THE CLOSED PARTISAN MIND

A New Psychology of American Polarization

MATTHEW D. LUTTIG

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To Karen, Estelle, and Cecilia

The thing about democracy, beloveds, is that it is not neat, orderly, or quiet. It requires a certain relish for confusion.

—Molly Ivins

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Introduction

THE RIGIDITY OF THE RIGHT *AND* THE RIGIDITY OF THE EXTREMES

In November 2016, immediately following the election of President Donald Trump, *Saturday Night Live* ran a comedy sketch in the form of an advertisement in which "the unthinkable didn't happen." A liberal paradise called "the bubble" was proposed. The bubble was a place where the internet was restricted to show only "the good sites": HuffPo, DailyKos, YouTube videos about sushi rice, and "the explosive comedy of McSweeney's." The bubble promised to be a utopia for open-minded free thinkers to close themselves in and avoid the then-imminent America of President Trump. The implication of this sketch, of course, is that strong Democrats with the most negative reaction toward Trump were—despite espousing openness—actually rather closed-minded.[1]

Republicans, meanwhile, seem to like their bubbles just as much as *SNL*'s hypothetical Democrats. For instance, many Republicans express a host of factually erroneous beliefs: that the 2020 presidential election was stolen, that Trump's presidential inauguration drew more attendees than any other inauguration in US history, and that global warming is a hoax. These and other attitudes suggest that Republicans, like the aforementioned parodied Democrats, are closed and feel secure only when ensconced inside their own bubble.

These parodies, anecdotes, and data points about public opinion in the modern United States suggest that Democrats and Republicans alike may be more closed than open. Many people, in fact, would agree with this description. For instance, a 2016 report published by the Pew Research Center indicated that majorities of both Democrats and Republicans thought that members of the other party were more closed-minded than their fellow copartisans.[2] Are these

characterizations fair? What, precisely, is the relationship between closed minds and partisan identity? Is it accurate to say that modern partisans are, in some sense, psychologically closed?

This book investigates these questions. Specifically, I examine whether people who are psychologically closed are more intensely partisan than people who are psychologically open. By "partisan," I mean something specific: the extent to which people feel an identification with, an emotional connection to, and a sense of personal relevance for supporting the Democratic and Republican Parties. I focus on the construct of partisanship for two reasons. First, partisanship is one of the primary ways in which Americans today are politically divided (e.g., Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2015). There may also be some amount of ideological polarization in society, depending on which political scientist you ask (e.g., Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2011 versus Abramowitz 2010). But while the debate over the ideological climate continues, the partisan environment is fairly settled: according to Mason (2018, 77), "Political scientists can disagree until we are blue in the face over the extent of America's policy polarization, but are citizens prejudiced in their evaluations of political opponents? Absolutely."

The second reason I focus on partisanship in particular is that many political scientists (though not all) conceive of partisanship as a social identity rather than a reflection of ideological orientations or policy preferences. This conception has profound implications for our expectations about the association between closed minds and the intensity of an individual's partisanship. Indeed, since I derive my hypotheses about the link between closed minds and intense partisan identities from psychological literature closely associated with the social identity paradigm, this book can be viewed as a type of test of the social identity conception of partisanship.

I label the type of partisanship that I investigate in the following pages *group-centric partisanship*. As I define it, this is a way of expressing one's social identification with the political parties, and it reflects the multiple components of social identity theory as defined by Henri Tajfel (1972, 292) as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership." This definition incorporates both cognitive self-categorization (knowledge of belonging) and emotional and value significance (feelings and judgments). The term therefore builds on past understandings of partisanship within the expressive or social identity perspective as a "psychological attachment" (Campbell et al. 1960) and an enduring identity signifying emotional connection (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). The concept of group-centric partisanship also incorporates a number of the concepts and measures that political scientists have developed to

capture differences in the intensity of partisanship, including partisan strength and affective partisan polarization.

Yet none of the concepts or measures of variation across people in the intensity of their partisanship currently in use in the field of political science (including partisan strength or affective polarization) achieves the goal of capturing the multifaceted definition of social identity. Both the traditional and newer, revised measures of partisan identity strength (e.g., Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015) primarily reflect cognitive self-categorization but neglect feelings and values as well as views of the outgroup. Similarly, Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes's (2012, 406) theory of affective polarization seeks to utilize a "definitional test of social identity theory" by deploying a measure of the difference in the feelings people have toward their own party relative to the opposition. This incorporates the emotional dimension of social identity, and the crucial importance of outgroup as well as ingroup sentiment, but it does not measure the cognitive or value components of the theory. I believe that a more complete understanding of the social identity theory of partisanship can be achieved by incorporating all of these attributes of partisanship into a single conception. From this perspective, the concepts of partisan strength and affective polarization should be thought of as expressions of being a group-centric partisan. This book, therefore, will examine the relationship between psychological closure and group-centric partisanship, by which I mean strong partisan identification, affectively polarized feelings about the parties, and the extent to which one incorporates the parties' perceived values into their own worldview.

In conducting this inquiry, I build on and engage with a great deal of scholarship from political psychologists, many of whom have previously examined whether and how psychological closure (and related variables) may be associated with political preferences. For example, rigidity, dogmatism, and fear of threat and uncertainty were traits that earlier researchers associated with Nazism and fascism, and more recently with right-wing authoritarianism (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1988). Others, however, have argued that a rigid or closed cognitive style is associated with extremism on both the left and the right (e.g., Rokeach 1960; Greenberg and Jonas 2003). These two hypotheses—the rigidity of the right versus the rigidity of the extremes—constitute the primary claims that both earlier and modern researchers have investigated with respect to the relationship between psychological closure and political preferences.

Today the rigidity-of-the-Right hypothesis has many more supporters than the alternative, particularly among scholars who study US politics. Ariel Malka and colleagues (2017, 126) reflect this when they write that "people who

are intolerant of uncertainty and sensitive to threat tend to have a cognitive-motivational affinity for right-wing ideology. It is fair to say that this viewpoint has become conventional wisdom." One of my aims in this book is to push back—slightly—and release some tension from this reigning view of the relationship between psychological closure and political preferences that exists among many political psychologists. To do so, I argue that psychological closure is a construct that leads toward group-centric partisanship among both Republicans and Democrats.

Nevertheless, it is fair to assert that people who are closed tend to identify more with Republicans, while people who are open tend to be found more among Democrats. While this claim may not hold up in all eras or all contexts, it does seem to be valid in the contemporary United States (e.g., Johnston, Lavine, and Federico 2017). My own data even bear this out. For instance, in a survey I commissioned in 2014 through the organization YouGov, I found that 58 percent of Republicans, compared to 46 percent of Democrats, scored in the top half of a measure known as the need for cognitive closure (NFCC), a well-validated measure of psychological closure that I will elaborate on shortly. One point, therefore, for the rigidity-of-the-Right hypothesis.

The conventional view, however, often ends at this finding: that closure is more common among those on the right than it is among those on the left. But this finding does not eliminate the possibility that psychological closure may lead people, regardless of whether they are Democrat or Republican, to exhibit characteristics of group-centric partisanship: identifying strongly with their party, displaying negative feelings toward the political outgroup, and conforming to the views of party leaders. The conventional view, in other words, risks oversimplifying the relationship between closed minds and political preferences. A more accurate summary of the relationship between closed minds and political attitudes needs to incorporate an alternative perspective labeled "the rigidity of the extremes."

Indeed, there are strong theoretical reasons to think that this rigidity-of-the-extremes hypothesis may also have some validity. As I will explain in detail in chapter 1, there is a correspondence between psychological theories of cognitive closure and social identity theories of partisanship that leads to the alternative expectation that closed minds may be attracted to extreme political preferences on both the left and the right. Crucially, however, the "extremes" that these theories suggest will be appealing to the psychologically closed are not ideological in nature. Rather, psychological research on cognitive closure suggests that it is an attribute that predisposes an individual to be "group-centric": motivated to identify strongly with their own group, incorporate the group's values into

their own, and distance themselves from their opponents. Hence, I suggest that political psychologists revise their understanding of the rigidity-of-the-extremes hypothesis away from ideological values and toward a group-centric understanding, with partisanship reconceived as a social identity rather than an expression of ideology. Based on these theoretical premises, I hypothesize that psychological closure could lead both Democrats and Republicans toward a more group-centric expression of partisanship. Therefore, the closing of the partisan mind, I suggest, may be a bipartisan process.

The Open and Closed Mind

The distinction between "open" and "closed" is at the heart of this book. Throughout, the conception and measure of closure or closed-mindedness that I employ are based on the philosophy and psychology of the need for cognitive closure (NFCC). NFCC is a widely used variable in the psychological literature that, crucially, provides a very clear theory about, and measure of, the concept of closed-mindedness. Arie Kruglanski (2004, 14)—who pioneered the study of the need for cognitive closure—describes those with a strong need for cognitive closure as desiring to "seize" and "freeze" on beliefs and information. People with a strong need for cognitive closure are more likely to "seize" on readily available information to reach a quick conclusion, as that is more closure providing than maintaining an open mind, and to "freeze" on that conclusion—to maintain their closure—once a judgment has been formed. Federico and Deason (2012, 201) provide another helpful definition of the concept: "In general, individuals with a high need for closure tend to find uncertainty highly unsettling, and they try to eliminate it as quickly and definitely as possible."

Most of us can recall times when a period of uncertainty or strife temporarily made us anxious and eager to resolve a particular challenge or situation. Individuals with a high level of need for cognitive closure experience this discomfort on a chronic basis. Hence, the closed-minded thinking that individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure engage in is driven not by malice but by a deeper psychological need to avoid and/or eliminate psychic stress. Such individuals are motivated to avoid the painful experience of uncertainty or confusion, and as a result they exhibit a cognitive style that leads them to quickly form judgments and to hold on dogmatically to those judgments once formed. Quickly forming judgments and holding those judgments dogmatically are characteristic of the closed mind, and the value of the NFCC construct is that it seeks to capture those two aspects of information processing directly.

The measures of NFCC that I rely on most in this book are scales based on a series of questions (fifteen, in the case of the YouGov study mentioned above). Appendix A presents the full set of questions that make up these NFCC scales. The questions ask respondents to agree or disagree with a variety of statements, including (1) "I don't like situations that are uncertain," (2) "I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes," (3) "When I am confronted with a problem, I'm dying to reach a solution very quickly," (4) "I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more," and (5) "I prefer things that I am used to over things I am unfamiliar with."

One benefit of these questions is their face validity in assessing the extent to which someone is open- or closed-minded. The closed prefer situations that are certain, feel irritated by a lack of conformity within a group, feel real relief when they can reach a solution quickly, prefer living within a highly consistent routine, and favor the familiar over the unfamiliar. The open, by contrast, exhibit the opposite tendencies: they revel in ambiguity, enjoy discussions within groups of dissimilar people, are capable of withholding judgment on a difficult problem, prefer having diverse days where the unexpected can happen, and enjoy exposing themselves to new people, things, and ideas rather than what they already know and feel comfortable with.

Another benefit of these questions is the absence of any explicit political content. Unlike widely used measures in political psychology, such as the Big Five personality traits of openness to experience and some measures of authoritarianism, such as the right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) scale, the NFCC questionnaire completely avoids anything related to political disputes.[3] This is a major but potentially overlooked benefit of the NFCC scale in comparison to other widely used measures in the field. At a minimum, it implies that associations between the need for cognitive closure and political outcome variables will not be tautological. The absence of political content should also protect against respondents giving "false" answers to the questions, a possibility for questions such as those on child-rearing preferences—the basis for the modern measure of authoritarianism—which may have become implicitly partisan and therefore incentivize people to provide a politically "correct" response (see Luttig 2021).[4]

The origin of open and closed minds is multifaceted. Like many psychological variables, individual differences in the NFCC construct appear to be a product of both nature and nurture, genetics and environment. Research has established that individual differences in the NFCC scale are partly heritable (e.g., Ksiazkiewicz, Ludeke, and Krueger 2016). But genes alone do not determine an individual's need for cognitive closure. In fact, recent research suggests that we have some degree of control over how open or closed we are—for example, that activities

such as reading fiction (Djikic, Oatley, and Moldoveanu 2013), practicing mindfulness and meditation (Pokorski and Suchorzynska 2017) and cognitive behavioral training (Jackson et al. 2012) can make someone more open-minded (i.e., decrease their need for cognitive closure and/or increase their openness to new experiences). Thus, while this book treats NFCC largely as a predisposition, a precursor to outcome variables such as political beliefs, this should in no way be interpreted to imply that an individual's score on NFCC is unalterable. An individual's degree of open- or closed-mindedness, like most other aspects of individual psychology, can and does change.

How do the open and closed differ from each other? Research suggests that people at the poles of the NFCC construct differ in a variety of ways. For example, studies show that people high in the need for cognitive closure score lower on the openness-to-experience dimension of the Big Five personality traits (e.g., Neuberg, Judice, and West 1997), are less creative (Chirumbolo et al. 2004), are more prejudiced against outgroups (e.g., Roets and Van Hiel 2011a), consider less information when forming opinions (Choi et al. 2008), are less supportive of proenvironmental policies and behaviors (Panno et al. 2018), are more likely to be religious fundamentalists (Brandt and Reyna 2010; Saroglou 2002) and to endorse conspiracy beliefs (Marchlewska, Cichocka, and Kossowska 2018), are sometimes more militaristic (Federico, Golec, and Dial 2005), and are groupcentric, a mindset characterized by attitudes such as favoritism toward ingroups and the denigration of outgroups (Kruglanski et al. 2006).

The Ideological and Partisan Beliefs of Open and Closed Minds

Several researchers have also investigated how people with open and closed minds differ in terms of their Left-versus-Right political views. Studies show that people with high levels of the need for cognitive closure are more conservative and more likely to identify as Republicans, whereas those who are more open-minded tend to be more common among self-identified liberals and Democrats. In a meta-analysis of over eighty studies, John Jost and colleagues (2003) concluded that political conservatism has its roots in the psychological need to protect against threat and uncertainty, and NFCC was used as one of the primary indicators of the motivation to avoid uncertainty, which predicts embracing a conservative political orientation. This paradigm about the psychological underpinnings of conservative ideology is sometimes described as the "rigidity-of-the-Right" hypothesis: individuals who are politically aligned with the Right are characterized by psychological traits, such as the need for cognitive closure, associated with

a rigid cognitive style. The originator of the NFCC scale describes why those high in the need for cognitive closure are less common on the left side of the political spectrum: "Because left-wing ideologies espouse egalitarianism, democracy, and openness to new ideas, their contents are *incompatible* with need-for-closure-based psychological strivings for stability and inequality" (Kruglanski 2004, 148; emphasis added).

But despite the consensus within the field that people who are cognitively closed are more likely to identify with right-wing ideologies and political parties, recent scholarship has identified limitations and qualifications to this general claim. For example, one point of growing consensus is that psychological closure has a natural affinity with conservatism in the domain of social and cultural politics (regarding, for instance, immigration, gay marriage, and abortion), but not for economic issues (e.g., the minimum wage and the marginal tax rate) (e.g., Johnston, Lavine, and Federico 2017; Malka et al. 2014).

Another common finding in the field is that the association between psychological needs (like the need for cognitive closure) and political attitudes is concentrated among individuals who are highly "attentive" to politics (that is, they know and care about politics and spend at least some of their limited time following current events), and among those who are the most highly educated (Federico and Tagar 2014; Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009; Johnston, Lavine, and Federico 2017; Malka et al. 2014). The attentive and the educated possess two characteristics that enhance the link between their psychology and their politics. First, they are more knowledgeable about politics, and so they have greater ability to choose political attitudes that serve the purposes they desire (such as reaching cognitive closure). Second, the attentive are more likely than the indifferent to think that their political attitudes reflect who they are (Johnston, Lavine, and Federico 2017). Those individuals who pay attention to politics, then, have greater motivation to use politics for self-serving purposes. People who spend time following politics therefore have both a greater ability and more of a motivation to bring their psychological goals into alignment with their political beliefs.

Another set of emerging findings is that the psychological need for closure is sometimes associated with particular policy preferences, more among self-identified liberals than conservatives. For example, Federico, Deason, and Fisher (2012) show, in the domain of specific policy preferences (or what political scientists call *operational ideology*—that is, one's attitudes about issues being debated at a specific time and place), that NFCC has stronger effects among those who identify symbolically as liberal than among those who identify as conservative. Similarly, Baldner et al. (2018) have shown that the effect of NFCC on the endorsement of binding moral foundations (moral values emphasizing

ingroup loyalty, respect for authority, and religious or spiritual sanctity) is greater for liberals than it is for conservatives.[5] Findings like these complicate a blanket rigidity-of-the-Right narrative, and they suggest that there is value in investigating how the NFCC construct is related to political attitudes separately among individuals on the left and on the right. Thus, even though prior scholarship has shown that Republicans are more closed than Democrats, we should not make presumptions about how this correlation maps onto or can explain levels of group-centric partisanship *within* a party.

Theoretical considerations also suggest a need to complicate a simplistic rigidity-of-the-Right hypothesis as an explanation for the intensity of partisanship. In particular, the rigidity-of-the-Right model developed in political psychology was originally based on differences between liberals and conservatives, not Democrats and Republicans. But partisanship, according to many political scientists, is not simply a reflection of a person's ideological perspective. Instead many political scientists argue that partisan identity is a type of social identity in its own right, a product of socialization and emotional connection rather than a rational reflection of political values (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Greene 2004; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). Indeed, the theory of affective polarization—the growing divide between people's feelings toward their own party and their feelings toward the opposite party—itself originates in this distinction between ideology and affect. As Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012, 406) put it, "To the extent that party identification represents a meaningful group affiliation, the more appropriate test of polarization is affective, not ideological."

It is based on this perspective that Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) identified a previously overlooked amount of polarization in US society. Prior to their work, most research on polarization in public opinion focused on ideology (e.g., Abramowitz 2010; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2011). From an ideological perspective, it was clear that people were "sorting"—that is, bringing their political preferences and ideology into alignment with their partisanship (e.g., Levendusky 2009), but it was not clear that people were polarizing. Yet when Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) shifted the frame of reference to partisan affect (that is, positive affect toward one's own group and negative affect toward the outgroup), the evidence for polarization became clear. They showed that more Americans had become opposed to interparty marriage and had developed a wider gap in their feelings toward the two parties: they liked their own party more and the opposite party much less.

One of the widely known consequences of the need for cognitive closure is that it creates a pressure for people to like their own group more than outgroups, a pattern reflected in the argument that people with a strong NFCC are

"group-centric" (Kruglanski et al. 2006). The pattern and kind of mass polarization that emerged in the United States in the latter decades of the twentieth century and that persist into the present are therefore reminiscent of this broader psychological pattern, whereby people with a strong need for closure develop strong ties to their own group and become hostile toward outgroups. Could this psychological dynamic provide insight into the rise of affective polarization—and other characteristics of group-centric partisanship, such as partisan strength—in US society?

To date, a few studies have investigated this possibility. Zmigrod, Rentfrow, and Robbins (2019), for example, have found that extreme partisans—regardless of whether they are Democrat or Republican—exhibit a cognitive style indicative of closed-mindedness and inflexibility. I too have reported, in two publications, a similar set of findings: that strong Democrats and Republicans, as well as Democrats and Republicans with the most affectively polarized feelings about the parties, are more authoritarian (Luttig 2017) and score higher in their need for cognitive closure (Luttig 2018). Findings like these suggest that even while there are more closed-minded individuals in the Republican camp than in the Democratic one, the closed-minded, regardless of party, are also most common among strong partisans and the affectively polarized than among weakly identified partisans and those with more moderate feelings about the parties. The strongest and most divided partisans—those who, in other words, exhibit a group-centric type of partisanship—on both sides of the aisle appear to be characterized by a shared tendency for psychological closure.

The Closing of the Partisan Mind as a Bipartisan Phenomenon

In the chapters that follow, I expand on these findings by unpacking the theoretical link between partisanship as a social identity and group-centric partisanship rooted in the need for cognitive closure, assessing whether group-centric partisans are more likely to be closed- than open-minded, explaining why this pattern exists, and illuminating how this relationship has come about and given rise to the resurgence of partisan thinking in the US electorate. I want to emphasize that the association between closed minds and group-centric partisanship depends fundamentally on the political environment. It is only because politics has recently become a sphere in which it is easy to reach closure that the closed-minded have been turned into group-centric partisans; in previous eras where politics was confusing and difficult, the closed were turned off from expressing

this type of extreme partisanship. The upshot of this transition is that the nature of partisanship in the United States has changed. For people who are closed, partisanship has become less about emotional goodwill than about cognitive certainty regarding who is one of "us" and who is one of "them." Partisanship for the closed has, in turn, become akin to a religious identity, a place of comfort and solace where party leaders can act like a pastor leading a sermon, telling voters that to be a member of this party means endorsing certain positions and believing in certain truths.

Implications of Partisan Closure

Subsequent chapters unpack the psychological theory and historical dynamics that have given rise to group-centric partisanship rooted in the need for cognitive closure and assess various hypotheses that I derive from these theoretical premises. Some of the highlights of the findings include the following. In chapter 3, I show that there is a consistent and substantively strong relationship between the need for cognitive closure and indicators of group-centric partisanship, including measures such as partisan strength and affective polarization, among attentive supporters of both parties. In chapter 4, I show that the relationship between NFCC and group-centric partisanship has gotten stronger over time in the United States in response to polarization among political elites. And in chapter 5, I illustrate how political campaigns increase group-centric partisanship in part by making the public more politically attentive. Collectively, these chapters demonstrate that various indicators of group-centric partisanship are rooted in the need for cognitive closure, that this dynamic is evident among both Republicans and Democrats, and that this relationship is a variable one, across people, time, and events such as political campaigns.

These findings have both theoretical and normative implications. Theoretically, they suggest that political psychologists would be well served to revise their thinking about the relationship between psychological closure and political preferences. It is true that closure, or rigidity, is more common on the right than on the left. But it is also true that closure is more common at the extremes than among the moderates or independents—at least, that is, when partisanship rather than ideology is the dependent variable. These findings also, then, bolster the perspective in political science that partisanship represents something distinct from ideology and is a type of group identity rather than a running tally of policy preferences. As I elaborate further in the conclusion, however, these analyses

also suggest a way to reconcile previously incompatible perspectives about partisanship. In particular, I suggest that the social identity framework may be most applicable to the closed, while for the psychologically open, partisanship may be a more substantive reflection of political perspectives. Theoretically, then, these findings have implications for enduring debates in political psychology and political science about the politics of the closed-minded and about the nature of partisanship.

But these findings, I suggest, also have normative implications. As Molly Ivins tells us, democracies are not neat and orderly. But neatness and order are precisely what the closed mind seeks. An increasing number of strong Democrats and strong Republicans therefore have a psychological mindset that is hard to reconcile with the always fluid politics of democracy. The increasing numbers of closed or group-centric partisans that this book documents and describes help to illuminate why US politics has become increasingly toxic and even dangerous. In the conclusion, I offer some possible strategies for opening the closed partisan mind.

1

THE CLOSING OF THE PARTISAN MIND

> **All movements, however different in doctrine and aspiration, draw their early adherents from the same types of humanity; they all appeal to the same types of mind.**
>
> —Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*

Eric Hoffer, a San Francisco longshoreman and philosopher, observed in his book *The True Believer* that social movements from both the Left and the Right appeal to people with a similar type of mind. That type of mind, Hoffer (1951, 59) claimed, was one that was "frustrated." The frustrated individual seeks an escape from the self in some larger collective. The purpose of joining a political movement, Hoffer argued, is not for the instrumental goals the group claims to be seeking, but for psychological benefits such as "drown[ing] the voice of guilt within us" (95). The self-righteousness of the politically mobilized reflects deeply personal psychological motivations rather than instrumental policy goals.

Hoffer's account of social movements mirrors the explanation discussed here for the origins of group-centric partisanship in contemporary US politics. Like Hoffer, I argue that people who exhibit the characteristics of group-centric partisans, including being strong partisans and being affectively polarized, are motivated in part by deeper psychological needs, and are not simply the strongest supporters of their party's policy platform. Furthermore, in another echo of Hoffer, I argue that group-centric Republicans and Democrats, however different in label and doctrine they appear to be, appeal to a similar type of mind. Unlike Hoffer, though, I argue that the type of mind that leads one toward becoming a group-centric partisan is a closed mind rather than a frustrated one.

As I discussed in the introduction, the need-for-cognitive-closure scale provides a useful means of distinguishing people who are open- and closed-minded. An abundance of research, including my own, suggests that individuals who

score higher on the NFCC scale tend to be more Republican than Democratic. This finding is consistent with the rigidity-of-the-Right hypothesis and the idea that right-wing parties and beliefs advance policies that resonate or match with individuals who dislike uncertainty (e.g., Jost et al. 2003).

But it is not self-evident that this perspective illuminates the nature and origins of the intense type of partisan conflict that the United States is currently experiencing. Is partisan conflict in the US a battle between parties that are psychologically different? Or are analysts like Hoffer on to something in asserting that extremists of all types are similar in some way? This chapter provides a theoretical framework for addressing this question, using the construct of the need for cognitive closure.

The upshot of the theoretical framework I describe is a revised formulation of the rigidity-of-the-extremes hypothesis, in which I state that the need for cognitive closure may lead people, regardless of their party, to express a more intense type of partisanship that I label *group-centric*. To unpack the basis of this argument, I describe the theory of *groups as epistemic providers* and *uncertainty-identity theory*. Both of these theories provide the rationale for my central contention that the contemporary closing of the partisan mind is a bipartisan phenomenon.

Collectively, the ideas expressed in this chapter allow for an integrative statement about the political psychology of closed minds and partisan group-centrism in US politics. The three major variables identified in the theory are (1) individual differences in the need for cognitive closure, (2) variation in the internal cohesiveness and polarization of the political parties (i.e., how effectively the parties provide closure or a "shared reality" to their supporters), and (3) individual and contextual differences in political attention. The major empirical hypothesis of this book is that the confluence of these three variables creates a group-centric form of partisanship that is reflected in measures such as partisan strength and affective partisan polarization.

Groups as Epistemic Providers

One of the characteristics of people who have a strong need for cognitive closure is that they tend to be group-centric. This theoretical claim is articulated in a review essay by Arie Kruglanski and colleagues (2006). Kruglanski et al. (2006, 88) develop their theory of the link between the need for cognitive closure and group-centrism through a set of logical deductions. They first define the need for cognitive closure as a psychological state or trait in which an individual is driven by a desire for firm knowledge. This desire originates from a motivation rooted in the perceived costs and benefits of possessing or not possessing cognitive closure, and may derive, Kruglanski (2004, 2) writes, from "Mother Nature (probably via

the evolutionary process). . . . [T]he capacity to occasionally shut our minds, that is, develop the sense of secure knowledge that obviates our felt need for further agonizing deliberation" can spur us to action and help us "get on with our lives."

Take, for example, the issue of abortion. Many people may be comfortable not having a firm opinion on this issue. These individuals can recognize the complexities of the issue and see the strengths and weaknesses of both the pro-choice and the pro-life position. They can live their lives without concluding whether abortion is right or wrong. But other people need to have an answer to this question and a need for closure on this issue. They would be motivated to stop the agonizing deliberation they feel when thinking about abortion and would want instead to "seize" and "freeze" on an opinion. But what opinion should they form?

Kruglanski et al.'s (2006, 88) second proposition provides an answer: "Firm individual [or subjective] knowledge is grounded in the shared reality of one's reference groups." In other words, our knowledge about the world, how it works, what is true and false, right or wrong, and our opinions about issues like abortion, can be made certain, or "frozen," when such beliefs are shared with fellow group members. Embedded in this second proposition is a claim that may seem somewhat unusual at first glance. The claim, in short, is that our opinions about the world, including our preferences about public policy debates, do not solely emerge from within, through self-reflection or because of internal attributes, but are also heavily affected by the views of those in our social milieu. This dimension of public opinion has been somewhat neglected by political psychologists, who often point to internal characteristics, whether they be personality traits, moral foundations, or broad values, as the source of policy preferences. But however strongly internal psychological forces may push us in one or another direction on a controversial topic, Kruglanski et al.'s second proposition asserts that our confidence in this assessment hinges on that belief being shared with like-minded others. Absent a reference group to cement that belief, our preferences will be uncertain, fluid, and subject to change.

A number of other psychologists have made similar claims worth noting. For instance, Leon Festinger (1950, 272) argues that "an opinion, a belief, an attitude is 'correct,' 'valid,' and 'proper' to the extent that it is anchored in a group of people with similar beliefs, opinions, and attitudes." Hardin and Higgins (1996, 28) make a similar observation when they write that "in the absence of social verification, experience is transitory, random, and ephemeral; once acknowledged by others and shared in a continuing process of social verification termed 'shared reality,' experience is no longer mere capricious subjectivity, but instead achieves the phenomenological status of objective reality."

In other words, then, firm subjective knowledge about the world, and certainty in our political opinions about issues like abortion, can be achieved only

when that knowledge is shared and agreed on by others. Absent a shared reality that is provided by a group, firm knowledge will be difficult to acquire. Hence, individuals with a need for firm knowledge—those who score highly in the need for cognitive closure—will naturally find groups more appealing than those who have less of a need for firm knowledge and who instead can tolerate their subjective knowledge being held with greater levels of doubt and uncertainty.

Many classic experiments in social psychology illustrate the importance of group dynamics for individual beliefs and behavior. For example, Muzafer Sherif's (1936) experiments on the autokinetic effect—a visual illusion of light moving in a dark room even though it is still—illustrates the tendency of individuals to conform to group norms. In these experiments, Sherif had individuals first estimate on their own how much the light moved. Then Sherif created groups of three individuals; each group included one member who had a different perception of how much the light moved than the other two. Sherif observed a tendency for those with outlying perceptions to bring their views into line with the perception of the two other group members. This example illustrates the general tendency of human beings to bring their individual subjective beliefs into line with others when the group believes something different from them. It is hard for individuals to stand alone in their beliefs, particularly when they stand opposed to others they consider to be similar to themselves or part of the same group. As Jamil Zaki (2020, 119) summarizes some findings from the research on conformity, "People find foods tastier, faces more attractive, and songs catchier when others like them. We litter and vote more often after learning that others have. The extent to which a scandal outrages us, a political candidate invigorates us, or climate change frightens us depends on how people around us feel." One upshot of this proposition is that political cognition is often social; the views and reactions of others around us influence our own thoughts and opinions.

