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THE BIGGEST WINNER: HOW LOSS AVERSION AND NEGATIVITY BIAS CAN INCREASE AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

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THE BIGGEST WINNER: HOW LOSS AVERSION

AND NEGATIVITY BIAS CAN INCREASE

AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

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by

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Abstract

Affective polarization is on the rise, which makes understanding the origins of it increasingly important. Some work finds that partisan sorting is associated with increased polarization, due to a lack of exposure to conflicting opinions as well as the ease of making generalizations about the opposing side (Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra, & Westwood, 2019). Individuals with more closely aligned ideological and partisan identities are more likely to exhibit hostility towards the other party, and react more emotionally to information that threatens their party or issue stance (Mason, 2015). The aim of this paper is to analyze how contextual factors, specifically the partisan distribution of an area, can influence affective polarization. Building off of the loss aversion literature, I theorize that individuals in the majority party are likely to exhibit lower levels of out-party affect, and therefore greater affective polarization, than individuals in the minority party. Using electoral returns from presidential elections to proxy state party identity and American National Elections Studies data from 2008-2016, I find a modest, but statistically significant, association between party status and affective polarization and out-party affect.

Dedications page

To Roland and Zero, the best dogs that anyone could ask for.

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1 Introduction

In general, Americans are more polarized today than they were 30 years ago (Abramowitz, 2010a). Affective polarization—the distance between how an individual feels about their own party (in-party affect) and how they feel about the other party (out-party affect)—specifically, is also on the rise (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018). Moreover, recent work shows that affective polarization shapes a plethora of political attitudes and behaviors, as well as non-political behavior such as dating (Iyengar et al., 2019; J. Druckman, Klar, Kkrupnikov, Levendusky, & Ryan, 2020; Garrett, Long, & Jeong, 2019). The root causes of affective polarization, however, are still unclear.

The most widely accepted causes of affective polarization are individual level attributes such as strength of partisanship and ideology (Iyengar et al., 2019). In addition, with the advent of literature on negative partisanship (the notion that individuals more strongly identify as being against their out-party rather than identifying with their in party), recent evidence shows that affective polarization is largely linked with greater out-party animosity (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016).[1] However, the effect an individual's political environment has on their affective polarization warrants further study. Following recent work that considers how the political context an individual lives in influences their affective polarization (Connors, 2020), I argue that an individual's party being in the majority or minority of their own political context can influence their out-party attitudes. The specific mechanism by which I contend an individual's party status may be linked with their affective

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[1]In-party affect has been relatively stable over time, with some work showing that it has increased slightly due to increased partisan sorting (Levendusky, 2009; Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018).

polarization stems from the psychological phenomenon of loss aversion.

In brief, prior work shows that individuals wish to advance the status of their party and maintain the positive view that they have of the party (Huddy, 2001). Loss aversion theory shows that individuals do not like to lose and will do what they can in order to prevent themselves from losing (Hochman & Yechiam, 2011). The heightened awareness that is associated with potential losses causes increased emotionality (Hochman & Yechiam, 2011). Building off this literature, I argue that loss aversion will result in lower out-party affect (and as a consequence affective polarization) for those in the majority party because of the perception that the minority party is a threat to their party's majority status, regardless of how real that threat is.

In the remainder of this paper, I discuss the state of the current literature on the origins of negative out-party affect and affective polarization. Next, I develop a theory to demonstrate the impact that loss aversion can have on out-party animosity, and in turn affective polarization. The following section will discuss the means with which I intend to test my hypothesis. Using ANES data from 2008, 2012, and 2016, I am able to demonstrate support for my main hypothesis that being in the majority party in a state is associated with a decrease in out-party affect. The effect of majority party status, however, never reaches the same effect size as more conventional causes of out-party animosity, namely ideological strength and partisan strength. In order to account for loss aversion, I also analyze the association between party status and out-party affect based on electoral competition. I provide some evidence to show that the association between party status and out-party affect *may* be mitigated by electoral competition, however the results are inconsistent. The paper then concludes with a discussion of the implications of these results.

2 The Origins of Out-party Animosity and Affective Polarization

Prior work shows that out-party animus has been steadily increasing over the last 30 years, with negative partisanship becoming a primary motivator of political participation (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018; Klar & Krupnikov, 2016). Some work finds that partisan sorting increases polarization, due to a lack of exposure to conflicting opinions as well as the ease of making generalizations about the opposing side (Iyengar et al., 2019). The connection between sorting and increased affective polarization is due to a lack of cross-cutting identities decreasing exposure to other groups, which then in turn dehumanizes the out-party (Mason, 2015, 2018). This lack of cross-cutting identities has made it easier for individuals to create broad, negative generalizations about the out-party, which increases affective polarization. There is also evidence that decreasing exposure to the other side and increasing the presence of like-minded voices increases affective polarization (Gimpel & Hui, 2015).

Recent work also finds that those with more closely aligned ideological and partisan identities are more likely to exhibit hostility towards the other party, and react more emotionally to information that threatens their party or issue stance (Mason, 2015). Affective polarization can be as ingrained in us as our personalities, as other work shows (Webster, 2018). Even when accounting for personality, however, the strength of ideological and partisan identities are essential to the development of negative affect towards the out-party. Attachment to groups, such as racial groups, are also linked with attitudes towards the out-party (Mason & Wronski, 2018).

These group attachments are all formed and reinforced in an individual's political context (Conover, 1984).

The relationship between place and politics is well studied. Group attitudes are activated by their political environment, as some group identities are more salient in certain political environments (Conover, 1984). Group identities are activated by the political environment and they also are associated with affective polarization (Conover, 1984; Mason, 2015). Furthermore, a more affectively polarized political context can increase an individual's affective polarization (Connors, 2020). If, as other work shows, information that is threatening to their party will make individuals react more emotionally (Huddy, 2001; Mason, 2015), then it is likely that information about the area that they live in will also cause them to act emotionally, in turn causing them to have higher levels of affective polarization if that information poses a threat to their party's status (Huddy, 2001).

The main contribution of this paper is demonstrating that geographic context can influence affective polarization as it does with other political attitudes. The attribute of geographic context that I argue will influence affective polarization is the partisan distribution of the area in which an individual lives — in this paper, their state. As I expand on below, individuals respond negatively to threats to the party's status. This desire to defend their party, and in turn the impact that a state's partisan distribution can have on affective polarization, are rooted in social identity, and loss aversion.

3 Loss Aversion

The core foundation of the psychological concept of loss aversion is that people hate losing. Individuals will do what they can in order to avoid losing in any circumstance (Hochman & Yechiam, 2011; Brenner, Rottenstreich, Sood, & Bilgin, 2007; Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). The negative emotions from loss or potential losses are stronger than the positive emotions from winning or potentially winning. Furthermore, the effect of losing on negative emotions is significantly stronger than the effect of winning on positive ones (Hochman & Yechiam, 2011; Köbberling & Wakker, 2005; Tversky & Kahneman, 1991, 1971). In other words, "losses loom larger than gains," (Brenner et al., 2007).[2]

There are two types of losses that are considered in the loss aversion literature: valence losses and possession losses (Brenner et al., 2007). Valence losses/gains relate to how (un)attractive the item is to the individual, while possession losses/gains relate to the benefits associated with the loss/gain. Work shows evidence of the existence of both valence loss aversion (Ahluwalia, 2002; Taylor, 1991) and possession loss aversion (Carmon & Ariely, 2000; Brenner et al., 2007) in the marketplace; although not all work distinguishes between the two (e.g., Tversky and Kahneman 1991; Hochman and Yechiam 2011).

3.1 Loss Aversion and Party Status

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[2]The degree to which losses are overweighted has been called into question, but the overall notion that losses weigh heavier than gains has maintained support (Yechiam, 2019). Losses have been shown to improve cognitive performance due to the increased weight of losses on an individual's actions (Yechiam & Hochman, 2014).

Within the context of this paper, the main focus is on valence loss aversion. Party status is not a tangible gain; there is not a specific possession to lose in a decrease in the party's status. In the US, individuals are not really thinking in terms of economic gain when thinking about party status (Kinder & Kiewiet 1981; but see Gerber & Huber 2009), and are more concerned with protection from threats to the party's prestige (Huddy, 2001). Generally speaking, there is little possessive loss to be experienced in a change in party status. The value in an individual's party maintaining its status is valence. Because of this, valence loss aversion is the main mechanism when addressing threats to party status. While evidence shows that possessive loss aversion has a stronger impact on behavior and decision making, valence loss aversion is still an important aspect of the decision making process (Brenner et al., 2007).

