

Published: July 7, 2025

Editor(s): Ari Adut, Stephen Vaisey

DOI: 10.15195/v12.a18

Copyright: © 2025 The Author(s). This open-access article has been published under a Creative Commons Attribution License, which allows unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction, in any form, as long as the original author and source have been credited. 

POLITICALLY heterogeneous relationships have traditionally been considered a buffer against political division (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1964; Knoke 1990). Established explanations of the positive effect of exposure to out-party members on political tolerance hinge on a *hearing-the-other-side* mechanism, according to which cross-partisan political conversations, generally with close ties, facilitate mutual understanding and promote moderation (Mutz 2002; Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn 2004; Baldassarri and Bearman 2007; Sinclair 2012; Bello and Rolfe 2014). As the United States experiences a historic period of extreme political contention, politically diverse social encounters might have become even more crucial to safeguard democratic life.

However, the divisiveness of the current political climate could also have changed interactions between Republicans and Democrats. Conversations with outparty members may no longer lead to greater understanding and moderation, as people hold on to their opinions more intensely (Barabas 2004), and people may be avoiding the very same heterogeneous discussions that have the potential to reduce animosity (Gerber et al. 2012; Cowan and Baldassarri 2018; Carlson and Settle 2022). Indeed, recent literature has hinted at the increased political homogeneity of

close-tie networks (Iyengar, Konitzer, and Tedin 2018) and has questioned whether cross-partisan discussions are occurring with sufficient frequency (Carlson and Settle 2022).

In this article, we test whether political discussions with close ties are still related to lower animosity. Moreover, we theorize a novel mechanism – *seeing-the-other-side* – according to which exposure to a diverse network of acquaintances might reduce the kind of distorted out-partisan perceptions that partly drive political animosity. According to this complementary mechanism, not only political discussions but also simple occasional encounters with outparty members could significantly contribute to fostering a positive political climate.

To study how social network heterogeneity operates in an era of partisan politics, we engage in an original data collection, which includes novel survey items and behavioral tasks. First, to provide a more comprehensive overview of everyday exposure to outparty members, we measure both relationships with close ties as well as more casual acquaintance networks (DiPrete et al. 2011; Park 2021; Pietryka and Sokhey 2023). Second, we complement traditional attitudinal measures of inter-partisan animosity (also known as affective polarization) with a monetary-incentivized behavioral task. Finally, we implement an experimental manipulation to test the “seeing-the-other-side” mechanism.

We make three contributions. First, we provide a descriptive account of the composition of people’s social networks, considering both close ties and acquaintance networks. In line with previous research (Lee 2021; Pietryka and Sokhey 2023), we provide suggestive evidence that people’s social networks retain sizable levels of heterogeneity. Moreover, we document the substantial heterogeneity of acquaintance networks, and their critical role in exposing citizens to more diverse political contexts. We find that a large proportion of people who do not report any outparty member in their close discussion networks nonetheless entertain relationships with a broader, politically heterogeneous set of acquaintances.

Second, we document the positive relationship between politically heterogeneous social networks and lower levels of partisan animosity. Interestingly, not only diversity in political discussion networks (close ties) but especially relationships with a diverse set of acquaintances appear to buffer out-partisan hostility.

Third, we provide evidence of the two mechanisms through which acquaintance networks and close-tie networks, respectively, reduce animosity. For acquaintance networks, we provide experimental evidence for the seeing-the-other-side mechanism according to which casual exposure to a politically diverse set of acquaintances might be sufficient to successfully reduce inter-party hostility. We find that exposure to heterogeneous acquaintance networks is associated with lower misperceptions about outparty members. Furthermore, we experimentally manipulate the salience of similarities between Republican and Democrat acquaintances and show how this has the effect of reducing out-partisan animosity. For close-tie networks, we find that political discussions across partisan lines of division remain common even during a contentious election. Discussions in homogeneous partisan networks are related to higher animosity, whereas heterogeneous discussions are related to lower animosity.

Taken together, our results suggest that heterogeneous social encounters, and especially acquaintance relationships, are playing a vital role in containing levels of out-partisan animosity in today's polarized United States. These results speak to the broader literature on intergroup contact by suggesting – in line with a recent working paper (Chakraborty et al. 2024) – that brief encounters, in addition to sustained contact may work to reduce prejudice. They also provide a more nuanced perspective on worries about echo chambers, partisan sorting, and the existence of deep divisions between ordinary Republicans and Democrats. The fact that the great majority of our respondents maintain relationships with sizable numbers of out-partisans complicates the idea that U.S. citizens today live their lives in politically homogeneous environments. In fact, the ubiquity of cross-partisan relationships provides grounds for questioning the widespread idea that ordinary Democrats and Republicans are deeply socially divided by partisanship and calls for more in-depth study of the role of partisanship in the formation of social relationships.

Politically Heterogeneous Social Networks and the Rise of Affective Polarization

Since Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee's *Voting* and Katz and Lazarsfeld's *Personal Influence*, political discussion networks have been considered an important determinant of political attitudes and voting behavior (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1964; Knoke 1990; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Zuckerman 2005; De Jong and Kamphorst 2024; De Jong 2024b). Recent scholarship using longitudinal data has provided causal evidence that being embedded in politically heterogeneous social networks affects political views (Lazer et al. 2010) and voting behavior (Sinclair 2012; Bello and Rolfe 2014), above and beyond other individual and social factors. Exposure to diverse political discussion networks is also likely to foster awareness and tolerance of opposite views (Mutz 2002, 2006; Huckfeldt et al. 2004), thus containing political division.¹

Much of this scholarship on the benefits of mixed political company was established prior to the recent hyper-partisan turn in U.S. politics. After decades of elite (Sood and Iyengar 2016; McCarty 2019) and media (Prior 2013; Lelkes, Sood, and Iyengar 2017) polarization, the U.S. mass public has recently started to display signs of inter-partisan division that go beyond the ideological domain (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Political labels – for example, Democrat, Republican, Conservative, and Liberal – elicit stronger emotional reactions compared to a few decades ago (Iyengar et al. 2019; Finkel et al. 2020). And this animosity is further alimented by partisan media (Prior 2013; Barber 2020) and widespread misconceptions about the members of the opposite party (Levendusky and Malhotra 2016; Druckman et al. 2022). A distinctive trait of affective polarization is that it extends to domains of life that would generally be considered removed from politics, such as health-related decisions to wear a mask or get vaccinated (Druckman et al. 2021) and possibly lifestyles (DellaPosta, Shi, and Macy 2015; DellaPosta 2020).

In this context of heightened partisanship and animosity, the question arises whether exposure to alternative political views still plays a role in fostering

moderation. First, according to some, animosity is now mostly based on emotional attachment/repulsion rather than political ideology and material interests (Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2018)², and finding compromise may have become more complicated as a result. Second, ordinary Democrats and Republicans today are more ideologically – and socially – distinct than in the past (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Webster and Abramowitz 2017; Mason 2018; Rawlings 2022), increasing the social distance between them and potentially reducing the power of conversations to foster understanding and moderation. Finally, people may be actively avoiding political discussions with outparty members. Some recent work on the consequences of inter-partisan hostility for social relationships paints a bleak picture in this regard. Partisans may cut short Thanksgiving dinners when sharing the table with out-partisan relatives (Chen and Rohla 2018; Lee 2021) and say they prefer not to have discussions with out-partisans (Gerber et al. 2012; Cowan and Baldassarri 2018; Settle and Carlson 2019).