Kruglanski et al. (2006, 85) build on these and other findings in social psychology. What the second proposition of their theory asserts is that individual knowledge about anything, even our own direct perceptions, as in the Sherif experiments, let alone our beliefs about an issue as complex as abortion, becomes stronger and more certain when those beliefs are shared with others. Furthermore, once a group has formed a view of "reality," regardless of how arbitrary it may be, it will exert pressure on fellow group members to conform to the group's belief, particularly if that individual is motivated to seize and freeze on a viewpoint. Cognitive closure, therefore, is achieved when individual knowledge is socially supported by the beliefs of one's reference groups. Hence, if one wants to seize and freeze on an attitude about abortion policy, the views of one's reference groups (such as a political party) would provide a viable solution to an otherwise agonizing conundrum as to which opinion one should hold. Note here, too, that

there is no requirement that an opinion about abortion be extreme in order to offer someone cognitive closure. One can achieve cognitive closure from—that is, can seize and freeze on—an abortion perspective that is "moderate," as long as that position is provided in the shared reality of a reference group.

The third assertion that Kruglanski et al. (2006) make in their theory of groups as epistemic providers is that the ability of a group to provide a shared reality is variable, and varies as a function of a group's entitativity, or groupness. What makes a group entitative or groupy? Kruglanski et al. (2006, 85) write that "a central aspect of groupness resides in the coherence and consistency of the shared reality a group provides for its members, different groups in the same situation and the same group across situations may well differ in their degree of groupness or 'entitativity.'" "Coherence" and "consistency" are the two operable words above that define variation across groups in their degree of entitativity. When groups are coherent (or uniform, homogenous, unanimous, and constrained), and when they are consistent in those beliefs across situations and over time, they are more effective providers of a shared reality compared to groups that are diverse or heterogenous and whose beliefs are known to vary.

I believe that this proposition is key to understanding the rise in partisan strength and affective polarization over time in the United States, as both parties have changed in ways that have made them more coherent and consistent over the past few decades. This is evident in the case of abortion. In the 1970s and 1980s, the parties' positions were not nearly as opposed as they are today. Joe Biden, for example, cast a vote in 1982 for a constitutional amendment that would have allowed states to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which proved problematic in the 2020 Democratic primaries. Anyone desiring cognitive closure on the abortion issue could not have found it from the political parties in the previous century. But today the parties provide a more consistent abortion opinion than in the past, allowing supporters to easily seize and freeze on a position.

The last proposition that Kruglanski et al. (2006, 88) assert is simply a logically derived extension of the points raised above: "The need for cognitive closure should foster the emergence of group-centrism in its varied manifestations." Manifestations of group-centrism include pressure to have a uniform opinion, endorsement of autocratic leadership, intolerance of diversity in group composition, rejection of opinion deviates, ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation, attraction to groups possessing strongly shared realities, adherence to group norms, and loyalty to one's ingroup, qualified by the degree to which it is a "good" shared reality provider. All of these manifestations help to foster and maintain a shared sense of reality and firm knowledge. The theory that the need for cognitive closure promotes group-centrism therefore follows from a logical set of deductions based on claims about the interaction between individual

motivations (for firm knowledge) and social relations (groups as epistemic or shared reality providers). Hence, Kruglanski et al. (2006, 85) write, "because persons construct their beliefs in concert with their fellow members, individual knowledge is inevitably grounded in a shared reality, and a desire for shared reality is tantamount to the quest for a firm individual knowledge."

This theory has clear empirical implications for the study of partisanship, especially if we conceive of partisanship as another type of group identity (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Mason 2015). In particular, the manifestations of NFCC-based group-centrism, such as ingroup favoritism, outgroup derogation, and loyalty to one's ingroup, have clear empirical resonances with concepts and measures in political science, such as partisan strength and affective polarization. Hence, this theory suggests that NFCC may be associated with a group-centric type of partisanship that is expressed through signs like stronger partisan identities and more extreme levels of affective polarization. Furthermore, this theory suggests that the relationship between NFCC and group-centric partisanship may vary as a function of the perceived polarization of the parties. In environments where the parties are perceived as more divided and internally coherent, the relationship between NFCC and group-centric expressions of partisanship should grow stronger.

Uncertainty-Identity Theory

Michael Hogg's research on uncertainty-identity theory leads to the same expectations but is derived from the traditions of social identity and self-categorization theories (Tajfel 1969, 1974; Tajfel et al. 1979). Both social identity theory and self-categorization theory were influenced by Muzafer Sherif and colleagues' (1954) famous Robbers Cave experiment. In this experiment, young boys at a camp were divided into two teams (the Rattlers and the Eagles) and, after a week spent with just their own team members, were subsequently made aware of the other group's existence. Despite the boys in both groups having much in common, Sherif and other researchers at the camp observed that the two groups quickly engaged in competition with each other. They called each other names, showed a clear bias favoring ingroup members, and started fighting with members of the opposite group.

Henri Tajfel, inspired by these studies, wanted to examine the minimal conditions that would spur people toward the ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination observed in the Robbers Cave experiment. Tajfel designed the "minimal group paradigm" experiments as a baseline on which he could build

in greater conditions for intergroup competition, based on the assumption that the "minimal" condition of simply assigning individuals to a group (with no meaning or value associated with that group) would be insufficient to create said competition. This assumption turned out to be wrong. On the basis of simply categorizing an individual as a member of a group, Tajfel and colleagues observed substantial levels of intergroup competition. For example, one experiment classified people as preferring paintings by Klee, others as preferring Kandinsky; in another, people were told that they were "overestimators" while others were "underestimators" of the number of dots on a screen. Note that people were randomly assigned to these conditions; they did not reflect their actual artistic preferences or dot-estimating capabilities. From this act of mere categorization, Tajfel and colleagues observed that people exhibited a clear tendency to favor members of their ingroup at the expense of the outgroup.

One of the explanations offered for this phenomenon was that group identities provide us with a sense of self-esteem; ingroup bias has the effect of bolstering our own self-image and providing a sense of positive distinctiveness (Turner 1975). But the empirical basis for self-enhancement as a motivational root of social identity processes such as ingroup bias and outgroup discrimination became "muddy" based on research conducted during the 1990s (Hogg 2007, 71). The ambiguity of the self-esteem hypothesis drove Michael Hogg and colleagues to formulate an alternative hypothesis about the motivations underlying social identity processes: uncertainty reduction (Mullin and Hogg 1998; Grieve and Hogg 1999).

As Hogg (2007, 71) summarizes in an essay reviewing his research on uncertainty-identity theory, "An epistemic motivation related to uncertainty was implicit in Tajfel's early discussion of social categorization (Tajfel 1972, 1974). Tajfel (1969, 92) believed that people engage in a 'search for coherence' to preserve the integrity of the self-image. . . . Tajfel and Billig (1974) suggested that one reason why people identify with minimal groups might be to impose structure on intrinsically uncertain circumstances. This idea was not pursued further—the motivational focus shifted to positive distinctiveness." That is, the motivational focus stayed on the theory of positive distinctiveness until Hogg and colleagues began their exploration of the role of uncertainty reduction in processes of social identification.

Uncertainty-identity theory has many similarities with Kruglanski et al.'s (2006) theory of groups as epistemic providers. It starts with the assumption that uncertainty is a generally uncomfortable state of mind. Uncertainty is mentally painful, and when we experience it, we want to get over it. We are especially motivated to reduce uncertainty when we are uncertain about something we care about, and particularly when we are uncertain about some aspect about our

self and our relations with others. Human beings are incredibly social creatures. We want to know who we are and where we fit in. "Ultimately," Hogg (2007, 73) observes, "people like to know who they are and how to behave and what to think, and who others are and how they might behave and what they might think."

Hogg argues that social identities provide one of the most effective and accessible tools for alleviating feelings of uncertainty about the self and others. Our identities reduce uncertainty by providing prototypes of typical group members. Beliefs about prototypical characteristics of groups (e.g., Republicans are pro-life; Democrats are pro-choice) can *prescribe* perceptions, beliefs, feelings, values, and so on, that one can adopt if they choose to identify with that group. According to Hogg,

> When we categorize someone as a member of a specific group, we assign the group's attributes to varying degree to that person. We view them through the lens of the prototype of that group; seeing them not as unique individuals but as more or less prototypical group members—a process called *depersonalization*. When we categorize others, ingroup or outgroup members, we stereotype them and have expectations of what they think and feel and how they will behave. When we categorize ourselves, self-categorization, exactly the same process occurs—we assign prescriptive ingroup attributes to ourselves, we autostereotype, conform to group norms, and transform our self-conception. In this way, group identification very effectively reduces self-related uncertainty. It provides us with a sense of who we are that prescribes what we should think, feel, and do. (2007, 80)

Group identification can therefore reduce uncertainty about the self through the provision of group prototypes. The hypothesis that Hogg derives from this is that uncertainty (and the motivation to reduce uncertainty, which arises when we feel uncertain) will drive social identification processes, including ingroup loyalty and outgroup derogation. In one particularly telling demonstration of the centrality of uncertainty reduction to social identity processes, Hogg and Grieve (1999) showed that the minimal group paradigm effect is *eliminated* under conditions of high subjective certainty about the self. By reducing their participants' need for certainty about who they were, Hogg and Grieve (1999) ameliorated their need to identify with a group in the context of the minimal group paradigm. By contrast, in a state of high subjective uncertainty, Hogg and Grieve (1999) observed substantial amounts of ingroup bias in the minimal group context. Like Kruglanski et al. (2006), this theory thus places the psychological need for certainty at the core of social identity processes such as ingroup love and outgroup hatred.

Also like Kruglanski et al. (2006), Hogg and colleagues identify group-level entitativity as a key factor in the ability of groups to function as certainty providers. Groups that are highly entitative (that is, groups that have clear boundaries and have common cohesive goals) are better at providing certainty than less entitative groups. In Hogg's words, "An unclearly structured low-entitativity group that has indistinct boundaries, ambiguous membership criteria, limited shared goals, and little agreement on group attributes will do a poor job of reducing or fending off self or self-related uncertainty. In contrast, a clearly structured high-entitativity group with sharp boundaries, unambiguous membership criteria, highly shared goals, and consensus on group attributes will do an excellent job" (2007, 88). More plainly, social groups vary in their ability to provide prototypical traits and characteristics that can provide self-related certainty. Highly entitative groups are more effective at this role than less entitative groups. Thus, when people are uncertain, they will identify and identify more strongly with highly entitative groups that have clear group attributes than with less entitative groups that do not.

Like the theory of groups as epistemic providers, uncertainty-identity theory, combined with the well-established theory in political science that partisanship is a social identity, leads to the expectation that the desire to avoid uncertainty—a desire that is more strongly felt by individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure—will lead to stronger partisan identities and more extreme levels of affective polarization. Uncertainty-identity theory's emphasis on entitativity, and the importance it places on the capacity of groups to reduce uncertainty through the provision of group prototypes, also coheres with the theory of groups of epistemic providers in the implication that the relationship between uncertainty-reduction motives and group-centric partisanship will be stronger in eras of highly polarized parties than in eras of more diffuse parties.

Importantly, both the theory of groups as epistemic providers and uncertainty-identity theory postulate that only certain groups provide closure and/or reduce uncertainty. In particular, groups that provide a unified shared reality and/or a clear set of prototypes that their supporters can adopt are especially effective at providing this psychological benefit. Individuals with a strong need for closure, therefore, become group-centric only toward groups that they perceive as capable of providing these needs: groups that tell their supporters who is one of "us" and who is one of "them," what that means, and what beliefs accompany those group identifications. Over the past fifty years, the political parties in the United States have changed in ways that have made them more appealing to individuals with a strong need for closure. Today, the parties prescribe both self- and other-related prototypes to make it easier for supporters to think about the political landscape (e.g., Ted Cruz calling the Democrats the party of Lisa Simpson and

Republicans the party of Homer, Bart, Maggie, and Marge), and they provide a shared reality that offers partisans a script about what political positions they should embrace. Below I document how some of the changes in the political landscape have made partisanship more effective at reducing uncertainty and providing firm knowledge.

Changes in the Political Environment and the Unfolding of Partisan Group-Centrism

Over the past several decades, a number of changes have transformed partisanship in the US into an effective epistemic provider. I focus on three in particular. The first is the ideological polarization of political elites, which changed the parties from “big tent” parties lacking coherent goals and having substantial overlap into ideologically coherent parties with clearly distinct agendas. The second is the fragmentation of the media environment, which facilitated the creation of distinct partisan shared realities. Finally, the third is the realignment of the parties on the basis of various social identities, such as symbolic ideology, race/ethnicity, and religion (e.g., Mason 2018), which created clearer prototypes of both Democratic and Republican partisans. These three changes in the political environment have increased the ability for partisanship to provide a shared reality and reduce self-related uncertainty. The parties today, aided and abetted by sympathetic media outlets, provide a coherent shared reality that allows their supporters to seize and freeze on beliefs about the political world, themselves, and their opponents.

Polarization of political elites

The first change that has contributed to making partisanship a more effective provider of cognitive closure is polarization among elites, by which I mean elected officials and highly engaged political activists. It is widely acknowledged by political scientists that Republican and Democratic elites have polarized ideologically and have also become more divided over issues that cannot easily be classified as ideological. The result of this change is that the parties are now more effective at providing their supporters with a shared reality; they prescribe a set of beliefs that their supporters can adopt with confidence and certainty.

The polarization of political elites can be illustrated with quantitative indicators based on congressional roll call votes such as DW-Nominate and party unity scores, both of which track changes in the voting behavior of members of Congress over time (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2016). DW-Nominate scores

allow researchers to place individual members of Congress in a one-dimensional ideological space from liberal to conservative. Based on this measure, which tracks the ideologies of every member of Congress throughout history, McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2016, 3) identify two recent changes in the ideological mapping of members of Congress: "First, at the level of individual members of Congress, moderates are vanishing. Second, the two parties have pulled apart. *Conservative* and *liberal* have become almost perfect synonyms for *Republican* and *Democrat*." In other words, the parties no longer overlap in Congress (moderates are vanishing) and there are thus clear boundaries between the parties at the elite level. The two parties have also drifted further apart (the median Democrat has shifted left and the median Republican has shifted right). This ideological polarization of the two parties in Congress started during the mid-1970s and has steadily increased since.

Party unity scores provide another quantitative indicator of voting patterns in Congress, and by this measure, too, party elites have undoubtedly polarized over time. A vote in Congress is considered a party unity vote when a roll call vote divides at least 50 percent of Democrats against at least 50 percent of Republicans. Based on this indicator, there has been a clear rise over time in the number of votes that divide the parties. In 1970, for example, only about one-third of votes in the Senate divided Democrats and Republicans in this way. In 2010, nearly three-quarters of votes in the Senate divided a majority of Democrats against a majority of Republicans. In other words, as recently as 1970, most votes did not divide Democrats from Republicans in the Senate. By 2010, by comparison, most Senate votes split fairly neatly across partisan lines.

David Rohde (1991) and Sam Rosenfeld (2018) describe the process by which the political parties were transformed from big-tent parties of various factions in the middle of the twentieth century to vehicles for competing ideological agendas by the turn of the twenty-first century. Rohde emphasizes institutional changes in Congress (particularly the House) that empowered majority party leaders to push issues favored by a "majority of the majority," a philosophy that continues to shape the structure and behavior of the House and its members today. Rohde observes that these institutional changes began in the 1970s after conservative southern Democrats started being replaced by conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats, leading both parties to become more ideologically cohesive. The reduction in ideological cross-pressures within the parties incentivized "party government," whereby the majority party empowered their leaders to push items favored by a majority of the majority, away from the median preference of the legislative body as a whole. In the 1970s it was Democrats who had a majority in Congress and who, by virtue of changes in their southern delegation and the election of "new-breed northerners," had become a more ideologically cohesive party

and changed the structure of Congress to advance issues on which the Democratic Party was unified. This process was accelerated under Newt Gingrich's leadership in the 1990s and continued through Nancy Pelosi's first speakership in the 2000s (Aldrich and Rohde 2019). The result of these changes was increased party unity in Congress, and issues that might bring the parties together are often kept off the agenda altogether.

Rosenfeld (2018) attributes the marriage of ideology and partisanship among political elites to the efforts of various actors who believed that parties *should* represent distinct ideological agendas. The American Political Science Association (1950) was one actor that advocated this change, believing that clearly defined parties would invigorate partisan competition and stimulate greater ideological thought among the public. Political activists also believed that the parties should be vehicles for advancing particular ideological beliefs, and they were crucial in changing the parties to become more ideological. Phyllis Schlafly's *A Choice Not an Echo*, published in 1964 and used in support of the staunchly conservative Barry Goldwater campaign, provides a prominent example of political activists in the middle of the century working to forge a new type of ideologically motivated party. The McGovern-Fraser reforms initiated after the fraught 1968 Democratic convention, in which the traditional factions within the Democratic coalition reached a crisis, also helps to illustrate the beliefs that would eventually shift power within both parties toward ideologically driven activists and away from traditional power brokers. Rosenfeld (2018, 151) cites one contributor to these reforms, James MacGregor Burns, as saying that his remade party "would welcome and recruit members on the basis of one test and one test alone—belief in the principles and goals of the party as defined in the national platform" and that "those who do not share its goals would see no point in joining it, or staying in it." These two examples, one from the GOP and one from the Democratic Party, illustrate how ideologically driven activists helped shift power within both parties away from those who could dole out patronage and make compromises between competing interest groups and toward issue-driven activists. The result was that the two parties, especially at the elite level, came to represent only those members who could pass an ideological litmus test. By the end of the twentieth century, the parties were no longer loose coalitions with indistinct boundaries, ambiguous membership criteria, and limited shared goals; instead they had become distinct groups defined by competing ideological interests.

But while the parties have become divided by ideology, political conflict among elites cannot be reduced to ideological disagreements. Frances Lee (2009, 18) argues that a lot of partisan conflict in Congress reflects the "inherent zero-sum conflicts between the two parties' political interests as they seek to win elections and wield political power." Thus, the parties often vote against each other

not necessarily because of real disagreements, but because they want to weaken support for the other party or their initiatives. For example, votes on the debt ceiling used to be a routine matter; every president since Harry Truman has had to sign at least one bill raising it (Lee 2017). But recently, especially during Barack Obama's presidency and again during Joe Biden's, debt ceiling votes have become grist for the partisan mill as Republican legislators have used these votes as tools to (1) try to convince the electorate of the Democratic president's profligacy, and (2) exert concessions in other matters of public policy. Despite being an issue that Republican and Democratic presidents and legislators alike have supported in the past, and not being an issue that can be categorized as liberal or conservative since the vote on the debt ceiling does not actually change spending priorities, the debt ceiling has come to be seen as a tool for partisans to paint the party holding the presidency as irresponsible.

Illustrating the nonideological nature of some partisan conflict in Congress are those instances in which partisans vote for (or against) issues that they should be ideologically opposed to (or supportive of). Lee (2009, 76–77) provides as an example the partisan switch on the issue of federal sponsoring of testing in public schools. In 1993, this was an initiative proposed by President Clinton and supported by Democrats in Congress but opposed by congressional Republicans. In 2001, however, President Bush proposed a similar policy. This time, federal school testing was supported by Republicans and opposed by congressional Democrats. Ideology cannot readily explain this shift in voting patterns. A better explanation is that when presidents get behind an issue, their copartisans in the legislature have a political incentive to offer their support, and the president's political opponents have an incentive to oppose the presidential initiative and hope that the president can be weakened in the process. Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012, xi) recount a similar example based on a 2003 vote to expand Medicare, "the most significant piece of social welfare legislation since the Great Society." One might assume this legislation was supported mostly by liberal Democrats. In fact, however, this was a proposal offered by Republican president George W. Bush and supported almost exclusively by congressional Republicans. Republicans supported, and Democrats opposed, a liberal policy initiative in order to rally behind their partisan interests in bolstering (or weakening) the incumbent president.

These persistent political conflicts separating elite Democrats from elite Republicans signal to voters that the parties are fundamentally distinct from each other. Most issues that garner political attention end up enmeshed in the web of partisan conflict, even if the issue is not ideological. The result is that on any salient issue, Democratic and Republican elites communicate to their followers different interpretations and sometimes even different facts. They communicate,

in other words, a distinct but shared reality. It is easy for members of the public today to know what to think about an issue simply by looking to the leaders of their party. Since there is typically little disagreement within a party on any given issue, people do not need to think hard or question the validity of the information their leaders provide to them. They also do not need an ideological worldview to guide their political preferences. In fact, such an ideology would have led people astray from their party in the cases of federal school testing and Medicare expansion. It is far easier for people to simply look toward and adopt the positions of their political leaders. When those leaders are all unified in their position on an issue, their partisan supporters can acquire their "own" opinion on that issue with confidence.

The upshot is that today people can easily seize and freeze on a political opinion; the parties allow their supporters to readily acquire political closure. Compare this environment to the environment fifty years ago, when the parties were not often unified on issues. In that environment, forming a political opinion required considerably more cognitive effort, and one could be never certain one's belief was the "right" one, since it lacked the permanence that is obtained by a consensual shared reality. It is perhaps not surprising that in this earlier environment, political opinions were shown to be highly unstable over time (Converse 2006). But today, because the parties have become so ideologically cohesive, people can be confident that their beliefs are the "right" ones.

These changes in the political parties have not gone unnoticed by the public. Research has demonstrated that, in response to the polarization of political elites, the public has come to perceive the parties as increasingly distinct. No longer do most people see the parties as an echo; they see a clear choice when they think of differences between Republicans and Democrats. For example, Marc Hetherington (2001) reported a fairly dramatic spike in the percentage of American respondents perceiving "important differences between the parties" starting in 1980. Corwin Smidt (2017) updates this time series on perceptions of party differences and observes a continuing rise in the number of Americans who recognize the parties as different from each other throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. By 2008, nearly 90 percent of those with high levels of political awareness were reported as believing that there are important differences between the parties (compared to only about 66 percent of those with low levels of political awareness). In short, the public now sees the two parties as separate groups with important differences.

As a result, the parties today are much are more highly *entitative* groups than the parties of the past. Party elites now have coherent goals, clear boundaries, and unambiguous membership criteria, and are consistent in these characteristics across issues and over time. The parties provide a shared reality to their

supporters by communicating a relatively uniform position on almost all issues, a position that in almost every case is opposed by the other political party. From the perspective of potential voters, it is now much simpler to know which position they should take on an issue; it is easier for them to seize and freeze on their political opinions than in the past, when the parties represented a diverse group of interests with varying opinions on any given issue. As a result, partisanship today should be more appealing to individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure than partisanship was in the past. Individuals with a strong need for closure should be more likely to identify as strong partisans and exhibit dislike toward the opposite party in this environment, as these manifestations of group-centrism help to cement the shared reality of their party.

But political elites did not provide for this shared reality on their own. They have been aided and abetted by media entrepreneurs navigating an environment transformed by new technologies such as cable and the internet. These technological innovations, too, have been critical for the creation of partisan shared realities and, thus, for the emergence of group-centric partisanship rooted in the need for cognitive closure.

The Fragmentation of the Media Environment and the Rise of Partisan Media

For much of the twentieth century, Americans of both Republican and Democratic persuasions had a common source of shared reality: the television news media. In 1972, Walter Cronkite was the most trusted man in the United States. Lacking alternative choices, in the evenings many Americans tuned in to the major broadcast networks, all of which aired news programming at similar times (e.g., Prior 2007, 16). Without the intense competitive pressures that would soon overtake the news media, these news organizations could offer relatively "hard" journalistic coverage and take an objective or neutral stance. The result was that, regardless of partisan affiliation, Americans turned to the same few news sources and thus had a common basis for their beliefs about what was happening in the world, the consequences of policy proposals, and interpretations of events. And it was precisely in this period that political partisanship was in the throes of dealignment: partisan strength reached its lowest point in 1978, split-ticket voting was at record highs throughout this period, and many Republicans in Congress (and among the public) turned against Richard Nixon following the Watergate scandal.

But with the introduction of cable television, news organizations faced increased competitive pressures. In response to the changed environment, the mainstream news aired more "soft" coverage to try to attract viewers, a shift that

seems to have directly contributed to the rapid decline in trust in the media that has occurred since the mid-1970s (Ladd 2012, chap. 5). Today, only 41 percent of Americans express trust in the news.[1]

As Americans turned away from traditional news organizations, an opportunity was created for entrepreneurs to capitalize on their discontent. Niche news organizations presenting an explicitly ideological view of the news found their footing in this new setting. Technological changes opened the space for these entrepreneurs, and Americans' growing distrust of traditional news organizations helped provide willing viewers.

Thus came the emergence of conservative talk radio, represented by such figures as Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck, and ideological programs on cable channels such as Fox News and MSNBC. These outlets, or at least segments presented on them, present their viewers with an explicitly ideological take on current events. Democrats and Republicans no longer share common "pictures in their heads," to paraphrase Walter Lippmann. Instead, Democrats and Republicans can tune in to like-minded media sources that offer an explicitly one-sided perspective. This shift was instrumental in the creation of separate partisan realities. As such, this change in the media environment also made politics and partisanship more appealing to those individuals who desire firm knowledge—that is, individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure. In today's environment, the media make it much easier for people to seize and freeze on political views by presenting information in an ideologically biased manner that reinforces the messages people are hearing from their political leaders.

The internet furthered this development by creating echo chambers in which people are protected from encountering viewpoints, arguments, and perspectives that might puncture the shared reality offered by their partisan group (Sunstein 2018). Research suggests that most people consume a more diverse media diet than is implied by the term "echo chambers" (e.g., Eady et al. 2019; Guess 2021), but the internet and social media, like cable television, give people more choice over their news sources. Given the natural psychological impulse to avoid cognitive dissonance, the introduction of choice often leads people to selectively consult media sources that bolster their preexisting opinions (Stroud 2011). The internet offers people a space where their beliefs can be, if they so choose, continually and willfully verified, helping those beliefs achieve the status of truth or objective reality. People's beliefs about the political world, their shared reality, become more easily "frozen" when they are not presented with contrasting viewpoints.

While the polarization of the parties around competing ideological goals set the stage for partisanship to be an epistemic provider of cognitive closure, it is unlikely that this change alone would have effectively created the separate realities

that are so appealing to individuals seeking firm knowledge. The parties also needed to burst the power of mainstream news organizations, which in the middle of the twentieth century worked to forge a set of factual beliefs that Democrats and Republicans among the public held in common. To this end, party leaders and media entrepreneurs worked to vilify the mainstream media, weakening trust in those institutions and shifting viewers' attention toward explicitly partisan media that articulated party doctrine (Ladd 2012). Eric Hoffer (1951, 79) describes this process as a strategy typical of extremist political movements: "All active mass movements strive, therefore, to interpose a fact-proof screen between the faithful and the realities of the world." By creating a "screen"—in this case a partisan perceptual screen, to use the phrase coined by Campbell et al. (1960, 133)—through which followers can interpret the world, belief systems become immune to objective reality. What makes for an effective screen? To Hoffer (1951, 80), "the effectiveness of a doctrine does not come from its meaning but from its certitude. No doctrine however profound and sublime will be effective unless it is presented as the embodiment of the one and only truth."

The emergence of like-minded media outlets is a central part of the story of how partisanship has become a more effective provider of a shared reality. For those who dislike uncertainty and crave cognitive closure, tuning in to their side's nightly broadcasts provides reassurance that their beliefs are valid. A tightly bound social network, where like-minded news articles are shared and opposing views are vilified, similarly provides the certainty and solace that individuals with a strong need for closure desire. Prior to the introduction of these technologies, it would have been much harder for separate shared realities differentiating the parties to emerge. Therefore, we should view the new media environment as a key contributor to reforming the nature of partisanship into a place where those seeking firm knowledge and cognitive closure find their certainty.

Social Sorting and Partisan Prototypes

A third important change in the political environment is the social sorting of the party system. Social sorting refers to the fact that the political parties today are divided on the basis of other social identities, such as race, religion, class, and geography (Mason 2018). This separation of the parties along the lines of these social identities provides the parties with more explicit prototypes that provide greater certainty to people about who typical Democrats and Republicans are and what they are like. Democrats are highly educated, racially and ethnically diverse, and atheist or agnostic. Republicans are less educated, white, and Christian. These prototypes exist more in our minds than in reality (e.g., Ahler and

Sood 2018), but because so many people think of Democrats and Republicans in these prototypical ways, identifying someone (including oneself) as a partisan provides "knowledge" about who that person is and what he or she is like. This change in the party system, much like the ideological separation of the parties, has the potential to alleviate psychological uncertainty about the self and others (Hogg 2007).

A number of scholars have documented this recent sorting of the party system. In fact, this social sorting, and its contributions to partisan polarization, is the primary focus of Lilliana Mason's (2018) book. She writes, "We have gone from two parties that are a little bit different in a lot of ways to two parties that are very different in a few powerful ways" (43). Specifically, she shows that the two parties, over the past six decades, have become more distinct from each other in terms of their ideological identity (i.e., liberal or conservative), their religious beliefs, and their racial and ethnic identities. These social distinctions between the parties allow partisanship to become an identity that prescribes prototypes of ingroup and outgroup members. By categorizing oneself as a Democrat or a Republican, one can readily assign prototypical characteristics of that group to oneself, reducing self-related uncertainty.

Indeed, much of the ideological and religious sorting that has occurred over this time period has taken place as partisans have changed their ideological and religious identities to match the increasingly clear prototypes of fellow partisans on these dimensions (Levendusky 2009; Margolis 2018). And while racial and ethnic identities are less subject to partisan-driven change (but not entirely devoid of it either; see, e.g., Egan 2020), racial *attitudes* have increasingly moved in response to beliefs about the prototypical racial attitudes of one's partisan ingroup (Engelhardt 2018). Thus, the social sorting of the two parties has made partisanship a more effective provider of certainty about the self and others and therefore more appealing to those individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure. Social sorting has in fact caused individuals to change some of their own identities to bring them into closer alignment with the perceived identities of their party. This is precisely the type of pattern that social psychologists like Hogg (2007, 80) would anticipate: "When we categorize ourselves, self-categorization, exactly the same process occurs—we assign prescriptive ingroup attributes to ourselves, we autostereotype, conform to group norms, and transform our self-conception."