For the remainder of the paper, party status is discussed in terms of majority and minority status. This does not directly mean electoral outcomes, rather it is if the majority (or minority) of people identify with their party in their state. For the individuals in the minority, there is not any threat that can change their party's status. Those in the majority, however, have something to lose and a group to blame for that potential loss. For example, their status as the majority party can be changed, therefore the minority party will be perceived as a threat.

While work shows that the immediate happiness of the minority party is more strongly affected than the majority party following an election, this work does not directly analyze individuals' views of the other party (Pierce, Rogers, & Snyder, 2016). Individuals know that losing will impact their happiness and will work to prevent their losses wherever possible, and dislike whatever potential causes of their loss there are. Individuals who realize they are in the majority are going to be more focused on avoiding a loss than basking in their victory.

People who are in the majority party do not want to lose their status. Loss aversion also leads individuals to wanting to maintain the status quo, which in this case would be those

in the majority maintaining their status (Alesina & Passarelli, 2019). The only source of their potential loss would be from the minority party, which is a potential cause of conflict between those in the majority and those in the minority. This conflict between the majority and minority parties will likely have a direct influence on those in the majority party's levels of affective polarization due to the perception that the minority party poses a threat. With this threat to party status in mind, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Individuals in the majority party in an area will be more affectively polarized than those in the minority party.

The main source of increasing affective polarization is an increase in out-party animosity, not so much an increase in affect towards their own group (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018). As individuals' identities become more sorted, their disdain for other groups have become more focused (Levendusky, 2009). Individuals also perceive the out-party as further away from themselves ideologically than they are in reality, which increases negative affective ratings towards the out-party (Enders & Armaly, 2019). Due to this, I propose the following second hypothesis:

H1a: The difference in affective polarization between the majority and minority parties will be driven by differences in out-party affect.

3.2   Loss Aversion, Party Status, and Electoral Competition

Neither of the above hypotheses directly account for loss aversion. Electoral competition is one potential way to account for this. I have two competing expectations for how competition can mitigate the relationship between party status and both affective polarization and out-party affect. First, competition could impact how real of a threat the minority party poses. How real the threat is could directly influence how party status is associated with out-party affect and affective polarization. As such, I propose the following:

H2a: Individuals in the majority party who live in a *more* competitive area will have lower levels of out-party affect, and higher affective polarization, due to loss aversion.

The inverse relationship could also be true, however. Individuals in the majority party in an area that is *not* competitive also suffer a loss if their party loses the election in their state. In addition, individuals in the majority party in a non-competitive context may be more shocked by such a defeat, which may also contribute to an increase in negative emotions towards the out-party. There is evidence to show that loss aversion is more of an affective forecast (Kermer, Driver-Linn, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2006). If individuals are thinking about *potential* losses, then those in the majority may be more shocked by a potential loss if their status is more secure. In accordance with this, I propose the following:

H2b: Individuals in the majority party who live in a *less* competitive area will have lower out-party affect, and higher levels of affective polarization, due to loss aversion.

I contend that this association will exist independently of other known causes of out-party animosity, such as ideological strength and strength of party identity — other work attempting to find the causes of out-party animosity finds that ideological strength and strength of party identity are consistently root causes, regardless of context (Webster, 2018).

4   Data and Research Design

In order to test my hypotheses, I first utilize the following models to analyze whether party status is associated with affective polarization and out-party affect: [3]

$$
\begin{aligned}
Affective\ Polarization = {}& PartyStatus + Competition + Party\ Status \\
& * Competition + PID\ Strength \\
& + Ideological\ Strength + Demographic\ Controls + \epsilon
\end{aligned}
\tag{1}
$$

$$
\begin{aligned}
Out\text{-}party\ Affect = {}& PartyStatus + Competition + Party\ Status \\
& * Competition + PID\ Strength \\
& + Ideological\ Strength + Demographic\ Controls + \epsilon
\end{aligned}
\tag{2}
$$

I use data from the American National Elections Studies in 2008, 2012, and 2016. Feeling thermometers are used to measure affect toward the parties. Feeling thermometers were chosen due to their consistent inclusion on the ANES from year to year. While other measures of feelings towards groups such as social distance measures are utilized in some of the literature on affective polarization, feeling thermometers are the most widely used and most direct measure (Iyengar et al., 2019). Respondents in each year were asked to rate their feelings towards Democrats or Republicans on a thermometer scale ranging from 0 to 100, with 0 representing cold/negative feelings towards the groups and 100 representing warm/positive feelings towards them. These feeling thermometers were then coded to reflect if they were a respondent's in-party or out-party based on a respondent's partisanship. Affective polarization is then measured as the difference between a respondent's rating of their

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[3]Model 1 is used to test H1 and Model 2 is used to test H1a. Both are utilized to test H2a and H2b

in-party and out-party. For example, a Democrat who rated the Democrats at 80 and Republicans at 40 would receive a score of 40 (80-40); a Republican who rated Republicans at 60 and Democrats at 10 would receive a score of 50.

4.1 Measuring Party Status and Electoral Competition

To generate my primary independent variable, party status, I begin with a measure of respondent partisanship. Partisanship was measured using the standard 7-point scale. True independents were removed from the sample due to a lack of partisan affiliation, however leaning independents were left in the sample in order to maximize the sample size in each year.[4] Furthermore, evidence shows that leaning independents act similarly to partisans in terms of political attitudes (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016; Keith et al., 1992). While more recent scholarship on leaning independents has demonstrated that their motivations for identifying as such are different and can cause certain attitudes to be manifested differently (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016), I am not aware of any evidence that this difference impacts affective polarization or the manifestation of out-party animosity.

To approximate state-level partisanship, I use presidential election results.[5] Presidential vote choice has been shown to be an accurate approximation of partisan identity, due to the strong correlation between the two (Dinas, 2014). For the sake of congruence, I used election results from the same year that the survey was administered for my proxy measure of state-level partisanship.

Respondents were matched to the Republican or Democratic presidential candidate's vote total to measure their in-party and out-party percentages in their state based on their placement on the 7-point PID scale. In-party and out-party partisan distributions were then used to determine the party status of the respondent's party. The party status variable was

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[4]The final sample size for each year is 1934, 4904, and 3324 in 2008, 2012, and 2016 respectively.

[5]Using the state level distribution rather than the federal level distribution to determine party status was due to the state's closer proximity to the individual. Future iterations of this project may attempt to utilize restricted data to generate a measure of a respondent's county or district partisanship. Party status, as theorized here, is based on how many people an individual believes there are in their in-group; it extends beyond just winning elections (Huddy, 2001).

coded as 0 if the individual was in the minority party (the number of in-party members in their state are less than the number of out-party members), and 1 if they were in the majority party (the number of in-party members in their state are greater than the number of out-party members). For example, an individual from Mississippi in 2016 would be coded a 0 if they are a Democrat and a 1 if they are a Republican, while an individual from New York in 2016 would be a 1 if they are a Democrat and a 0 if they are a Republican. In 2008 and 2012, a Democrat in Pennsylvania would be coded as 1, being in the majority party, while in 2016 they would be marked as a 0 for being in the minority party. The inverse is true of a Republican in Pennsylvania, with Pennsylvania Republicans being marked in the minority party in 2008 and 2012, and then in the majority party in 2016.

Competition is being utilized in order to analyze how the tangibility of the threat the minority party poses can influence affective polarization and out-party affect. The most common cutpoint for an election to be considered competitive is a 10 percentage point difference (i.e., 55-45%) between the two parties (Jacobson, 1987). I utilize this measure here, with states that saw a less than 10 percentage point difference between the candidates's votes share coded as 1, and every other case coded as 0.

4.2   Measuring other Covariates

I contend that the association between party status and both out-party animosity and affective polarization will exist independently of other known causes of out-party animosity, such as ideological strength and partisan strength — other work attempting to find the causes of out-party animosity finds that ideological strength and strength of party identity are consistently root causes, regardless of context (Webster, 2018). Nevertheless, I must account for these identities and other factors that may be associated with out-party animosity and affective polarization

Strength of identity has been shown to be a contributing factor for out-party attitudes and affective polarization (Mason, 2015). In order to account for this, partisan strength and

ideological strength were included in the models. Strength of partisanship was coded from 1-3, with 1 representing leaning party attachment and 3 being a strong partisan attachment. Since I do not include true independents, there is no category for them in this measure. As for ideological strength, this was coded from 0-4, with 0 representing self-identified moderates and 4 representing strong conservatives or liberals.