If indeed individuals have become more proactive in abandoning cross-partisan conversations to avoid conflict (Gerber et al. 2012; Cowan and Baldassarri 2018), casual exposure through weak ties and acquaintances might have become the primary way to develop a less stereotypical, more nuanced view of members of the opposite party (Mutz 2002). Although people exercise some choice in selecting partners or close friends, social structure is likely to exert constraint on broader networks, making it almost impossible for most Americans to completely avoid out-partisans in the workplace, leisure activities, and public spaces (Park 2021). Acquaintance networks have not been considered much in relation to inter-partisan animosity but they could play a powerful role in reducing it.

Do Heterogeneous Social Networks Inoculate Against Partisan Animosity?

Do politically heterogeneous social networks inoculate against inter-partisan animosity, even in a very contentious political climate? When it comes to close ties, research based on core discussion networks has demonstrated that having outparty members in one's network increases political tolerance (Mutz 2002), moderates attitudes (Grönlund, Herne, and Setälä 2015) and contains affective polarization, at least in the far less partisan setting of Canada (Amsalem, Merkley, and Loewen 2022). We expect this relationship to remain valid even in a more contentious political climate. In fact, the wider intergroup contact literature generally shows that sustained contact can reduce prejudice even in the case of deep-rooted intergroup conflict (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Paluck, Green, and Green 2019).

In addition, a host of recent experimental work has shown that exposure to cross-partisan views of strangers can moderate attitudes (Grönlund et al. 2015; Combs et al. 2023) and reduce affective polarization (Levendusky and Stecula 2021; Santoro and Broockman 2022; de Jong 2024a), even in the immediate aftermath of a contentious political election, and in conversations carried out with strangers in online anonymous chats (Rossiter and Carlson 2023). There are reasons to believe that the moderating effect of cross-partisan conversations might be even stronger

when it happens within social networks (Levendusky 2023). Therefore, we expect that:

H1. Individuals embedded in politically heterogeneous close-tie and acquaintance networks have lower out-partisan animosity.

At the same time, we cannot rule out the possibility that having a diverse close-tie network may not do much to reduce animosity. People avoid discussing political topics, especially when they expect disagreement (Gerber et al. 2012; Cowan and Baldassarri 2018; Carlson and Settle 2022). In addition, a recent experimental study shows that discussions do not reduce animosity when partisans' opinions are too far apart (de Jong 2024a). Finally, having only one close tie may not necessarily lead to stereotype correction about the broader outgroup as people may view their close ties as exceptional rather than prototypical of the outgroup (Chakraborty et al. 2024).

Whereas much of the focus in previous literature is on close relationships and sustained contact, there are good reasons to believe that heterogeneous acquaintance networks may be especially effective in reducing hostility by lowering out-partisan misperceptions, a mechanism that does not necessarily require engagement in uncomfortable political conversations. We posit that the mere exposure to out-partisans in occasional encounters might be sufficient to correct misperceptions about the other side. Recent studies have shown that partisans consistently misperceive out-partisans' policy positions (Westfall et al. 2015; Levendusky and Malhotra 2016), social composition (Ahler and Sood 2018), ideological extremity, levels of political engagement (Druckman et al. 2022), and hostility toward their own group (Lees and Cikara 2020). These misperceptions, in turn, are strongly predictive of out-partisan animosity. Casual exposure to a few political opponents could be sufficient to properly see the other side, naturally facilitating the correction of the stereotypical views that derive from hastened party and media rhetoric. In other words, heterogeneous acquaintance networks could serve as a reality check, making people realize that out-partisans are more moderate, less politically engaged, and more civil than commonly understood.

Some recent studies provide suggestive, indirect evidence of the importance of weak ties and acquaintance networks in influencing not only political attitudes and behavior (Pietryka et al. 2018), but also outgroup views. Gelman and Margalit show that a change in the number of acquaintances one has with a particular social group is often associated with a change in their views on policies that relate to that group (Gelman and Margalit 2021). During a Facebook de-activation experiment that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an ethnically polarized setting, Asimovic et al. unexpectedly find lower regard for ethnic outgroups among those who went offline. The likely explanation being that online networks are more heterogeneous than in-person networks and de-activation made people spend more time with homogeneous close ties, leading to greater out-group hostility (Asimovic et al. 2021; Asimovic, Nagler, and Tucker 2023). An interpretation that is in line with the more general finding that online social networks, which span broadly and include more acquaintances than in-person networks, exhibit reasonably high levels of ideological and partisan heterogeneity (Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic 2015; Eady

et al. 2019; Barberá 2020). Therefore, we test two hypotheses that are central to the seeing-the-other-side mechanism. First, we expect that:

H2a. Individuals embedded in heterogeneous acquaintance networks have lower partisan misperceptions than individuals embedded in homogeneous acquaintance networks.

Second, we directly test the core tenet of the seeing-the-other-side mechanism by experimentally increasing the salience of acquaintance networks, prompting respondents to reflect on similarities between their in-partisan and out-partisan acquaintances. We expect that:

H2b. Reminding people of the similarity between their in-partisan and out-partisan acquaintances reduces out-partisan animosity.

Data and Methods

The survey containing most of our measures was fielded with Bovitz Inc., a reputed survey firm, during the the U.S. 2022 Congressional Elections. Elections bring a particularly contentious political atmosphere where partisan animosity tends to be higher (Sood and Iyengar 2016) and people avoid discussing politics with some of their out-partisan ties (Lee 2021). Thus, the setting provides a hard test for our hypothesis on heterogeneous relationships as a potential moderating force.³ Figure A1 in the online supplement shows that the sample is slightly younger, more educated, and less wealthy, but otherwise closely matches the U.S. population in 2018. Following common practices, we exclude respondents who did not pass the attention checks, were below the age of 18, or completed the survey more than once. Respondents provided standard demographic information (age, gender, race, religion, education, income, and state of residence) and political information (partisanship, ideology, vote in the 2020 election, expected or actual vote in the 2022 election, political interest, and exposure to the 2022 Congressional Election).

The research obtained IRB approval (NYU IRB-FY2023-6996) and all our hypotheses were preregistered ([click here to access OSF preregistration](#)). Data and related code necessary to produce the results are publicly available here: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/6ISNQQ>.

To address our research questions, we introduce novel survey modules. To measure political network heterogeneity, our primary construct of interest, we rely on both traditional core discussion networks questions as well as a simplified version of the Aggregate Relational Data (ARD) method to capture the political composition of acquaintance networks. Moving on to the dependent variables, we follow previous literature using the standard items of interpartisan animosity – feeling thermometers, trait ratings, and a trust item. In addition, we go beyond traditional attitudinal measures and include a novel, behavioral incentivized task – the competence game – in which discrimination based on partisanship costs the respondent actual money. Two reasons support the choice of relying on a behavioral measure: first, intergroup attitudes often have limited effects on intergroup behavior (Brauer 2024), and, second, partisan animosity tends to be freely and

easily expressed, due to the lack of strong norms against it. Finally, we design an experimental manipulation of the salience of perceived similarity between in and out-partisan acquaintances to test the seeing-the-other-side mechanism.