Another perspective on social sorting is that it varies between the two parties. Grossmann and Hopkins (2016, 67) develop this "asymmetrical perspective" when they write that Democrats "attract voters who endorse specific parts of their policy agenda, who identify with a social group within their coalition, or

who sympathize with the party claiming to fight the powerful on behalf of the downtrodden. In contrast, the Republican Party's potential attractiveness rests on symbolic conservativism and a shared general perspective on the proper role of government in society." This claim that Democrats and Republicans differ qualitatively, with the former emphasizing the social groups in the party's coalition and the latter its ideological worldview, is not necessarily irreconcilable with the group-centric perspective on partisanship that I am offering here. The group-centric perspective, notably, is silent about the *type* of shared reality or group prototypes that parties offer their supporters. Thus, a party in the "groups as epistemic providers" framework could offer prototypes that reduce self-related uncertainty and provide cognitive closure about social groups within the coalition or about the symbolic goals that the party stands for. The key in the group-centric perspective is not the content, but the *manner* in which that content is communicated. As long as the content, whatever it is, is shared within the group, provides clear markers of group identity, and creates boundaries between "us" and "them," it can serve to reduce uncertainty and appeal to individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure. Thus, both the Democratic and Republican Parties can function as epistemic providers despite this asymmetry in the type of goals that they advocate.

This theoretical perspective may also illuminate patterns of group-centric partisanship among supporters of Donald Trump, despite the oft-noted lack of a consistent ideological reality presented to them. Barber and Pope (2019), for instance, have shown that strong Trump supporters willingly follow him regardless of whether the position he takes on an issue is a liberal or conservative one. What characterizes the shared reality from Trump, therefore, is not his ideological positions. Ideological commitments *could* provide a basis for constructing a shared reality, but it is not necessary. In the case of Trump, supporters are not getting ideological closure in the classic sense, but they are getting closure about who the "good guys" and "bad guys" are in the ongoing drama of US politics, about where they should get their news and whom they can trust. Trump supporters also get closure about specific political issues, particularly those (like the Robert Mueller investigation into the 2016 Trump campaign's relations with Russia, or the 2020 election) that directly challenge Trump himself. The content of the shared reality—the precise offerings made available by the group—is endlessly variable. What matters is not the content of that reality, but how it is communicated. As long as a group has a high degree of internal unification in some salient domains, and those domains create sharp boundaries between "us" and "them," that group will be entitative and will be able to help its supporters seize and freeze on their beliefs and their sense of self and where they fit in.

The Crucial Role of Political Attention

The two psychological theories reviewed above state that the desire for cognitive closure causes people to become group-centric because our beliefs about the world and the self are given greater permanence and certainty when those beliefs are shared with like-minded others. But neither theory specifies which groups people will turn to for closure. Both theories state that highly entitative and cohesive groups are more effective at providing closure than internally diverse groups. But a lot of group identities can provide a shared reality and offer comfort to individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure. Why and when, then, would people turn to political parties to fulfill this need?

One condition, discussed above, is the extent to which partisanship offers firm knowledge. As I have argued, the ability of parties to provide seizing and freezing on political beliefs has substantially strengthened over the past fifty years as political elites have polarized, explicitly partisan media have reemerged, and the social/demographic characteristics of Democratic and Republican partisans have become more distinct. But another, perhaps necessary condition is that political identity must be important to people in order for them to use their partisan affiliation for psychological closure. Someone who does not care about politics is unlikely to rely on political identity for psychological closure, and will instead look elsewhere—for instance, to religious identity.

This insight leads to my third theoretical claim: the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and being a group-centric partisan should be concentrated among individuals who are highly knowledgeable about and interested in politics. The concept that I label *political attention*—which I measure with various indicators, including general knowledge of political facts, self-described interest in politics, a preference for partisan media over traditional news sources, and, in one case where these other measures are absent, an individual's level of education—is indicative of two key aspects of an individual that should strengthen the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and the strength of the person's partisan identity. First, those individuals who are more attentive to politics and more highly educated should have greater exposure to elite discourse and partisan media (e.g., Zaller 1992), and thereby be more enmeshed in their parties' "realities." For example, research suggests that political knowledge, rather than promoting more "correct" attitudes, enhances conspiracy beliefs among conservatives—beliefs that are frequently mentioned by Republican Party leaders and in right-wing partisan media (Miller, Saunders, and Farhart 2016)—and polarizes Democrats and Republicans in their views about climate change (Tesler 2018). As one's political attention increases, one becomes more exposed to the separate realities

constructed by the two parties, not necessarily to more accurate opinions. Corwin Smidt's (2017) research on perceptions of party differences, too, shows a clear difference between individuals with high and low levels of political attention in terms of their recognition of stark differences between the parties. Those who are highly attentive are much more likely to see the parties as representing a clear choice, not an echo.

The second characteristic of being highly attentive to politics is that it signals that one's political identity is important to one personally, to one's self-image. This perspective of political attention borrows from that developed by Johnston, Lavine, and Federico (2017, 47), who write that paying attention to politics is partly "rooted in a desire to express core aspects of the self through politics. In this view, people do not expect to change public policy by placing bumper stickers on their cars, by posting political messages on social media, or by arguing with their relatives at Thanksgiving dinner. They engage in these behaviors because they reinforce and signal an important component of their self-image." Consistent with this perspective, Johnston, Lavine, and Federico (2017) show that there is a strong correlation between measures of political interest and general political knowledge, with survey questions asking respondents whether their political attitudes are "an important reflection of who I am" and whether their political preferences "are an important part of my self-image."[2] High levels of political attention, therefore, signal both exposure to the epistemic communities constructed by both parties and that political identity is important to the individual.

Hypothesis

The sections above allow for an integrative statement about the political psychology of the need for cognitive closure and partisan group-centrism in US politics. The three major variables from the theory are (1) individual differences in the need for cognitive closure, (2) variation in the entitativity or polarization of the political parties (i.e., how effectively the parties provide a shared reality to their supporters, which increases as a function of ideological polarization and partisan conflict among elected officials, media fragmentation along partisan or ideological lines, and the extent to which partisanship is associated in the public's mind with clear stereotypes), and (3) individual and contextual differences in political attention. The major empirical hypothesis to be evaluated in subsequent chapters is that the confluence of these three variables creates a group-centric form of partisanship that is reflected in measures such as partisan strength and affective partisan polarization.

The Mueller Investigation as a Case Study of Partisans' Distinct Shared Realities

One case that illustrates the separate realities of the Democratic and Republican Parties is the Robert Mueller investigation of 2017–19, which was charged with investigating accusations that the 2016 Trump presidential campaign had colluded with Russia throughout the 2016 election and that President Trump had obstructed justice during his presidency. As with many contemporaneous controversies, public opinion about this issue was sharply divided by partisanship. For example, a CBS News poll conducted after Attorney General William Barr released his controversial summary of the Mueller report found that while 68 percent of Republicans thought that the report exonerated Trump, only 9 percent of Democrats thought similarly.[3] And like many preceding disputes, this issue is one that—at least for some time—was characterized fundamentally by uncertainty about what really happened. In the face of this uncertainty, political leaders and their media allies were able to craft favorable narratives that provided their viewers with firm knowledge.

The conclusion of the Mueller investigation offered an opportunity for information to be provided with the weight of authority that lay outside the he said–she said battle lines that had been drawn between Democrats and Republicans on the issue. It was for this reason that Donald Trump—back when he still had access to Twitter—tried to paint the Mueller team as simply "13 Angry Democrats." From this perspective, any information Mueller provided in his report could be simply interpreted from this well-established, us-versus-them, partisan frame. Yet the Mueller report never provided the unambiguous certainty that could potentially have punctured the closure that Democratic and Republican partisans had already reached on the issue. Thus, while Mueller concluded that there was insufficient evidence to charge the Trump campaign with a conspiracy to work with Russia during the 2016 campaign, he also detailed numerous interactions between the Trump team and Russia that may have been considered inappropriate. On the obstruction issue, Mueller's report was even more ambiguous. Mueller and his team described several episodes that they considered potential cases of obstruction of justice, but they failed to offer a firm conclusion.

Partisan opinion leaders and talking heads in the media filled this uncertainty with their own conclusions. Trump tweeted, "No Collusion! No Obstruction!" following the release of the report. And on Fox News there were ample opportunities for viewers to come away certain in their belief that Trump had done no wrong. For example, Sean Hannity remarked on May 29, 2019, following Mueller's press conference after the release of his report, "At this hour, what you are hearing from the Democrats [and] their, well, pet parrots in the media mob? Is

nothing more than dumb, idiotic noise. Only noise, per usual, ongoing hysteria. Not about truth, not about facts. You've had two years of lies and hoaxes and conspiracy theories peddled every second, every minute of every hour of every day. And it's just one more round of lying, tinfoil hat conspiracy theories, Trump-bashing over a narrative that is totally dead and buried" (Bump 2019).

As Hannity's remarks indicate, Democrats and Democratic-aligned media offered very different interpretations. Indeed, the response from many Democrats was to call for Trump's impeachment. Kamala Harris, for example, tweeted on May 29, 2019, that "we need to start impeachment proceedings." Rachel Maddow on MSNBC responded to the conclusion of the Mueller report with skepticism about the conclusions that had been reached. To this day, Democrats and Republicans remain divided over the report, its conclusions, and what actions (if any) it warranted. There is not, and likely never will be, a shared consensus on the nature of the 2016 Trump campaign's relations with Russia and Trump's actions while in office. Beliefs about these questions are formed within partisan echo chambers that convey separate realities to their supporters.

Zack Beauchamp (2019), writing for Vox ahead of the Mueller report's release, had anticipated these reactions. He wrote that he was "profoundly pessimistic about the future of the Mueller investigation. Even if Mueller's full report is released in a timely fashion—and that's still an 'if' at this point, not a 'when'—people will read it differently, in each case trying to vindicate their narrative of events. There will never be a *shared sense of reality* about what really happened in 2016 or whether Trump obstructed justice during the investigation. No authoritative document could overcome the deep systemic forces that produced this dispute" (emphasis added). The Mueller investigation, and the partisan reactions to it, reveals the separate realities in which Democrats and Republicans now reside. To return to Kruglanski et al. (2006), the provision of a shared reality is one core function of a social group. When groups provide a shared reality, they work as epistemic providers, turning our subjective beliefs into objective truths. "The sharing of realities has been repeatedly highlighted as a definitional aspect of groupness," Kruglanski et al. (2006, 85) write. As the two parties have divided in the realities they provide to their supporters, they have become more "groupy," or entitative, and thus more appealing, especially to those individuals with a strong psychological need for cognitive closure.

In sum, this dispute reveals the deeply divided realities in which Democrats and Republicans reside in the present era when highly controversial partisan challenges arise. As is evident in this case, both party elites and partisan media entrepreneurs play an important role in conveying these separate realities to partisan supporters. If party elites did not divide so sharply in their reactions to this and similar cases, and if there was no partisan media offering opposing interpretations

to politically engaged supporters, it is hard to imagine that the Mueller report would have divided mass Democrats and Republicans as sharply as it did.

The Rise of the Group-Centric Partisan

To integrate psychological research on group-centrism with broad patterns of historical change in US politics, I have argued that the political environment has increased the appeal of partisanship to those individuals with a psychological need for cognitive closure, particularly those who pay a lot of attention to politics. As a result, highly attentive individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure should exhibit a more group-centric form of partisanship: identifying more strongly with their party, expressing higher levels of affective polarization, and incorporating the parties' perceived values into their own worldview. One implication here is that it is incomplete to explain the rise of group-centric partisanship solely as a product of elite polarization, changes in the media environment, or social sorting. If most people were highly comfortable with doubt and uncertainty, they would be capable of navigating this new environment without becoming group-centric in their partisanship. It is primarily those people *uncomfortable* with doubt and uncertainty, who desire firm knowledge, for whom these structural changes in the political environment have meaningfully altered their partisan identities.

Thus, I hypothesize that those individuals high in the need for cognitive closure have become group-centric partisans precisely because the party system has changed in ways that they find appealing. Similarly, absent these changes in the political environment, those individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure would likely remain ambivalent about politics. When the two parties overlap, and lack internally coherent goals and inconsistent membership criteria, they are perceived as too ambiguous to offer firm knowledge or cognitive closure. In short, the rise of group-centric partisanship can be accounted for only by recognizing how the changes in the political environment have created parties that fulfill the psychological needs of the cognitively closed. In the remaining chapters, I set about assessing these hypotheses, starting first with an empirical assessment of the relationship between psychological closure and group-centric partisanship.

2

THE NEED FOR COGNITIVE CLOSURE AND PARTISAN GROUP-CENTRISM

One of the dominant trends over the past few decades of US politics has been the increasing partisanship of the US electorate. Studies have reported that strength of party identification is on the rise (Mason 2015), that the most engaged partisans are motivated more by the emotional stakes of winning and losing than by the policy consequences of election returns (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015), that feelings about the parties have become more intense and divided (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012), and that more partisans are intolerant toward the idea of interparty marriage (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). All of these outcomes are expressions of what I label group-centric partisanship, and from the perspective of viewing each of these variables as expressions of the same underlying trait, it is not particularly surprising that they have all risen in tandem. Here, I provide an empirical assessment that examines and analyzes the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and each of these outcomes—partisan strength, intensity of partisan social identity, difference in feelings about the two parties, and attitudes toward interparty marriage—among both Republicans and Democrats. Researchers have found rising responses to all four of these measures, ushering in a wave of scholarship on the concept of affective polarization. The findings reported in this chapter therefore are relevant for those interested in the causes of affective polarization in US society. To the extent that the partisan group-centrism hypothesis is valid, I expect to find that NFCC increases each of these outcomes among politically attentive Republicans and Democrats.

Data and Methodological Details

Data for the subsequent analyses come from three separate sources: a nationally representative 2008 survey collected by Christopher Federico through GfK networks, a representative survey from 2014 that I collected through YouGov, and a 2018 SSI study that I collected. Each of these surveys contains unique indicators of group-centric partisanship. For instance, the GfK study, which also has the best claim to being nationally representative given that firm's subject recruitment methodology, contains a traditional measure of strong partisanship. The YouGov study captured the partisan social identity scale and feeling thermometers toward both parties. And the SSI survey was administered to ask respondents a revised measure of attitudes regarding interparty marriage (Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan 2018). All three of these surveys were administered in an environment of high political polarization or party entitativity. Therefore, the second variable of the model is constant in these analyses, and what varies are individual differences in the need for cognitive closure and political attention. The hypothesis for this chapter, therefore, is that the interaction of NFCC and political attention will be positively associated with these various indicators of group-centric partisanship.[1]

In all of the models presented in this chapter, I control for standard demographic characteristics often used in political behavior research: age, education, income, sex, and race/ethnicity. I also include a control variable for *ideological self-identification*, a measure that seems to mostly reflect a social identification as either liberal or conservative (Mason 2018). This measure in all surveys is derived from a question asking respondents to categorize themselves on a seven-point scale from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. As Mason (2015) shows, partisans who share their party's ideological identity also exhibit the most partisan polarization. The second substantive control variable I include in the analysis is an index of respondents' extremism in response to questions about their issue attitudes (ranging from moderate on all issues to extreme on all issues). One theory is that partisan strength and affective polarization reflect different substantive disagreements between Democrats and Republicans over policy issues (e.g., Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012; Webster and Abramowitz 2017). The policy extremism variable controls for the likelihood that some people are driven to express a group-centric form of partisanship because they feel very strongly about policy issues.

One common strategy in past research on some of these outcome variables, the feeling thermometer difference variable in particular (what political scientists have taken to calling affective polarization), is to control for partisan strength. That is, many researchers will examine the relationship between partisan strength and affective polarization, modeling an assumption that the former precedes or causes

the latter. For both theoretical and empirical reasons, I do not take that approach here. Part of my rationale for this decision is my conception of these outcomes as expressions of the same underlying latent variable of group-centric partisanship. Theoretically, therefore, modeling any one of these variables as a function of another is at least partly tautological. Empirically, it is not clear that partisan self-categorization precedes feelings about the parties, the assumption made in models in which partisan strength is included as a predictor of affective polarization. Affect, in fact, is widely theorized to precede cognition (e.g., Zajonc 1980), a notion that would suggest modeling partisan strength as a function of affective feelings toward the parties, rather than vice versa. My goal, however, is not to tease out the relations among different components of the group-centric conception of partisanship. Rather, my agenda is to assess whether psychological closure increases the expression of group-centric partisanship (and whether it does so among members of both parties). The clearest way to pursue this agenda is to model the relationship between NFCC and the various indicators of group-centric partisanship, conditional only on demographic variables and variables capturing alternative theories of these outcomes (e.g., ideological identity and policy preferences). That is the approach that the models below are designed to follow.

In presenting the findings, I focus on communicating the most central results about the relationship between NFCC, political attention, and partisan group-centrism. Interested readers can see the full tables in appendix B.

Study 1: Partisan Strength

In the first set of analyses, I examine the relationship between NFCC and the probability of a respondent identifying as a strong partisan. Partisan strength, I have claimed, is one expression of group-centric partisanship. Being a strong partisan captures the knowledge-of-group-identification dimension mentioned by Tajfel (1972), as well as the loyalty component of group-centrism identified by Kruglanski et al. (2006). Strength of partisan identification, therefore, is one component of the social identity theory of partisanship, and being a strong partisan is one way for an individual to express a group-centric form of partisanship.

Partisan strength is also widely acknowledged to be an important variable in political science, though more scholarship has investigated its effects than its causes. For instance, researchers have shown that strong partisans are more politically engaged and more biased in favor of their party (e.g., Bartels 2002; Fowler and Kam 2007), and are the least supportive of bipartisanship (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). To the extent that strong partisanship reflects strong social

identification with a political party and group-centric impulses, it should be rooted in the same motivation that drives group-centrism generally: the need for cognitive closure. This section presents a test of this possibility.

For this analysis, I utilize the 2008 GfK study, which contains a fourteen-item measure of the need-for-cognitive-closure scale (Pierro and Kruglanski 2006). Consistent with previous scholars, I find in this data set that more Republicans than Democrats score high on NFCC. Twenty-four percent of Republicans score in the top quartile of NFCC, compared to 20 percent of Democrats, while 36 percent of Democrats reside in the bottom quartile of the variable, compared to only 23 percent of Republicans. The remainder of respondents score somewhere in between. The data set also includes three indicators of political attention: self-described *political interest*, an eight-item measure of *general political knowledge*, and a two-item measure of *political-identity centrality*, which measures how important respondents say their political beliefs are to their self-concept.

The dependent variable is a traditional measure of partisan strength based on a measure of partisanship with seven response options: strong Democrat (18 percent), not-so-strong Democrat (16 percent), lean Democrat (10 percent), independent (13 percent), lean Republican (9 percent), not-so-strong Republican (14 percent), and strong Republican (19 percent).[2] Using this measure, I examine, using a binary logistic regression model, whether the need for cognitive closure predicts identification as a strong partisan (vs. a not-so-strong partisan or a partisan leaner) at high levels of political attention, and among Democrats and Republicans separately. Appendix A includes a list of the survey questions that go into the measurement of these key variables.[3] For ease of interpretation, each variable in the following analysis is rescored to range from 0 to 1, except for age, which is kept in its natural metric.

According to my hypothesis, I predict that the probability of a respondent identifying strongly with his or her party should rise as the need for cognitive closure rises, among respondents who are highly attentive to politics. Indeed, I find no significant direct relationship between NFCC and partisan strength among either Democrats ($b = 0.38$, $p <$ *n.s.*) or Republicans ($b = 0.60$, $p <$ *n.s.*) in this study. This is not surprising, however, as I anticipate that the relationship between NFCC and being a strong partisan will be concentrated among people who know and care about politics. The best way to test this prediction is with an analysis that models partisan strength as a function of an interaction between NFCC and political attention.

Table 2.1 presents the results of models estimating the probability of a Republican respondent identifying strongly with the Republican Party as an interactive function of NFCC and three measures of political attention (for full results,

including control variables, see appendix B). As indicated in the table, the coefficient estimate for the interaction between NFCC and political attention is in the expected (positive) direction for all three indicators of political attention, but attains statistical significance in only one case (with the political-identity centrality variable). These findings suggest that, among highly attentive respondents, going from a low to a high value of NFCC increases the probability of a Republican respondent identifying strongly with the Republican Party, but in only one case can we make that inference with a high degree of statistical certainty.

In that latter case, the findings suggest a strong relationship between partisan strength and the psychological need for cognitive closure, among those Republican respondents who say that their political beliefs are an important reflection of their identity. Approximately 40 percent of Republican respondents score highly on the political-identity centrality scale. Fifty percent of Republican respondents in the survey agree or strongly agree with the statement that their political attitudes and beliefs are an important reflection of who they are, while 32 percent agree or strongly agree that their political attitudes are a part of their self-image. The political-identity centrality variable combines responses to these two questions. For respondents who score highly on this variable, the results in model 3 of table 2.1 suggest that NFCC plays a powerful role indeed in predicting the strength of Republican partisanship.

Specifically, among Republican respondents who score in the highest quintile of the political-identity centrality variable, the average marginal effect (AME) of going from the lowest to the highest value of NFCC is to increase

TABLE 2.1 NFCC, political attention, and partisan strength—Republicans

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP
NFCC	−2.05	−0.17	−7.10**
	(3.181)	(4.916)	(2.224)
NFCC × Political interest	3.24		
	(4.043)		
NFCC × Political knowledge		1.03	
		(5.815)	
NFCC × Political-identity centrality			12.39**
			(3.218)
N	626	626	626

Logistic regression model coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. Control variables include income, education, age, white, Black, female, ideology, and policy extremism.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

the probability of a respondent being a strong partisan by 0.66. The average marginal effect can be interpreted in this and the following studies as the effect of moving from the lowest to the highest value on the NFCC measure on the outcome variable, as averaged across each observation in the sample. A 0.66 increase in the probability of strong Republican identification as a function of moving from the lowest to the highest value of NFCC is, to put it bluntly, a huge effect. Not all Republicans who say that their political beliefs are important to them are equally likely to be strong Republicans. Those who score highly on the NFCC scale are much more likely to be strong than weak partisans, while those with a weak need for closure are significantly less likely to be strong partisans. Among the large and politically significant subgroup of Republican respondents who say that their political attitudes are personally relevant to them, therefore, NFCC has a very powerful ability to predict who is and who is not a strong Republican partisan.

Next, I run the same analyses but among Democrats instead of Republicans. This is the critical analysis for assessing the group-centric partisanship hypothesis. Is the closing of the partisan mind limited to Republicans, or is it bipartisan? If it is bipartisan, we should again observe a positive and statistically significant interaction between NFCC and political attention in predicting the strength of partisanship among self-identified Democrats.

Table 2.2 presents the results. Here we again see a consistent positive interaction between NFCC, political attention, and partisan strength. In this case, however, the key interaction term is statistically significant in each case. Therefore, we have here even more dispositive evidence in support of the partisan group-centrism thesis. At high levels of political attention, as measured by political interest, general political knowledge, and political-identity centrality, the need for cognitive closure is strongly predictive of partisan strength among self-identified Democrats. Thus, even though it is true that more Republicans than Democrats have a strong need for closure, it is also true that, at high levels of political attention, high-NFCC Democrats are more likely to be strong supporters of their party than low-NFCC Democrats.

To better illustrate these findings, I will unpack the relationship between NFCC, political knowledge, and strong Democratic partisanship. The political knowledge scale in this survey is based on eight factual questions about US political institutions and leaders (e.g., How long is the term of office for a US senator?). Twenty percent of Democrats in the 2008 GfK survey answered all eight questions correctly. My findings suggest that it is among these most knowledgeable respondents that the need for cognitive closure leads to stronger partisan identity. Specifically, for these "political experts," the average marginal effect of going from the lowest to the highest value in the need for cognitive closure is associated

TABLE 2.2 NFCC, political attention, and partisan strength—Democrats

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP
NFCC	−3.86*	−3.75*	−3.67*
	(2.138)	(2.151)	(2.027)
NFCC × Political interest	5.85**		
	(2.672)		
NFCC × Political knowledge		5.80**	
		(2.871)	
NFCC × Political-identity centrality			6.57**
			(2.941)
N	650	650	650

Logistic regression model coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. Control variables include income, education, age, white, Black, female, ideology, and policy extremism.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

with an increase of 0.29 in the predicted probability of a respondent identifying as a strong Democrat.

Strong partisans are some of the most politically active Americans. They vote at high rates and are among the most eager to have their voices heard. What makes someone a strong partisan? These findings suggest that the need for cognitive closure is part of the answer. For people who crave certainty and a shared reality, becoming a strong partisan appears to be a viable means for achieving cognitive closure. This, however, is true in these surveys only for people who, for whatever reason, care about and are interested in politics. This makes sense, as politics can be confusing, complicated, and difficult—precisely what people with a strong need for closure dislike. Yet having a strong need for closure is likely to push those who are interested in and knowledgeable about politics toward becoming strong partisans, and this is true regardless of whether they identify as Republicans or Democrats.

Study 2: Partisan Social Identity Strength

In this next study, I examine the relationship between the need for cognitive closure, political attention, and a variable labeled partisan social identity strength. The partisan social identity strength measure was created by Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015) to provide an indicator of partisan strength that better matches with social identity theory, and that better captures variation in the intensity of one's partisan commitments. This measure is intended to reflect the expressive, identity-based theory of partisanship. Questions in the scale ask people how

important their partisan identity is to them, how well the term "Democrat" or "Republican" applies to them, whether they use the word "we" instead of "they" when talking about their partisan ingroup, and the extent to which they think about themselves as being members of the party they say they support. Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015) validate the expressive dimension of this measure by showing that people with strong partisan social identities respond more to threats to their group's political standing than to threats to the group's policy positions.

But while this measure is surely an improvement over the traditional indicator of partisan strength that I assessed in the previous section, it does not fully capture all dimensions of social identity theory. In particular, the measure seems to prioritize cognitive self-categorization over the emotional and value significance of group membership. Moreover, the measure does not incorporate attitudes about the partisan outgroup, a component that Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) remind us is key to the social identity definition. Therefore, this measure, too, I suggest, should be viewed as another expression of group-centric partisanship. It greatly improves on previous measures of partisan self-categorization, and especially the intensity of that identity, but alone the measure does not fully reflect the social identity of partisanship. I hypothesize that NFCC will increase partisan social identity strength, particularly among those who are highly attentive to politics, and for both Republicans and Democrats.

To assess these predictions, I administered a survey in 2014 using the research firm YouGov (*N* = 1,200).[4] The survey included a fifteen-item measure of the need for cognitive closure (Roets and Van Hiel 2011b), two measures of political attention (a political knowledge questionnaire and a measure of self-described political interest), and the partisan social identity scale, as provided in Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015). The specific survey questions for these main items are provided in appendix A. As in the previous analysis, the NFCC and political attention measures are here rescored to range from 0 to 1.

Unlike the partisan strength measure in the previous analysis, this measure of partisan social identity strength is a continuous variable (which, again, I rescore to range from 0 to 1), with 0 indicating the weakest possible social identification with one's party and 1 the strongest identification. The mean rating on the scale is 0.63 for self-identified Democrats and 0.62 for Republicans. Twenty-one percent of Democrats, and 15 percent of Republicans, say that their partisanship is "extremely" important to them. Seventeen percent of Democrats, and 11 percent of Republicans, say that the term "Democrat" (or "Republican") describes them "extremely well." Eleven percent of Democrats, and 6 percent of Republicans, report using the word "we" instead of "they" when talking about the party they support. And finally, 38 percent of Democrats, compared to 33 percent of Republicans,

say that they think of themselves as being a Democrat (or Republican) "a great deal" of the time. Scoring a 1 on the combined variable, as 6 percent of Democrats and 3 percent of Republicans do, indicates the strongest response to all four of the partisan social identity questions.

With respect to the need for cognitive closure, this survey confirmed the general rigidity-of-the-Right pattern (as described in chapter 1): there tend to be slightly more Republicans than Democrats at high values of the need-for-closure scale, and more Democrats at low values of NFCC. But this pattern does not rule out the prediction of group-centric partisanship that NFCC will increase strength of partisanship among politically attentive individuals regardless of whether they identify with Republicans or Democrats. Here I test that prediction with a similar analysis, as reported above: interacting NFCC with measures of political attention in the prediction of partisan social identity strength. The results of an analysis modeling the direct relationship between NFCC and partisan social identity strength reveal again an insignificant pattern among Democrats ($b = 0.04$, $p < n.s.$) and Republicans ($b = -0.00$, $p < n.s.$). Does NFCC increase partisan social identity strength at high levels of political attentiveness?

The results in table 2.3 are generally consistent with theoretical expectations. In three of four analyses, the interaction term between NFCC and political attention (here measured with an indicator of political knowledge and political interest) reaches statistical significance, and in all four cases the relationship is in the anticipated positive direction. Thus, these findings indicate that, at high levels of political attention, going from a low to a high value on the need-for-cognitive-closure scale increases the strength of an individual's partisan social identity.

TABLE 2.3 NFCC, political attention, and partisan social identity strength

VARIABLES	REPUBLICANS		DEMOCRATS	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY STRENGTH	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY STRENGTH	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY STRENGTH	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY STRENGTH
NFCC	–0.51*	–0.34**	–0.40*	–0.17
	(0.278)	(0.146)	(0.227)	(0.183)
NFCC × Political knowledge	0.65*		0.68**	
	(0.335)		(0.283)	
NFCC × Political interest		0.50**		0.43
		(0.200)		(0.263)
N	373	373	508	508

OLS coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. Control variables include income, education, age, white, Black, female, ideology, and policy extremism.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

In this data set, approximately 40 percent of Republicans scored at the highest level of political knowledge, as did approximately 34 percent of Democrats. It is among these most knowledgeable respondents that a strong need for closure produces the strongest increase in partisan social identity strength. For knowledgeable Republicans, the average marginal effect of going from a low to a high value of NFCC increases the predicted level of partisan social identity strength by 0.14, on the 0–1 scale. For Democrats, the AME of NFCC on partisan social identity strength among the most knowledgeable is even more pronounced: going from the lowest to the highest value of NFCC is estimated to lead to an increase in partisan social identity strength of 0.28 on the 0–1 scale, or an increase of 28 percentage points. These are by no means trivial effects. For the most knowledgeable respondents, these findings once again suggest that the need for cognitive closure is a pronounced predictor of being a group-centric partisan.