The demographic control variables included in my final analysis were education, race, gender, and age. Gender is coded 0 if the respondent is male and 1 if the respondent is female. Responses other than male or female were changed to NAs to keep responses consistent from year to year. Age ranges from 18 to 90 in 2016 and 17 to 90 in 2012 and 2008. In all three years 90 represents 90 and all ages above 90, although this represents very few respondents from the total sample.

Race and education were each recoded to conform to a single scale due to inconsistencies in the ANES from year to year. These variables were both treated as categorical variables. The race variable is primarily based on the 2008 scale, however it incorporates self-identification as Hispanic or non-Hispanic, which was not included in a single measure in 2008. The final scale was "White, non-Hispanic (1)," "Black, non-Hispanic (2)", "Other, non-Hispanic, including multiple (3)," and "Hispanic (4)". In the analysis below, the reference category for this variable was White, non-hispanic. Education was coded to the 2012 scale, which marked individuals for having less than a high school credential (1), a high school credential (2), some post-high-school education without a Bachelor's degree (3), a Bachelor's degree (4), and a Graduate degree (5). The reference category in the analyses presented below is having no high school credential.

5 Results

To test my hypotheses, I first report the average levels of affective polarization and out-party affect in each year by party (majority/minority) status. I analyze if there is a statistically significant difference between the average level of affective polarization and average out-party affect for those in the majority and those in the minority using a two sample t-test for each year. I then look at the average levels of affective polarization and out-party affect broken down by both party status and electoral competition.

Following this descriptive analysis, I estimate an OLS regression model for each year. In these models, standard errors are clustered by state in order to account for variation within the states and DC. For 2008 there are only 34 clusters, this is due to some states not being sampled that year. The fourth model estimated for each of my dependent variables pools the data and uses yearly fixed effects. Following these OLS models, in order to best interpret the interaction between party status and competition, I present the marginal effect of party status based on competition from each model.

5.1 Party Status and Affective Polarization

Figure 1 shows the average levels of affective polarization in each year for those in the majority and minority parties. In 2008, the average level of affective polarization was 40.97 (standard error = .97) for those in the majority party and 34.36 (1.09) for those in the minority party. Using a t-test, I find that this 6.61 difference is

statistically significant at p< .01. In the remaining years, the difference between the two groups is not as stark. In 2012, the average affective polarization for respondents was 45.60 (.60) and 42.08 (.69) for those in the majority party and the minority party, respectively. This difference, while less substantial at 3.52, is statistically significant at p<.01. In 2016, the average affective polarization was 41.6 (.74) for those in the majority party and 40.39 (.83) for those in the minority party. This difference, while in line with my hypothesis, is not substantial and does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance (p=.28).

Figure 1: Average Affective Polarization by Party Status

Figure 2 shows the average out-party rating in each year for those in the majority party and minority party. In 2008, the average out-party rating for those in the majority party was 33.25 (.68), while the average out-party rating for those in the minority party was 37.61 (.77). Using a t-test, I find that this difference of 4.36 is statistically significant at p<.01.

For 2012, the average out-party rating for those in the majority party was 26.29 (.41), while those in the minority party averaged a 28.23 (.46) out-party rating. Using a t-test, I again find that the difference between these two averages is also statistically significant at p<.01; however, it is noticeably smaller than the difference from 2008 at just 1.94. Lastly, for 2016, the average out-party rating was 24.14 (.49) for those in the majority party and 28.23 (.59) for those in the minority party. As with the previous two years, I utilize a t-test and find that this difference is statistically significant at p<.01. This difference of 4.09 is greater than the difference in 2012, and is more similar to the results from 2008.

Figure 2: Average Out-Party Feeling by Party Status

95% confidence intervals, party status determined by presidential electoral returns
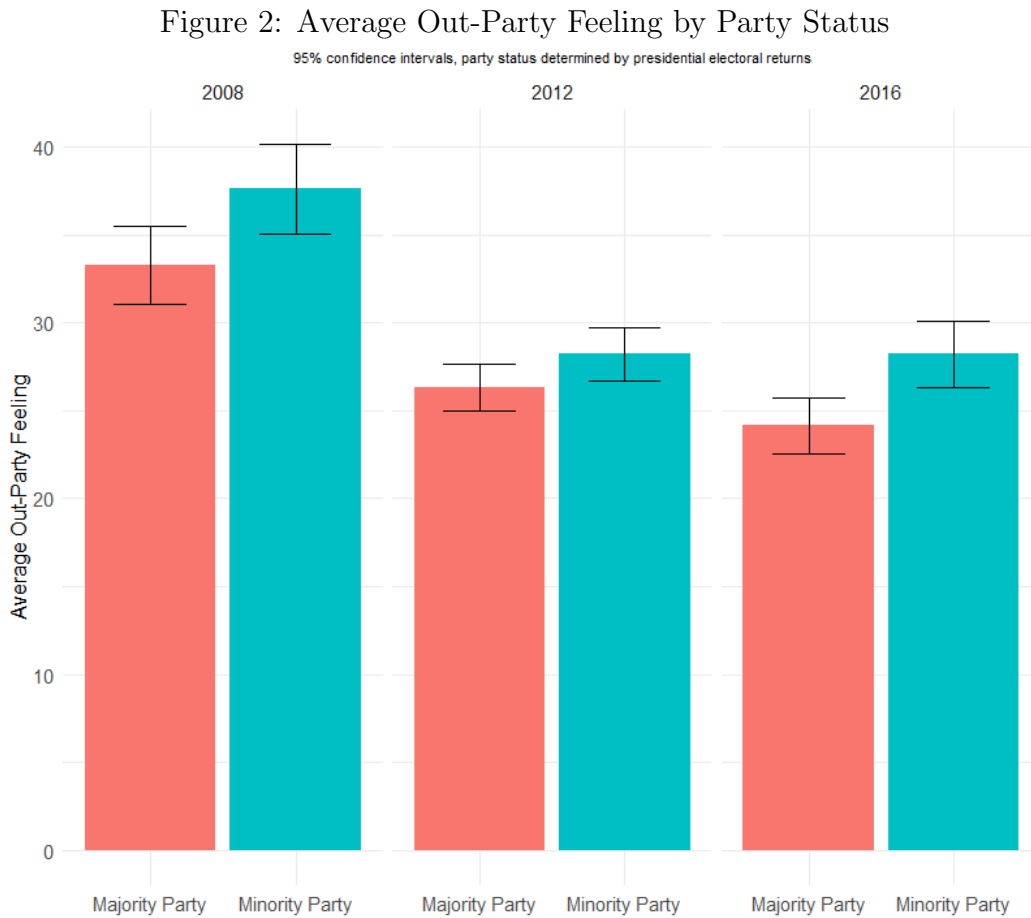
The averages for in-party affect are also reported in Figure A1. For 2008 and 2012, the relationship is the exact opposite of the out-party affect models, although in 2012 the size of this association is even smaller than that of party status and out-party affect. On average,
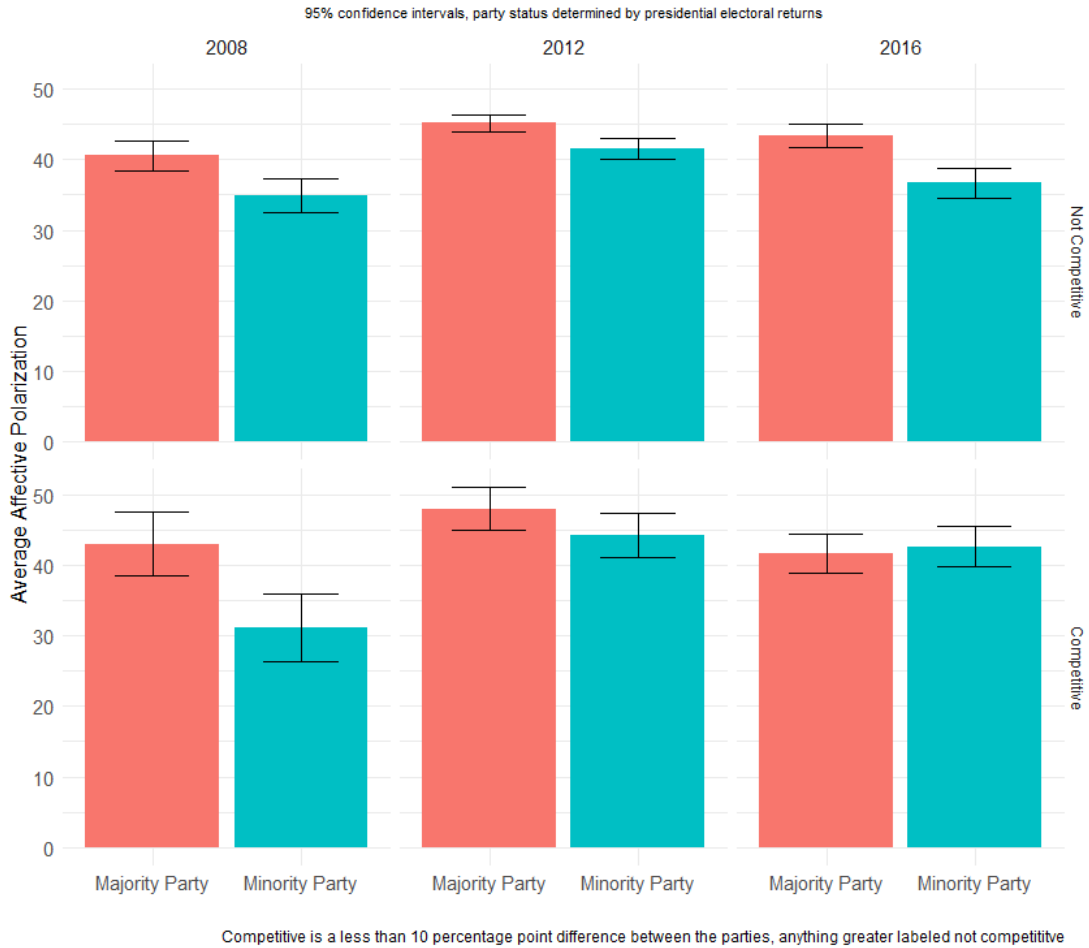
majority party status is associated with an increase of 2.891 (p<.01) and 1.790 (p<.01) in 2008 and 2012, respectively. 2016 saw a statistically significant difference between the majority and minority party, however, this relationship was the opposite of the differences seen in 2008 and 2012, with the majority party having significantly *lower* in-party affect.