Measuring Close Ties and Acquaintance Networks

Conceptually, we distinguish between close and acquaintance relationships based on the strength, frequency, and emotional intensity of the relationship (Granovetter 1973; Small, Brant, and Fekete 2024). For close relationships, we use the name generator method (McCallister and Fischer 1978; Marsden 1987). We ask respondents to name up to five others with whom they have discussed personally important matters in the last month. After providing names or initials of close ties, respondents are asked to provide several characteristics of each tie, such as partisanship, gender, education, type of relationship, and whether they talk about politics. We classify respondents' close-tie networks as heterogeneous if they report at least one out-partisan tie, following the established practice in the analysis of close-tie networks of focusing on the presence of disagreement rather than its proportion (Huckfeldt et al. 2004; Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2005; Eveland, Appiah and Beck 2018).⁴

To elicit the partisan composition of our respondents' acquaintance networks, we use a simplified version of the ARD method (McCormick, Salganik, and Zheng 2010; DiPrete et al. 2011; Park 2021). The question reads: "We would now like to focus on your acquaintances. Think of all of the people that you are acquainted with (meaning that you know their name and would stop and talk at least for a moment if you ran into the person on the street or in a shopping mall). How many of them are Republicans/Democrats?" We randomly assign the order in which each group appears. As respondents are unlikely to recall exact numbers of acquaintances, we first ask whether they know more or fewer than 10 people. We then provide more fine-grained categories: those who indicate fewer than 10 will then choose between "0," "1 – 2," "3 – 5," or "6 – 9," whereas those who report more than 10 are given the following options: "10 – 12," "13 – 20," "21 – 50," and "more than 50." This response strategy not only helps with recall but also helps with the issue of skewness in responses for categories (among which partisanship) that are unevenly distributed in the population (DiPrete et al. 2011).

Responses are re-coded into a numerical variable that takes the lower bound of each response option, ranging from 0 (zero acquaintances) to 50 (50 or more acquaintances). The whole partisan network size is computed as the sum of Democratic and Republican acquaintances. We then calculate the proportion of *out-partisan* acquaintances. For robustness checks, we use the number of out-partisan acquaintances instead of the proportion and also use a dummy version, cutting the variable at its mean level of 0.33. Notice that by considering the proportion of out-partisan acquaintances, rather than their number, we bypass the problem of accounting for individual variation in network size (McCormick et al. 2010).

As theorized, these measures capture different types of relationships. For each close tie, we asked respondents how they knew the other person. Most people primarily report relatives, friends, and their spouse. Only very occasionally do

they report colleagues, neighbors, classmates, or people they met in church or in sports or leisure activities. To assess who people think of when asked about their acquaintances, we asked a few respondents in a pilot study ($N = 244$) to describe the most recent acquaintance they made, using the exact same wording that we used for the ARD measure. Here, respondents predominantly described their neighbors, colleagues, and people they met while exercising, shopping, or attending church services.

Measuring Out-Partisan Animosity

Following the affective polarization literature, we combine three attitudinal measures: feeling thermometers, trust items, and trait ratings (Druckman and Levendusky 2019; Druckman et al. 2022). Feeling thermometers ask respondents how cold or warm they feel toward Republican voters and Democratic voters. The trust item asks how much of the time people think they can trust Democrats/Republicans “to do what’s right for the country.” Finally, respondents assess how well a series of traits describe Democrats and Republicans (American, intelligent, honest, open-minded, generous, hypocritical, selfish, and mean). Although we ask about both partisan groups, we only use the measures about out-partisans in the main article. Our final variable is an index of the three measures ranging from 0 to 1 (Druckman et al. 2022). To make sure that recalling the partisanship of social networks does not influence responses to the affective polarization measures, or vice versa, we randomly assign respondents to either fill in the polarization measures first, or to first take the network modules.

In addition to common attitudinal variables, we include a behavioral measure of out-partisan animosity (Mummolo and Nall 2017; McConnell et al. 2018). Because there is no cost or stigma in expressing negative sentiment toward political opponents in the United States, the bar for expressing negative affect is low (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). We raise the stakes for expressing out-partisan hostility by assessing the effect of network heterogeneity on behavior in an incentivized competence task.

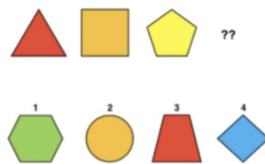
To do so, respondents are presented with a logic puzzle (Baldassarri, Gereke, and Schaub 2024) and informed that they will receive extra compensation if both they and a partner solve the puzzle correctly. Respondents are asked to choose between two potential partners: “John, who works in a supermarket, is 43, likes to swim, and is a Democrat/Republican” and “James, who works *as an engineer*, is 41, likes to go on walks, and is a Democrat/Republican.” The main difference between the profiles is their occupation: respondents choose between a supermarket employee and an engineer, the latter being the obvious choice when selecting someone to correctly perform a logic task. In the control condition, both alternatives are co-partisans and we therefore expect people to overwhelmingly favor the engineer.⁵ In the treatment condition, however, the engineer is an out-partisan (Fig. 1), thus respondents face a trade-off: to maximize their chances to earn extra money they need to partner with a member of the opposite party. Therefore, the experimental manipulation captures the extent to which individuals are willing to forgo actual financial compensation by favoring a co-partisan.

Set Up

In this activity, both you and another participant have to solve the puzzle below.

If you both solve the puzzle correctly, you will be paid an additional loyalty credit (valued at \$0.67).

If only one of you solves the puzzle correctly, neither of you will be paid. We first ask you to solve the puzzle. On the next page, you see two brief descriptions of potential partners and we will ask you to select one.



Control

Now, please pick your partner. Remember, payment of **one loyalty credit** is conditional upon your partner also solving the puzzle.

John works in a supermarket, is 43, likes to swim, and is a Democrat.



James is an engineer, is 41, likes to go on walks, and is a Democrat.



Treatment

Now, please pick your partner. Remember, payment of **one loyalty credit** is conditional upon your partner also solving the puzzle.

John works in a supermarket, is 43, likes to swim, and is a Democrat.



James is an engineer, is 41, likes to go on walks, and is a ~~Democrat~~.



Republican

Figure 1: Competence task.

Each respondent was randomly presented with a choice between either a co-partisan supermarket worker and a co-partisan engineer (control), or a co-partisan supermarket worker and an *out*-partisan engineer (treatment).

Measuring Misperceptions and Manipulating Perceived Similarity

To directly assess the seeing-the-other-side mechanism, we embedded an experimental manipulation in a subsequent data collection. According to this mechanism, heterogeneous acquaintance networks may curb out-partisan animosity by providing a more realistic, and less extreme view of out-partisans, thus correcting misperceptions. Following Ahler and Sood (2018), we measure misperceptions by asking respondents to estimate the percentage of Democrats who are union

members, LGBT, black, and atheist/agnostic, and the percentage of Republicans who are from the South, over 65, evangelical, and earn over 250k. We additionally ask people to estimate the percentage of both Republicans and Democrats who frequently discuss politics and who are politically moderate, integrating findings from previous research (Druckman et al. 2022). For each category, we subtract actual percentages from levels reported by our respondents and divide the outcome by the actual level. The final measure reported in the text takes the average over(under)estimation of all categories. We conduct robustness checks looking separately at the in-party and the out-party, and, following Ahler and Sood (2018), we also limit our measure of misperceptions to only include the social composition variables.

We conjecture that seeing-the-other-side makes people realize that Republicans and Democrats are more similar than the stereotyped images projected by media and politicians. We experimentally manipulate this aspect by asking respondents to think about the similarities between their in-partisan and out-partisan acquaintances and expect this to reduce out-partisan animosity. Namely, we randomly assign half of the respondents to a treatment condition in which they are asked to assess how similar their Republican and Democratic acquaintances are with respect to their income, frequency of political discussion, interest in politics, and love for the country. The treatment takes place right before the battery of questions measuring out-partisan animosity.⁶ Respondents assigned to the control condition first fill in the partisan animosity measures, followed by the battery on misperceptions. Finally, they fill in the treatment as well, in order for us to compare respondents in both conditions who see their acquaintances as mostly similar or mostly different. In line with our expectation about misperceptions, we expect that respondents in a more heterogeneous network will report more similarities.