Study 3: Party Feeling Thermometers

In this section I examine the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and a measure of party feeling thermometers. The party feeling thermometers ask people to rate both the Democratic and Republican Parties on a "feeling thermometer" that ranges from 0 to 100, where scores below 50 indicate "cold" feelings and scores above 50 indicate "warm" feelings (50, therefore, serves as a neutral point). Recently, these feeling thermometers have gained increasing attention by political scientists, as it has been shown that the gap between the ratings people give to their own party and the ratings given to the outparty has grown (e.g., Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). This trend has become indicative of a phenomenon that Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) label "affective polarization."

Affective polarization refers to the increasingly divided feelings that people have toward their own party compared to the opposite party. In the past, people liked their own party slightly more than the opposite party; today they like their own party much more. To capture this phenomenon, researchers like Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) subtract respondents' feelings toward the opposite party from their feelings toward their own party. Positive scores on this feeling thermometer difference variable indicate that the respondents express more warmth toward their own party than toward the opposition. As I have stated, I believe that affective polarization provides a valid measure of the emotional dimension of partisan social identity. For that reason, I include the measure as another indicator of group-centric partisanship.

Here I examine the extent to which NFCC is associated with more positive values on the feeling thermometer difference variable. As in the previous sections, I estimate scores on the feeling thermometer difference variable as a function of the interaction between NFCC and measures of political attention. I include the same set of control variables mentioned in the above analyses. As in the previous two studies, all variables except age have been rescored to range from 0 to 1.

The data for this analysis come again from the 2014 YouGov study described in the previous section. The dependent variable is derived from subtracting respondents' ratings of the opposite party from their ratings of their own party on the feeling thermometer. In its natural metric, this feeling thermometer difference variable ranges, in theory, from +100 to −100, where +100 indicates the warmest feelings for one's own party and the coldest feelings for the opposite party, 0 indicates an equal rating for each party, and −100 signals a rating for the opposite party at the warmest level and one's own party at the coldest level. In practice, most people score positively on the feeling thermometer scale, indicating warmer feelings for the party they identify with than for the opposition. In the current data set, values on the feeling thermometer difference variable range from +100 to −74. Most respondents (85 percent), however, score above 0, indicating a relative preference for their own party; another 11 percent score at 0, rating both parties equally; the remainder indicate having warmer feelings for the opposite party than for their own. In the analyses below, I rescore the variable to range from 0 to 1 to ease interpretation. The results of an analysis modeling the direct relationship between NFCC and the party feeling thermometer variable reveal once again an insignificant pattern among both Democrats ($b = 0.02$, $p < n.s.$) and Republicans ($b = 0.08$, $p < n.s.$). Table 2.4 presents the results of the critical interaction model between NFCC, political attention, and party feeling thermometer differences.

In three of four tests in table 2.4, the interaction between NFCC and political attention is positive and statistically significant in predicting party feeling thermometer levels. Those who score high in both the need for cognitive closure and political attention are more likely to have more extreme ratings on the party feeling thermometer difference variable, indicating more positive feelings toward their own party than toward the opposition. Thus, among the politically attentive, and for both Republicans and Democrats, higher levels of cognitive closure are associated with higher levels of affective partisan polarization.

For example, approximately 27 percent of Republicans and 20 percent of Democrats indicated in the survey that they "always" pay attention to politics and elections (the highest value on the variable I labeled "political interest"). For these individuals, highly attuned to political affairs, the need for cognitive closure plays a strong role in differentiating those with a high degree of affective

TABLE 2.4 NFCC, political attention, and party feeling thermometer differences

VARIABLES	REPUBLICANS		DEMOCRATS	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE
NFCC	0.03	−0.15	−0.53**	−0.17
	(0.244)	(0.150)	(0.134)	(0.142)
NFCC × Political knowledge	0.07		0.90**	
	(0.288)		(0.180)	
NFCC × Political interest		0.35*		0.42**
		(0.201)		(0.196)
N	373	373	508	508

OLS coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. Control variables include income, education, age, white, Black, female, ideology, and policy extremism.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

polarization from those with more moderate attitudes toward the parties. Among the most attentive Republicans, the average marginal effect of going from the lowest to the highest value of NFCC is associated with a 35-point increase in the feeling thermometer difference score (using the variable's natural metric). Among the most attentive Democrats, by comparison, the AME of going from the lowest to the highest value of NFCC is associated with a 44-point increase. In short, among those who are most frequently tuning in to politics, those with a strong need for closure are much more polarized by this metric than those with a weak need for closure. The closed exhibit much more extreme and divided feelings about the parties than the open.

Study 4: Attitudes about Interparty Marriage

The final analysis I will report on in this chapter is of the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and attitudes about interparty marriage. Marital attitudes are frequent indicators of social distance and prejudice. In the United States, for example, opposition toward interracial marriage has been used as an indicator of racism (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2006). Research has also shown that attitudes about marriage across ethnic lines in Africa are indicative of the degree to which ethnic groups are socially and politically divided (e.g., Posner 2004). Marital attitudes therefore reflect an enduring indicator of the extent to which groups see themselves as divided and their willingness to tolerate, intermingle with, and live among other members of their community.

Thus, it was somewhat shocking to many when Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) showed in their article on the rise of affective polarization that large and increasing numbers of Democrats and Republicans expressed opposition or unease at the prospect of having a son or daughter marry someone across party lines. According to them, in 1960, when survey researchers asked partisans to express thoughts about interparty marriage, few people (approximately 5 percent) expressed any intolerance toward the idea. But they find that in more recent years, a large number of both Democrats and Republicans state that they would feel unhappy if a son or daughter of theirs married someone from the opposite party. The authors report, based on a 2010 survey, that approximately one out of every four partisans would be "somewhat upset" or "very upset" about the possibility of interparty marriage. Since the publication of that article, attitudes toward interparty marriage have become another indicator of affective partisan polarization. I believe that the interparty marriage item also reflects core dimensions of the social identity concept. It reflects a sense of loyalty to the ingroup and a visceral, emotional rejection of the outgroup. Hence, this item, too, I suggest, provides another way of assessing the extent to which a respondent is a group-centric partisan.

In an article published in 2018, and using the same YouGov data set analyzed in the two previous sections of this chapter, I showed that the need for cognitive closure is associated with a higher probability of a respondent—at least, a politically attentive respondent—indicating an opposition to interparty marriage (Luttig 2018). Like the findings reported above, this association was positive and statistically significant for both Republicans and Democrats. Hence, using this indicator of social distance or affective polarization, I reported another piece of evidence consistent with the rigidity-of-the-(partisan)-extremes hypothesis.

But research has subsequently emerged that challenges the validity of the traditional measure of attitudes toward interparty marriage. Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan (2018) convincingly argue that the original survey questions measuring attitudes about interparty marriage potentially conflated negative attitudes toward the outparty specifically with negative attitudes toward both parties. As Klar and Krupnikov (2016) show, a number of people have gone "undercover" in their partisanship—not expressing their partisan identities or engaging in expressive partisan behavior—because they believe it is no longer socially desirable to identify with the parties. As a result, individuals who are opposed to having their children marry someone from the opposite political party may also be opposed to having their children marry someone from their own party. To quote Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan (2018, 381), "In order to measure affective *polarization* properly, one must identify those who both *dislike the outparty* and *like their inparty*. When researchers ask only about dislike for the other party, they run the risk of overestimating affective polarization" (emphasis in the original).

Past measures of attitudes toward interparty marriage, including those I have published, do not sufficiently distinguish dislike of members from the opposite party specifically from dislike of partisanship generally. My purpose in this section is to attempt to remedy this shortcoming of my prior publication and to assess whether, using a revised measure of attitudes toward interparty marriage proposed by Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan (2018), the need for cognitive closure is predictive of a preference for having offspring marry a member of their own party rather than a supporter of the political opposition.

In 2018 I commissioned a survey with the research firm SSI to address this concern by including questions that ask respondents how they would feel if one of their children married someone from both the Democratic and Republican Parties, capturing sentiment toward both inparty and outparty marriage and, therefore, better capturing the concept of affective polarization. The dependent variable here is a measure of *relative* preference for intraparty versus interparty marriage. If the need for cognitive closure increases opposition toward marriage of members of both parties, then it should be unrelated to this measure of social distance that incorporates feelings toward both inparty and outparty marriage. On the other hand, if NFCC contributes to group-centric partisanship, it should lead to a greater preference for inparty marriage relative to outparty marriage, and among supporters of both the Republican and Democratic Parties.[5]

Another feature of the 2018 SSI survey is that I included a measure of media preference as another indicator of political attention. Recall that the attentive are characterized by both their cognitive ability and their motivations. But the political interest variable used above potentially conflates two distinct motives: to be better informed and to have one's preexisting views validated. News choice provides a way to distinguish between these two motivations. Those who say they prefer like-minded media sources (Fox News for Republicans, MSNBC for Democrats) rather than a news show from a more neutral place such as PBS are, arguably, revealing their motivation for confirming their views rather than for obtaining neutral information. Thus, I hypothesize that the need for cognitive closure will be associated with group-centric partisanship (in this case, opposition to interparty marriage) more among those who use the media for affirmation (like-minded news) than among those who use the media to become informed (PBS). The political attention and NFCC variables are all, for the sake of interpretation, rescored to range from 0 to 1 in the following analysis.

The dependent variable in the following study takes values ranging from −3 to +4 (and is kept in that metric in the analyses below). Negative numbers

indicate a greater preference for outparty marriage, while positive numbers indicate a preference for inparty marriage (0 indicates that respondents answered identically in their attitudes about inparty and outparty marriage). Approximately 58 percent of respondents indicated no preference for inparty or outparty marriage, 5 percent indicated a preference for outparty marriage, and the remaining 37 percent indicated a relative preference for inparty marriage and thus a group-centric form of partisanship. Does the psychological need for cognitive closure continue to explain variation in partisan marital attitudes using this measure?

The answer is unequivocally yes. First, note that I find in this study a significant *direct* effect of NFCC on affective polarization. Going from a low to a high level of the need for cognitive closure is associated with greater bias in favor of inparty marriage among both Republicans ($b = 0.76$, $p < 0.05$) and Democrats ($b = 0.74$, $p < 0.05$). As anticipated by my theory and hypotheses, however, this effect is concentrated among highly attentive respondents and among those who indicate a preference for like-minded over neutral news. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 provide a look at the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and partisan polarization across low and high levels of political attention among Republicans (figure 2.1) and Democrats (figure 2.2). Thus, figure 2.1 shows that the need for closure is associated with partisan group-centrism (as indicated by a greater preference for inparty relative to outparty marriage) among Republicans, but only for those who are interested in politics, say that their political identities are important to their self-image, prefer like-minded news, and are high in general political knowledge. For Republicans who do not follow politics, the need for cognitive closure is unrelated to this expression of group-centric partisanship.

Figure 2.2 shows a similar pattern among Democrats. At low levels of political attention, the need for cognitive closure is inconsistently related to group-centric partisanship. But at high attention levels (interest in politics, identity centrality, preference for like-minded news, and general political knowledge), NFCC increases the extent to which Democrats express a preference for inparty relative to outparty marriage. But the interaction term between NFCC and political attention on marital attitudes among Democrats is statistically significant only for the attention variables of interest in politics ($p < 0.05$) and political knowledge ($p < 0.05$). In short, the 2018 SSI survey provides consistent support for the partisan group-centrism hypothesis: the need for cognitive closure is associated with opposition to interparty marriage among both Democrats and Republicans, especially those who pay a lot of attention to the political environment.

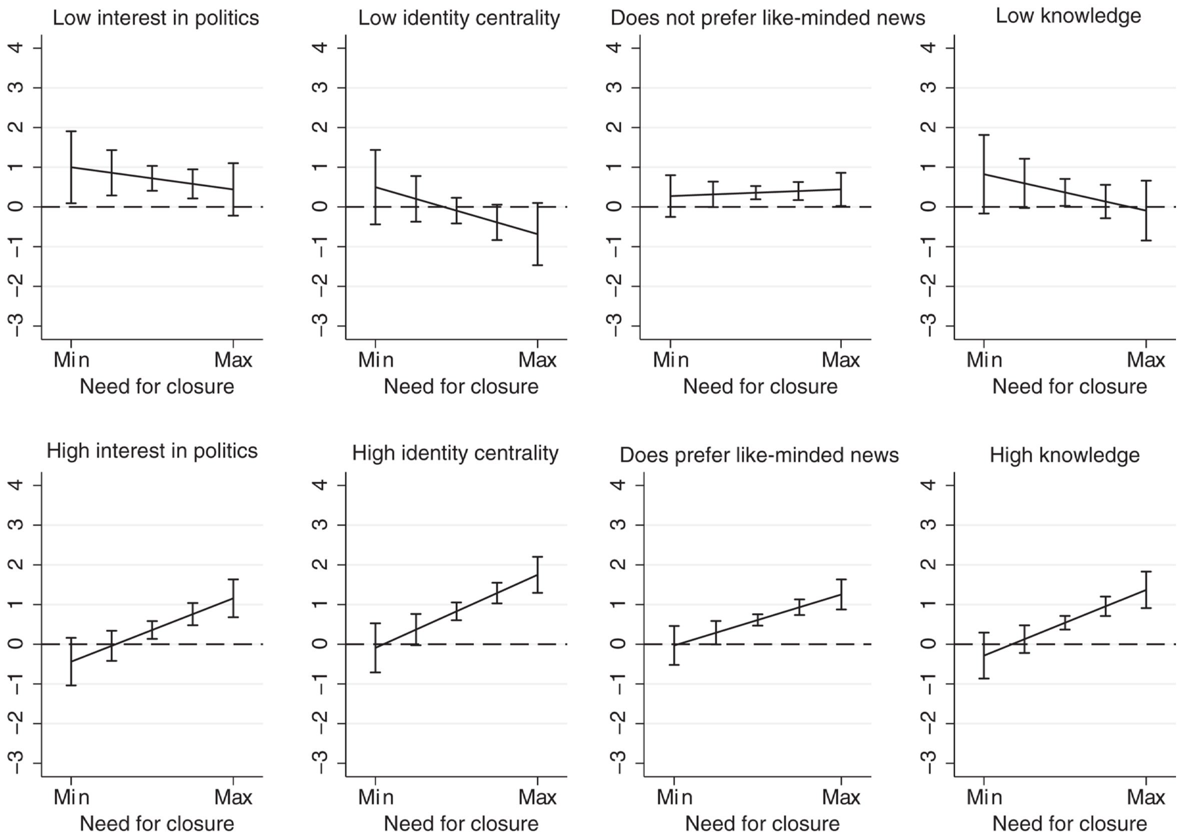

FIGURE 2.1 Relationship between the need for closure and affective polarization at low and high levels of political attention—Republicans. Note: Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

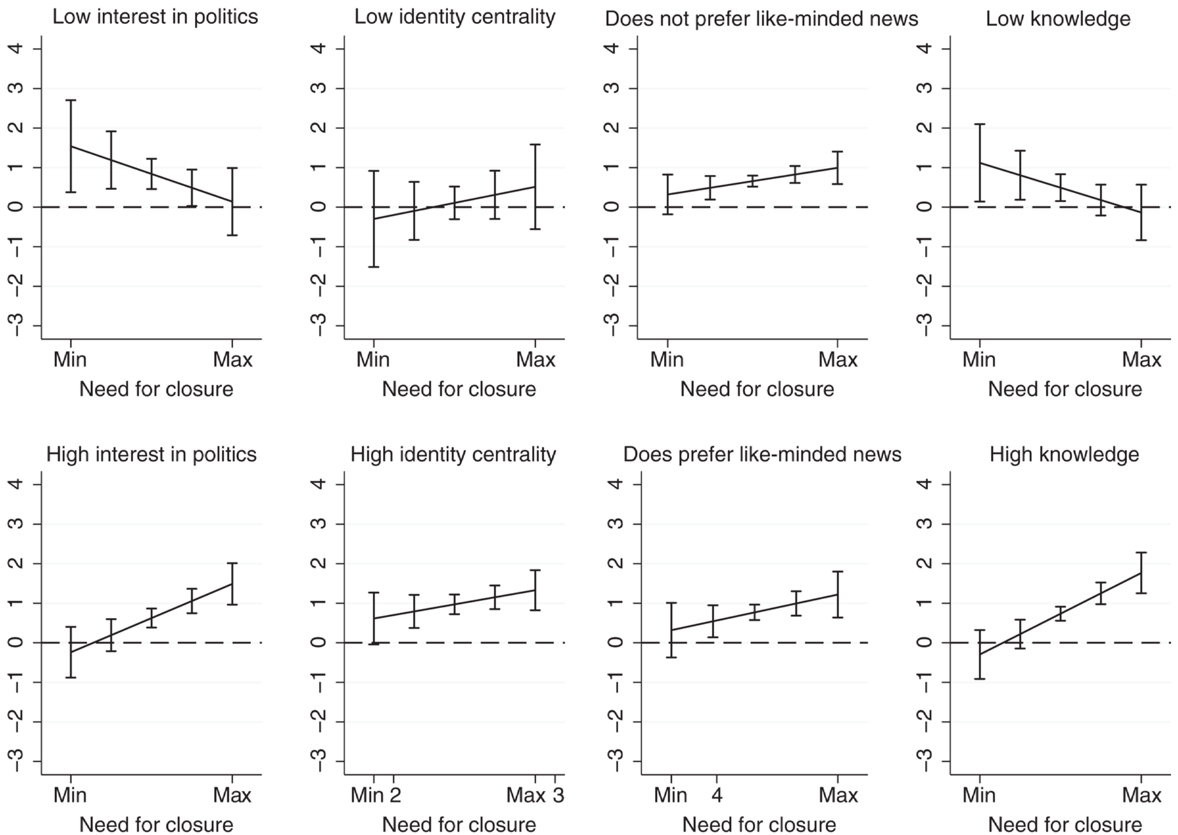

FIGURE 2.2 Relationship between need for closure and affective polarization at low and high levels of political attention—Democrats. Note: Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

The Need for Cognitive Closure and Political Independence

The studies above suggest that stronger levels of the need for cognitive closure are associated, among the politically attentive, with being a more group-centric type of partisan: NFCC increases partisan strength, the intensity of partisans' social identification with their party, levels of affective polarization, and intolerance of interparty marriage. The flip side of these findings is that lower levels of NFCC are associated with a *weakened* form of partisanship. Among respondents who indicate a partisan affiliation, the findings above suggest, individuals with greater cognitive openness are more likely to "lean" toward their party or be a "not strong" partisan, have weaker social identifications with their party, be less affectively polarized, and be more tolerant of interparty marriage. Furthermore, my data also suggest that individuals with a weak need for cognitive closure are more likely to shun partisanship altogether, compared to individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure. NFCC, therefore, provides some insight into today's "pure" independents, but the results of these analyses are more suggestive than definitive.

For instance, in the 2008 Knowledge Networks survey, the interaction between NFCC and political knowledge is a statistically significant predictor of identification as a "pure" independent ($b = -7.29$, $p < 0.05$). At high levels of political knowledge, as the need for cognitive closure rises, the probability of identifying as a pure independent falls. This is what the theory of groups as epistemic providers would anticipate. As parties become perceived as effective providers of cognitive closure, they appeal more to individuals with a strong need for closure, and people with a weak need for closure become turned off from partisanship.[6]

An analysis of the relationship between NFCC and "pure" Independence from the political parties from the 2014 YouGov study presents similar findings. In that study, I find a significant main effect between NFCC and identification as a "pure Independent" ($b = -1.27$, $p < 0.10$). This finding suggests that as NFCC *weakens* (and openness rises), the likelihood of shunning partisanship altogether increases. There is also evidence suggesting that this finding strengthens at high levels of political knowledge, replicating the finding from the 2008 Knowledge Networks data ($b = -2.98$, $p = 0.144$). This finding, however, while suggestive, falls short of conventional levels of statistical significance, so we should interpret that finding with caution.

These results suggest that NFCC can be used to identify both sides of the partisanship spectrum: strong partisans and those abandoning their partisan identities altogether. At one end are concentrated individuals with a strong need for closure. Politically attentive strong Democrats and strong Republicans alike share

a similar psychological need for cognitive closure. Their polar opposite in terms of psychology is not the other side, therefore, but those who are less partisan or completely independent. This divide, I suggest, is as important as the Left-Right divide. Individuals who are more open appear, in the present context of US politics, to find partisanship unappealing, as neither party embraces a complicated and ambivalent stance on, or approach to, pressing political questions.

Summary and Implications

The analyses reported in the four studies provide the first support for the rigidity-of-the-extremes hypothesis. I examined the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and partisan group-centrism using four dependent variables: partisan strength, partisan social identity strength, party feeling thermometer differences, and attitudes toward interparty marriage. The results have been consistent: the need for closure is a strong predictor of each outcome variable for both Republicans and Democrats at high levels of political attention. These results provide support for the theory of group-centric partisanship. The conflict between Democrats and Republicans does not appear to originate in a clash between rigid right-wingers and open-minded leftists; instead, strong partisans on both sides are characterized by a psychological characteristic—the need for cognitive closure—associated with group-centrism and psychological rigidity.

It is also noteworthy that NFCC is positively associated with each of these outcome variables. That consistency across these dependent variables supports the conception of each of these variables as separate indicators of a group-centric form of partisanship characterized by a strong sense of belonging, an affective divide in feelings toward the ingroup relative to the outgroup, and a willingness to conform to the parties' perceived values. Therefore, the growth in both the number of strong partisans and affective partisan polarization in US politics can be viewed as a simultaneous expression of a group-centric form of partisanship rooted in the need for cognitive closure.

A second empirical conclusion from this chapter is that the relationship between NFCC and group-centric partisanship is conditional on political attention. In particular, the relationship between being closed and being a group-centric partisan is concentrated among the most attentive. This finding potentially challenges an assumption in much of the political science literature that paying attention to politics translates into "good" democratic citizenship. Thus, attentive respondents, others have found, tend to participate the most in politics and appear the most capable of constructing their political beliefs along the same

ideological lines as political elites. Many scholars, therefore, treat politically knowledgeable and interested respondents as ideal citizens: the bedrock foundation on which our democratic system depends (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). The inattentive, by comparison, are often portrayed as politically incompetent: rarely participating in public affairs and, when they do, making decisions in haphazard ways and on the basis of superfluous criteria.

This portrait of differences between the attentive and inattentive is not supported in the analyses above. Instead, it is those who are paying attention who are the most affected by nonideological motives for psychological closure. Given the limited instrumental value of following public affairs, most people follow politics because it provides certain expressive benefits, such as conveying who one is as a person (e.g., Somin 2006). Thus, for the attentive respondents—those who know about and express an interest in public affairs—partisanship is important to their self-image, a part of their self-conception and social identity. Apathetic respondents, by comparison, rarely think of themselves as members of a political party, outside, perhaps, of the hustle and bustle of a presidential campaign (as I will discuss more in chapter 4).

This underappreciated difference between the attentive and inattentive leads to different expectations about the psychology of partisanship. For the former, partisanship may be more like a social identity: an affective group attachment rooted in the need for psychological certainty. For the latter, those who do not closely follow politics, by contrast, partisanship is likely to be less stable over time, less important to political decision-making, and less a source of psychological solace. The upshot of this empirical difference should be a shift in the way we evaluate the political competence of the attentive and apathetic. While political apathy may fall short on some indicators of political competence (civic knowledge, participation rates), the attentive are more psychologically invested in their partisan commitments and therefore may be less willing to take the steps necessary for democratic accountability—for example, voting their party out of office for bad performance, scandalous behavior, violating the party's ideological commitments, or disrespecting the rule of law.

It is precisely because the politically attentive are the most active in participating in elections and communicating with elected officials that their cognitive closed-mindedness is problematic. These findings suggest a fundamental tension between, on the one hand, a lack of attention and the problems associated with low participation rates and political attention, and, on the other hand, political attention coupled with dogmatism. As Johnston, Lavine, and Federico (2017, 14) describe this "real democratic dilemma," the inattentive "do not participate at high rates, and thus people who do participate are typically more concerned with gratifying their identities than achieving good policy outcomes."

But the results here—which, in general, are consistent with this description of the democratic dilemma—also suggest a solution, or at least a crucial caveat in the form of high attention to politics in combination with a weak psychological need for firm knowledge. I find that when NFCC is weak, an increase in political attention often leads toward a decrease in partisan strength, intensity of partisan social identity, party feeling thermometer differences, and intolerance toward interparty marriage. These individuals—attentive but not cognitively closed—represent one solution to the democratic dilemma. Attention to politics does not inherently promote political dogmatism. When the need for closure is weak, the informed and politically interested appear to be quite capable of sustaining a political open mind and tolerating those who identify with their political opponents.

Therefore, I have uncovered new support for an old hypothesis: psychological closure contributes to political extremism (of a particular, partisan, and group-centric kind). This finding bolsters contemporary concerns about the politically aware population by showing that these individuals—who are the most influential in our politics—are most affected by their psychological characteristics. A necessary next step in evaluating the theory of partisan group-centrism is to unpack the broader social and political context in which individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure become group-centric partisans. This goal is achieved in the next chapter, where I assess the extent to which polarized political parties (i.e., those that prescribe clear beliefs to their supporters) attract the psychologically closed better than parties that are diffuse and fail to prescribe clear ideas. Elite polarization, the fragmentation of the media, and social sorting have contributed to changing perceptions of the political parties. The undoing of these perceptions, therefore, may have some potential to weaken the partisan commitments of those who crave cognitive closure.

3

CLEAR CHOICES, GROUP-CENTRIC PARTISANS

As I described in chapter 1, US politics has undergone a dramatic change over the past few decades. Political elites have polarized, the media environment has fragmented, and supporters of the two parties have become more demographically distinct. The parties are no longer echoes of each other; they give voters clear choices. I argued that these changes may be vital to understanding why individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure are, today, group-centric partisans. In the psychological literature, for example, the theory of groups as epistemic providers (Kruglanski et al. 2006) states that the relationship between the psychological need for cognitive closure and group-centrism varies based on the context and nature of the groups in question. It depends, in particular, on a group being perceived as a unified whole and sharply distinct from relevant outgroups (i.e., entitativity). A group must be capable of providing firm knowledge—about the world or the self—in order to attract those individuals motivated by a desire to achieve cognitive closure.

Thus, the strong association between NFCC and being a group-centric partisan documented in the previous chapter should, I hypothesized, represent a relatively recent phenomenon. This chapter assesses this claim in two studies. First, I examine whether the relationship between psychological closure and group-centric partisanship has changed over time. To do so, I assess the extent to which NFCC predicts strength of partisanship in the present era compared to the past. Second, I report the results of an experiment I conducted that manipulated subjects' perceptions about the polarization of the two parties. Here, I examine whether the power of party leaders to influence public opinion among their

followers with high levels of NFCC increases when those elites are perceived to be politically polarized. This study, therefore, models the effect of NFCC and political attention on partisan group-centrism at different levels of party entitativity or polarization. In both cases, the studies converge on the finding that conditions of party polarization create the link between closed minds and group-centric expressions of partisanship.

Overall, the results support the argument that changes in the party system and the broader social and political environment appear to be causing respondents with a strong need for cognitive closure to become group-centric partisans. The link between NFCC and partisan group-centrism among highly attentive members of the population (1) exists in the present but not the past, and (2) is strengthened when political elites are perceived to be polarized.

Study 1: The Link between NFCC and Partisan Group-Centrism in the Past and Present

One empirical way of assessing the theory that polarized parties caused the link between closed minds and group-centric partisanship is simply to examine whether the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and partisan group-centrism is constant across time. I hypothesize that the link should be stronger in contemporary years than in the past, as a result of changes that have taken place over time in US politics and society.

To assess this claim, I draw on data collected by the General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative survey done on a regular basis by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.[1] In 1988, the GSS first asked respondents to express their approval or disapproval of a statement that can be used as an indicator of individual differences in the need for cognitive closure: "Right and wrong are not usually a simple matter of black and white; there are many shades of gray." Stronger agreement with this statement indicates a low need for cognitive closure, while disagreement indicates a strong need for closure. As this has been used as a proxy for NFCC in previous research (e.g., Brandt and Reyna 2010; Peterson et al. 2009), the measurement of this item in distinct time periods—1988, 2006, 2008, and 2010—provides an opportunity for assessing whether the link between the need for closure and expressions of partisanship are stronger in today's era of polarized parties than in the past.

The GSS also includes a measure of partisanship and partisan strength in the years 1988, 2006, 2008, and 2010, which I use as dependent variables. Unfortunately, the GSS does not include a traditional measure of political knowledge or political interest consistently throughout these years. It does, however,

include a measure of respondents' level of education, which I rely on as a proxy for political attention. While this is not ideal, education is commonly used as a substitute for political knowledge and attention (e.g., Converse 2006), and previous scholarship in political psychology suggests that, like other indicators of political attention, education increases the association between personality characteristics and political attitudes (e.g., Federico and Tagar 2014).

This data set, therefore, provides the crucial ingredients for assessing my hypotheses. It includes a measure of the need for cognitive closure in 1988, before partisan polarization and media fragmentation turned partisanship into a potential source of psychological certainty, and does so again in 2006, 2008, and 2010, after the political environment had undergone the profound changes that made the parties more "groupy," or entitative, and therefore more appealing to individuals seeking cognitive closure. The data set also includes an indicator of group-centric partisanship with the partisan strength variable, and a widely used proxy for political attention (education). Therefore, this study allows for an assessment of whether the expression of group-centric partisanship, the relationship between the need for closure and a more intense variety of partisan identification, can be tied to contemporaneous changes in the political environment. The key test is whether, at high levels of education, people with a strong need for cognitive closure are more likely to identify with, and identify strongly with, a political party in recent years, but not in 1988.[2]

Identifying as a Partisan

In the first analysis, I examine whether individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure are more likely to identify with a party, rather than as independents, in recent years than in the past. That is, when respondents are asked about their partisanship, the GSS first asks them, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?" The first analysis assesses the extent to which NFCC is related to people responding "Democrat" or "Republican," rather than "Independent," in response to this first question.[3] As indicated in the previous chapter, those who are more psychologically open may increasingly shun partisanship, while those who are closed gravitate toward it, in light of changes in the party system. This section tests that claim.