These descriptive statistics provide some support for both H1 and H1a. The association between affective polarization and party status is not found in every year, but this could be due to any number of oddities that took place during the 2016 election. Descriptively, this association does exist and is statistically significant; however, outside of 2008 the difference is relatively small. Out-party affect's association with party status is statistically significant in every year studied. As with affective polarization, however, this difference is relatively small. 2008 and 2016 saw differences greater than 4, while in 2012 the difference was just 1.94. While the difference seen in 2016 is more than double that of the difference in 2012, neither is particularly large, as feeling thermometers are scaled from 0-100.

5.2 Party Status, Affective Polarization, and Electoral Competition

Figure 3 shows the average levels of affective polarization broken down by both party status and electoral competition. While there is still a statistically significant difference between those in the majority party and minority party, there is little difference based on competition. In 2008, those in the majority party averaged 40.53 (1.071) for affective polarization in states that were not competitive, and 43.03 (2.299) in states that were competitive. For the minority party, those in competitive states averaged an affective polarization of 34.9 (2.406) and 31.17 (1.206) in states that are not competitive. These differences are consistent with H2a (that the majority party will be more affectively polarized in more competitive states), although there are differences based on party status in both competitive and not competitive settings. In a competitive context, the difference between those in the majority and minority parties is 11.86, which is substantially larger than the difference of 5.63 between those in the majority and minority parties in a not competitive

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Figure 3: Average Affective Polarization by Party Status and Competition

95% confidence intervals, party status determined by presidential electoral returns

Competitive is a less than 10 percentage point difference between the parties, anything greater labeled not competitve

context.

In 2012, the results support H1 again, however neither H2a or H2b have substantial support. Those in the majority party on average reported affective polarization scores of 45.16 (.643) in contexts that are not competitive and 47.96 (1.555) in a competitive setting. For the minority party, the average affective polarization is 41.59 (.762) in a setting that is not competitive and 44.23 (1.595) in a setting that is competitive. The difference in affective polarization between those in the majority and minority parties is just 3.57 in not competitive contexts and 3.73 in competitive contexts. Unlike 2008, this difference is not substantial.

2016 presents the strongest case for H2b (that the majority party will be more affectively

polarized in less competitive states), and the introduction of competition does explain some of the oddities seen in the descriptive statistics for affective polarization based exclusively on party status in 2016. For the majority party, the average affective polarization rating was 43.41 (.839) when there was no competition, and 41.63 (1.440) when there was. Individuals in the minority party, however, on average reported 36.66 (1.040) in affective polarization when there is not competition and 42.65 (1.487) when there is. The difference of 6.75 between the majority and minority party without competition is statistically significant (p<.01), while the difference between the two parties was not statistically significant in a competitive setting.

These descriptive statistics do not provide clear support for either H2a or H2b. While the substantially greater difference between those in the majority and minority parties in a competitive setting in 2008 would show support for H2a, no other year has quite as substantial a difference. 2016 provides some support for H2b as the not competitive setting shows a larger gap between the majority party and minority party, and it is in a direction consistent with H2b. The statistics from 2012 provide no support for either hypothesis.

The descriptive statistics for out-party affect, however, provide support for H2b. Figure 4 shows the average out-party feeling thermometer ratings broken down by both party status and electoral competition. As Figure 4 shows, there is only a statistically significant difference in average out-party ratings based on party status when there is competition present. Starting in 2008, when there is no competition, the average out-party rating is 33.18 (.799) for the majority party and 37.66 (.853) for the minority. In areas where there is competition, those in the majority party averaged a 33.54 (1.551) out-party feeling rating while the minority party averaged 37.30 (1.711). The difference between average out-party ratings when there is no competition is a statistically significant 4.48 (p< .01), while the presence of competition reduces this difference down to 3.76. This does provide some support for H2b as the only statistically significant difference is seen in not-competitive contexts. However, the difference-in-differences (4.48 – 3.76) is not all that substantively meaningful.