Results

The Partisan Composition of Close Ties and Acquaintance Networks

Both close networks and acquaintance networks show reasonably high levels of partisan heterogeneity. 41 percent of respondents report at least one outparty member among their close ties, which is a number largely in line with both historical and contemporary estimates (Lee 2021).⁷ The average respondent reports having between 3 and 9 out-partisan acquaintances, constituting approximately 33 percent of their estimated partisan network. The median is around 31 percent. More interestingly, even respondents with politically homogeneous close-tie networks report substantial heterogeneity in their acquaintance networks. On average, those who report not having any out-partisan in their close-tie network have an acquaintance network that is 26 percent out-partisan. Those who report at least one close tie have an acquaintance network that is 41 percent out-partisan.

Figure 2 plots the distribution of the proportion of out-partisans in the acquaintance network. Although most people tend to know more co-partisans than out-partisans, almost a fourth of the sample reports an evenly distributed acquaintance network. To further explore the relationship between acquaintance and close-tie

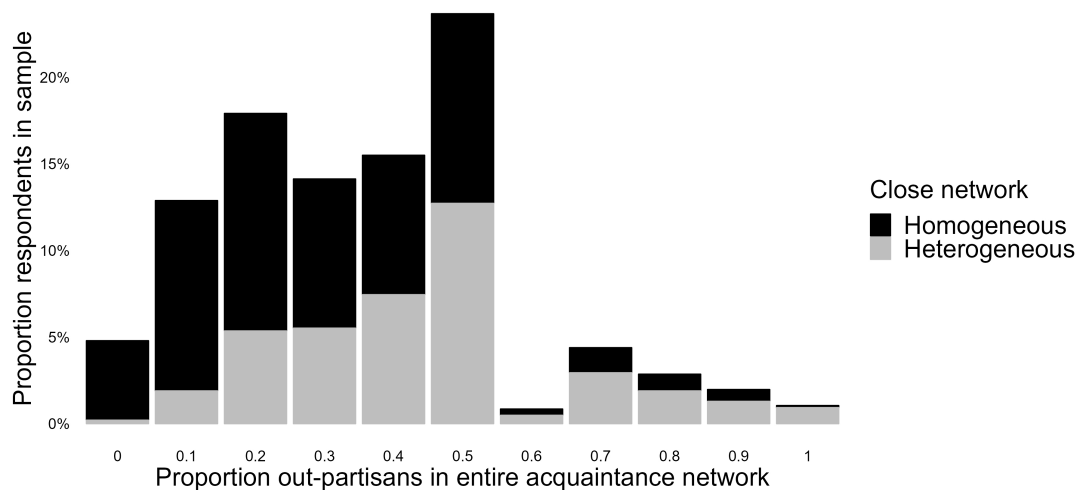


Figure 2: Distribution of the proportion out-partisans in the acquaintance network

Bars colored according to the composition of the close-tie network. Gray bars show respondents in heterogeneous close-tie networks. Black bars show respondents in homogeneous close-tie networks. Notably, a large group of people report having between 20 percent and 50 percent of their acquaintances belonging to the outparty and between a third and half of them are people whose close-tie networks are homogeneous.

networks, bars in Figure 2 are colored according to the share of people who report homogeneous (black) or heterogeneous (gray) close-tie discussion networks. Only 5 percent of respondents report having a completely homogeneous acquaintance network, and these individuals are all embedded in homogeneous close-tie networks. On the opposite end, we have small amounts of people fully embedded in out-partisan acquaintance networks, and they also report having outparty members among their close ties. More interestingly, a large group of people report having between 20 percent and 50 percent of their acquaintances belonging to the outparty and between a third and half of them are people whose close-tie networks are homogeneous.⁸ Overall, this evidence supports the intuition that weak ties might be providing exposure to out-partisans for a sizable number of people whose intimate discussion networks are politically homogeneous (Park 2021).

Are Heterogeneous Networks Related to Lower Out-Partisan Animosity?

Next, we consider attitudinal measures of out-partisan animosity and estimate a series of linear regression models, including controls, to capture their association with both close-tie and acquaintance network heterogeneity. Figure 3 shows results for the out-partisan animosity index. The x-axis shows effect sizes, with positive values denoting higher levels of affect toward out-partisans. We find that respondents in politically heterogeneous social networks display more positive attitudes toward outparty members, and this happens not only for respondents with outparty members in their close-tie networks but also in the broader context of acquaintance ties. In fact, having heterogeneous acquaintances has an even larger effect: respondents

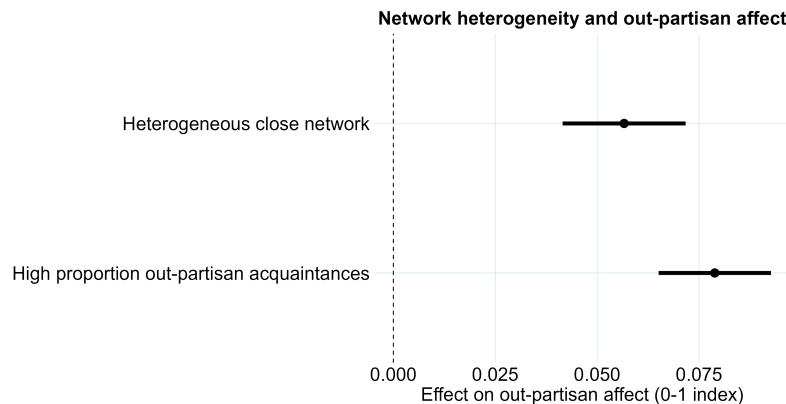


Figure 3: Relationship between network heterogeneity and out-partisan affect

Coefficient plot from a model that regresses an index of out-partisan affect on two different measures of network heterogeneity, controlling for gender, age, education, race, ideology, political interest, and strength of partisanship. Black dots are point estimates and lines are 95 percent CIs. See Table A1 in the online supplement.

exposed to a large proportion of out-party acquaintances are on average 0.08 points more sympathetic toward out-partisans than those in homogeneous networks, on a 0 – 1 scale ($SD = 0.41$). The average effect of heterogeneous close networks is 0.06 points ($SD = 0.3$).⁹

A third model in Table A1 in the online supplement shows that both effects remain significant when additionally controlling for the other type of tie. The effect of close ties controlling for acquaintances becomes 0.04, whereas the effect of heterogeneous acquaintances becomes 0.07. In addition, Table A2 in the online supplement shows that effects hold and are even stronger, using an alternative measure of affective polarization, namely the difference between in-partisan and out-partisan affect. Finally, Table A3 in the online supplement shows that the results hold when instead of dichotomizing the network variables, we take the proportion of out-partisan acquaintances and the number of close ties.