Given that the transformation of the party system should have made the contemporary parties more appealing to those seeking closure than the parties of the late 1980s were, I expect that individuals today with a strong need for closure would be more likely to be partisans than individuals with a weak need for closure. By contrast, I expect that in 1988, before the polarization of the

party system had reached its apex, individuals with a strong need for closure would not be any more likely than individuals with a weak need for closure to find partisan identification gratifying. Figure 3.1 presents the results of the analysis assessing whether, at high levels of education, NFCC's association with being a partisan rather than an independent varies across these two periods of time.

As figure 3.1 illustrates, there is clear support for the theoretical expectation that, at high levels of education, individuals with a strong need for closure will, in the present period but not in the past, find the parties attractive and therefore be more likely to identify as partisans than individuals with a weak need for closure. In 1988, the need for cognitive closure appears, if anything, to decrease the likelihood that an individual will identify with a political party, though this negative relationship is not statistically significant ($b = -0.29$, $p = n.s.$). There is no relationship between NFCC and partisanship in this earlier time period because partisanship at the time did not function well as an epistemic or shared reality provider that gave a party's supporters clear prototypes about what it meant to support that party.

From 2006 to 2010, however, the need for cognitive closure does have a pronounced effect on the likelihood of an educated respondent choosing to identify with a party rather than identifying as an independent ($b = 0.40$, $p < 0.05$). In other words, figure 3.1 shows that in 1988 the relationship between NFCC and being a partisan is negative but not significantly so, while in 2006–10 the relationship between NFCC and being a partisan is positive and statistically significant. In 2006–10, people who are highly educated and have a strong need for closure are more likely to say they identify with one of the two major parties than people who are educated and have a weak need for closure. In the contemporary era of US politics, individuals who view right and wrong as black and white rather than as shades of gray are more likely to identify as partisans than individuals who see ambiguity in matters of right and wrong. Partisanship has become a source for firm knowledge and cognitive closure.

Another way to see figure 3.1 is to look at the likelihood of an individual identifying with a political party at the same level of NFCC across these two time periods. For example, figure 3.1 shows that for people with a low need for cognitive closure, the predicted probability of identifying with a party is about 0.63 in 1988 and approximately 0.62 in 2006–10. In other words, individuals with low scores of NFCC are just as likely to be partisans in the contemporary period as in the past. But at the highest level of NFCC, the predicted probability of identifying as a partisan was just 0.56 in 1988, compared to 0.71 in the more recent period, a jump of 15 percentage points. This difference in the effect of NFCC across these

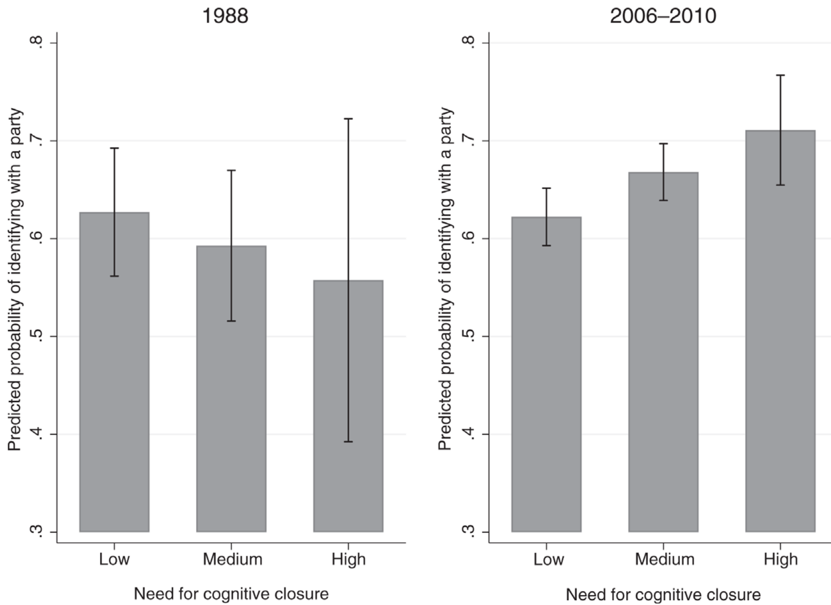

FIGURE 3.1 The effect of NFCC on being a partisan (vs. an independent) in 1988 and 2006–10. Note: Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Results limited to those with more than a high school degree.

two time periods just misses statistical significance using a conservative two-tailed hypothesis test ($p = 0.137$). As the parties have polarized and the political environment has changed more generally, it appears that only individuals with a strong need for closure have responded by becoming more likely to identify as partisans.

Identifying as a Strong Partisan

In the next analysis, I assess the extent to which the need for cognitive closure predicts strong partisanship (among partisan identifiers but not leaners) across these time periods, one of the indicators of a group-centric type of partisanship. For those respondents who answered "Democrat" or "Republican" in response to the first question posed to them by the GSS, the GSS then follows up with a second question that asks, "Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat/Republican]?" Figure 3.2 presents the results of an analysis examining whether NFCC increases the probability that a respondent chooses strong partisanship as opposed to not-very-strong partisanship.

Figure 3.2 shows a dynamic similar to that observed in figure 3.1. In 1988, there is a slight but statistically insignificant negative relationship between NFCC and the predicted probability of a partisan identifying as a strong partisan ($b = -0.12$, $p < n.s.$). By contrast, in 2006–10, the relationship between NFCC and strong partisanship is positive and statistically significant ($b = 0.38$, $p < 0.10$). The need for cognitive closure causes highly educated respondents to be strong partisans in the present period of time, but not in the past.

Similarly, a look across the two time periods reveals how the rise of strong partisanship in the United States over the past few decades has been driven largely by individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure. Thus, the predicted probability of an individual with the lowest value on the NFCC scale identifying strongly with a political party was just 0.37 in 1988 and 0.44 in 2006–10, a 7-percentage-point increase. By comparison, the predicted probability of an individual with the highest value on the NFCC scale identifying strongly with a political party was 0.34 in 1988 and 0.54 in 2006–10, a 20-percentage-point increase. As in the previous analysis, this difference in the effect of NFCC across the two time periods is just shy of statistical significance using the more stringent two-tailed hypothesis test ($p = 0.144$). Some caution, therefore, is warranted in

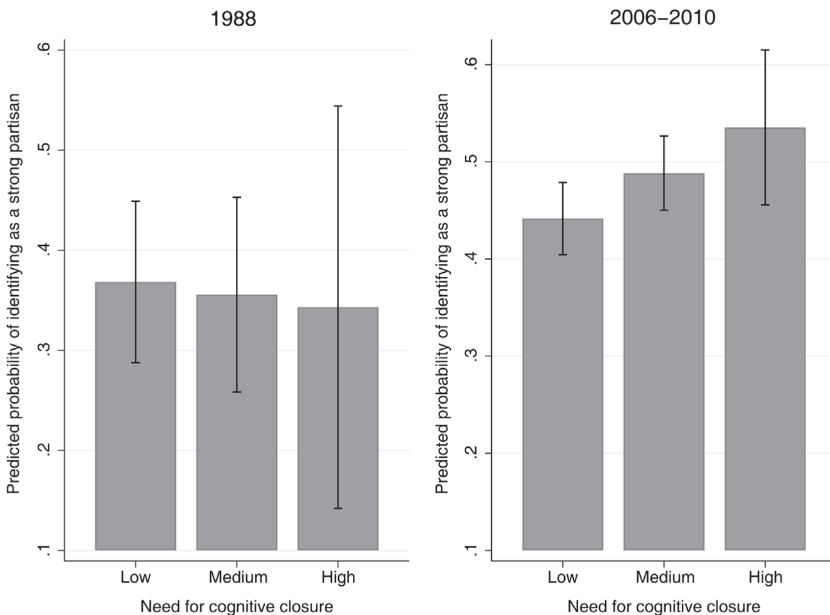

FIGURE 3.2 The effect of NFCC on being a strong partisan (vs. a not-very-strong partisan) in 1988 and 2010. Note: Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Results limited to those with more than a high school degree.

these findings. Nevertheless, I believe that the findings are at least highly suggestive, especially in light of the less-than-ideal measure of NFCC included in the study.

Summary

These two analyses illustrate the dynamic and variable relationship between the psychological need for cognitive closure and partisanship across time in US politics. In the past, before the parties were polarized, individuals with strong and weak needs for cognitive closure were similarly likely to identify with a party and to identify strongly with a party. But today, individuals with a strong need for closure are significantly more likely than those with a weak need for closure to be partisans and to be strong partisans. Consistent with the theory that modern parties function as epistemic providers of a shared reality, the increase in group-centric partisanship over time in the United States can be partly accounted for by the increasing tendency of individuals with a strong psychological need for cognitive closure to become strong partisans in response to changes in the political environment. Partisanship is no longer just an emotional identity akin to a sports affiliation; it is now an identity that provides cognitive closure, a way of making sense of the world. Individuals who can handle more cognitive complexity, by comparison, are no more or less likely to identify with or identify strongly with a party today than they were in the past.

Of course, these findings are, like those presented in chapter 2, conditional on political attention (qua education). For individuals with a high level of education, NFCC leads to partisan identification and strong partisanship in 2006–10, but not in 1988. Indeed, this difference between the highly and less engaged is itself statistically significant. Thus, in a model predicting strength of partisanship from 2006 to 2010 as a function of the need for closure, education, and an interaction of the two variables, the interaction term of this equation is statistically significant ($b = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that for the highly educated, their psychological need for closure drives their partisan commitment, while for the less educated, partisanship remains unaffected by an individual's score on the NFCC variable. It is among the educated—those individuals generally praised for being knowledgeable about and involved in politics—where the psychological need to acquire cognitive certainty produces a group-centric form of partisanship.

The next study expands on these findings in two ways. First, it isolates the role of elite polarization by specifically manipulating that aspect among the broader set of changes that have taken place in US society. Second, it extends the analysis to the process of opinion formation and the last dimension of the social identity conception of partisanship: the incorporation of the group's views into one's own

worldview. Together, these two aspects of the next study illustrate how the polarization of political elites has fostered a stronger sense of partisan group-centrism.

Study 2: The Effect of Polarization on Elite Opinion Leadership

> **Fanatics of all kinds are actually crowded together at one end. It is the fanatic and the moderate who are poles apart and never meet. . . . It is easier for a fanatic Communist to be converted to fascism, chauvinism or Catholicism than to become a sober liberal.**
>
> —Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*

The theory of groups as epistemic providers developed by Kruglanski et al. (2006) postulates that, in addition to ingroup love and outgroup hatred, group-centrism grounded in the epistemic need for cognitive closure will also foster pressure for members to conform their beliefs about the world to the beliefs of their group. This, indeed, is also a key dimension of the social identity concept (Tajfel 1972). In this section I assess this claim in the context of political opinion formation. I build on the finding, documented in the political science literature, that the polarization of political elites has strengthened the extent to which partisans in the electorate, when forming opinions, follow partisan cues rather than alternative sources of information such as the arguments used in support of a policy position. For example, Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) show that when political elites are polarized over policy issues, partisans will follow their party leaders even when the position of those party leaders is contradicted by a "strong argument." By contrast, when elites are not polarized in their position over an issue, the position with a strong argument supporting it receives much greater support. As Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013, 75) summarize their conclusion, "In polarized conditions citizens turn to partisan biases and ignore arguments that they otherwise consider to be 'strong.'"

This finding is consistent with the theory of group-centric partisanship developed in this book. The polarization of political elites increases the entitativity of partisanship, or the sense that a party represents a coherent and distinct group. The result of this change is that partisanship becomes a viable source for a shared reality and firm knowledge. Once this change in the nature of partisan groups occurs, the psychological theory of groups as epistemic providers predicts that partisan groups will have greater authority over the opinions and beliefs of their members—particularly, of course, over the opinions and beliefs of members with

a strong need for cognitive closure, who are motivated to achieve a shared reality in order to attain confidence in their beliefs about the world. Thus, one extension of Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus's theory and findings that I would add, based on the theory developed in this book, is that the power of polarized elites over the opinion formation of partisans should be greatest among individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure.

Finally, I predict that this interaction between elite polarization and the need for cognitive closure on conformity to elite positions in matters of opinion formation will be greatest among respondents who are highly attentive to politics. The attentive, recall, know and care about politics, and are therefore personally invested in their partisan identity. It is on these individuals, then, that the psychological need for group-centrism should exert its strongest effect.

Research Design

To assess these expectations, I added an opinion formation experiment to the 2014 YouGov study described in chapter 2. This study, like Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013), attempted to give participants two competing considerations to choose from when forming an opinion about a public policy issue. In this case, the two considerations were (1) support from party elites, and (2) the ideological stance typically associated with a policy position. Thus, each issue that partisans were asked to express an opinion about was associated with both partisan signals and long-standing ideological implications, and these two pieces of information were designed to push partisan respondents in opposing directions.

The study assessed opinion formation about four public policy issues: (1) Medicaid expansion, (2) affirmative action, (3) global warming, and (4) environmental regulation of iron mining. Each of these issues has clear associations with ideological liberalism and conservatism in US politics. Thus, Medicaid expansion is a clearly liberal issue, as is support for affirmative action, for policies that address global warming, and for environmental regulation. Therefore, if partisans are thinking about these issues ideologically, they should know these ideological associations and choose the "correct" policy position accordingly, with Republicans choosing the conservative stance on an issue and Democrats the stereotypically liberal option. In each case, however, respondents were given information that their party elites were taking an ideologically inconsistent position on the issue: Democrats were opposing Medicaid expansion, while Republicans were supporting it, for example. The key question, therefore, is whether partisans align their own position on an issue with the position of their party, even though this position is inconsistent with the general ideological outlook of

the party. Furthermore, how do variables such as elite polarization, the need for cognitive closure, and political attention condition how people respond to this information environment?

The key manipulation in the experiment is the polarization of the parties. Following Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013), as well as Matthew Levendusky's (2009) work on the role of political polarization in the increasing levels of constraint between partisan identity and policy attitudes, respondents were randomly assigned to either a high- or a low-polarization treatment condition.[4] In the low-polarization condition, respondents were told, "As you can see, the partisan divide is not stark on this issue, as the parties are not very far apart. [Party A] tend to support [the issue]; [Party B] tend to oppose [the issue]. However, members of each party can be found on both sides of the issue." In addition to this information, respondents were shown an image of the positions of hypothetical partisans in Congress on the issue. In the low-polarization treatment condition, respondents saw an image with significant overlap between the parties, and though one party was clearly presented as supporting the issue and the other party as opposing it, there was also some overlap between the parties.

In the high-polarization condition, respondents were told, "As you can see, the partisan divide is stark on this issue, as the parties are very far apart. [Party A] strongly support [the issue]; [Party B] strongly oppose [the issue]. Also, most members of each party are on the same side as the rest of their party on this issue." As in the low-polarization condition, this verbal description of the parties' positions was complemented by a graphical image showing hypothetical partisans in Congress. In the high-polarization graphic, the parties were very far apart, and there was a large gap between them.[5]

These manipulations capture differences between a low- and high-polarization political environment. In the less polarized environment, the parties do not provide respondents with a shared reality or firm knowledge, whereas in the highly polarized environment the parties are much more entitative and therefore capable of providing closure. Thus, I hypothesized that this manipulation should strengthen the power of party leaders to persuade their supporters to adopt their positions, even, as was the case here, when the position of party leaders is contrary to that party's ideological reputation.

After exposure to this information, respondents were asked to report their own position on the issue: whether they supported or opposed Medicaid expansion, efforts to combat global warming, affirmative action, and environmental regulations, on a seven-point Likert scale. This study, as discussed in previous chapters, also included a fifteen-item measure of the need for cognitive closure and a multi-item index of political-knowledge and interest-in-politics questions,

which, to simplify the presentation here, are combined to form a scale for political attention (alpha = 0.62).[6] To test my hypotheses, I assessed the likelihood of a respondent taking the same side on an issue as his or her party (e.g., Democratic partisans adopting a conservative policy position, and Republicans adopting a liberal position), as a function of elite polarization, the need for cognitive closure, political attention, and the interaction between these three variables. This allowed for a direct assessment of the theory of parties as epistemic providers: when parties are polarized, an individual psychologically craves closure, and that individual knows and cares about politics, the conditions for partisan group-centrism should be strongest.

Figure 3.3 displays the results of a model estimating the likelihood of a respondent choosing the same (ideologically incorrect) position presented as being supported by the respondent's party leaders, averaged across all four issues, as a function of the three variables central to my theory and analysis. Thus, on the left-hand side of the figure, when respondents were exposed to the low-polarization treatment condition, the likelihood of their choosing their party's position on the issue appears to be unaffected by the need for cognitive closure. By contrast, in the high-polarization treatment condition, individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure are—at high levels of political attention—significantly and substantially more likely than those with a weak need for cognitive closure to choose the same side of the policy issue as their party leaders. Indeed, in this right-hand side of figure 3.3, I observe that the likelihood of an individual bringing his or her attitudes into uniformity with party leaders increases by over 50 percentage points when moving from a weak to a strong need for cognitive closure in the condition of high elite polarization and at high levels of political knowledge and interest.

The upshot of this experiment is that it shows how the impact of NFCC on partisan group-centrism—captured here with opinion formation and bringing one's own opinions into alignment with group leaders—varies as a function of the political environment. It is only in the condition of high elite polarization that the interaction between political attention and NFCC significantly affects this manifestation of partisan group-centrism. The polarization of political elites has been central to making the parties shared reality providers that appeal to individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure. As a result of this shift in the political environment, high-NFCC respondents, particularly those who are invested in politics, have reacted by becoming more partisan, even to the point where they are willing to adopt policy positions that diverge from the ideological reputations of their partisanship. These partisans are group-centric partisans, not ideologues, and while they may exhibit more constraint between their partisan identities and issue attitudes, this is not necessarily a reflection of their growing

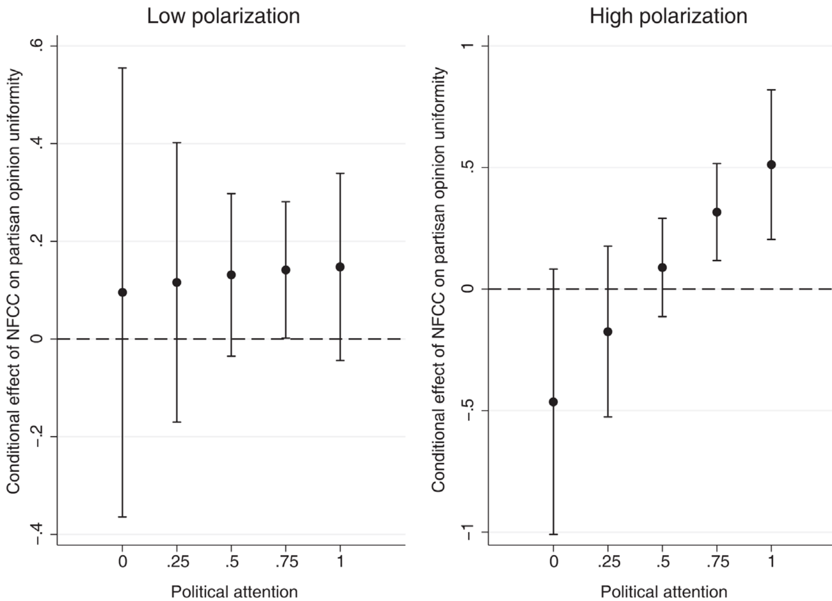

FIGURE 3.3 The effect of NFCC on partisan opinion uniformity across low and high levels of elite polarization. Note: Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

capacity for ideological thinking. Instead this increasing constraint reflects the growing power that party leaders, who now are unified and offer firm knowledge, have over the opinions of their followers.

Polarization Changed the Nature of Partisanship

Together, these two studies establish the important temporal dynamic driving the association between the psychological need for cognitive closure and partisan polarization. This relationship is a recent phenomenon; it did not exist in 1988, as demonstrated in the GSS study. And the experimental section of this chapter established that manipulating perceptions of elite polarization similarly "activated" the relation between NFCC and manifestations of partisan group-centrism among the politically attentive.

As the parties have changed, as Democratic and Republican elites have become more divided and more cohesive unto themselves, and as the media environment has fragmented, the psychology of partisanship has changed. Politics has become simplified. Are you pro-life or pro-choice? Defund the police, or LAW & ORDER!?

Policy choices like these are no longer presented to the public with the difficulties, ambiguities, and complications that they naturally entail. Instead they are presented as simple, obvious, logical decisions. In turn, it has become cognitively easier for one to know one's position on complex issues, as it involves just looking to party leaders—all of whom today are much more likely to agree with each other than they were in the past—to derive an attitude one can feel confident about.

Of course, trends in the parties have not been a constant movement toward greater uniformity from the past to the present. The electoral cycle, in particular, exerts change on the parties. For example, during primaries, candidates seeking their party's nomination emphasize the differences between themselves and their competitors. Following the primary, then, parties unify around their general election candidate as the dynamics switch to competition between the two parties. This dynamic, too, has implications for the theory of partisanship as epistemic provider. Specifically, it suggests that general election campaigns should—like elite polarization more generally—cause individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure to gravitate especially strongly toward their party. Elections, in other words, should be among the most polarizing of events in our politics because they create the conditions in which the two parties best exhibit the characteristics most appealing to the cognitively closed. Thus, while this chapter focused squarely on the historical polarization of the two major political parties responsible for creating the link between closed minds and the intense kind of partisanship currently rampant in US politics, the next chapter focuses on the results of this polarization over the course of a contentious political campaign: the 2016 presidential contest between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

4

THE DYNAMICS OF PARTISAN CLOSURE AND THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

During presidential campaigns, two critical things happen that should affect the relationship between psychological closure and political preferences. First, as campaigns shift from the primary to the general election, the messages being communicated to the public change. During the primary, political communication emphasizes differences within the parties, a state of affairs that should inhibit the ability for political parties to clearly prescribe beliefs and offer cognitive closure. By contrast, as the primary ends and the two parties settle on their general election nominee, political communication shifts to emphasize the unity of each party and its differences with the opposition. Hence, in this latter stage of campaigns, the closure-providing capacities of political parties should be at their height. The second key dynamic of political campaigns, and presidential campaigns in particular, is that they represent a moment when most Americans pay some attention to politics. Political campaigns, therefore, represent a case in which two of the three major variables in the psychological theory undergo important change.

The upshot of these two dimensions of presidential campaigns is that they should provide events that "trigger" the theoretical link between NFCC and group-centric partisanship. Recall the concept of entitativity described in chapter 1 and its connection to the theories of groups as epistemic providers and uncertainty-identity theory. Both theories state that the link between the need for cognitive closure (or the motive to reduce uncertainty, in the case of the latter theory), and group-centric outcomes such as strong ingroup identification and outgroup derogation is strengthened in environments where groups are internally

unified and sharply differentiated from the outgroup. This is when groups are effective at providing a shared reality or self-related prototypes that effectively reduce uncertainty and provide cognitive closure.

Therefore, as the internal conflicts made apparent during primary elections wane and as the walls differentiating the parties wax as the general election unfolds, individuals who crave firm knowledge should be the most likely to strengthen their partisan allegiances and exhibit dislike of the partisan outgroup. Furthermore, this association should be strengthened during presidential campaigns *regardless* of an individual's general level of political attention. In this environment, almost everyone is exposed to some political discourse, and many people who otherwise do not pay much attention to politics take an interest when the White House is at stake. It is for these reasons, I believe, that campaigns have been shown to be one of the forces driving the rising tide of partisan antagonism in our society (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012).

This chapter assesses these claims in the context of the 2016 presidential campaign, one of the most vicious political campaigns in recent memory. The two candidates vying for the presidency that year, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, were polar opposites in many respects. Clinton, a longtime staple of US politics, former first lady, senator, and secretary of state, and first female major-party nominee for the presidency, appealed to many traditional Democrats but came to be viewed unfavorably by the rest of the electorate. Donald Trump, by contrast, had never held political office before in his life. His appeal was rooted partly in his promise to "drain the swamp" and remake US politics. The two candidates differed not only in their political history but in their style, manners, and character as well. And both candidates became, over the course of the campaign, more disliked than liked.

Thus, the stage was set for 2016 to be a highly acrimonious election. And it was. Clinton and Trump raised vicious attacks against each other. Clinton's commercials showing Trump mimicking reporters with disabilities and bragging about sexual assault left a deep impression on many Americans, who widely viewed Trump as not having the personality or temperament to hold office.[1] Similarly, Trump's attacks on Clinton for her email scandal and for forcing Americans to relive former president Bill Clinton's sexual escapades contributed to a widespread sense that Clinton could not be trusted.[2] In the face of these biting personal attacks, 2016 held the potential to increase the already polarized state of US politics.

Capturing Campaign Effects

While the 2016 campaign seems to have been almost designed to foster greater partisanship in the electorate, actually identifying campaign effects has always

been a challenge for the social sciences. Larry Bartels (2006) wrote about the challenges of identifying campaign effects in a 2006 book chapter titled "Three Virtues of Panel Data for the Analysis of Campaign Effects." The second and the third of these virtues are of the most relevance here, as they directly address issues of causal inference in the context of political campaigns.[3] Bartels's second virtue of panel data—data that interview the same people at multiple points over time—is that they "permit analyses of opinion change in which prior opinions appear as explanatory variables" (2006, 136). The third virtue is that "panel data facilitate analyses in which relevant explanatory variables are measured outside the immediate campaign setting" (136). The upshot of these two virtues is that panel data provide a better basis for causal inference, as temporal priority is a necessary condition for an independent variable to cause a dependent variable.

The use of panel data, therefore, allows for an assessment of whether psychological NFCC precedes partisan polarization. By including a lagged measure of partisan polarization as an explanatory variable, I can investigate whether high NFCC was associated with changes in levels of partisan polarization over the course of the 2016 campaign. In sum, the use of panel data in this context provides further evidence about (1) the nature of the temporal relationship between NFCC and partisan polarization, and (2) whether the 2016 presidential campaign facilitated change toward greater partisan polarization particularly among individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure.

Data and Analysis

Fortunately, researchers at the University of Minnesota carried out just such a panel survey in order to allow for an investigation into the unfolding of partisan polarization over the course of the 2016 campaign. This survey allows me to assess whether individual differences in the need for cognitive closure contributed to that dynamic. Beginning in July 2016, before the campaigns had held their nominating conventions, and over four separate waves concluding after the election, these researchers tracked respondents recruited by Survey Sampling International and measured their attitudes toward the parties, among many other attitudes people held about politics at the time.[4] In addition, the July wave included a six-item measure of the need-for-cognitive-closure scale, based on the highest-performing items identified by me in the 2014 YouGov study used throughout earlier chapters of this book. Given this rich source of data, I can assess my hypotheses in the context of one of the most consequential elections of modern US history, and leverage the panel data to assess (1) whether

NFCC is temporally prior to measures of partisan polarization, and (2) whether elections provide a moment of high party entitativity that causes high-NFCC respondents to become even more group-centric in their partisan attitudes and identities.

This study includes three of the measures of group-centric partisanship analyzed in previous chapters of this book: (1) the traditional measure of partisan strength, (2) a measure of partisanship as a social identity (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015), and (3) feeling thermometers of both parties. The study also includes three additional measures, each of which reflects different components of Tajfel's (1972) definition of social identity as composed of knowledge of belonging to a social group together with emotional and value significance of group membership. The alternative partisanship measure (4) asks respondents how strongly they "identify" with their party (an alternative way of assessing knowledge of belonging compared to the traditional partisan strength measure, which asks whether respondents "think of themselves" as partisan). The partisan certainty dependent variable (5) further captures the cognitive categorization dimension of partisan strength in asking respondents about how certain they are in their Democratic or Republican outlook. And finally, the partisan morality variable (6) reflects the value significance of partisan group membership in asking respondents a set of questions about the extent to which their partisanship informs their ethics. In conceiving of partisan strength as a latent variable composed of multiple cognitive, affective, and value dimensions, I believe that it is a strength to include analyses for each of these dependent variables.[5] Question wording for all key variables is included in appendix A.

In discussing the results from this and the next survey, I present the simple main effect of the need for cognitive closure on partisan polarization (averaged across all levels of political attention). I do not find in these analyses support for the expectation that the effect of NFCC on partisan group-centrism is concentrated among individuals with high levels of political attention. I believe, however, that the lack of this interaction effect in this case does not invalidate the attention-interaction hypothesis. Instead I believe that this set of null findings tells us something important about political campaigns. Campaigns, I believe these results suggest, heighten levels of political attention broadly throughout the population. Especially with social media so prominent in our lives, everyone (or nearly everyone) gets exposed to political discourse regardless of whether they seek it out, and regardless of whether they live in a battleground state. During presidential campaigns, politics becomes essentially unavoidable. Furthermore, people take more of an active interest in politics during presidential campaigns. During these contests, it is hard not to feel like politics is important to one's own life, and therefore people give politics more of their limited attention. As a

result, most people during presidential campaigns exhibit the two characteristics of individuals who, at other times, I characterize as being highly attuned to politics: (1) they are exposed to political discussion, and (2) they are motivated to pay greater attention to the sound and fury of political contestation.

Before making use of the panel data, I wanted to assess whether, in July of 2016, before the general election campaign really heated up, individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure were more group-centric in their partisanship than individuals with a weak need for closure.[6] Figures 4.1 and 4.2 offer a simple conclusion to this question: on the eve of the 2016 campaign, individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure already expressed higher levels of group-centric partisanship than those who were more cognitively open (full results of these analyses are available in appendix B).

In July of 2016, on the eve of the contest between Clinton and Trump, I find across numerous indicators that individuals with a strong need for closure were already more group-centric in their partisanship than individuals with a weak need for closure. Specifically, for Republicans, I find a positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) association between NFCC and group-centrism among five of the dependent variables. The only insignificant relationship among Republicans is with the feeling thermometer dependent variable. Aside from this one finding, however, we can conclude, based on these findings, that among Republicans, those individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure were more strongly Republican in their cognitive categorization (across two distinct measures), more likely to say that their Republican partisanship was important to their social identity, more certain about their partisanship, and more likely to report that their Republican identity was important to their sense of morality and right and wrong.