Figure 4: Average Out-Party Feeling by Party Status and Competition
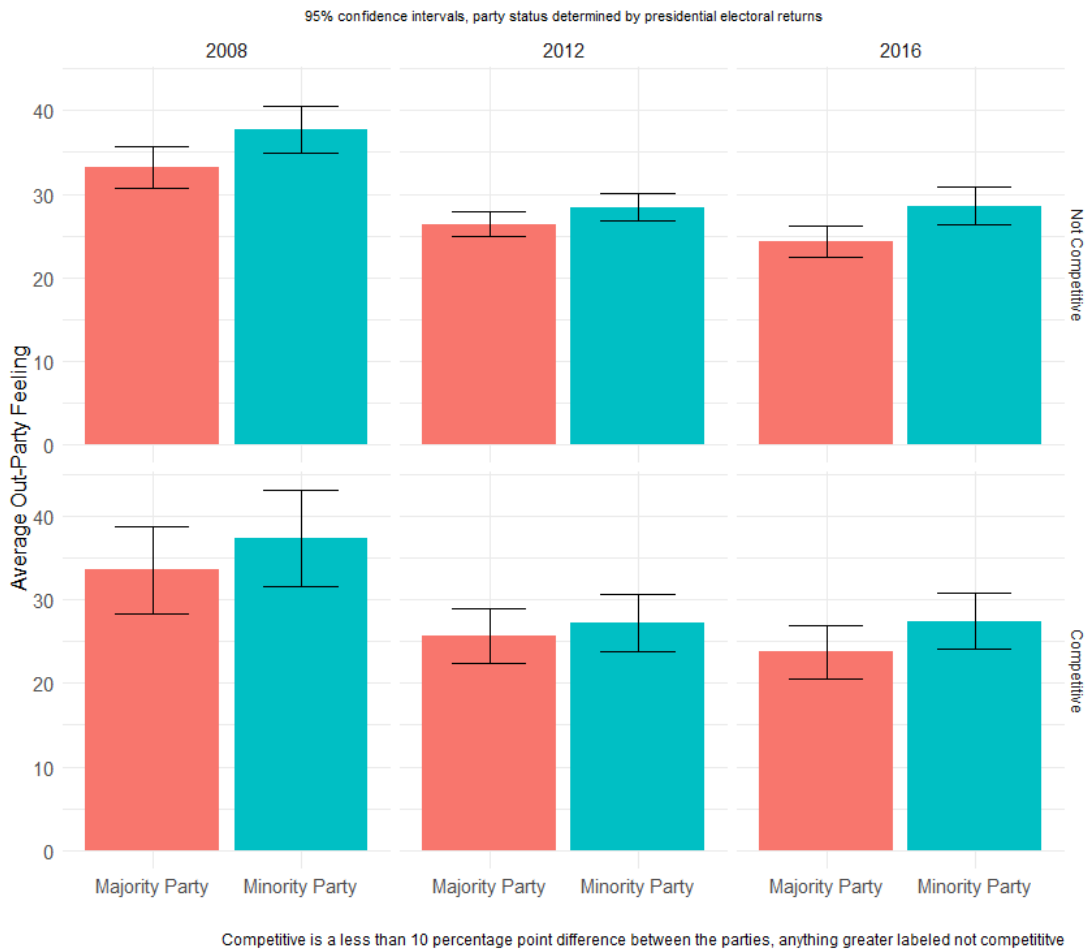
The descriptive statistics for 2012 show more of the same. When there is no competition, those in the majority party reported an average out-party affect of 26.41 (.443), and those in the minority party reported an average out-party affect of 28.45 (.513). This difference is again statistically significant (p<.05). However it is not very substantively meaningful, as the majority party only shows an average out-party affect that is 2.04 less than those in the minority. When there is competition, this difference is consistent with H2a, however it is not statistically significant. Those in the majority party reported an average out-party affect of 25.65 (1.003), and the minority party has an average of 27.22 (1.054). This difference of 1.57 is both substantively and statistically insignificant.

In 2016, both in competitive and not competitive contexts, the difference between the

majority and minority party is statistically significant, however, in a not competitive context this difference is slightly greater. In a not competitive context, those in the majority party reported an average out-party affect of 24.27 (.567), and the minority party had an average out-party affect of 28.6 (.699). This difference of 4.33 is statistically significant (p<.01), and is larger than the difference seen in 2012. For competitive contexts, those in the majority part averaged 23.74 (.952) in out-party affect, while those in the minority averaged 27.43 (1.001) out-party affect. This 3.69 difference is statistically significant (p<.05), although it is marginally smaller than the difference seen in a not competitive setting, which suggests support for H2b.

These descriptive statistics for out-party affect provide some support for H2b, as the largest differences in out-party affect in each year came from contexts which were not competitive. Only in 2016 was there a statistically significant difference in out-party affect, however this difference was smaller than in the not competitive setting from the same year. These descriptive results are more consistent than those for affective polarization. A closer look at in-party affect may provide insight into this inconsistency.

Figure A2 shows the average in-party affect by both party status and electoral competition in each year. In most cases these differences are statistically significant and less than 2.5, with two exceptions. In competitive settings in 2008, the majority party averaged an in-party feeling of 76.56 (1.309) and the minority party had an average in-party feeling of 68.48 (1.664). This difference of 8.08 is both statistically significant (p<.01) and substantial. The second oddity is in 2016, where in competitive settings, the majority party had a lower level of in-party affect (65.37 (.981)) than the minority party (70.08 (.952)). This statistically significant difference (p<.01) is relatively substantial at 4.71, which is nearly double the difference in the same year when elections were not competitive. These results are overall inconsistent and do not paint a clear relationship between in-party affect and party status or competition.

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5.3 Regression Results

Table 1 shows the results of 4 OLS models with affective polarization as the dependent variable. All standard errors are clustered by state.[6] As expected, strength of partisanship and strength of ideology have a significant association with affective polarization. This association is present in each year. The full model shows that on average, increasing an individual's partisan strength by 1 is associated with an increase of 15.04 in the difference between that respondent's in-party and out-party feeling thermometer ratings. In other words, a respondent who identifies as a strong partisan on average has an affective polarization rating that is approximately 30 times greater than an individual who identifies as a leaning partisan in any given year.

For the main independent variables of interest, in general, majority party status is shown to have a weak association with affective polarization when there is no competition in an election.[7] The strongest association is in 2008, however this is not statistically significant. In 2012, an individual who is in a not competitive state and in the majority party is associated with on average being 3.39 points more affectively polarized than individuals in not competitive states and in the minority party.

The interaction term is inconsistent across models and statistically insignificant. In order to better understand these results, Figure 5 shows the average marginal effect of party status by level of competition from each model. As shown in Figure 5, in 2008, there is a statistically significant association between party status and affective polarization when there is a competitive election (p<.01). While this difference of 12.4 between those in the majority and minority party is the most substantial, it is the only significant association which occurs in a competitive context.

In the remaining three models, the only statistically significant average marginal effects occur when there is no competition in a given state. In 2012, the average marginal effect of

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[6]2008 only has 34 clusters due to some states being missing from the sample.

[7]Differences in significance from descriptive statistics due to different methods in calculating standard errors.

Table 1: Party Status, Competition, and Affective Polarization (ANES 2008, 2012, 2016)

	2008	2012	2016	Full
Majority Party (0,1)	5.65	3.39*	4.74*	4.28*
	(4.22)	(1.39)	(1.88)	(1.78)
Competition (0,1)	−4.65	1.60	4.91	2.44
	(3.58)	(3.43)	(2.53)	(1.74)
Majority Party*Competiton	6.74	0.33	−5.28	−1.24
	(5.49)	(5.15)	(3.29)	(2.75)
PID Strength (1-3)	16.56***	14.84***	14.46***	15.04***
	(0.98)	(0.61)	(0.56)	(0.51)
Ideology Strength (0-3)	2.86***	5.88***	5.96***	5.30***
	(0.66)	(0.61)	(0.50)	(0.43)
Education (base: no high school)				
High School Credential	3.18	−1.42	2.93	0.97
	(2.50)	(1.51)	(2.22)	(1.22)
Some post-high-school, no bachelor's degree	1.27	−0.90	3.99*	1.29
	(3.01)	(1.54)	(1.88)	(1.29)
Bachelor's degree	1.21	−2.23	1.18	−0.46
	(3.27)	(1.48)	(2.13)	(1.49)
Graduate Degree	2.45	−1.03	2.06	0.69
	(3.37)	(1.78)	(2.23)	(1.56)
Race (base: white, non-hispanic):				
Black, non-hispanic	6.22*	13.50***	11.89***	11.82***
	(2.30)	(1.51)	(2.08)	(1.07)
Other, non-hispanic, including multiple	−1.89	0.12	0.74	0.14
	(2.90)	(1.88)	(2.25)	(1.25)
Hispanic	−2.29	2.77*	1.78	1.55*
	(1.81)	(1.20)	(1.62)	(0.73)
Female (0,1)	−0.17	0.49	1.36	0.73
	(1.15)	(0.99)	(0.86)	(0.61)
Age	−0.06	0.02	0.06*	0.02
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.01)
2012				4.65***
				(0.99)
2016				2.63*
				(1.09)
Constant	−2.82	0.16	−8.27**	−6.39***
	(4.01)	(1.81)	(2.76)	(1.36)
R^2	0.24	0.25	0.23	0.24
Adj. R^2	0.23	0.25	0.23	0.24
Num. obs.	1934	4904	3324	10162
N Clusters	34	51	51	51