Moving beyond attitudinal measures of interpartisan animosity, we test whether embeddedness in politically homogeneous networks also predicts behavior, namely the likelihood of avoiding outpartisans in costly situations. Figure 4 shows results from the competence task, in which respondents had to choose a partner to solve a logic puzzle. The x-axis shows the treatment effect, displaying the mean likelihood of selecting an out-partisan engineer over a co-partisan supermarket employee, compared to the mean likelihood of selecting a co-partisan engineer over a co-partisan supermarket employee in the control condition. Respondents are, on average, 30 percent less likely to select an engineer when this person is an out-partisan rather than a co-partisan, even though they might lose actual money doing so. In line with our previous results, respondents embedded in heterogeneous acquaintance networks are 14 percentage points more likely to select the out-partisan engineer than respondents in homogeneous acquaintance networks (23 percent vs. 37 percent), and the interaction term in the corresponding model in Table A4 in the online supplement is significant. The difference amounts to a 38 percent reduction in

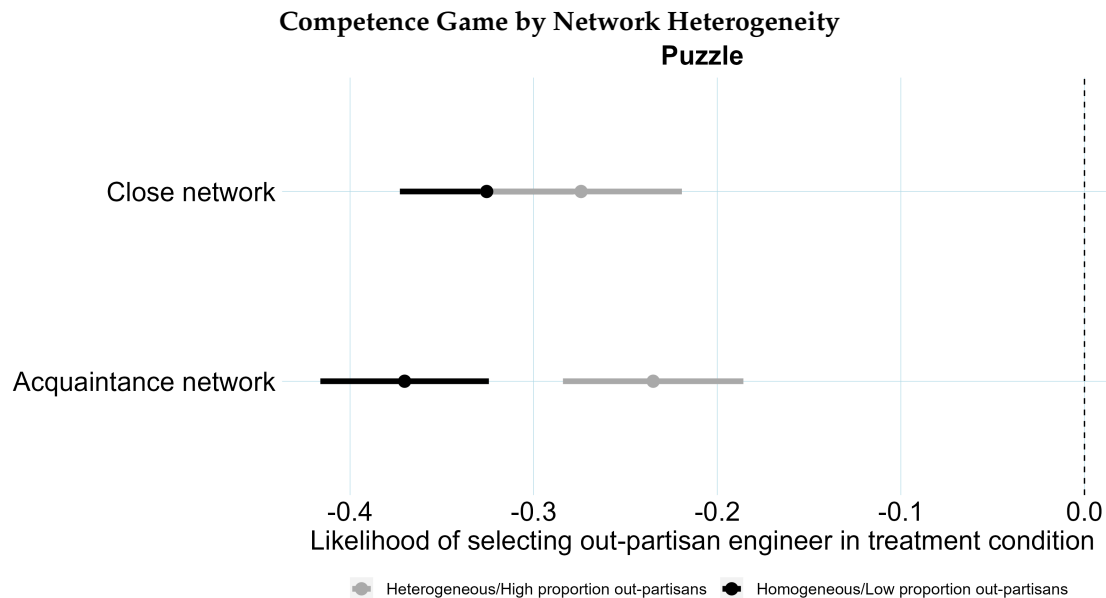


Figure 4: Logic puzzle by network heterogeneity.

The figure shows the likelihood of selecting the out-partisan engineer in the treatment condition of the competence game, by close-tie and acquaintance network heterogeneity (cfr. Table A4 in the online supplement). All models control for gender, age, education, race, ideology, political interest, and strength of partisanship.

the likelihood of selecting the engineer. Respondents in heterogeneous close-tie networks are, on average, not significantly more likely to select the engineer – the difference of 5 percentage points is not statistically significant. However, as we will show later, this effect is contingent upon talking politics. The more respondents in heterogeneous networks report cross-cutting political discussion, the higher their likelihood to select the out-partisan engineer in the treatment condition.

Taken together, these results point to a consistent relationship between network heterogeneity and lower outpartisan animosity, thus supporting Hypothesis 1. Results are particularly strong with respect to acquaintance networks.¹⁰

Seeing-the-Other-Side: Do Heterogeneous Acquaintances Reduce Misperceptions? Experimental Evidence

How do out-partisan acquaintances lower animosity? The traditional role of cross-cutting conversations is greatly reduced in more casual contexts, because political discussions are less common with acquaintances (Cowan and Baldassarri 2018; Carlson and Settle 2022). Nonetheless, our previous analysis hints to the possibility that heterogeneous acquaintance networks could be equally valuable in containing out-partisan hostility. Therefore, we consider a complementary mechanism, seeing-the-other-side, which might achieve the same outcome, even without conversations.

We expect that people embedded in heterogeneous acquaintance networks will hold fewer misperceptions about members of the opposite party (Hypothesis 2a). Although parties and media constantly project extreme, stereotypical views of

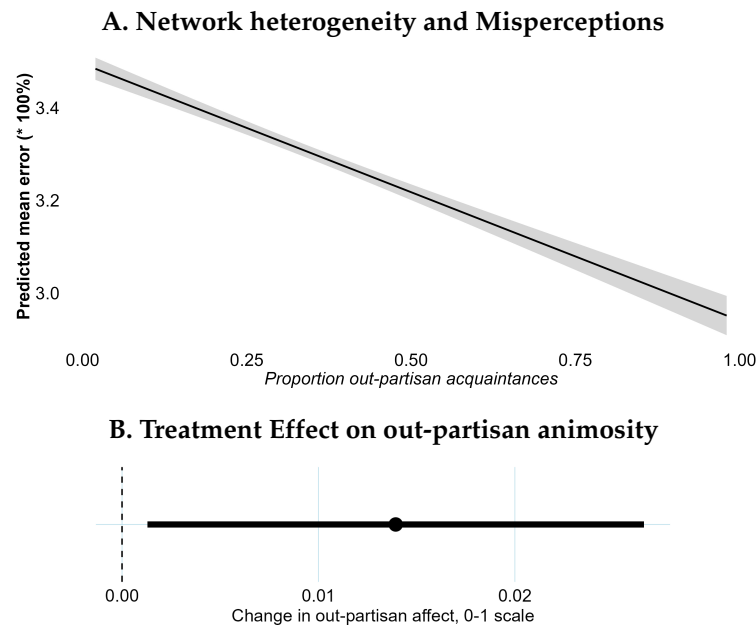


Figure 5: Heterogeneous acquaintance networks contain out-partisan animosity by reducing misperceptions. Panel A. Plot of the estimated coefficients from a model regressing misperceptions on the proportion of out-partisan acquaintances in a respondent's network, controlling for gender, age, education, race, ideology, political interest, and strength of partisanship (cfr. Table A5 in the online supplement). Panel B shows the average treatment effect of the misperception experiment (cfr. Table A9 in the online supplement).

party members, knowing a few out-partisans may serve to reduce misperceptions about the other side. To test this expectation, we first model a respondent's level of misperceptions of Democrats and Republicans as a function of the proportion of outparty members in their acquaintance network, including standard controls.¹¹ Panel A in Figure 5 shows that, on average, respondents embedded in heterogeneous acquaintance networks have fewer misperceptions ($P = 0.008$). The y-axis shows the total misperceptions (real value minus reported value) for all the 12 misperceptions measures combined, pertaining to both the inparty and the outparty. Table A5 in the online supplement shows that results hold with a binary network measure. Table A6 in the online supplement shows that results are even stronger when using the measure of misperceptions originally introduced by Ahler and Sood (2018), as well as when considering exclusively misperceptions about the outparty. Finally, in line with our broader intuition, Figure A2 in the online supplement shows that respondents with higher misperceptions report more negative feelings toward outparty members.

Having established this relationship, we embed an experimental manipulation in our survey encouraging respondents to think about similarities between their Republican and Democratic acquaintances with respect to their income, interest in politics, frequency of political discussion, and love for the country.¹² Table A8 in the online supplement shows that, in line with our expectation about misperceptions, respondents in more heterogeneous acquaintance networks see their in-partisan and out-partisan acquaintances as more similar.