The results for Democrats are nearly identical. Across the same five measures of partisan group-centrism, I find statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) support for the expectation that individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure were more likely to express a group-centric form of partisanship than individuals with a weak need for cognitive closure. Democrats who scored higher on NFCC expressed a greater likelihood of cognitively identifying strongly with the Democratic Party (across two ways of measuring self-categorization), a stronger Democratic social identity, greater certainty about their Democratic partisanship, and a greater feeling that their Democratic partisanship was connected to their moral beliefs and reflections. Once again, the only clear null effect that emerges in this analysis is with the feeling thermometer dependent variable, where individuals with a strong need for closure were no different than individuals with a weak need for closure.

This lack of an effect of NFCC on the feeling thermometer variable could reflect in part the highly negative associations that many voters had with both Clinton and Trump throughout the 2016 campaign. Thus, the real effect of

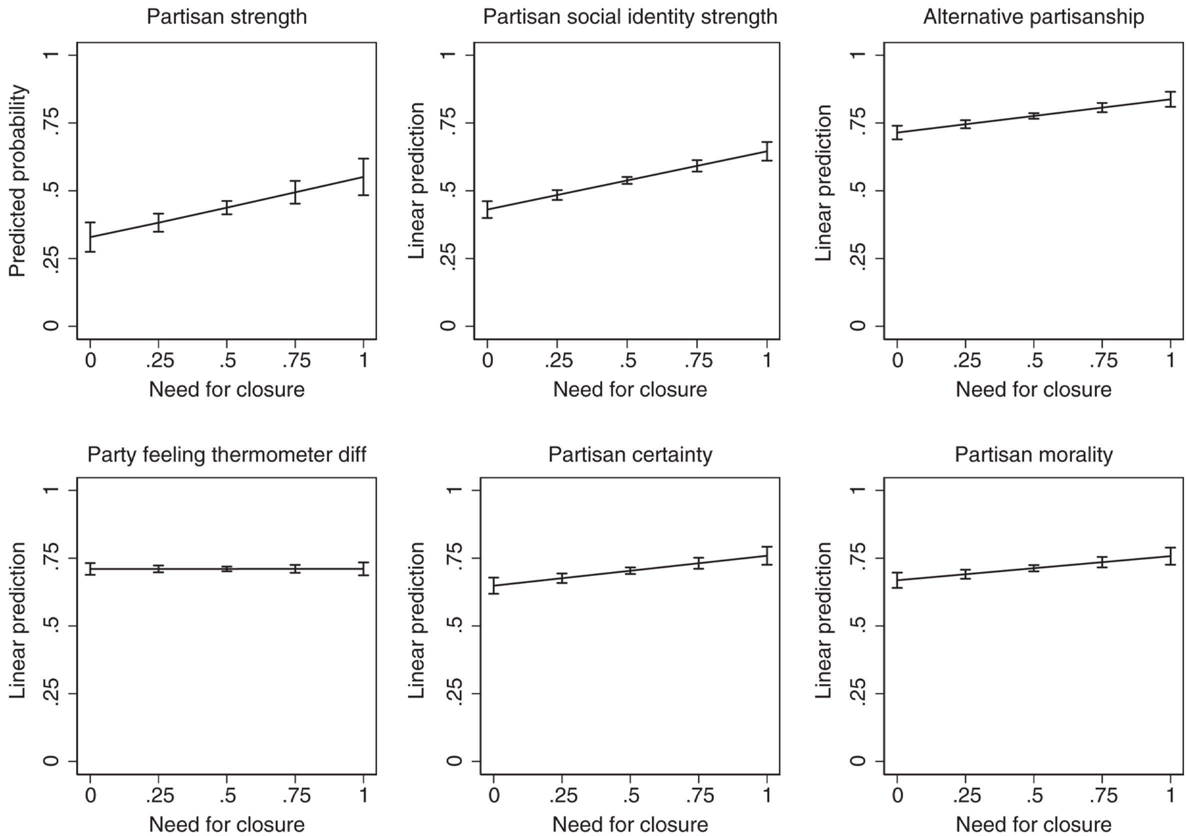

FIGURE 4.1 Relationship between NFCC and partisan polarization—Republicans. Note: Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

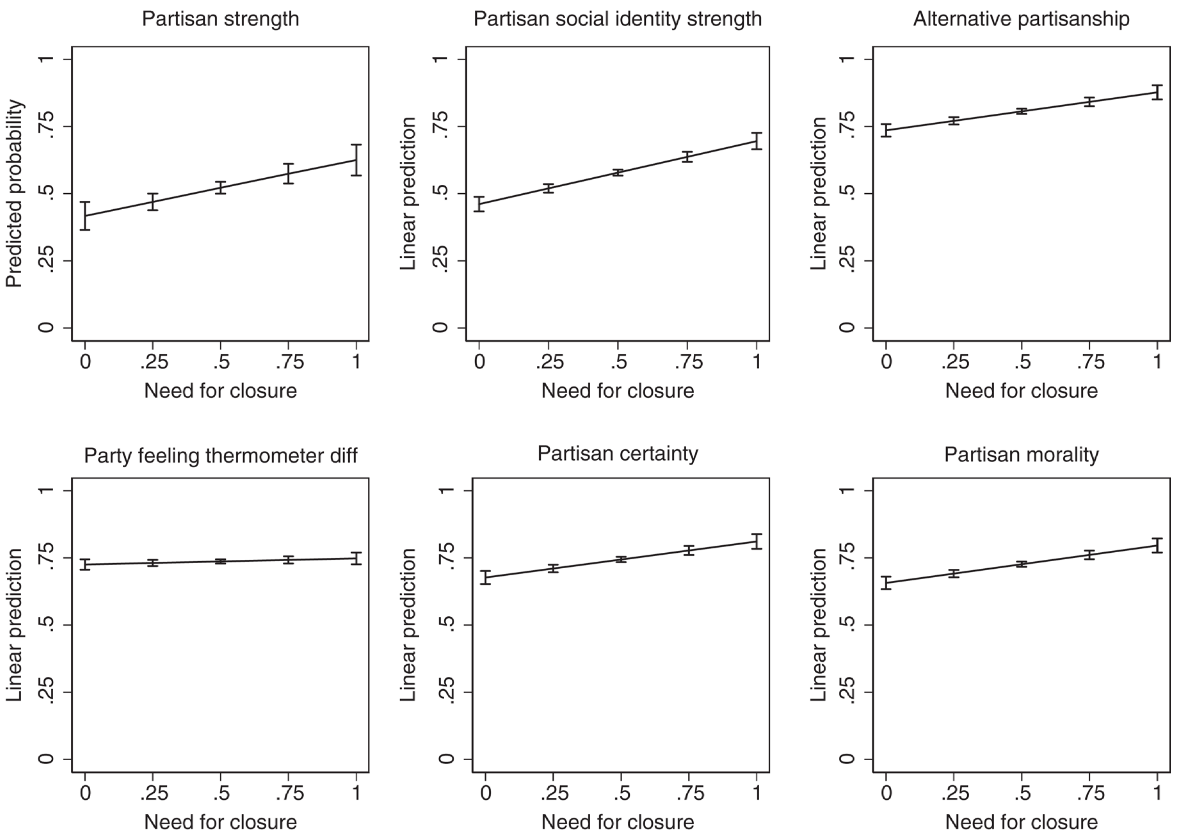

FIGURE 4.2 Relationship between NFCC and partisan polarization—Democrats. Note: Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

NFCC on the eve of the 2016 general election campaign was not in fueling hatred toward the opposite party (which was strong enough without it), but in keeping partisans strongly committed to supporting their own party come the fall. As the 2016 campaign heated up, Republicans and Democrats with a strong psychological need for cognitive closure differed from those who were more comfortable with uncertainty in their strength of partisan identification, the certainty of their partisan convictions, and the extent to which their partisan affiliation was said to be a component of their moral belief system. What happened as the campaign unfolded?

Change in Partisan Polarization between Waves 1 and 2

Wave 2 of the 2016 Minnesota panel study was in the field between September 10 and 16, 2016, while wave 3 was in the field during the conclusion of the general election campaign: October 20–29, 2016. The main advantage of panel surveys like these, which survey the same people at different points in time, is that they allow for an assessment of temporal precedence. A necessary condition of causality is that the causal variable precedes the outcome variable. This is the theory that I have posited for the link between NFCC and partisan polarization, but so far, I have not provided an assessment of this assumption. The following analyses, in part, allow me to remedy that shortcoming of the previous analyses.

This is an increasingly important assessment for political psychologists to undertake, as recent research has undermined the previously long-standing presumption that most psychological characteristics precede political attitudes. For instance, the measure of psychological authoritarianism based on child-rearing preferences was constructed in the hope of identifying an exogenous indicator of this element of human personality that would precede political attitudes (Feldman and Stenner 1997). But recent research of my own (Luttig 2021) and others (Bakker, Lelkes, and Malka 2021; Goren and Chapp 2019; Smith et al. 2021) shows that this variable is in fact *endogenous* to many political preferences. Political attitudes precede and potentially cause changes in authoritarianism. This is true of other psychological characteristics as well, including the Big Five trait of openness to experience (Boston et al. 2018) and moral foundations (Hatemi, Crabtree, and Smith 2019). Hence, it is increasingly important that political psychologists abandon assumptions about the temporal relationship between psychological variables and political ones. In my case, this recent research demands

that I at least assess whether NFCC does in fact precede and lead to increases in expressions of partisan group-centrism, rather than the alternative, that being a group-centric partisan increases an individual's need for cognitive closure.

The need for cognitive closure, measured in July, is clearly prior in time to the partisanship measures from September and October (that is, there is no logical way for partisan polarization at a later time period to cause levels of need for closure measured in an earlier period). By including a control variable for a respondent's level of partisan polarization in July (per Bartels 2006), before the nominating conventions even began, I track how the need for closure—measured in July—contributes to changes in partisan polarization between this relatively subdued period and September, when the campaign was in full swing (wave 2), and between September and when the campaign reached its pinnacle at the end of October (wave 3). As in the previous analyses, I include the same set of control variables (also measured in wave 1).

In addition to testing the assumption that NFCC is temporally prior to levels of partisan polarization, these panel studies also allow for an examination of the psychology of partisanship in the midst of an ongoing political campaign. The 2016 campaign is particularly notable in light of the fact that it brought to the fore two very different candidates offering opposed messages to the American people. As such, it was a context in which perceptions of the parties' entitativity should have grown. The parties, in this and other recent campaigns, tried to present a unified front, rallying around their respective nominees, and to clearly differentiate themselves from their partisan opponent. Because of this dynamic within political campaigns, as campaigns progress from the summer into the fall, identification as a strong partisan should become increasingly attractive to respondents with a strong psychological need for cognitive closure, who are attracted to cohesive groups that present themselves as a solid source for a comforting shared reality.

Partisanship, however, is among the most stable of variables over time in the study of American political behavior (e.g., Converse 2006; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). It is therefore difficult to imagine widespread changes occurring in levels of partisan strength or affective polarization over these few months. Any detectable movement, in fact, may be unexpected over this relatively short time frame and when considering past research on the stability of partisan identification. Indeed, there are very strong correlations between each of the measures of partisan polarization across survey waves in this study. For example, the correlation between the wave 1 and wave 2 partisan social identity measures was greater than 0.75 for both Democrats and Republicans. This was among the most stable of the measures of partisanship used in this study.

But despite the stability of partisanship, I do find some evidence that NFCC led to increases in partisan group-centrism over this time period, though it was limited to only a few of the dependent variables. Tables 1 and 2 present the results.

As shown in tables 4.1 and 4.2, between wave 1 in July and wave 2 in September, I find a sizeable and significant effect of the need for closure on increases in partisan social identity strength for both Republicans and Democrats, as well as a significant effect of NFCC on the traditional partisan strength measure for Democrats. Between July and September of the 2016 presidential campaign, Democrats and Republicans with a high need for closure increased the strength of their

TABLE 4.1 The effect of NFCC (wave 1) on change in partisan strength (wave 1–wave 2), Republicans

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PARTISAN STRENGTH, W2	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE, W2	PARTISAN CERTAINTY, W2	PARTISAN MORALITY, W2	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY, W2
Lagged DV	4.29**	0.60**	0.42**	0.41**	0.70**
	(0.284)	(0.033)	(0.047)	(0.045)	(0.027)
NFCC, W1	0.72	0.00	−0.01	−0.01	0.09**
	(0.706)	(0.025)	(0.051)	(0.046)	(0.031)
Observations	668	690	651	645	668

Standard errors in parentheses; column 1 contains logistic regression coefficient estimates. Remaining columns present OLS regression coefficient estimates. Control variables include political interest, political knowledge, education, income, age, white, Black, ideology, policy extremism.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE 4.2 The effect of NFCC (wave 1) on change in partisan strength (wave 1–wave 2), Democrats

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PARTISAN STRENGTH, W2	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE, W2	PARTISAN CERTAINTY, W2	PARTISAN MORALITY, W2	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY, W2
Lagged DV	4.27**	0.44**	0.44**	0.43**	0.74**
	(0.240)	(0.031)	(0.051)	(0.053)	(0.024)
NFCC, W1	2.17**	0.03	−0.00	−0.03	0.07**
	(0.578)	(0.025)	(0.053)	(0.051)	(0.027)
Observations	908	890	870	865	904

Standard errors in parentheses; column 1 contains logistic regression coefficient estimates. Remaining columns present OLS regression coefficient estimates. Control variables include political interest, political knowledge, education, income, age, white, Black, ideology, policy extremism.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

identification with their party. Figure 4.3 presents the results of this analysis, and shows the effect of NFCC on changes in partisan social identity strength. To put this finding into context, I also show the effect of policy extremism, ideological identity, political interest, and the stability estimate of partisan social identity strength from wave 1 to wave 2.

Figure 4.3 shows the effect of NFCC on partisan social identity strength in wave 2, conditional on partisan social identity strength in wave 1 and relative to other variables that may be associated with increases in partisan strength over the course of a presidential campaign, such as political interest, ideology, and policy extremism. As the figure shows, there is a very strong correlation between partisan social identity strength in wave 1 and partisan social identity strength in wave 2. The only two variables associated with increases in partisan social identity strength are the need for cognitive closure and political interest (neither ideology nor policy extremism increased or decreased partisan social identity strength between waves 1 and 2). These findings lend support to one of the primary hypotheses of this book: the need for cognitive closure leads to increases in partisan polarization for both Republicans and Democrats.

One reason this finding in particular is important is that the dependent variable, partisan social identity strength, is central to understanding political participation

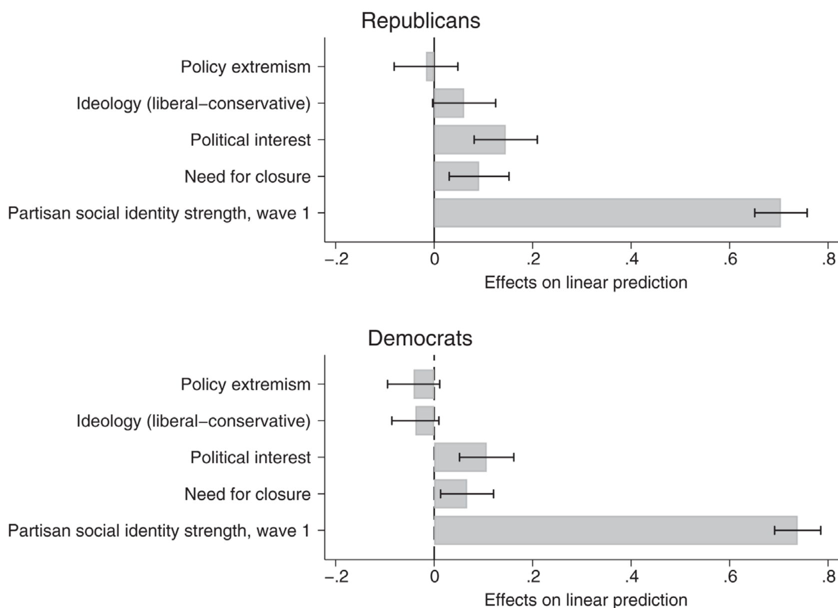

FIGURE 4.3 Predictors of partisan social identity strength, wave 2. Note: Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

and partisan activism. As Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015) show, this measure of partisan strength outperforms variables such as ideological self-placement and policy preferences in predicting campaign activity. Strong partisans, as indicated by this measure, are also more emotionally reactive to election outcomes: angry when they believe their party will lose and uplifted when they believe their side is poised to win. Yet we know less about what makes someone a strong partisan over the course of a presidential campaign. The results here suggest that the need for closure is one variable that causes partisans of both persuasions to commit more strongly to, and therefore be more active on behalf of, their party during presidential campaigns. Individuals with a psychological predisposition to group-centrism, more so than ideology or policy preferences, strengthen their commitment to the partisan team over the course of a presidential campaign.

These findings therefore support the theoretical argument that I have made in this book: that the need for cognitive closure precedes and causes increases in expressions of group-centric partisanship. But it is also possible that the relationship between partisan group-centrism and NFCC is reciprocal. Unfortunately, I do not have the data to assess that possibility. Furthermore, it is also the case that the evidence for the temporal primacy of NFCC is limited here to the few instances when its relationship to group-centric partisanship is statistically significant. The majority of the tests above show no significant relationship between NFCC and changes in expression of partisanship. Therefore, I view these findings as suggestive evidence for my theoretical expectations, but not definitive or certainly capable of ruling out the possibility that political attitudes influence an individual's degree of cognitive closure.

Change in Partisan Polarization between Waves 2 and 3

Did the need for cognitive closure lead to further increases in partisan group-centrism between September (wave 2) and October (wave 3) of the 2016 presidential campaign? The answer is yes but, once again, inconsistently so. Republicans with a strong need for cognitive closure increased their level of affective polarization, as indicated by the party feeling thermometer difference scale ($b = 0.08$, $p < 0.05$). In other words, as the campaign shifted from September to October, Republicans with a strong need for cognitive closure became 8 percentage points more group-centric in terms of their emotional feelings toward the two parties than Republicans with a weak need for closure. But the relationship between NFCC and increases in partisan strength ($b = 0.36$, $p =$ *n.s.*), partisan certainty ($b = 0.03$, $p =$ *n.s*), partisan morality ($b = -0.03$, $p =$ *n.s*), and partisan social identity strength ($b = -0.02$, $p =$ *n.s.*) were all statistically insignificant.

Among Democrats, meanwhile, individuals who are psychologically averse to uncertainty became more certain in their partisan identity ($b = 0.08$, $p < 0.10$) and increased the extent to which they believed their partisanship to be central to their moral belief system ($b = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$). But the relationship between NFCC and increases in partisan strength ($b = -0.59$, p=*n.s*), party feeling thermometer differences ($b = -0.03$, $p =$ *n.s*), and partisan social identity strength ($b = 0.05$, $p =$ *n.s*) were all insignificant. The full set of results is provided for each dependent variable in appendix B.

Together, these panel findings suggest two important details. First, they suggest that the NFCC variable is temporally prior to, and can explain changes in, levels of partisan group-centrism over time. Again, the findings are inconsistent across the dependent variable measures, for reasons that defy easy explanation, so there is some warrant for caution in interpreting the findings. Nevertheless, it is still important that the data did uncover some evidence consistent with the notion that the need for cognitive closure precedes and gives rise to a group-centric form of partisanship. Given the relative lack of panel studies with regard to the relationship between personality characteristics and political attitudes in the field, these inconsistent findings on their own are not inconsiderable.

These findings also suggest that we can rule out the alternative as the *sole* explanation for the relationship between NFCC and group-centric partisanship: that being a group-centric partisan causes an individual to become more closed. I do not have the ability to test that hypothesis, and I am certainly open to future studies investigating the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between the need for cognitive closure and indicators of partisan group-centrism. Nevertheless, these findings do, I believe, suggest that the correlation between the need for cognitive closure and group-centric partisanship that I have uncovered throughout this book arises at least to some degree as a function of closed personalities becoming more group-centric in the expression of their partisan identification.

How Presidential Campaigns Polarize the US Electorate

The findings reported in this chapter indicate that general election campaigns for the US presidency provide a context in which partisanship becomes especially attractive to individuals with a strong psychological need for cognitive closure. Campaigns are when the entitativity, or groupiness, of the parties reaches its zenith. The boundary lines are drawn, distinctions are made, the two groups unify around their chosen nominee, and the disagreements revealed during the primary are papered over. When this happens, people who crave the certainty

that can be provided only by a closed community and shared reality network find in the parties a welcome source for the firm knowledge they seek. Clear choices create rigid partisans by providing a welcome home for the cognitively rigid, who see the world in stark, black-and-white terms. Election campaigns can seem so polarizing, these findings suggest, because they provide the perfect breeding ground for the type of partisan group-centrism that has become increasingly commonplace in US politics. Political campaigns tap into the type of messaging most appealing to the psychologically closed, and unlike most other periods, they attract most people's attention. It is because campaigns tap into the underlying sources of strong partisanship and affective polarization that they become moments of intense partisan enthusiasm and anger.

Furthermore, the results reported here illustrate that psychological closure causes both Republicans and Democrats to embrace their chosen party more strongly, a pattern of results that contradicts the conventional narrative about the psychological characteristics of Trump's and Clinton's supporters. The 2016 campaign is conventionally perceived as a culmination of a longer-term process of psychological sorting within the party system. The psychologically closed found in Donald Trump, the conventional story goes, a candidate whose very worldview matched their own. Any remaining Democrats predisposed to authoritarianism or dogmatism should, in this case, have defected from their party. Meanwhile, those who were open should have seen their psychological worldview best reflected by the Democrats and the Clinton campaign. As the 2016 campaign unfolded, these psychological distinctions should have been made crystal clear to American voters, allowing people to more easily align their partisan identities with their psychological worldviews.

In this analysis, I do not find any evidence for this story. In no case did I find the closed abandoning the Democratic Party, for instance. Instead I found numerous instances of closed Democrats becoming stronger supporters of their party as the election unfolded. As the 2016 campaign progressed, the psychologically closed became, if anything, more attached to whichever party they identified with at the beginning of the campaign. Closed Republicans became more Republican, and closed Democrats became more Democratic. The psychological composition of the parties was not shaken by Donald Trump's emergence onto the partisan playing field. Instead, as the battle lines became clearer, the rigid and the closed became further entrenched in the camp they already belonged to. The story of the 2016 campaign, therefore, does not appear to be one of a psychological realignment of the parties on the basis of psychological openness versus closure. Rather, the 2016 campaign seems to have accelerated a longer-term process of making the closed more group-centric in their expression of partisanship.

Conclusion

OPENING THE CLOSED MIND?

> **The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right.**
>
> —Learned Hand

The American polity of today is troubled. Signs of decay are everywhere: from Freedom House scores to attacks on the Capitol in front of our very eyes. The informal norms of mutual toleration and respect for the institutional rules of the game that helped cement the world's most established democracy are coming undone. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) describe the erosion of these norms over decades and argue that their loss may portend a looming authoritarian crisis in this country. We may in fact be in the midst of such a crisis, as Republican politicians continue to question the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election and sow doubts in the minds of their supporters about the validity of Joe Biden's presidency. In order to work our way through this politically fraught period of our history, it is important to understand from whence it came.

Political scientists and other commentators widely agree that both political polarization and partisanship are key parts of the problem. The nation's politicians have become more divided, and more ideologically extreme, and this has been a crucial factor behind the bruising hardball politics of the past few decades. And voters, meanwhile, have become more partisan, encouraging the brinksmanship of elected officials. Why has polarization been linked to more intense degrees of partisanship among the masses? What consequences does this resurgence of mass partisanship have for our evaluations of the public's political competence? And what can be done to stem the rising tide of group-centric partisanship?

By reviewing the major theoretical claims and summarizing the most important findings, I connect observations in this book to enduring topics in political

science and political psychology: debates over the nature and origins of partisanship, the consequences of political engagement, asymmetries between the two parties, the pros and cons of different types of party systems, and what it means to be a good citizen. All of these important topics, in turn, have implications for future research that can investigate ways in which group-centric partisanship might be diminished.

Summary of Major Claims and Findings

I approached this study with a fairly straightforward question: what is the relationship between closed minds and the partisan divide between Democrats and Republicans? Some scholarship in the political psychology literature may be read to imply a ready answer: Republicans are closed, Democrats are open. Yet I found this answer unsatisfying for two reasons. First, many recent publications by political psychologists have suggested that the relationship between closure and political preferences is more nuanced than the straightforward rigidity-of-the-Right hypothesis would anticipate. In particular, the relationship between closure and political attitudes has been shown to be moderated by (1) variables related to political attention (e.g., Federico and Malka 2018; Federico 2021), (2) the domain of politics under consideration (e.g., economic versus social issues) (e.g., Federico and Malka 2018; Johnston, Lavine, and Federico 2017;), and (3) the symbolic ideological identities of respondents (e.g., Baldner et al. 2018; De Zavala, Cislak, and Wesolowska 2010; Federico, Deason, and Fisher 2012). All of these findings suggest a complex set of patterns by which psychological closure becomes associated with political beliefs, opening up the possibility that closure may lead to left-wing extremism in some domains or among some subgroups.

The second reason why the traditional rigidity-of-the-Right narrative left me unsatisfied had to do with the disjuncture I perceived between the conception of "Left versus Right" in much of the political psychology literature and its treatment in political science. Among many political psychologists, the concept of ideology has reigned supreme (e.g., Jost 2006). But as Nathan Kalmoe (2020) recounts, this prioritization of ideology does not mesh particularly well with the views of many political scientists who study public opinion, who instead tend to prioritize the concept of partisanship and view it not just as an expression of ideology but as an identity in its own regard. Kalmoe concludes his article by stating that "the sound and fury of *mass* politics is real, but it expresses partisan identities and ethnocentric prejudices, signifying nothing ideological for most" (2020, 789; emphasis in the original).

Hence, I ventured toward assessing the relationship between psychological closure and partisanship as well as indicators of the intensity with which people were attached to partisanship. A few contemporaneous articles reinforced this effort to prioritize partisanship over ideology. Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes's (2012) influential work on affective polarization, defined in social identity terms as the feelings people hold about both their own party and the opposition, illuminated both the extent of the partisan divide in US society and the value of shifting our reference toward partisanship rather than ideology. And Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe's (2015) effort to improve our measure of partisanship from the social identity perspective, along with their demonstration that strong partisans valued expressive goals over instrumental ones, further cemented this approach. Both of these important papers would also improve the empirical indicators I would ultimately embrace as measures of what I came to call "partisan group-centrism."

In addition to these efforts by political scientists, I also found in the psychological literature a set of theoretical paradigms anticipating a strong relationship between the psychological need for closure and group-centrism, a psychological term that encompasses ingroup loyalty, outgroup derogation, and a tendency to conform to group norms. Both Arie Kruglanski and colleagues' (2006) theory of groups as epistemic providers and Michael Hogg's (2007) theory of uncertainty-identity theory therefore provided a framework that led directly to the hypothesis that the desire for psychological closure will increase the intensity of partisanship, *if* we conceive of partisanship as a group identity rather than an ideology. In chapter 1, I reviewed both of these theoretical paradigms and discussed their explanation for why groups provide closure or certainty and why, therefore, individuals with a strong need for closure tend to be more group-centric than individuals who are more cognitively open.

These paradigms also provided key insight into the conditions under which closure leads to group-centrism. It happens, both Kruglanski et al. (2006) and Hogg (2007) theorize, under conditions of high group entitativity, a concept that refers to the cohesiveness or unity of the groups in question. Only entitative, cohesive groups, with shared goals and clear boundaries, are effective providers of psychological closure. Kruglanski et al. and Hogg have slightly different explanations for what it is that groups provide closure about. For Kruglanski et al., it is a "shared reality" generally—perceptions and beliefs about the world that encompass any number of potential considerations. For Hogg, the main benefit of groups is the certainty they provide about the social world, the prototypes that we attach to ourselves and others. This is an important distinction that may have some relevance to future research building on these theoretical premises. But for

my purposes, what was most beneficial was the twin insights that (1) people with a strong need for closure or certainty become group-centric, and (2) this process happens under conditions in which groups are perceived to be more internally unified and distinct from related outgroups.

Increasing internal unification and a growing distance from each other are precisely how US political parties have changed over the past decades. This is evident both from quantitative indicators like DW-Nominate and party unity scores and via qualitative and historical records of the transformation of the party system from echoes to clear choices. Thus, I theorized that any increase in the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and partisan group-centrism (1) would be a relatively recent phenomenon rather than an enduring one in US politics, and (2) would increase under perceptions of high rather than low elite polarization.

The final theoretical building block for my analyses was to incorporate recent research within political psychology on the importance of political attention (and, where necessary, related variables such as education) as a moderator of the link between personality and politics. Simply put, paying attention to politics, a concept that is measured primarily by indicators such as knowledge about factual political issues and self-described interest in politics, reflects that someone both understands the current political climate and cares about it. The highly attentive, therefore, are more aware of the growing divide between party elites (Smidt 2017). In addition, the attentive, by virtue of the fact that they are paying attention to a realm that offers little instrumental rewards (Somin 2006), are signaling that they care about politics—that politics, in other words, is a realm that is important to them. Based on these considerations, a number of political psychologists have shown that paying attention *strengthens* the link between indicators of psychological closure and political beliefs (e.g., Federico and Tagar 2014; Federico 2021). Building from this scholarship, I posited the same dynamic: that closure would increase expressions of partisan group-centrism more among the politically interested than among the detached.

The empirical chapters set out to assess these hypotheses. I conceptualized partisan group-centrism as a social identity, and used Tajfel's (1972) definition of social identity as composed of cognitive self-categorization, emotions, and values to guide my identification of measures of the group-centric partisanship construct. In chapter 2, I described the results of the relationship between the psychological need for closure, political attention, and various indicators of partisan group-centrism, including partisan strength, the intensity of partisan social identities, a measure of differences in reported feelings toward the two parties, and a measure of attitudes toward interparty marriage. Across each of these dependent variables, which encompassed different data sources, I found

a consistent pattern of positive associations between the need for closure and group-centric partisanship among the most highly attentive supporters of both the Republican and Democratic Parties. And in most cases, this association far surpassed conventional levels of statistical significance. Thus, chapter 2 reports consistent evidence that NFCC leads to stronger expressions of group-centric partisanship, and that it does so for both Republicans and Democrats.