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

Figure 5: Average Marginal Effect of Party Status on Affective Polarization, by Competition
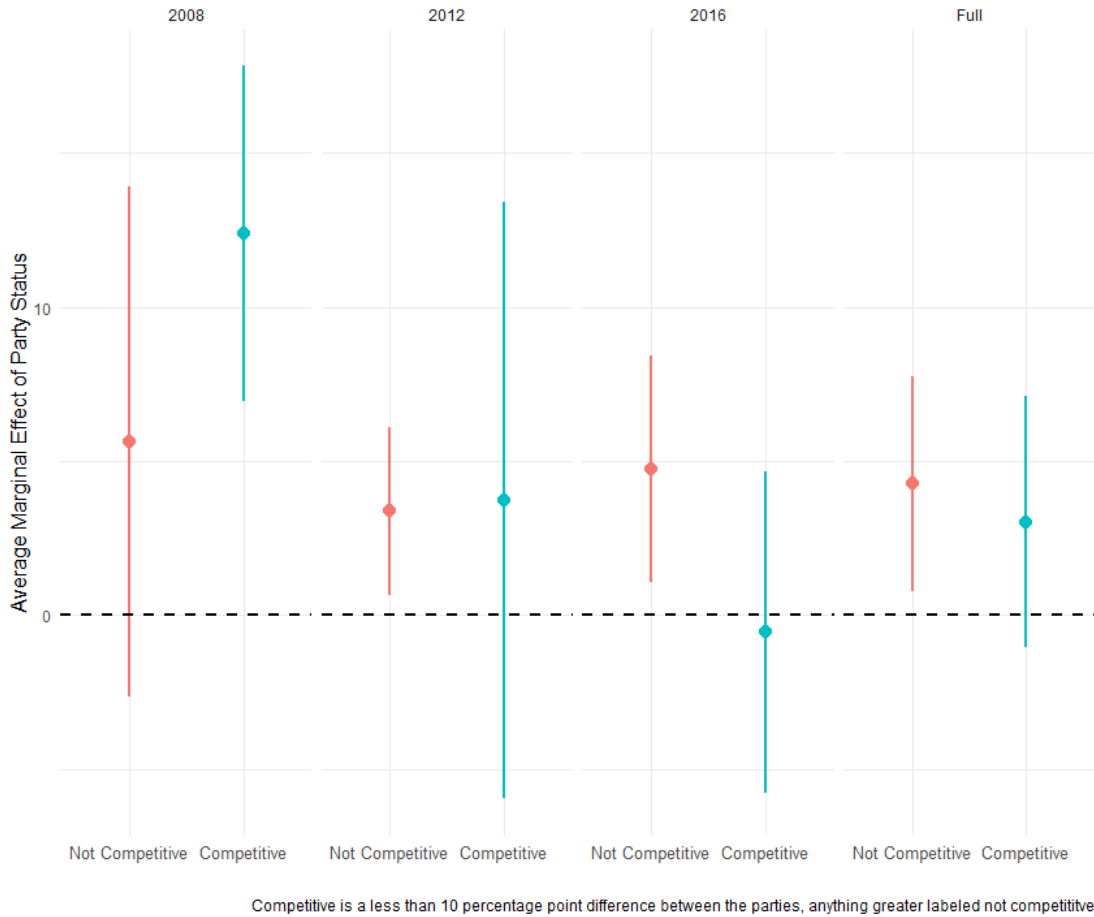
party status when there is no competition is 3.39 (p<.05). In 2016, this average marginal effect is 4.74 (p<.05), which shows that in 2016, in a state in which there was no competition, the average difference in affective polarization between those in the majority and minority parties is 4.74, with individuals in the majority party displaying higher levels of affective polarization. Interestingly, the average marginal effect of party status in 2016 when there is competition is -.539, which is counter to all my hypotheses; however, this average marginal effect is not statistically significant. The full model shows that on average, in any given year, when there is a state with no competition, the majority party is associated with a 4.28 greater difference in feeling thermometer ratings between their in- and out-parties. While these results are somewhat mixed, the majority of the evidence supports H2b. While this

evidence does support H2b, it is clear that the association between affective polarization and party status is not substantial, although it is statistically significant and present in three out of the four models presented.

Table 2 shows the results of four OLS models with out-party affect as the dependent variable. As with affective polarization, strength of partisanship and strength of ideology both have substantial and statistically significant associations with out-party affect. In 2008, partisan strength is associated with a decrease of 7.57 (p<.001) for each change in strength. An individual in 2008 who identified as a strong partisan will on average have on average 15.14 lower out-party affect than those who identified as leaning independents. The full model shows that in any given year in the sample, the difference in out-party affect between a leaning independent and a strong partisan is on average 11.16 (p<.001).

The association between party status and out-party affect is statistically significant when there is no competition, as shown by the majority party coefficients in Table 2. These results are similar to those found in Table 1 for affective polarization. To better understand the association between party status and out-party affect, however, Figure 6 shows the average marginal effects of party status based on levels of competition. As with affective polarization, the only significant average marginal effect in the 2008 model is when a state was competitive, with an average marginal effect of -5.44 (p<.001). When a state is not competitive, the average marginal effect of party status is -4.08, however this does not reach traditional standards of statistical significance (p=.127).

For the 2012 model, the average marginal effect of party status when there is no competition is -1.95 (p<.05). This shows that when an individual is in a competitive state, those in the majority party are associated with having a decreased outparty affect by nearly 2 points on the feeling thermometer scale. While this effect is statistically significant, as with the other findings it is not that substantial. The average marginal effect of party status when there is competition is -2.70, although this marginal effect is not statistically significant (p=.315).
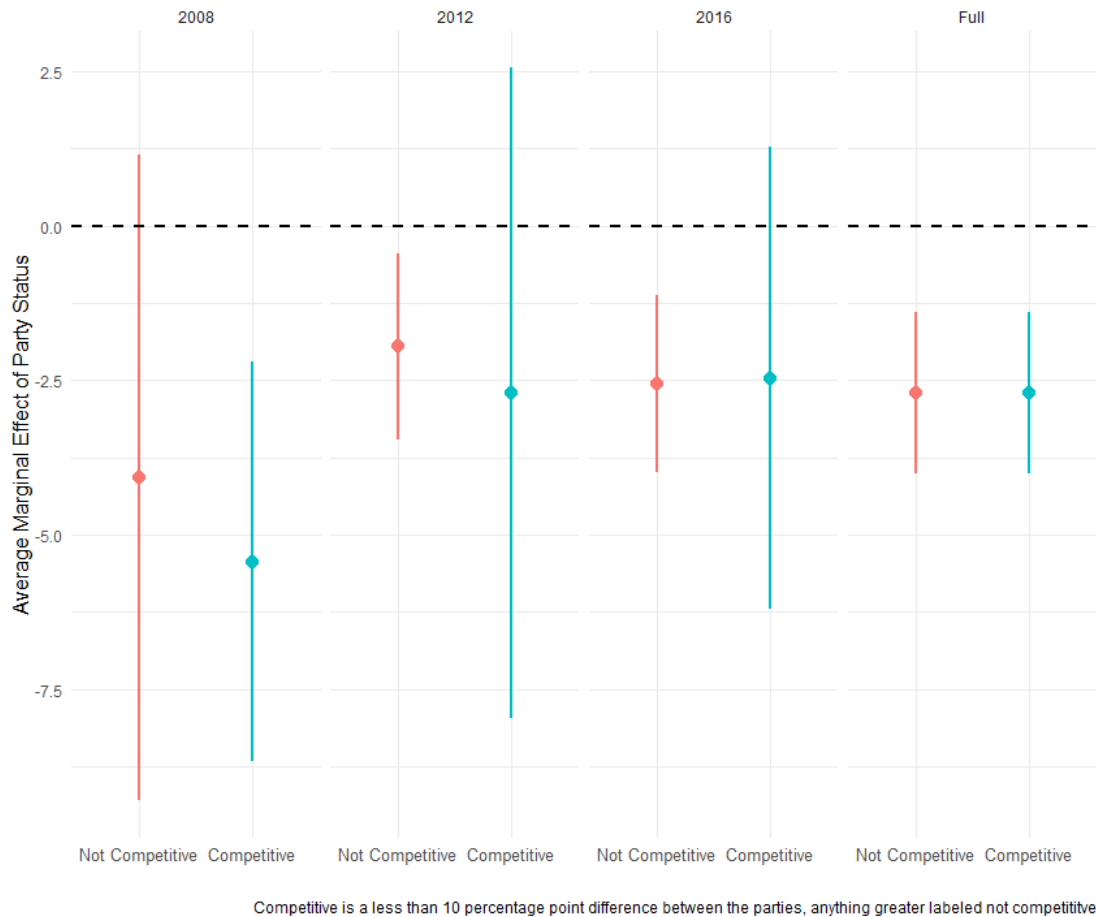
The average marginal effect of party status in the 2016 model was -2.56 when the state

Table 2: Party Status, Competition, and Out-Party Affect (ANES 2008, 2012, 2016)