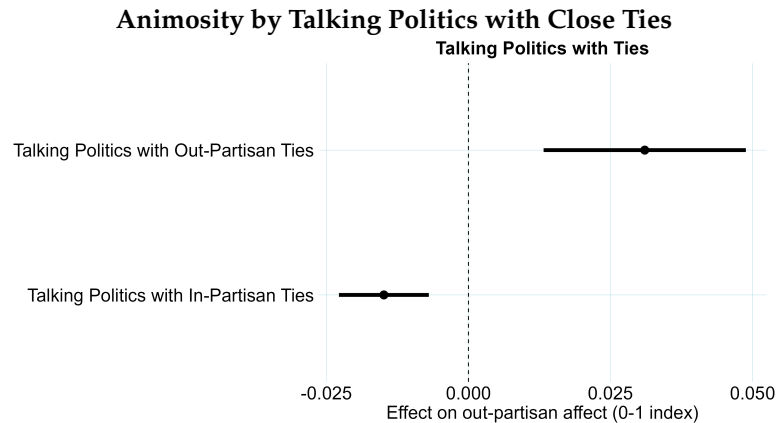


Figure 6: Animosity by talking politics with close ties

The figure shows the estimated effect of talking politics with in-partisan ties in homogeneous networks and out-partisan ties in heterogeneous networks on out-partisan animosity. All models control for gender, age, education, race, ideology, political interest, strength of partisanship, and network size (cfr. Table A11 in the online supplement).

Panel B in Figure 5 shows that having people think about the similarities between their co- and out-partisan acquaintances produces a small, but significant decrease in out-partisan animosity ($P < 0.05$), thus supporting Hypothesis 2b. Table A9 in the online supplement shows the regression model, and Table A10 in the online supplement shows that there is no heterogeneity of treatment effect when considering the number of out-partisan acquaintances in the network, or the perceived similarity of acquaintances.

Hearing-the-Other-Side: Does Talking Politics with Close Ties Reduce Animosity?

Finally, we further probe the classic mechanism of hearing-the-other-side, during a contentious election. For each tie, we asked the respondent whether they had talked about politics in the last month. Respondents reported a total of 1430 out-partisan close ties. They reported to talk politics with 65 percent of these ties. For in-party ties, respondents reported a total of 5394 ties and talked politics with 74 percent of them. For out-party ties, respondents report a total of 1442 close ties and talked politics with 64 percent of them. Figure 6 shows that talking politics matters for animosity. The first coefficient shows that the more respondents in heterogeneous networks talk to their out-partisan ties, the lower their out-partisan animosity. The second coefficient shows that the more respondents in homogeneous networks talk to their in-partisan ties, the higher their animosity. The regression model is shown in Table A11 in the online supplement. For the competence game, we find that respondents in heterogeneous networks who talked more to their out-partisan ties were less likely to select the engineer in the treatment condition (see Table A12 in the online supplement).

Finally, in Figures A4 and A5 in the online supplement, we further probe the relationship between cross-party discussion and animosity. When a respondent

reported an out-partisan tie, they were asked to respond to two statements about cross-partisan discussions. They read: "When [TIE] and I talk about politics, I usually understand [TIE]'s point of view" and "when [TIE] and I talk about politics, we usually end up disagreeing." Respondents could agree, disagree, or remain neutral with these statements. Compared to the neutral position, the 60 percent of respondents who reported understanding their discussion partner's point of view had lower levels of animosity, whereas the 20 percent who did not understand it had significantly higher levels. Similarly, again compared to the neutral position, the 25 percent of respondents who ended up disagreeing with their discussion partners had higher levels of animosity, whereas the 50 percent who did not report disagreements when discussing politics with outpartisans reported lower animosity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite decades of elite polarization, and despite widespread worries about echo chambers and partisan sorting, U.S. citizens retain cross-cutting ties. By documenting the extent to which social networks still display significant levels of political heterogeneity, we draw particular attention to the role of acquaintance relationships in facilitating cross-partisan exposure. Even if close networks increasingly segregate, it is difficult to imagine segregation in acquaintance networks. Although people exercise some choice in selecting partners or close friends, social structure is likely to exert some constraint on broader networks, making it almost impossible for most Americans to completely avoid out-partisans in the workplace, leisure activities, and public spaces (Park 2021).

Heterogeneous social relationships, in turn, play a role in buffering inter-partisan animosity, even in the current era of hyper-partisan politics. We find that not only close-tie relationships but also, if not primarily, acquaintance networks are associated with lower hostility toward out-partisans, and they increase the chances of choosing members of the opposite party for a cooperative task. We suggest that merely seeing the other side, superficially knowing a few out-partisans, may be sufficient to lower one's guard, correcting the misperceptions about the other side that partly fuel animosity. The broader literature on intergroup contact, which primarily focuses on deep, sustained interactions, may benefit from a similar complementary focus on brief interactions.

How do we reconcile widespread accounts of out-partisan animosity with our finding that social networks remain politically heterogeneous and likely reduce inter-partisan hostility? To some extent, these scholarships reach different conclusions because they attend to two different realities. When surveyed, in the abstract, about hypothetical (thus, to some extent, stereotypical) Republicans and Democrats, people might express far more animosity than they experience in their everyday life when interacting with coworkers, neighbors, or acquaintances that happen to disagree with them about politics (de Jong and Baldassarri 2025). In other words, partisan division, at the interpersonal level, might not be as widespread and constitutive as previously thought.

Notes

- 1 However, see Mutz (2006) for a discussion of the dark side of mixed political company.
- 2 Although others have instead pointed out the policy-based nature of partisan animosity (Orr and Huber 2020), or concluded that both partisan identity and policy disagreement may affect interpersonal affect (Dias and Lelkes 2022).
- 3 Additionally, we oversampled respondents in battleground states, where political contention (e.g., spending on political advertisements and campaign events) tends to be even higher.
- 4 We exclude from the analysis the 15.7 percent of ties reported as Independents and 20.2 percent of ties for which partisanship was not reported.
- 5 In the control condition, 78 percent of respondents indeed choose the engineer over the person who works in the supermarket.
- 6 Only respondents who report at least one acquaintance from either side are included in the analysis. As a robustness check, we run separate analyses for respondents who perceive their networks as mostly similar, and mostly different, knowing, nonetheless, that this is in itself a function of network heterogeneity.
- 7 Our respondents report a higher total number of close ties than (Lee and Bearman 2020): an average of 3.72 with a standard deviation of 1.42. This is likely because our survey is far shorter than large-scale surveys that ask network questions, and because we encourage participants to fill in as many ties as they could.
- 8 Our second survey shows a similar distribution of the partisan composition of acquaintances.
- 9 Of course, to some extent, this comparison hinges on a dichotomic definition of heterogeneity that is based on cut-off criteria that are somewhat subjective.
- 10 We cannot exclude the possibility of reversed causality. However, politics usually plays a limited role in the formation of social relationships (Lazer et al. 2010; de Jong and Baldassarri 2025) and the experimental manipulation below suggests that the partisan composition of acquaintance networks does work to reduce hostility.
- 11 We only run this model on respondents who report at least one co-partisan and one out-partisan acquaintance.
- 12 Table A7 in the online supplement shows that the randomization was largely successful, although respondents who self-identify as “extremely conservative” were more likely to end up in the treatment condition compared to the baseline category of ideologically moderate. We control for ideology in our models. In line with the spirit of the treatment, Figure A3 in the online supplement shows that respondents see their acquaintances as more similar than different.