In chapter 3, I assessed whether this relationship has recently emerged as a function of changes in the US party system. First, I assessed whether the linkage between NFCC and group-centric partisanship is a present-day phenomenon or an enduring one. I found that in 1988 there was absolutely no association between NFCC and being a strong partisan, while in more recent years there was one. Second, in a survey experiment on partisan opinion formation, which reflects the values dimension of social identity theory, in which people endorse the group's position as their own, I manipulated the perception of elite polarization. I found in that study that highly attentive, high-NFCC respondents were much more likely to endorse the party's perceived position under conditions of high elite polarization than under conditions of low elite polarization. Collectively, these two studies indicate that elite polarization is a contextual condition that works to strengthen the association between closed minds and group-centric partisanship.

Chapter 4, finally, examined these dynamics during the 2016 presidential campaign. Three findings stand out from this chapter. First, the association between NFCC and group-centric partisanship throughout 2016 was evident for both Republicans and Democrats. Thus, rather than representing a partisan realignment on the basis of psychological closure, the 2016 campaign appears instead to have accelerated the bipartisan closing of the partisan mind. Second, there was no evidence from this chapter for the attention-interaction hypothesis. I conclude from this that during campaigns, most people pay some attention to politics and care to some degree about it. Hence, during campaigns, I suggest, we may see a weaker moderating effect of attention in political psychology than we do during less robust political periods. Third and perhaps most importantly, I found some evidence for the argument that the need for closure precedes and thus gives rise to group-centric partisanship. In light of recent studies in political psychology indicating that politics can lead to changes in psychological orientation rather than, or perhaps in addition to, the reverse dynamic, this evidence is reassuring for the claim that closed minds become attracted to partisanship under certain conditions, and not simply that being partisan causes someone to develop a closed personality.

Collectively, these analyses provide an abundance of evidence supporting a revised rigidity-of-the-extremes thesis, as long as the dependent variables reflect

extremity of partisanship and we reconceive of partisanship as a social identity rather than a reflection of ideology. Based on this collection of findings, I suggest that a reconsideration of the relationship between closed minds and the partisan divide in US society is in order. The closed, it is true, are slightly more common among Republicans than among Democrats. But it is also true, I hope to have demonstrated, that being closed predisposes one to becoming a more group-centric partisan, regardless of whether one identifies with the party of the Right or of the Left. The closing of the partisan mind, these findings indicate, is a recent and bipartisan phenomenon.

Theoretical Implications

Partisanship

One implication of the above findings is about the value we gain by thinking about partisanship as a social identity rather than an ideology. The premise of this entire work, in fact, derives from this conception of partisanship, and the proof for this conception rests on the consistent empirical evidence. This is particularly true of the findings among Democrats. The need for cognitive closure, recall, is consistently related to symbolic conservatism and conservative positions on social issues. So even though I control for both symbolic ideology and issue attitudes in the empirical models, there may be some unmeasured ideological component of the NFCC construct that could explain the finding that NFCC increases the intensity of Republican partisanship. But there is no corresponding explanation, at least that I can think of, for making sense of these findings among Democrats *other than* the social identity explanation. These findings, therefore, lend themselves to an enduring debate within political science about the nature and foundations of mass partisanship and provide evidence in favor of the expressive or social identity point of view.

But while I firmly believe that these findings provide evidence for the social identity conception of partisanship, I do not think it is valuable to dismiss entirely the instrumental perspective. Indeed, some of the findings here suggest that the need for closure may in fact help to differentiate people for whom partisanship is group-centric from those for whom partisanship is a more instrumental expression of policy goals. For people with a weak need for cognitive closure, in particular, partisanship may reflect more of a rational "summary judgment" of ideological beliefs and political perceptions than an enduring psychological attachment. In that respect, this work resonates with others that make distinctions between types of partisanship (e.g., Groenendyk 2013; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012).

The work most closely resembling my own in identifying individual difference variables in psychology that help differentiate between different forms of partisanship is Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2017), which theorizes and tests the roles of the need for cognition and the need for affect in partisan reasoning. Using these two variables, Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2017) distinguish between reflective and intuitive reasoners, and show that those who are reflective (those who have a high need for cognition and low need for affect) are much more ideological than partisan in the way they reason, while more intuitive reasoners (who have a low need for cognition and a high need for affect) are more emotional and partisan in their reasoning. Thus, these authors suggest, the social identity perspective of partisanship may be more applicable to intuitive reasoners, while the instrumental view may be more appropriate for describing individuals capable of greater reflection.

While there are therefore clear similarities in the implications derived from both Arceneaux and Vander Wielen's (2017) research and my own, the two works are distinct in the nature of the motivations they posit as underlying partisan reasoning. For Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2017), the motivations for partisanship are primarily emotional or affective in nature (high need for affect), while the benefit of having a high need for cognition is that it allows individuals to overcome their intuitive emotional response due to the enjoyment of thinking that characterizes individuals who score highly on this psychological construct. By contrast, individuals with a strong need for cognitive closure are motivated not by affect but by a particular cognitive goal: to reduce uncertainty. This motivation coincides with a dislike of thinking, but is not synonymous with the need for cognition.[1]

Thus, unlike Arceneaux and Vander Wielen's (2017) perspective that emotion drives partisan reasoning, the motivation underlying the form of group-centric partisanship featured in this book is cognitive in nature. Perhaps these different models of partisanship lend themselves to an integrative effort. While it is beyond the reach of this book to fully theorize such a framework, let alone test it, some speculation is in order.

One possibility is that the nature of partisanship is more diverse than political scientists have previously conceived. In particular, it may be worth differentiating within the social identity paradigm between an emotional type of partisanship rooted in a high need for affect and a cognitive form of group-centric partisanship rooted in a high need for cognitive closure. The corresponding metaphor for the former may be that of a sports fan, while the latter would best be thought of as a type of religious identity and the group-centric partisan a kind of "true believer."

Indeed, I think that this metaphorical distinction between partisans as sports fans versus partisans as religious true believers is a useful one and may help us to

distinguish distinct forms of partisanship, even if both categories can be broadly placed within the social identity paradigm. Partisans who are akin to sports fans may feel an emotional bond with their party, stick with their party through good times and bad, and receive a boost in their self-esteem when their party succeeds. But unlike religious true believers, sports fans are often quite capable of criticizing their team, recommending personnel changes, and adjusting their level of commitment to the team in response to its performance. But for the true believer, these responses are unlikely because the organization has become so central not only to their self-esteem but to their very construction of reality. The true believer is a partisan not just because it feels good, but because the parties provide a shared reality and a set of self-related prototypes that give people a sense of order and structure about how the world works and where they fit within it.

Bolstering this perspective, social psychologists have long noted an association between the need for cognitive closure and religious commitments. Like the modern political parties in the United States, religions can reduce uncertainties by prescribing beliefs about right and wrong, ideas about what is true and false, and notions of what typical members of their group are like. Vassilis Saroglou (2002, 185), for example, writes that religion can ameliorate a number of psychologically aversive states for those with a strong need for cognitive closure, such as "disorder among ideas, the chaos in the inner world, the simultaneous presence of incompatible elements, and the lack of integration-subordination of everything to what constitutes the fundamental, essential body of their belief system." Mark J. Brandt and Christine Reyna (2010, 715) similarly write about religion, and particularly about being a religious extremist, that "from a psychological perspective, religious fundamentalism represents an adherence to a set of religious teachings that are believed to contain the inerrant truth. . . . It is this cluster of beliefs surrounding a presumptive inerrant truth that makes fundamentalism a firm knowledge structure." Finally, Michael Hogg, Janice Adelman, and Robert Blagg (2010, 76) write that religions "provide an explanatory ideology and worldview that relates to both the sacred and the secular and shared rituals, behavioral conventions, and normative values and beliefs. Identification with such a group reduces uncertainty in precisely the way described by uncertainty-identity theory." All three of these articles show that individuals who have a strong need for cognitive closure or who are temporarily made to feel uncertain about themselves become stronger religious identifiers.

The group-centric partisanship described in this text, therefore, may require a broadening of the partisanship concept. People may be partisan because of an emotional bond that bolsters their self-esteem (rooted in a high need for affect and low need for cognition), because they rely on the parties to provide a sense of certainty and closure about the world and themselves (rooted in a high need

for cognitive closure), or because the parties reflect their values (as in the instrumental perspective).

Indeed, aggregate trends in mass partisanship call perhaps for a more diverse set of frameworks for understanding its manifestations and consequences. For instance, the electorate has experienced a resurgence in mass partisanship as indicated by variables such as partisan strength and affective polarization, but it has also simultaneously observed a rise in partisan "leaners" (Klar and Krupnikov 2016). These leaners, as I discussed earlier, are characterized by a weaker need for cognitive closure compared to group-centric partisans, but Klar and Krupnikov (2016) show that they also have unique concerns related to impression management. Similarly, research has suggested that outparty negativity is more extreme in contemporary US politics than inparty positivity (e.g., Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012), with issue attitudes having a stronger influence on the former than the latter (e.g., Bougher 2017). People certainly can dislike parties because of what they stand for without relying on a partisan identity for cognitive closure.

The need for cognitive closure, therefore, should be not be seen as necessary for the production of any of the outcome variables examined in this book. There are various pathways through which an individual can become a strong partisan, have negative views of the outgroup, or dislike the thought of interparty marriage. What characterizes group-centric partisanship is a pattern exhibited by multiple symptoms, including having a strong partisan identity, polarized feelings, and a willingness to conform to the party's worldview. It is this pattern, in which the need for cognitive closure gives rise to multiple and diverse indicators of the intensity of partisanship, that I hope to have illuminated in this text.

Political Attention

Another important implication of this work is that political attention is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, interest in politics is crucial in the development of political participation, which any democracy requires. On the other hand, as I demonstrate, political attention can also foster partisan rigidity, which prohibits the reflection and deliberation that good citizenship depends on. In particular, attention when coupled with a strong need for cognitive closure breeds the closed type of group-centric partisanship described in this book.

This finding may help to make sense of what is otherwise a puzzling set of conflicting findings in political science about those who pay attention to politics. Some find that the attentive are more partisan in the way they reason (e.g., Taber and Lodge 2006), while others find the opposite (e.g., Kam 2005). Perhaps attention to politics alone is insufficient for differentiating those who are likely to engage in partisan reasoning from those who can avoid it. Instead, attention

to politics should be thought of as an indicator of both having awareness about and taking an interest in the political realm. But this alone will not distinguish between partisan and nonpartisan reasoners. We also need to identify the underlying psychological motivations of respondents. When the motivation is to achieve cognitive closure, attention is likely to enhance partisan reasoning. But when the need for cognitive closure is weak or absent, attention may coincide with a more reflective type of reasoning in which partisan cues are ignored.

Partisan Asymmetries

This work puts forward a straightforward thesis: the closing of the partisan mind is a bipartisan phenomenon. Yet this conclusion should not be read to imply that the closing of the partisan mind—and the nefarious consequences that may result—is symmetrical across the two parties. There are two complications that render such a reading incomplete. The first is simply that there are more closed Republicans than closed Democrats. Thus, group-centric partisanship is an outcome we should see more of on the right side of the political spectrum than on the left (holding all else constant).

A second complication is a product of the theory itself and the implications it has for the types of beliefs that citizens will hold. In particular, the theory of groups as epistemic providers is more or less silent about the types of shared reality that groups can or will construct for their supporters. That "reality," for instance, could emphasize the concerns of social identity groups within the coalition, or symbolic ideological goals (cf. Grossmann and Hopkins 2016). Alternatively, the shared reality constructed within a party could have some fidelity to reality or be removed from it. Here, the messages and views of elites within the parties—including by partisan media outlets—will be instrumental to the opinions that will be expressed by the parties' supporters. Hence, evidence of asymmetries between the parties in terms of the reality of their beliefs should not automatically be interpreted as evidence for psychological differences between the parties. The need for cognitive closure leads partisans, as the experiment in chapter 3 most clearly illustrates, to adopt the opinions of their leaders. Therefore, many of the asymmetries between Democrats and Republicans in factual beliefs may result not from enduring psychological differences but from different messages emanating from party leaders and ideological media outlets.

Polarization and Voter Competence

Another implication of these findings has to do with the consequences of different types of party systems for the competence of voters. As I briefly mentioned

at various points in this book, both political scientists and political advocates have long argued in favor of party polarization as a boon to democratic forms of governance. One problem, at least from the perspective of political science, was that most citizens did not think about politics in the same way that their elected officials did. This disjuncture implied a lack of attention among citizens and an incapacity to use the criterion of ideology to make their political decisions. This argument was forcefully put forward by Philip Converse (2006), who showed that Americans lacked constraint in their political belief systems: they held a mix of liberal opinions with conservative ones. By differentiating the parties, political scientists proposed, people would have greater ability and motivation to develop more constrained belief systems and therefore come closer to meeting their ideal of good citizenship.

Indeed, research indicates that elite polarization has increased constraint among the masses (Levendusky 2009). But I would contend that constraint among belief elements may be an insufficient criterion for evaluating voter competence. The growing constraint we have observed in US politics over the past few decades appears to be largely a product of group-centric motivations rather than a greater capacity among the public for ideological reasoning. Americans' increasing constraint therefore reflects the growing power that party leaders, who now are unified and offer firm knowledge, have over the opinions of their followers. In light of these findings, I suggest we shift the criteria we use to evaluate public competence, away from outcome (constrained versus unconstrained) and toward process (partisan versus open-minded). What matters is not the structure of mass opinion, but the way in which people reason. Closed-minded partisan thinking is not, from this perspective, politically beneficial, even if it leads to an appearance of greater ideological constraint. What should be valued, I propose, is open-minded thinking that shuns the motivation to conform to the position of party leaders and instead relies on a greater variety of information as well as more fully cultivated internal values. An open-minded perspective would be one that, to echo Learned Hand, is never too sure that it is right, and that is therefore always capable of change.

Opening the Closed Mind?

Can people be made more open-minded, or are our psychological characteristics fixed and unalterable? Fortunately, research suggests that an individual's degree of open- or closed-mindedness can be changed. Political psychologists are starting to recognize this possibility and are showing that many of the correlations between political preferences and psychological variables arise because our

political views influence our personalities (e.g., Bakker, Lelkes, and Malka 2021; Boston et al. 2018; Hatemi, Crabtree, and Smith 2019; Luttig 2021; Smith et al. 2021). The Stanford psychologist Jamil Zaki (2020, 21) reinforces this perspective when he writes, "Our personalities also change more than we might realize. After leaving home, new adults grow more neurotic. After getting married, they become more introverted; after starting their first job, they become more conscientious. We can, of course, also change intentionally. Psychotherapy leaves people less neurotic, more extroverted, and more conscientious than they were before—and these changes last at least a year after therapy ends. Personality doesn't lock us into a particular life path; it also reflects the choices we make." Zaki calls the idea that human personalities are fixed and beyond our control the "Roddenberry hypothesis," referencing Gene Roddenberry, the creator of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which embodied this hypothesis in the fixed nature of many of the characters on the show. But Zaki informs us that this hypothesis is wrong. Citing numerous works from neuroscience on the plasticity of the brain, as well as work by psychologists like Carol Dweck (2008), whose research on mindset illustrates the power of our beliefs and actions over our own psychological characteristics, Zaki (2020, 21) claims that "we're not static or frozen; our brains and minds shift throughout our lives." Based on these new findings about the malleability of personality, it is now possible to examine those factors that create more open-mindedness.

What, then, has the potential to foster open minds and, with them, politically healthier forms of citizenship? Fortunately, psychological research has already identified some candidates that may help promote greater psychological and therefore political openness. In particular, research suggests that psychological openness can be enhanced by strategies such as reading literary fiction, practicing cognitive behavioral therapy, and practicing mindfulness and meditation (Djikic, Oatley, and Moldoveanu 2013; Jackson et al. 2012; Pokorski and Suchorzynska 2017). While the mechanisms for these effects are not definitively understood, some research suggests that these types of "treatments" work by changing neural connections in the brain, which undermines our default modes of thinking about ourselves and others. In a more open state of mind brought about by meditation, fiction, or cognitive behavioral training, people are given the opportunity to literally rewrite aspects of their personality, such as the need for cognitive closure.

For instance, Mieczyslaw Pokorski and Anna Suchorzynska (2017) find that meditation practices significantly increase scores on the openness-to-experience dimension of the Big Five personality traits, a dimension that is highly related to the need for cognitive closure (with more openness on the Big Five trait corresponding closely to lower levels of the need for cognitive closure) (see also Crescentini and Capurso 2015; van den Hurk et al. 2011). This result may occur

as a function of reduced activity in the default mode network of the brain, a state of mind associated with increased neural plasticity, and a component of the brain that appears to be less active in the midst of meditation and among experienced meditators (e.g., Brewer et al. 2011; Garrison et al. 2015; Pollan 2019, 305).

In fact, researchers have connected heightened activity in the default mode network with the type of closed or group-centric partisan thinking described in this book. Specifically, Jonas T. Kaplan, Sarah I. Gimbel, and Sam Harris (2016) of USC conducted a neuroimaging study in which self-identified liberals were presented with information that contradicted their personal political beliefs. In response, participants showed increased activity precisely in the default mode network. The default mode network, in other words, became activated when people's political identities were threatened. It follows that reducing activity in the default mode network may facilitate greater open-mindedness, not just in terms of personality but also in terms of political judgment. Practices like meditation, therefore, which reduce activity in the default mode network, may help to foster more political open-mindedness.

Another viable option for reducing the psychological need for closure is the reading of literary fiction. Literary texts are by their very nature ambiguous and lacking in closure with respect to interpretation. Cognitively, literature provides access to another's consciousness, a function that may draw on and expand the default mode network, suppressing the overbearing and rigid ego characteristic of those with closed minds. Virginia Woolf pointed toward this function of literature when she wrote that "the state of reading consists in the complete elimination of the ego."[2] Consistent with this hypothesis, numerous neuroimaging studies have found that reading fiction does serve to exercise the default mode network (e.g., Mar 2004; Tamir et al. 2016). For these reasons, the reading of literature has the potential to change minds, reduce the need for closure, make people more open, allow them to empathize more with those who disagree with them politically, and therefore become less polarized. While no studies as yet have assessed these hypotheses directly, there is an abundance of suggestive research that implies their plausibility.

First, an experimental study by Maja Djikic, Keith Oatley, and Mihnea C. Moldoveanu (2013) from the University of Toronto discovered that exposure to literary short stories (as compared to a nonfiction essay) reduced participants' need for cognitive closure. The variable that I have identified in this book as the primary psychological source of partisan polarization appears to be changeable in response to a relatively innocuous exposure to literary fiction. Fiction, it appears, may not only offer an alternative sense of belonging and identity, but may also directly make people more open-minded. This is the means by which

good fiction can disturb the comfortable, with potentially profound psychological and sociological effects.

These lessons have been applied by Elizabeth Levy Paluck and Donald Green (2009) in a second suggestive study assessing the efficacy of a fictional radio program, *New Dawn*, in changing the political culture in Rwanda. The *New Dawn* program exposed Rwandans to a narrative of a Romeo-and-Juliet story in which star-crossed lovers become entangled in the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis (a situation that could very well take place in the current United States, where there is a rising tide of opposition to interparty marriage). Exposure to this storyline, in which the two lovers attempt to bring about a unification of the two opposed communities, seems to have had lasting and meaningful effects on the political culture in Rwanda. Specifically, the program seemed to cultivate in listeners a greater sense of independence from authority figures and changed the ways listeners sought to resolve community problems. A fictional narrative, exposing people to the lives of others, had meaningful consequences for important attitudinal and behavioral indicators of societal conflict and polarization.

Literature has the potential to increase political open-mindedness by undermining the default predictions and categorizations that our brains are designed to make in the most efficient way possible. This is what the Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard (2015) suggests is the defining characteristic of literature in a *New Yorker* article titled "Vanishing Point." As he writes, "The indefinite human, faceless and devoid of character, the mass human, lives its life in patterns by which it is bound and is the material of statistics." This is the realm of cognition exhibited by the default mode network, where we seek to make quick judgments and generalizable inferences from a limited amount of information. But as Knausgaard observes, "The instant a novel is opened and a reader begins to read, the remoteness between writer and reader dissolves. The *other* that thereby emerges does so in the reader's imagination, assimilating at once into his or her mind. This establishing of proximity to another self is characteristic of the novel." The ego, and the default mode network, may subsequently expand on this assimilation of minds. The mind in the hands of a powerful storyteller lets go of its assumptions, its default mode, and opens to the mind of the writer and the actions of the characters.

Knausgaard (2015) goes on to note that the novel is a space where reality is "idiosyncratic, particular, and singular: in other words, it represents the exact opposite of the media, which strives toward the universal and general." By undermining the general, the regular patterns of life, and exposing us instead to the idiosyncratic and the particular, literature teaches us that the predictions our

brains were designed to make efficiently, on the basis of limited data, are often wrong or incomplete. This may cause uncertainty to rise in the brain, neural connections to become unglued, and the default mode network to shut down or expand, much like what happens when we meditate. The result of such an experience may be more openness and, as a result, reduced group-centrism in the realm of politics.

The suggestion made here that literary fiction can reduce group-centric partisanship is of course speculative and awaits future research. But the existing literature does identify important theoretical mechanisms warranting this research. Fiction increases openness to new experiences (Djikic, Oatley, and Moldoveanu 2013), increases empathy (Mar, Oatley, and Peterson 2009), interacts in suggestive ways with the default mode network of the brain (Mar 2004; Tamir et al. 2016), and has been shown to decrease other types of group-based social conflict (Paluck and Green 2009). Perhaps John Adams was on to something when he included a section titled "The Encouragement of Literature" in the constitution for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The final possibility with some demonstrated potential for changing minds toward greater psychological openness is cognitive training. Jackson et al. (2012) conducted a study in which participants were assigned to complete various mental tasks meant to increase their cognitive ability. These tasks included activities like crossword and sudoku puzzles as well as inductive reasoning exercises aimed at fostering the recognition of novel patterns. These interventions, through a period of sixteen weeks, had a demonstrable effect on the personality trait of openness to experience. This study, conducted primarily among older adults, both illustrates the malleability of personality—that human beings are psychologically fluid—and also identifies a fairly benign set of tasks that can mitigate against the psychological closed-mindedness driving our currently polarized society.

In short, research suggests a variety of ways in which the psychological foundations of group-centric partisanship can be ameliorated. In this last section I hope to have offered some suggestions and identified plausible mechanisms for changing partisan minds. A number of political scientists, concerned about polarization in US politics, have argued for institutional changes to the party system or to the US Constitution. While we should continue these conversations, this last discussion suggests there may be alternative remedies to the type of polarization in our society, in the form of psychological interventions. Some part of human nature may indeed be inimical to life in a liberal democracy, especially one as vast and diverse as ours. Institutions can be designed to protect us from our worst impulses, as the Constitution sought to do. But we—those of us

who study political psychology and those who cherish the values of liberty and democracy—should avail ourselves of all the tools at our disposal to create a more perfect union. Opening minds, I suggest, should become another focus of our investigations into how to overcome the problems of toxic partisanship and polarization in US politics.

Appendix A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES FOR KEY VARIABLES

15-Item Measure of the Need for Cognitive Closure (NFCC), 2014 YouGov Survey (alpha = 0.89) and 2018 SSI Survey (alpha = 0.83)

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with these statements. (Strongly disagree—Strongly agree)

1. I don't like situations that are uncertain.
2. I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.
3. I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.
4. I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life.
5. I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.
6. I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.
7. When I have made a decision, I feel relieved.
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I'm dying to reach a solution very quickly.
9. I would quickly become impatient and irritated if I would not find a solution to a problem immediately.
10. I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.

11. I dislike it when a person's statement could mean many different things.
12. I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.
13. I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.
14. I do not usually consult many different opinions before forming my own view.
15. I dislike unpredictable situations.

14-item Measure of the Need for Cognitive Closure (NFCC), 2008 Knowledge Networks Survey (alpha = 0.81)

Read each of the following statements and decide how much you would agree with each according to your attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Please respond according to the following scale, using only one number for each statement. (Strongly disagree—Strongly agree)

1. In case of uncertainty, I prefer to make an immediate decision, whatever it may be.
2. When I find myself facing various, potentially valid alternatives, I decide in favor of one of them quickly and without hesitation.
3. I prefer to decide on the first available solution rather than to ponder at length what decision I should make.
4. I get very upset when things around me aren't in their place.
5. Generally, I avoid participating in discussions on ambiguous and controversial problems.
6. When I need to confront a problem, I do not think about it too much and I decide without hesitation.
7. When I need to solve a problem, I generally do not waste time in considering diverse points of view about it.
8. I prefer to be with people who have the same ideas and tastes as myself.
9. Generally, I do not search for alternative solutions to problems for which I already have a solution available.
10. I feel uncomfortable when I do not manage to give a quick response to problems that I face.
11. Any solution to a problem is better than remaining in a state of uncertainty.
12. I prefer activities where it is always clear what is to be done and how it needs to be done.
13. After having found a solution to a problem, I believe that it is a useless waste of time to take into account diverse possible solutions.
14. I prefer things that I am used to over things I am unfamiliar with.

Measures of Political Attention and Partisan Group-Centrism in the 2008 Knowledge Networks Study

Interest in Politics

1. Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?

General Political Knowledge (alpha = 0.65)

1. What job or political office does DICK CHENEY currently hold?
2. What job or political office does JOHN ROBERTS currently hold?
3. What job or political office does GORDON BROWN currently hold?
4. What job or political office does NANCY PELOSI currently hold?
5. Which political party currently has the most members in the Senate in Washington?
6. Which political party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington?
7. How long is the term of office for a U.S. Senator?
8. Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to the Federal Courts—the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?

Political Identity Centrality (alpha = 0.84)

1. My political attitudes and beliefs are an important reflection of who I am. (Strongly disagree—Strongly agree).
2. In general, my political attitudes and beliefs are an important part of my self-image. (Strongly disagree—Strongly agree).

Group-Centric Partisanship

1. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?
   If Republican or Democrat
   i) Would you call yourself a strong [Republican/Democrat] or a not very strong [Republican/Democrat]?

Measures of Political Attention and Partisan Group-Centrism in the 2014 YouGov Study

Interest in Politics

1. How often do you pay attention to politics and elections?

General Political Knowledge (alpha = 0.70)

1. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Harry Reid?
2. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not? Is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?
3. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?
4. Which of the two major parties would you say is more conservative?
5. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Jack Lew?

Group-Centric Partisanship

1. Partisan social identity strength (alpha = 0.85)
    a. How important is being a [Democrat/Republican] to you?
    b. How well does the term [Democrat/Republican] describe you?
    c. When talking about [Democrats/Republicans], how often do you use "we" instead of "they"?
    d. To what extent do you think of yourself as being a [Democrat/Republican]?
2. Party Feeling Thermometer Difference
    a. Respondents are asked to rate both the Democrats and the Republicans on a feeling thermometer scale that ranges from 0 to 100, where ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean they feel favorably and warm toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean they don't feel favorably toward the group and don't care too much for them.
        i. I then calculate a difference score by subtracting ratings of the outparty from ratings of the inparty. Higher values indicate greater affect toward the inparty than toward the outparty.

Measures of Political Attention and Partisan Group-Centrism in the 2018 SSI Study

Interest in Politics

1. How often do you pay attention to politics and elections?

General Political Knowledge (alpha = 0.46)

1. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Paul Ryan?
2. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?
3. Which of the two major parties would you say is more conservative?
4. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by John Roberts?

Political Identity Centrality (alpha = 0.90)

1. My political attitudes and beliefs are an important reflection of who I am. (Strongly disagree—Strongly agree).
2. In general, my political attitudes and beliefs are an important part of my self-image. (Strongly disagree—Strongly agree).

Preference for Like-Minded Media

1. In today's media marketplace, there are many different kinds of networks with different kinds of news shows that people might like to watch. For example, some people might like to watch a show from PBS, another might like to watch a show from Fox News, and another a show from MSNBC. If you had to pick, which of the following types of news show would you most like to watch?

Group-Centric Partisanship: Interparty Marriage (analysis combines all three question wordings)

1.
   a. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Democratic Party? Would you feel happy or unhappy?

b. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Republican Party? Would you feel happy or unhappy?

2.

c. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Democratic Party but who RARELY talks about politics? Would you feel happy or unhappy?
d. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Republican Party but who RARELY talks about politics? Would you feel happy or unhappy?

3.

e. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Democratic Party and who FREQUENTLY talks about politics? Would you feel happy or unhappy?
f. How would you feel if you had a son or daughter who married someone who votes for the Republican Party and who FREQUENTLY talks about politics? Would you feel happy or unhappy?

Measures of Key Variables in the 2016 MN Panel Study

Need for Cognitive Closure (alpha = 0.87), Wave 1 (Strongly disagree—Strongly agree)

1. In case of uncertainty, I prefer to make an immediate decision, whatever it may be.
2. When I find myself facing various, potentially valid, alternatives, I decide in favor of one of them quickly and without hesitation.
3. I prefer to decide on the first available solution rather than to ponder at length what decision I should make.
4. When I need to confront a problem, I do not think about it too much and I decide without hesitation.
5. When I need to solve a problem, I generally do not waste time in considering diverse points of view about it.
6. Any solution to a problem is better than remaining in a state of uncertainty.

Group-Centric Partisanship (Waves 1, 2, and 3)

1. Partisan strength categorization
   a. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?
      If Republican or Democrat
      i. Would you call yourself a strong [Republican/Democrat] or a not very strong [Republican/Democrat]?
2. Partisan social identity strength (alpha = 0.85 Democrats; alpha = 0.92 Republicans)
   a. How important is being a [Democrat/Republican] to you?
   b. How well does the term [Democrat/Republican] describe you?
   c. When talking about [Democrats/Republicans], how often do you use "we" instead of "they"?
   d. To what extent do you think of yourself as being a [Democrat/Republican]?
3. Alternative partisanship
   a. I identify with [Democrats/Republicans] (Strongly disagree—Strongly agree)
4. Party Feeling Thermometer Difference

   a. Respondents are asked to rate both the Democrats and the Republicans on a feeling thermometer scale that ranges from 0 to 100, where ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean they feel favorably and warm toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean they don't feel favorably toward the group and don't care too much for them.
      i. I then calculate a difference score by subtracting ratings of the outparty from ratings of the inparty. Higher values indicate greater affect toward the inparty than toward the outparty.
5. Partisan certainty
   a. To what extent do you feel certain about your [Democratic/Republican] political outlook?
6. Partisan morality (alpha = 0.85 Democrats; alpha = 0.92 Republicans)
   a. To what extent is your [Democratic/Republican] political outlook deeply connected to your beliefs about fundamental questions of right and wrong?
   b. To what extent is your [Democratic/Republican] political outlook deeply a reflection of your core moral beliefs and reflections?