	2008	2012	2016	Full
Majority Party (0,1)	−4.08	−1.95*	−2.56**	−2.60**
	(2.67)	(0.77)	(0.73)	(0.78)
Competition (0,1)	1.80	−0.32	−1.01	−0.39
	(2.11)	(1.53)	(1.65)	(0.69)
Majority Party*Competition	−1.36	−0.75	0.09	−0.51
	(3.30)	(2.81)	(2.04)	(1.29)
PID Strength (1-3)	−7.57***	−5.48***	−4.51***	−5.58***
	(0.54)	(0.45)	(0.41)	(0.35)
Ideology Strength (0-3)	−1.69**	−4.74***	−5.48***	−4.39***
	(0.53)	(0.42)	(0.39)	(0.34)
Education (base: no high school)				
High School Credential	−3.26	0.61	−3.35*	−1.53
	(2.05)	(0.96)	(1.54)	(0.84)
Some post-high-school, no bachelor's degree	−2.48	−0.29	−4.27**	−2.26*
	(2.50)	(1.17)	(1.53)	(1.09)
Bachelor's degree	−5.26	−1.34	−3.96**	−3.03*
	(2.66)	(1.21)	(1.33)	(1.15)
Graduate Degree	−7.37*	−3.61**	−4.74**	−4.70***
	(3.33)	(1.29)	(1.64)	(1.06)
Race (base: white, non-hispanic):				
Black, non-hispanic	0.79	−3.13**	−2.65	−2.36**
	(1.91)	(1.13)	(1.75)	(0.84)
Other, non-hispanic, including multiple	2.31	0.53	2.35	1.49
	(1.93)	(1.53)	(2.06)	(1.29)
Hispanic	6.75***	3.11**	2.24	3.63***
	(1.44)	(0.97)	(1.20)	(0.82)
Female (0,1)	2.97**	1.69*	1.17*	1.78***
	(0.83)	(0.79)	(0.52)	(0.47)
Age	0.08**	0.00	−0.05*	−0.00
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
2012				−6.35***
				(0.76)
2016				−7.16***
				(0.78)
Constant	51.13***	45.20***	49.38***	53.34***
	(2.84)	(1.50)	(1.96)	(1.23)
R^2	0.13	0.13	0.14	0.15
Adj. R^2	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.14
Num. obs.	1934	4904	3324	10162
N Clusters	34	51	51	51

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

Figure 6: Average Marginal Effect of Party Status on Out-Party Affect, by Competition

Competitive is a less than 10 percentage point difference between the parties, anything greater labeled not competitive

was not competitive. When the state was competitive, this average marginal effect was decreased to -2.47, and this effect was not statistically significant (p=.195). In short, the previous two models provide some support for H2b, while the model for 2008 mainly supports H2a.

That said, the full model shows that the average marginal effect of party status does not change based on levels of competition. Regardless of competition, the average marginal effect of party status in the full model is -2.70 (p<.001). In any given year, the majority party is associated with nearly 3 feeling thermometer points of lower out-party affect than those in the minority regardless of how competitive the state is. A difference of 2.70 is not substantial, however it is statistically significant in both contexts. This evidence suggests

that collectively across all three elections neither H2a or H2b are supported, however this does provide support for H1a — that those in the majority party will have lower out-party affect than those in the minority party.

Table A1 shows the results of four OLS models estimated with In-party affect as the dependent variable. Again, strength of partisanship and strength of ideology have the strongest association with in-party affect as they do with both out-party affect and affective polarization. Unlike the previous two variables, however, there is no real clear relationship that can be discerned between party status and in-party affect. None of the coefficients for majority party status are statistically significant.

Figure A3 shows the average marginal effects of party status by competition. In competitive states in 2008 did party status have a significant association with in-party affect with an average marginal effect of 6.95 (p<.01). In 2012, however, there was a significant association between party status and in-party affect only when there was no competition (p<.1). This average marginal effect of 1.44 is not substantial in the slightest. Conversely, the average marginal effects in 2016 show that there is a significant association between party status and in-party affect as well when competition is present (p=.059), however this average marginal effect is in the opposite direction from the 2008 model at -3.01. The results of these average marginal effects show that there is no clear relationship between party status and in-party affect.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, the association between party status and both affective polarization and out-party affect does not eclipse the effect of either strength of partisanship or strength of ideology in any model. As shown in past literature, strength of partisanship and ideology are the strongest influences on affective polarization and out-party affect (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018; Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). That said, the association between party status and out-party affect *does* still remain statistically significant despite the inclusion of these strong predictors of out-party affect.

Understanding the causes of affective polarization is an essential question for political science. Previous work has shown that an individual's attachment to certain groups such as partisan groups or ideological groups has a direct effect on out-party affect (Mason, 2015; Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018; Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). Social identity theory has shown that social groups can be treated similarly to sports teams, and that there is a desire to advance the status of one's group (Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015; Huddy, 2001). An aspect of this relationship that past literature has left out is whether or not an individual's "team" is winning or losing in their home state. The desire to advance a groups' status has been discussed previously, but how that group already having status impacts its view of the "other" has not been tested at length.

In this paper, I hypothesize that individuals who are in the majority have higher levels of affective polarization and lower levels of out-party affect. Both descriptively and through statistical analysis, I find support for my hypotheses. Although this

association is not greater than the association between affective polarization and both ideology strength and strength of partisanship, it still maintains significance in the majority of the models presented with these covariates. While the strength, or lack thereof, of this association is potentially problematic, it is possibly due to the use of observational data, and the majority status variable only being an approximation utilizing electoral returns to estimate partisan distribution. A more accurate measure of partisan distribution at the state or some lower level could potentially yield a stronger association between status and out-party affect. This analysis has demonstrated that there exists at least some relationship between the status of a party and out-party affect.

The association between affective polarization and party status is potentially due to valence loss aversion, however the data presented here does cast doubt on that connection. With competition being used as a proxy for loss aversion, or more specifically a threat which would activate loss aversion, there was little difference in the average marginal effect of party status based on competition. The results for affective polarization do show some support for H2b, that in less competitive settings the majority party will be more affectively polarized as they have more to lose, however this evidence is still weak at best. The association between party status could be unrelated to loss aversion, instead being an artifact of partisan sorting. Other literature shows that increased sorting causes a decrease in cross cutting cleavages and an increase in affective polarization (Levendusky, 2009). If an individual is in the majority party, then they are likely not exposed to as many opposing beliefs, while those in the minority party are likely constantly confronted with the opinions of those who disagree with them.

One potential cause for the weak association between party status and affective polarization could be due to the use of observational data to test this relationship. Further research could attempt to isolate causality through manipulation of perceptions of partisan distribution in an experimental setting. This research has not considered an individual's perception of their state's partisan distribution, rather using a measure that likely reflects the objective

partisan distribution at the time the survey was administered. Intentionally manipulating these perceptions would allow for a more direct means for analyzing the relationship between perceptions of partisan distribution and affective polarization. This work could also include a direct measure of loss aversiveness in order to determine the role that loss aversion plays in the relationship between party status and affective polarization.

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-Appendix-

Appendix

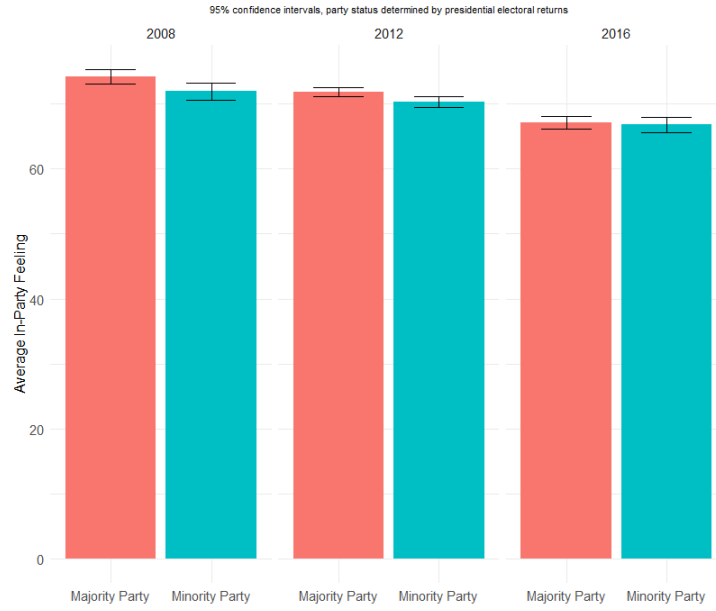Figure A1: Average In-Party Feeling by Party Status