References

- Ahler, Douglas J and Gaurav Sood. 2018. “The Parties in Our Heads: Misperceptions about Party Composition and Their Consequences.” *The Journal of Politics* 80(3):964–81. <https://doi.org/10.1086/697253>
- Amsalem, Eran, Eric Merkley and Peter John Loewen. 2022. “Does Talking to the other Side Reduce Inter-Party Hostility? Evidence from Three Studies.” *Political Communication* 39(1):61–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2021.1955056>

- Asimovic, Nejla, Jonathan Nagler and Joshua A Tucker. 2023. "Replicating the Effects of Facebook Deactivation in an Ethnically Polarized Setting." *Research & Politics* 10(4):20531680231205157. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20531680231205157>
- Asimovic, Nejla, Jonathan Nagler, Richard Bonneau and Joshua A. Tucker. 2021. "Testing the Effects of Facebook Usage in an Ethnically Polarized Setting." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118(25):e2022819118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2022819118>
- Bakshy, Eytan, Solomon Messing and Lada A Adamic. 2015. "Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook." *Science* 348(6239):1130–32. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaa1160>
- Baldassarri, Delia and Andrew Gelman. 2008. "Partisans without Constraint: Political Polarization and Trends in American Public Opinion." *American Journal of Sociology* 114(2):408–46. <https://doi.org/10.1086/590649>
- Baldassarri, Delia, Johanna Gereke and Max Schaub. 2024. "Prosociality Beyond in-Group Boundaries: A Lab-in-the-Field Experiment on Selection and Intergroup Interactions in a Multiethnic European Metropolis." *Sociological Science* 11(30):815–53. <https://doi.org/10.15195/v11.a30>
- Baldassarri, Delia and Peter Bearman. 2007. "Dynamics of Political Polarization." *American Sociological Review* 72(5):784–811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240707200507>
- Barabas, Jason. 2004. "How Deliberation Affects Policy Opinions." *American Political Science Review* 98(4):687–701. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404041425>
- Barberá, Pablo. 2020. "Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization." Pp. 34–55 in *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform*. Vol. 34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapter 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108890960.004>
- Bello, Jason and Meredith Rolfe. 2014. "Is influence mightier than selection? Forging agreement in political discussion networks during a campaign." *Social Networks* 36:134–46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2013.06.001>
- Berelson, Bernard, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and William McPhee. 1954. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Brauer, Markus. 2024. "Stuck on Intergroup Attitudes: The Need to Shift Gears to Change Intergroup Behaviors." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 19(1):280–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916231185775>
- Carlson, Taylor N. and Jaime E. Settle. 2022. *What Goes Without Saying*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108912495>
- Chakraborty, Anujit, Arkadev Ghosh, Matt Lowe and Gareth Nellis. 2024. "Learning about Outgroups: The Impact of Broad versus Deep Interactions." *CESifo Working Paper No. 11363*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4991911>
- Chen, M Keith and Ryne Rohla. 2018. "The Effect of Partisanship and Political Advertising on Close Family Ties." *Science* 360(6392):1020–24. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag1433>
- Combs, Aidan, Graham Tierney, Brian Guay, Friedolin Merhout, Christopher A. Bail, D. Sunshine Hillygus and Alexander Volfovsky. 2023. "Reducing Political Polarization in the United States with a Mobile Chat Platform." *Nature Human Behaviour* 7:1454–61. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01655-0>
- Cowan, Sarah K and Delia Baldassarri. 2018. "'It Could Turn Ugly': Selective Disclosure of Attitudes in Political Discussion Networks." *Social Networks* 52:1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2017.04.002>

- de Jong, Jona and Delia Baldassarri. 2025. "Avoiding the Other Side? The Limited Role of Partisanship in the Formation of Social Relationships in the United States." Working Paper.
- de Jong, Jona F. 2024a. "Cross-Partisan Discussions Reduced Political Polarization between UK Voters, but Less So When They Disagreed." *Communications Psychology* 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44271-023-00051-8>
- De Jong, Jona Franciscus. 2024b. "Enduring Divides?: Social Networks and the Entrenchment of Political polarization." PhD thesis. European University Institute.
- De Jong, Jona and Jonne Kamphorst. 2024. "Separated by Degrees: Social Closure by Education Levels Strengthens Contemporary Political Divides." *Comparative Political Studies* p. 00104140241271104. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/rcvnt>
- DellaPosta, Daniel. 2020. "Pluralistic Collapse: 'The Oil Spill' Model of Mass Opinion Polarization." *American Sociological Review* 85(3):507–536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420922989>
- DellaPosta, Daniel, Yongren Shi and Michael Macy. 2015. "Why Do Liberals Drink Lattes?" *American Journal of Sociology* 120(5):1473–511. <https://doi.org/10.1086/681254>
- Dias, Nicholas and Yphtach Lelkes. 2022. "The Nature of Affective Polarization: Disentangling Policy Disagreement from Partisan Identity." *American Journal of Political Science* 66(3):775–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12628>
- DiPrete, Thomas A., Andrew Gelman, Tyler McCormick, Julien Teitler and Tian Zheng. 2011. "Segregation in Social Networks Based on Acquaintanceship and Trust." *American Journal of Sociology* 116(4):1234–83. <https://doi.org/10.1086/659100>
- Druckman, James N and Matthew S Levendusky. 2019. "What Do We Measure When We Measure Affective Polarization?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 83(1):114–22. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfz003>
- Druckman, James N., Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, Matthew Levendusky and John Barry Ryan. 2021. "Affective Polarization, Local Contexts and Public Opinion in America." *Nature Human Behaviour* 5(1):28–38. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-01012-5>
- Druckman, James N., Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, Matthew Levendusky and John Barry Ryan. 2022. "(Mis) Estimating Affective Polarization." *The Journal of Politics* 84(2):1106–17. <https://doi.org/10.1086/715603>
- Eady, Gregory, Jonathan Nagler, Andy Guess, Jan Zilinsky and Joshua A. Tucker. 2019. "How Many People Live in Political Bubbles on Social Media? Evidence from Linked Survey and Twitter Data." *Sage Open* 9(1):2158244019832705. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019832705>
- Eveland, William P., Osei Appiah and Paul A. Beck. 2018. "Americans Are More Exposed to Difference Than We Think: Capturing Hidden Exposure to Political and Racial Difference." *Social Networks* 52:192–200. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2017.08.002>
- Finkel, Eli J., Christopher A. Bail, Mina Cikara, Peter H. Ditto, Shanto Iyengar, Samara Klar, Lilliana Mason, Mary C. McGrath, Brendan Nyhan, David G. Rand et al. 2020. "Political Sectarianism in America." *Science* 370(6516):533–36. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abe1715>
- Gelman, Andrew and Yotam Margalit. 2021. "Social Penumbra Predict Political Attitudes." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118(6):e2019375118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2019375118>
- Gerber, Alan S., Gregory A. Huber, David Doherty and Conor M. Dowling. 2012. "Disagreement and the Avoidance of Political Discussion: Aggregate Relationships and

- Differences across Personality Traits." *American Journal of Political Science* 56(4):849–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00571.x>
- Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6):1360–80. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225469>
- Grönlund, Kimmo, Kaisa Herne and Maija Setälä. 2015. "Does Enclave Deliberation Polarize Opinions?" *Political Behavior* 37:995–1020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-015-9304-x>
- Huckfeldt, R. Robert and John D. Sprague. 1995. *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication: Information and Influence in an Election Campaign*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09780511664113>
- Huckfeldt, Robert, Jeanette Morehouse Mendez and Tracy Osborn. 2004. "Disagreement, Ambivalence, and Engagement: The Political Consequences of Heterogeneous Networks." *Political Psychology* 25(1):65–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00357.x>
- Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(3):405–431. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038>
- Iyengar, Shanto and Sean J Westwood. 2015. "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(3):690–707. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12152>
- Iyengar, Shanto, Tobias Konitzer and Kent Tedin. 2018. "The Home as a Political Fortress: Family Agreement in an Era of Polarization." *The Journal of Politics* 80(4):1326–38. <https://doi.org/10.1086/698929>
- Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra and Sean J. Westwood. 2019. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1):129–146. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034>
- Katz, Elihu and Paul Felix Lazarsfeld. 1964. *Personal Influence, The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. Transaction Publishers.
- Knoke, David. 1990. "Networks of Political Action: Toward Theory Construction." *Social Forces* 68(4):1041–63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2579133>
- Lazer, David, Brian Rubineau, Carol Chetkovich, Nancy Katz and Michael Neblo. 2010. "The Coevolution of Networks and Political Attitudes." *Political Communication* 27(3):248–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2010.500187>
- Lee, Byungkyu. 2021. "Close Relationships in Close Elections." *Social Forces* 100(1):400–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soaa101>
- Lee, Byungkyu and Peter Bearman. 2020. "Political Isolation in America." *Network Science* 8(3):333–55. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nws.2020.9>
- Lees, Jeffrey and Mina Cikara. 2020. "Inaccurate Group Meta-Perceptions Drive Negative Out-Group Attributions in Competitive Contexts." *Nature Human Behaviour* 4(3):279–86. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0766-4>
- Lelkes, Yphtach, Gaurav Sood and Shanto Iyengar. 2017. "The Hostile Audience: The Effect of Access to Broadband Internet on Partisan Affect." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(1):5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12237>
- Levendusky, Matthew. 2023. *Our Common Bonds: Using What Americans Share to Help Bridge the Partisan Divide*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226824697.001.0001>

- Levendusky, Matthew S. and Dominik A. Stecula. 2021. *We Need to Talk: How Cross-Party Dialogue Reduces Affective Polarization*. Elements in Experimental Political Science. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009042192>
- Levendusky, Matthew S and Neil Malhotra. 2016. "(Mis) Perceptions of Partisan Polarization in the American Public." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80(S1):378–91. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfv045>
- Marsden, Peter V. 1987. "Core Discussion Networks of Americans." *American Sociological Review* 52(1):122–131. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095397>
- Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement. How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226524689.001.0001>
- McCallister, Lynne and Claude S. Fischer. 1978. "A Procedure for Surveying Personal Networks." *Sociological Methods & Research* 7(2):131–148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004912417800700202>
- McCarty, Nolan. 2019. *Polarization: What Everyone Needs to Know®*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wentk/9780190867782.001.0001>
- McConnell, Christopher, Yotam Margalit, Neil Malhotra and Matthew Levendusky. 2018. "The Economic Consequences of Partisanship in a Polarized Era." *American Journal of Political Science* 62(1):5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12330>
- McCormick, Tyler H., Matthew J. Salganik and Tian Zheng. 2010. "How Many People Do You Know?: Efficiently Estimating Personal Network Size." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 105(489):59–70. <https://doi.org/10.1198/jasa.2009.ap08518>
- Mummolo, Jonathan and Clayton Nall. 2017. "Why Partisans Do Not Sort: The Constraints on Political Segregation." *The Journal of Politics* 79(1):45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1086/687569>
- Mutz, Diana C. 2002. "Cross-Cutting Social Networks: Testing Democratic Theory in Practice." *American Political Science Review* 96(1):111–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055402004264>
- Mutz, Diana Carole. 2006. *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative vs. Participatory Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09780511617201>
- Orr, Lilla V. and Gregory A. Huber. 2020. "The Policy Basis of Measured Partisan Animosity in the United States." *American Journal of Political Science* 64(3):569–586. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12498>
- Paluck, Elizabeth Levy, Seth A. Green and Donald P. Green. 2019. "The Contact Hypothesis Re-Evaluated." *Behavioural Public Policy* 3(2):129–58. <https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2018.25>
- Park, Barum. 2021. "Segregated in Social Space: The Spatial Structure of Acquaintanceship Networks." *Sociological Science* 8(20):397–428. <https://doi.org/10.15195/v8.a20>
- Pettigrew, Thomas F and Linda R Tropp. 2006. "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90(5):751. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751>
- Pietryka, Matthew T. and Anand E. Sokhey. 2023. "Why We Underestimate Americans' Exposure to Interpersonal Political Disagreement And Some Suggestions." *APSA 2023*.
- Pietryka, Matthew T., Jack Lyons Reilly, Daniel M. Maliniak, Patrick R. Miller, Robert Huckfeldt and Ronald B. Rapoport. 2018. "From Respondents to Networks: Bridging Between Individuals, Discussants, and the Network in the Study of Political Discussion." *Political Behavior* 40(3):711–735. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-017-9419-3>

- Prior, Markus. 2013. "Media and Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16:101–27. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-100711-135242>
- Rawlings, Craig M. 2022. "Becoming an Ideologue: Social Sorting and the Microfoundations of Polarization." *Sociological Science* 9(13):313–45. <https://doi.org/10.15195/v9.a13>
- Rossiter, Erin L. and Taylor N. Carlson. 2023. "Cross-Partisan Conversation Reduced Affective Polarization for Republicans and Democrats Even After the Contentious 2020 Election." *Journal of Politics*. 86(4).<https://doi.org/10.1086/729931>
- Santoro, Erik and David E. Broockman. 2022. "The Promise and Pitfalls of Cross-Partisan Conversations for Reducing Affective Polarization: Evidence from Randomized Experiments." *Science Advances* 8(25):eabn5515. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abn5515>
- Settle, Jaime E. and Taylor N. Carlson. 2019. "Opting Out of Political Discussions." *Political Communication* 36(3):476–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1561563>
- Sinclair, Besty. 2012. *The Social Citizen. Peer Networks and Political Behavior*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922836.001.0001>
- Small, Mario L., Kristina Brant and Maleah Fekete. 2024. "The Avoidance of Strong Ties." *American Sociological Review* 89(4):615–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224241263602>
- Sood, Gaurav and Shanto Iyengar. 2016. "Coming to Dislike Your Opponents: The Polarizing Impact of Political Campaigns." Working Paper. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2840225>
- Van Der Gaag, Martin and Tom A. B. Snijders. 2005. "The Resource Generator: Social Capital Quantification with Concrete Items." *Social Networks* 27(1):1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2004.10.001>
- Webster, Steven W. and Alan I. Abramowitz. 2017. "The Ideological Foundations of Affective Polarization in the U.S. Electorate." *American Politics Research* 45(4):621–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X17703132>
- Westfall, Jacob, Leaf Van Boven, John R. Chambers and Charles M. Judd. 2015. "Perceiving Political Polarization in the United States: Party Identity Strength and Attitude Extremity Exacerbate the Perceived Partisan Divide." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10(2):145–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615569849>
- Zuckerman, Alan S. 2005. *The Social Logic of Politics: Personal Networks As Contexts for Political Behavior*. Temple University Press.

Delia Baldassarri: Professor, Department of Sociology, New York University.

E-mail: delia.b@nyu.edu.

Jona de Jong: Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Sociology, Utrecht University.

E-mail: j.f.dejong2@uu.nl.