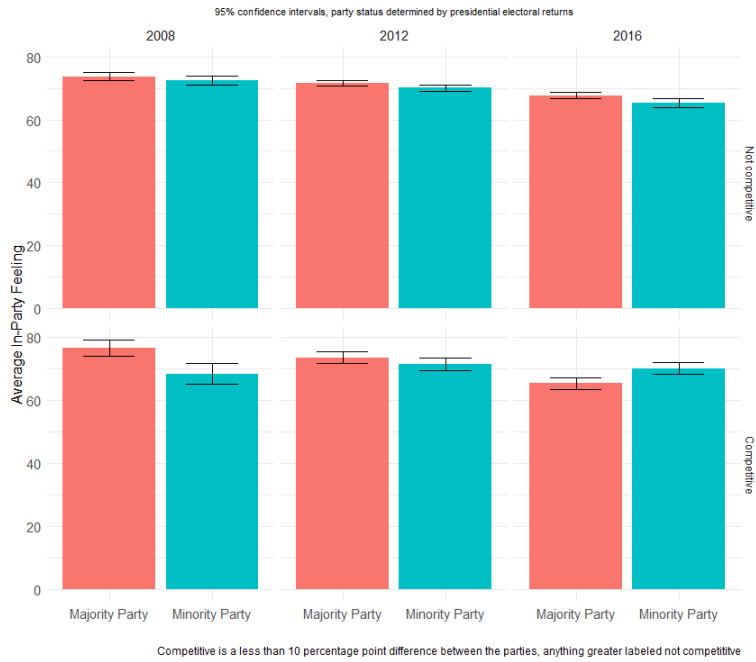Figure A2: Average In-party Feeling by Party Status and Competition

Figure A3: Average Marginal Effect of Party Status on In-Party Affect, by Competition
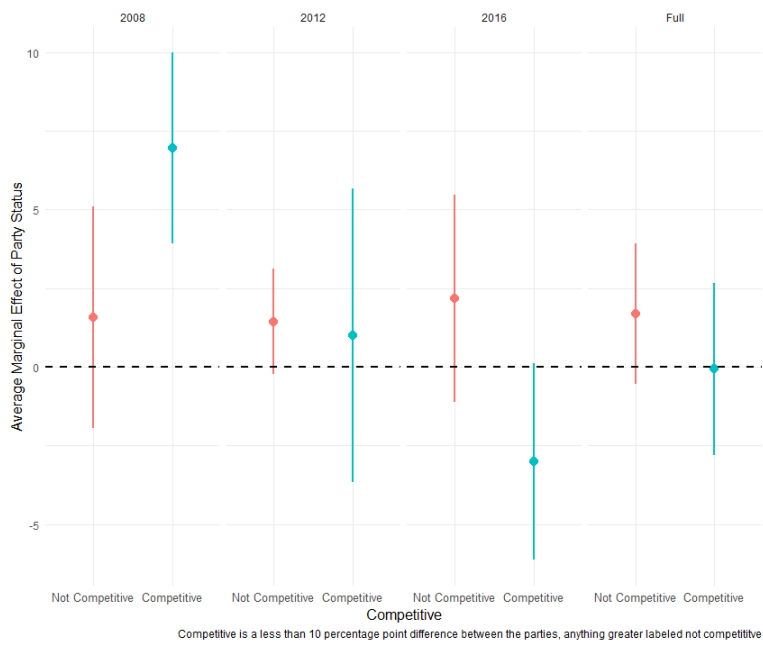

Competitive is a less than 10 percentage point difference between the parties, anything greater labeled not competitive

Table A1: Party Status, Competition, and In-Party Affect (ANES 2008, 2012, 2016)

	2008	2012	2016	Full
Majority Party (0,1)	1.58	1.44	2.18	1.69
	(1.80)	(0.86)	(1.68)	(1.14)
Competition (0,1)	−2.85	1.29	3.89*	2.04
	(1.74)	(2.05)	(1.53)	(1.25)
Majority Party * Competition	5.38*	−0.43	−5.18*	−1.75
	(2.51)	(2.54)	(2.33)	(1.77)
PID Strength (1-3)	9.00***	9.36***	9.95***	9.47***
	(0.53)	(0.37)	(0.49)	(0.28)
Ideology Strength (0-3)	1.17*	1.14***	0.48	0.91***
	(0.49)	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.21)
Education (base: no high school)				
High School Credential	−0.08	−0.81	−0.42	−0.56
	(1.27)	(1.05)	(1.53)	(0.69)
Some post-high-school, no bachelor's degree	−1.21	−1.19	−0.28	−0.97
	(1.82)	(1.05)	(1.20)	(0.65)
Bachelor's degree	−4.05**	−3.57***	−2.78	−3.48***
	(1.41)	(0.98)	(1.66)	(0.63)
Graduate Degree	−4.92**	−4.65***	−2.67	−4.02***
	(1.48)	(1.11)	(1.53)	(0.83)
Race (base: white, non-hispanic):				
Black, non-hispanic	7.01***	10.37***	9.24***	9.45***
	(1.20)	(0.72)	(1.08)	(0.58)
Other, non-hispanic, including multiple	0.42	0.65	3.08*	1.62
	(2.32)	(1.13)	(1.36)	(0.84)
Hispanic	4.46***	5.88***	4.02*	5.18***
	(0.70)	(0.59)	(1.65)	(0.50)
Female (0,1)	2.80***	2.18***	2.53***	2.51***
	(0.64)	(0.46)	(0.66)	(0.31)
Age	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)
2012				−1.70**
				(0.63)
2016				−4.53***
				(0.78)
Constant	48.31***	45.36***	41.10***	46.95***
	(1.92)	(1.31)	(2.28)	(1.37)
R^2	0.23	0.25	0.20	0.24
Adj. R^2	0.22	0.25	0.19	0.23
Num. obs.	1934	4904	3324	10162
N Clusters	34	51	51	51

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

VITA

State University of New York at Geneseo:

- Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Anthropology, May 2019

Teaching and Research Interests

Political Behavior, Public Opinion, Political Psychology, Social Identity, Polarization, Party Politics, Independent Voters, Third Parties, Quantitative Methods

Working Papers/Papers in Progress:

Cutler, Austin "The Biggest Winner: How Loss Aversion can Increase Out-party Animosity" (Paper in Progress)

Cutler, Austin "Finding the Party: Social Identity and Third Party Membership" (Paper in progress)

Paper Presentations

Dowling, Conor, Austin Cutler, Jennifer Holt, and Jonah King (2021) "The Effects of Changing Party Composition Perception on Affective Polarization" MPSA

Cutler, Austin (2019) "Minimum Wage's Impact on Food Stamp Recipients" Presented at the annual Geneseo Recognizing Excellence, Achievement & Talent Day in Geneseo, NY

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant:

University of Mississippi

- POL 251 Introduction to Political Science Methods Spring 2021

- POL 101 Introduction to American Politics, Fall 2020, Spring 2021

- POL 309 Public Opinion and Political Psychology, Spring 2020

- POL 307 Constitutional Law II: Civil Liberties & Civil Rights, Spring 2020

- POL 306 Constitutional Law I: Supreme Court & Constitution, Fall 2019

SUNY Geneseo

- Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Spring 2017 (as undergraduate)

Other Relevant Experience:

Social Science Research Lab, University of Mississippi, 2020-2021

- Assist in data collection using excel and Rstudio

- Analyzing data for several government projects such as the Year of the Child project

- Coordinate plans to analyze present and future data collect efforts with the DOD and other government agencies

Research Assisstant Tufts University, 2020

- Assisted Dr. Eitan Hersh in acquiring qualitative, archival data for a book project

- Organized Archival data based on relevance to the project

Legislative Aide at New York State Assembly, 2019

- Researched bills up for vote

- Collected data and other relevant information for future legislation

Erie County Democratic Committee Employee, 2018-2019

- Helped coordinate petitioning and canvassing efforts to effectively cover election districts

- Collected canvassing data on constituent candidate preferences

Buffalo Workers' Compensation Board Student Intern, Summer 2017

- Data entry and correction for workers compensation cases in New York State