Appendix B

TABLES

Chapter 2

TABLE B2.1 The effect of NFCC on partisan strength—Republicans, 2008 GfK

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP
NFCC	−2.05	−0.17	−7.10**
	(3.181)	(4.916)	(2.224)
NFCC × Political interest	3.24		
	(4.043)		
NFCC × Political knowledge		1.03	
		(5.815)	
NFCC × Political-identity centrality			12.39**
			(3.218)
Attention to politics	2.28	1.45**	1.07**
	(3.627)	(0.534)	(0.529)
Political-identity centrality	1.20*	1.33**	−5.19
	(0.650)	(0.608)	(3.664)
Political knowledge	−0.48	−6.37	−0.24
	(0.629)	(4.374)	(0.618)
Income	0.87	0.81	1.21*
	(0.663)	(0.657)	(0.629)
Education	−1.61*	−1.73*	−1.65*
	(0.933)	(0.966)	(0.944)
Age	−0.02**	−0.02**	−0.01*
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)

(*continued*)

TABLE B2.1 (continued)

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP
White	0.21	0.25	0.41
	(0.489)	(0.478)	(0.448)
Black	1.92	1.90	2.82**
	(1.325)	(1.296)	(1.243)
Female	0.63**	0.67**	0.67**
	(0.240)	(0.246)	(0.236)
Ideology	7.55**	3.37	4.86*
	(2.453)	(2.692)	(2.501)
Ideology × Attention to politics	−2.65		
	(2.970)		
Policy extremism	0.95	−2.34	0.65
	(1.567)	(1.844)	(1.583)
Policy extremism × Attention to politics	0.15		
	(1.991)		
Ideology × Political knowledge		3.08	
		(3.648)	
Policy extremism × Political knowledge		4.77**	
		(2.352)	
Ideology × Political-identity centrality			1.02
			(3.631)
Policy extremism × Political-identity centrality			0.79
			(2.452)
Constant	−6.91**	−2.27	−2.87
	(2.890)	(3.535)	(2.390)
Observations	626	626	626

Logistic regression model coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B2.2 The effect of NFCC on partisan strength—Democrats, 2008 GfK

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP
NFCC	−3.86*	−3.75*	−3.67*
	(2.138)	(2.151)	(2.027)
NFCC × Political interest	5.85**		
	(2.672)		
NFCC × Political knowledge		5.80**	
		(2.871)	
NFCC × Political-identity centrality			6.57**
			(2.941)

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP	STRONG PARTISANSHIP
Attention to politics	0.47	1.50**	1.44**
	(1.877)	(0.446)	(0.456)
Political-identity centrality	1.61**	1.59**	−0.44
	(0.492)	(0.488)	(2.150)
Political knowledge	−0.23	−2.02	−0.20
	(0.640)	(2.243)	(0.634)
Income	−0.37	−0.42	−0.40
	(0.617)	(0.611)	(0.613)
Education	0.57	0.44	0.45
	(0.793)	(0.798)	(0.775)
Age	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
White	0.29	0.28	0.33
	(0.332)	(0.321)	(0.327)
Black	1.18**	1.22**	1.26**
	(0.562)	(0.556)	(0.572)
Female	0.42*	0.37	0.37
	(0.246)	(0.240)	(0.244)
Ideology	0.42	−0.65	−1.92*
	(1.238)	(1.608)	(1.103)
Ideology × Attention to politics	−3.67**		
	(1.703)		
Policy extremism	0.86	0.32	0.87
	(1.689)	(1.654)	(1.598)
Policy extremism × Attention to politics	−0.72		
	(2.145)		
Ideology × Political knowledge		−2.47	
		(2.259)	
Policy extremism × Political knowledge		−0.02	
		(2.383)	
Ideology × Political-identity centrality			−0.68
			(1.725)
Policy extremism × Political-identity centrality			−0.81
			(2.337)
Constant	−2.29	−1.52	−1.70
	(1.638)	(1.825)	(1.593)
Observations	650	650	650

Logistic regression model coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B2.3 The effect of NFCC on partisan group-centrism—Republicans, 2014 YouGov

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PARTISAN SOCIAL ID	PARTISAN SOCIAL ID	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE
NFCC	–0.51*	–0.34**	0.03	–0.15
	(0.278)	(0.146)	(0.244)	(0.150)
NFCC × Political knowledge	0.65*		0.07	
	(0.335)		(0.288)	
NFCC × Political interest		0.50**		0.35*
		(0.200)		(0.201)
Political knowledge	–0.27	0.11*	0.09	0.19**
	(0.394)	(0.065)	(0.278)	(0.063)
Political interest	0.09	–0.11	0.03	–0.25
	(0.053)	(0.224)	(0.037)	(0.196)
Income	0.08	0.09	0.16**	0.15**
	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.050)	(0.049)
Education	–0.18**	–0.17**	–0.08**	–0.07*
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.039)	(0.038)
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female	0.05**	0.04**	0.03	0.03
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.021)
Black	0.06	0.08	–0.06	–0.06
	(0.065)	(0.059)	(0.061)	(0.058)
White	–0.07**	–0.07**	–0.04	–0.03
	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Ideology	0.12	0.32**	0.20	0.19
	(0.229)	(0.155)	(0.185)	(0.127)
Ideology × Political knowledge	0.09		0.13	
	(0.338)		(0.237)	
Policy extremism	0.17	0.01	0.13	0.15*
	(0.142)	(0.083)	(0.142)	(0.092)
Policy extremism × Political knowledge	–0.16		–0.06	
	(0.183)		(0.184)	
Ideology × Political interest		–0.22		0.15
		(0.218)		(0.176)
Policy extremism × Political interest		0.08		–0.11
		(0.122)		(0.131)
/cut1				
/cut2				
Constant	0.69**	0.51**	0.26	0.36**
	(0.262)	(0.157)	(0.228)	(0.132)
Observations	373	373	373	373
R-squared	0.18	0.19	0.24	0.25

OLS coefficients (1–4); ordinal logistic coefficients (5–6); standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B2.4 The effect of NFCC on partisan group-centrism—Democrats, 2014 YouGov

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PARTISAN SOCIAL ID	PARTISAN SOCIAL ID	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE
NFCC	−0.40*	−0.17	−0.53**	−0.17
	(0.227)	(0.183)	(0.134)	(0.142)
NFCC × Political knowledge	0.68**		0.90**	
	(0.283)		(0.180)	
NFCC × Political interest		0.43		0.42**
		(0.263)		(0.196)
Political knowledge	−0.33*	−0.18**	−0.23	−0.06
	(0.195)	(0.056)	(0.156)	(0.053)
Political interest	0.13**	−0.02	0.10**	−0.00
	(0.037)	(0.170)	(0.044)	(0.137)
Income	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.03
	(0.047)	(0.053)	(0.040)	(0.050)
Education	0.01	−0.00	0.01	−0.00
	(0.047)	(0.050)	(0.036)	(0.039)
Age	0.00**	0.00**	0.00**	0.00**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female	0.04**	0.04**	0.03	0.03
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.024)
Black	0.09**	0.09**	−0.05	−0.04
	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.040)
White	0.01	0.01	−0.05*	−0.05
	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.032)
Ideology	0.14	−0.06	0.09	−0.14
	(0.156)	(0.112)	(0.155)	(0.134)
Ideology × Political knowledge	−0.47**		−0.49**	
	(0.201)		(0.200)	
Policy extremism	0.18*	0.07	0.44**	0.16
	(0.099)	(0.073)	(0.069)	(0.100)
Policy extremism × Political knowledge	−0.18		−0.47**	
	(0.156)		(0.110)	
Ideology × Political interest		−0.22		−0.19
		(0.155)		(0.194)
Policy extremism × Political interest		−0.04		−0.12
		(0.123)		(0.124)
/cut1				
/cut2				

(*continued*)

TABLE B2.4 (continued)

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PARTISAN SOCIAL ID	PARTISAN SOCIAL ID	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE
Constant	0.65**	0.66**	0.73**	0.71**
	(0.157)	(0.142)	(0.118)	(0.109)
Observations	508	508	508	508
R-squared	0.20	0.18	0.30	0.22

OLS coefficients (1–4); ordinal logistic coefficients (5–6); standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B2.5 The effect of NFCC on partisan group-centrism—Republicans, 2018 SSI

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE
NFCC	0.76**	–0.56	–1.18	0.17	–0.92
	(0.310)	(0.741)	(0.816)	(0.452)	(0.826)
NFCC × Political interest		2.15**			
		(1.070)			
NFCC × Identity centrality			3.02**		
			(1.147)		
NFCC × Like-minded news preference				1.12*	
				(0.616)	
NFCC × Political knowledge					2.57**
					(1.161)
Attention to politics	–0.19	–2.69**	–0.19	–0.23	–0.20
	(0.234)	(0.825)	(0.229)	(0.234)	(0.234)
Identity centrality	1.08**	1.08**	–3.43**	1.10**	1.09**
	(0.251)	(0.249)	(0.931)	(0.252)	(0.249)
Like-minded news preference	0.32**	0.30**	0.32**	–0.72	0.30**
	(0.105)	(0.104)	(0.102)	(0.479)	(0.104)
Political knowledge	0.29	0.34	0.38*	0.31	–2.48**
	(0.215)	(0.215)	(0.211)	(0.215)	(0.888)
Age	–0.00	–0.00	–0.00	–0.00	–0.00
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Education	–0.32	–0.30	–0.31	–0.33	–0.30
	(0.226)	(0.225)	(0.222)	(0.226)	(0.225)

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE
Sex	–0.06	–0.06	–0.07	–0.05	–0.06
	(0.102)	(0.102)	(0.100)	(0.102)	(0.102)
White	0.10	0.12	0.10	0.10	0.16
	(0.192)	(0.192)	(0.188)	(0.192)	(0.193)
Black	–0.02	0.05	0.01	0.10	0.13
	(0.421)	(0.420)	(0.412)	(0.425)	(0.421)
Ideology	1.22**	0.50	–0.77	0.97**	0.21
	(0.223)	(0.492)	(0.656)	(0.321)	(0.535)
Ideology × Attention to politics		1.15*			
		(0.665)			
Policy extremism	0.39	–0.08	–0.72	0.23	–0.02
	(0.269)	(0.602)	(0.706)	(0.430)	(0.735)
Policy extremism × Attention to politics		0.85			
		(0.931)			
Ideology × Identity centrality			2.80**		
			(0.839)		
Policy extremism × Identity centrality			1.69		
			(1.052)		
Ideology × Like-minded news preference				0.38	
				(0.420)	
Policy extremism × Like-minded news preference				0.29	
				(0.527)	
Ideology × Political knowledge					1.56**
					(0.793)
Policy extremism × Political knowledge					0.57
					(0.998)
Constant	–1.63**	–0.15	1.36**	–1.06**	0.16
	(0.359)	(0.587)	(0.690)	(0.444)	(0.663)
Observations	471	471	471	471	471
R-squared	0.22	0.23	0.26	0.22	0.23
Pseudo R-squared	0.19	0.21	0.23	0.20	0.21

OLS regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B2.6 The effect of NFCC on partisan group-centrism—Democrats, 2018 SSI

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE
NFCC	0.74**	−1.40	0.81	0.67	−1.25
	(0.363)	(0.961)	(1.088)	(0.446)	(0.795)
NFCC × Political interest		3.13**			
		(1.293)			
NFCC × Identity centrality			−0.10		
			(1.424)		
NFCC × Like-minded news preference				0.23	
				(0.757)	
NFCC × Political knowledge					3.32**
					(1.122)
Attention to politics	0.05	−1.31	0.07	0.05	0.11
	(0.270)	(0.912)	(0.272)	(0.272)	(0.267)
Identity centrality	0.82**	0.90**	1.18	0.84**	0.76**
	(0.299)	(0.303)	(1.047)	(0.300)	(0.298)
Like-minded news preference	0.12	0.11	0.11	−0.24	0.09
	(0.116)	(0.116)	(0.116)	(0.550)	(0.114)
Political knowledge	0.49**	0.53**	0.49**	0.50**	−0.36
	(0.216)	(0.216)	(0.218)	(0.216)	(0.880)
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Education	0.18	0.10	0.20	0.18	0.22
	(0.265)	(0.267)	(0.266)	(0.266)	(0.262)
Sex	−0.03	−0.03	−0.03	−0.03	−0.03
	(0.112)	(0.112)	(0.112)	(0.112)	(0.110)
White	0.23	0.25	0.22	0.22	0.23
	(0.176)	(0.177)	(0.176)	(0.176)	(0.174)
Black	0.44**	0.47**	0.42**	0.45**	0.46**
	(0.209)	(0.211)	(0.210)	(0.210)	(0.207)
Ideology	−0.76**	−0.57	0.01	−0.89**	0.64
	(0.264)	(0.634)	(0.721)	(0.309)	(0.547)
Ideology × Attention to politics		−0.37			
		(0.843)			
Policy extremism	0.69**	1.14*	0.59	0.61*	0.99
	(0.299)	(0.692)	(0.812)	(0.359)	(0.690)
Policy extremism × Attention to politics		−0.62			
		(1.039)			
Ideology × Identity centrality			−1.06		
			(0.923)		
Policy extremism × Identity centrality			0.14		
			(1.173)		

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE	PREFERENCE FOR INPARTY VS. OUTPARTY MARRIAGE
Ideology × Like-minded news preference				0.43	
				(0.524)	
Policy extremism × Like-minded news preference				0.18	
				(0.632)	
Ideology × Political knowledge					–2.41**
					(0.803)
Policy extremism × Political knowledge					–0.51
					(0.976)
Constant	–1.11**	–0.25	–1.38*	–0.98**	–0.64
	(0.423)	(0.702)	(0.793)	(0.468)	(0.630)
Observations	490	490	490	490	490
R-squared	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.14	0.17
Pseudo R-squared	0.11	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.14

OLS regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

Chapter 3

TABLE B3.1 Effect of NFCC on identifying as a partisan among respondents with more than a high school degree

VARIABLES	1988	2006–10
	PARTISAN IDENTIFIER	PARTISAN IDENTIFIER
NFCC	–0.29	0.40**
	(0.416)	(0.172)
Age	0.01	0.00
	(0.008)	(0.003)
White	–0.21	–0.07
	(0.337)	(0.135)
Income	–0.04	0.07**
	(0.079)	(0.030)
Female	0.42*	0.34**
	(0.231)	(0.101)
Constant	0.58	–0.58
	(0.951)	(0.392)
Observations	328	2,419

Logit coefficient estimates; robust standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B3.2 Effect of NFCC on identifying as a strong partisan among respondents with more than a high school degree

VARIABLES	1988	2006–10
	STRONG PARTISAN	STRONG PARTISAN
NFCC	–0.12	0.38*
	(0.573)	(0.207)
Age	0.02**	0.02**
	(0.010)	(0.004)
White	–1.01**	–0.29*
	(0.408)	(0.157)
Income	0.13	–0.07*
	(0.115)	(0.039)
Female	0.02	0.26**
	(0.310)	(0.122)
Constant	–2.20	–0.07
	(1.352)	(0.504)
Observations	201	1,567

Logit coefficient estimates; robust standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B3.3 The effect of NFCC on partisan strength is conditional on political attention (Education)

VARIABLES	1988	2006–10
	PARTISAN STRENGTH	PARTISAN STRENGTH
NFCC	0.02	–0.09
	(0.256)	(0.148)
Education	–0.01	0.12**
	(0.057)	(0.029)
NFCC × Education	–0.13	0.17**
	(0.166)	(0.074)
Age	0.02**	0.02**
	(0.003)	(0.002)
White	–0.58**	–0.33**
	(0.152)	(0.066)
Income	0.03	0.06**
	(0.020)	(0.012)
Female	0.10	0.18**
	(0.101)	(0.052)
/cut1	–1.37**	–0.07
	(0.289)	(0.160)
/cut2	–0.04	1.00**
	(0.283)	(0.159)
/cut3	1.75**	2.42**
	(0.286)	(0.162)
Observations	1,420	6,694

Robust standard errors in parentheses; ordinal logit model predicting strength of partisanship on a 4-point scale.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B3.4 The effect of NFCC × political attention on partisan opinion uniformity across environments of low and high polarization

VARIABLES	(1)	(3)
	PARTISAN OPINION UNIFORMITY	PARTISAN OPINION UNIFORMITY
	LOW POLARIZATION	HIGH POLARIZATION
NFCC	0.81	–3.02*
	(2.034)	(1.833)
Political Attention	–1.36	–5.01**
	(1.860)	(1.768)
NFCC × Political Attention	1.11	7.32**
	(2.839)	(2.813)
Mining issue	0.41	0.16
	(0.324)	(0.273)
Medicaid issue	0.63*	0.63**
	(0.360)	(0.289)
Affirmative action issue	1.23**	0.89**
	(0.335)	(0.293)
Constant	–3.05**	0.05
	(1.372)	(1.188)
Observations	918	928

Logit coefficient estimates; robust standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

Chapter 4

TABLE B4.1 The relationship between NFCC and partisan group-centrism, wave 1—Democrats

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	PARTISAN STRENGTH	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY	ALTERNATIVE PARTISAN STRENGTH	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	CERTAINTY IN PARTISAN IDENTITY	PARTISAN MORALITY
NFCC	0.94**	0.26**	0.18**	0.02	0.14**	0.14**
	(0.372)	(0.033)	(0.044)	(0.042)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Political interest	2.80**	0.46**	0.16**	0.04	0.31**	0.29**
	(0.397)	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.033)
Political knowledge	–0.64**	–0.17**	–0.02	0.04	–0.09**	–0.07**
	(0.291)	(0.025)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.023)	(0.021)
Education	0.06	–0.02	0.02	–0.01	0.01	–0.01
	(0.343)	(0.031)	(0.035)	(0.033)	(0.029)	(0.027)
Income	0.09	0.05	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.06**
	(0.340)	(0.033)	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.033)	(0.030)

(*continued*)

TABLE B4.1 (continued)

VARIABLES	(1) PARTISAN STRENGTH	(2) PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY	(3) ALTERNATIVE PARTISAN STRENGTH	(4) PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	(5) CERTAINTY IN PARTISAN IDENTITY	(6) PARTISAN MORALITY
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.005)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
White	0.16	–0.01	0.06**	0.01	–0.03*	–0.00
	(0.252)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.017)
Black	0.93**	0.09**	0.09**	0.05**	0.04*	0.06**
	(0.283)	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.021)
Ideology	–2.44**	–0.16**	–0.04	–0.15**	–0.12**	–0.14**
	(0.345)	(0.034)	(0.031)	(0.033)	(0.029)	(0.028)
Policy extremism	0.37	0.04	0.17**	0.10**	0.12**	0.11**
	(0.352)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.030)
Constant	–1.89**	0.22**	0.44**	0.62**	0.46**	0.41**
	(0.471)	(0.044)	(0.046)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.036)
Observations	1,702	1,700	1,578	1,654	1,668	1,676
R-squared	N/A	0.29	0.16	0.09	0.21	0.21

Standard errors in parentheses; column 1 contains logistic regression coefficient estimates. Remaining columns present OLS regression coefficient estimates.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B4.2 The relationship between NFCC and partisan group-centrism, wave 1—Republicans

VARIABLES	(1) PARTISAN STRENGTH	(2) PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY	(3) ALTERNATIVE PARTISAN STRENGTH	(4) PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	(5) CERTAINTY IN PARTISAN IDENTITY	(6) PARTISAN MORALITY
NFCC	1.75**	0.22**	0.12**	0.00	0.11**	0.09**
	(0.433)	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.021)	(0.030)	(0.028)
Political interest	2.22**	0.35**	0.15**	0.11**	0.34**	0.28**
	(0.474)	(0.031)	(0.026)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.029)
Political knowledge	–1.17**	–0.15**	–0.07**	–0.03	–0.12**	–0.09**
	(0.338)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.025)	(0.023)
Education	0.71*	–0.05*	–0.00	–0.04*	–0.01	–0.02
	(0.366)	(0.029)	(0.023)	(0.020)	(0.027)	(0.026)
Income	–0.30	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.03
	(0.416)	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.028)
Age	–0.00	–0.00**	–0.00	0.00**	–0.00*	0.00
	(0.006)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
White	0.59*	0.01	0.05**	0.05**	0.05*	0.03
	(0.357)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Black	–0.03	–0.04	–0.04	–0.01	0.05	0.10**
	(0.652)	(0.052)	(0.041)	(0.037)	(0.053)	(0.050)
Ideology	3.31**	0.27**	0.27**	0.28**	0.19**	0.26**
	(0.489)	(0.031)	(0.025)	(0.021)	(0.030)	(0.028)
Policy extremism	0.98**	0.05	0.13**	0.10**	0.09**	0.09**
	(0.426)	(0.033)	(0.027)	(0.023)	(0.032)	(0.030)

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	PARTISAN STRENGTH	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY	ALTERNATIVE PARTISAN STRENGTH	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE	CERTAINTY IN PARTISAN IDENTITY	PARTISAN MORALITY
Constant	–5.40**	0.11**	0.34**	0.31**	0.29**	0.23**
	(0.631)	(0.047)	(0.038)	(0.032)	(0.045)	(0.042)
Observations	1,318	1,318	1,215	1,282	1,296	1,300
R-squared	N/A	0.21	0.19	0.22	0.17	0.19

Standard errors in parentheses; column 1 contains logistic regression coefficient estimates. Remaining columns present OLS regression coefficient estimates.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B4.3 The effect of NFCC (wave 1) on change in partisan group-centrism (wave 1–wave 2)—Democrats

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PARTISAN STRENGTH, W2	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE, W2	PARTISAN CERTAINTY, W2	PARTISAN MORALITY, W2	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY, W2
Lagged DV	4.27**	0.44**	0.44**	0.43**	0.74**
	(0.240)	(0.031)	(0.051)	(0.053)	(0.024)
NFCC, W1	2.17**	0.03	–0.00	–0.03	0.07**
	(0.578)	(0.025)	(0.053)	(0.051)	(0.027)
Political interest, W1	1.42**	0.00	0.04	0.07	0.11**
	(0.563)	(0.025)	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.028)
Political knowledge, W1	–0.31	–0.00	0.07*	0.06	–0.04*
	(0.453)	(0.021)	(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.022)
Education, W1	0.66	0.02	–0.02	0.01	0.02
	(0.523)	(0.024)	(0.049)	(0.048)	(0.025)
Income, W1	–0.04	0.02	0.10*	0.08	–0.01
	(0.543)	(0.025)	(0.052)	(0.050)	(0.026)
Age	0.01	0.00	0.00	–0.00	0.00
	(0.008)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)
White	–0.20	0.03	0.03	0.06	–0.03
	(0.426)	(0.020)	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.021)
Black	0.73	0.05**	0.01	0.04	0.01
	(0.461)	(0.022)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.023)
Ideology, W1	–1.20**	–0.06**	–0.03	–0.05	–0.04
	(0.521)	(0.023)	(0.047)	(0.046)	(0.024)
Policy extremism, W1	–0.29	0.09**	–0.01	0.02	–0.04
	(0.556)	(0.026)	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.027)
Constant	–4.18**	0.25**	0.17**	0.19**	0.09**
	(0.870)	(0.042)	(0.082)	(0.079)	(0.041)
Observations	908	890	870	865	904
R-squared	N/A	0.28	0.12	0.12	0.62
Adj. R-squared	N/A	0.28	0.11	0.11	0.62

Standard errors in parentheses; column 1 contains logistic regression coefficient estimates. Remaining columns present OLS regression coefficient estimates.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B4.4 The effect of NFCC (wave 1) on change in partisan group-centrism (wave 1–wave 2)—Republicans

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PARTISAN STRENGTH, W2	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE, W2	PARTISAN CERTAINTY, W2	PARTISAN MORALITY, W2	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY, W2
Lagged DV	4.29**	0.60**	0.42**	0.41**	0.70**
	(0.284)	(0.033)	(0.047)	(0.045)	(0.027)
NFCC, W1	0.72	0.00	–0.01	–0.01	0.09**
	(0.706)	(0.025)	(0.051)	(0.046)	(0.031)
Political interest, W1	1.99**	0.03	0.09*	0.14**	0.15**
	(0.758)	(0.026)	(0.054)	(0.049)	(0.033)
Political knowledge, W1	–0.96	0.00	0.05	0.01	–0.05*
	(0.592)	(0.021)	(0.043)	(0.039)	(0.026)
Education, W1	–0.12	–0.03	0.03	0.02	–0.04
	(0.641)	(0.023)	(0.046)	(0.042)	(0.028)
Income, W1	–0.21	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.06**
	(0.666)	(0.025)	(0.049)	(0.045)	(0.030)
Age	–0.01	0.00**	0.00	0.00*	–0.00**
	(0.011)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)
White	0.71	–0.04*	–0.01	0.03	0.04
	(0.594)	(0.023)	(0.045)	(0.041)	(0.028)
Black	–0.75	–0.07	–0.36**	–0.21**	0.05
	(1.227)	(0.043)	(0.097)	(0.089)	(0.057)
Ideology, W1	2.03**	0.07**	0.07	0.21**	0.06*
	(0.723)	(0.027)	(0.052)	(0.049)	(0.033)
Policy extremism, W1	0.75	0.03	0.08	0.05	–0.02
	(0.724)	(0.027)	(0.055)	(0.050)	(0.033)
Constant	–5.42**	0.14**	0.09	–0.04	0.01
	(1.155)	(0.042)	(0.083)	(0.077)	(0.050)
Observations	668	690	651	645	668
R-squared	N/A	0.46	0.20	0.26	0.63
Adj. R-squared	N/A	0.45	0.18	0.24	0.62

Standard errors in parentheses; column 1 contains logistic regression coefficient estimates. Remaining columns present OLS regression coefficient estimates.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B4.5 The effect of NFCC (wave 1) on change in partisan group-centrism (wave 2–wave 3)—Democrats

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PARTISAN STRENGTH, W2	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE, W2	PARTISAN CERTAINTY, W2	PARTISAN MORALITY, W2	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY, W2
Lagged DV	5.86**	0.51**	0.20**	0.25**	0.78**
	(0.544)	(0.050)	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.032)
NFCC, W1	–0.59	–0.03	0.08*	0.13**	0.05
	(1.106)	(0.044)	(0.049)	(0.050)	(0.040)
Political interest, W1	–0.38	0.03	0.19**	0.19**	0.03
	(1.079)	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.038)
Political knowledge, W1	–1.80*	0.02	–0.01	–0.02	–0.01
	(0.946)	(0.036)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.031)
Education, W1	–0.68	–0.04	–0.03	–0.03	–0.01
	(1.025)	(0.039)	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.035)
Income, W1	–0.95	–0.00	0.01	0.00	–0.01
	(1.058)	(0.043)	(0.047)	(0.048)	(0.037)
Age	–0.02	0.00	–0.00	0.00	–0.00*
	(0.017)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
White	0.15	–0.04	–0.02	–0.03	0.05
	(1.097)	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.034)
Black	0.68	0.01	0.06	0.02	0.04
	(1.157)	(0.043)	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.036)
Ideology, W1	–1.63*	–0.07*	–0.16**	–0.21**	–0.02
	(0.982)	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.034)
Policy extremism, W1	1.48	0.11**	0.11**	0.11**	0.10**
	(1.070)	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.049)	(0.037)
Constant	–0.20	0.32**	0.49**	0.40**	0.08
	(1.813)	(0.075)	(0.078)	(0.080)	(0.062)
Observations	392	379	381	379	392
R-squared	N/A	0.34	0.29	0.33	0.69
Adj. R-squared	N/A	0.32	0.27	0.31	0.69

Standard errors in parentheses; column 1 contains logistic regression coefficient estimates. Remaining columns present OLS regression coefficient estimates.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

TABLE B4.6 The effect of NFCC (wave 1) on change in partisan group-centrism (wave 2–wave 3)—Republicans

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	PARTISAN STRENGTH, W2	PARTY FEELING THERMOMETER DIFFERENCE, W2	PARTISAN CERTAINTY, W2	PARTISAN MORALITY, W2	PARTISAN SOCIAL IDENTITY, W2
Lagged DV	5.29**	0.50**	0.22**	0.27**	0.79**
	(0.529)	(0.049)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.034)
NFCC, W1	0.36	0.08**	0.03	–0.03	–0.02
	(1.118)	(0.042)	(0.051)	(0.048)	(0.039)
Political interest, W1	3.39**	0.02	0.06	0.10**	0.01
	(1.265)	(0.041)	(0.050)	(0.047)	(0.039)
Political knowledge, W1	–0.95	–0.01	–0.04	–0.11**	–0.04
	(0.945)	(0.033)	(0.040)	(0.037)	(0.031)
Education, W1	–0.85	–0.09**	–0.11**	–0.08**	–0.01
	(1.024)	(0.035)	(0.043)	(0.040)	(0.032)
Income, W1	–0.63	0.05	0.11**	0.05	–0.02
	(1.111)	(0.039)	(0.048)	(0.045)	(0.036)
Age	–0.06**	–0.00**	–0.00	–0.00	–0.00**
	(0.021)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
White	0.40	0.06	0.00	0.04	–0.05
	(1.115)	(0.038)	(0.049)	(0.045)	(0.037)
Black	0.22	0.00	–0.03	0.10	–0.08
	(2.472)	(0.084)	(0.116)	(0.128)	(0.088)
Ideology, W1	3.90**	0.26**	0.40**	0.40**	0.17**
	(1.450)	(0.047)	(0.056)	(0.054)	(0.044)
Policy extremism, W1	–1.69	–0.00	0.08	0.04	0.02
	(1.304)	(0.046)	(0.056)	(0.052)	(0.043)
Constant	–2.95	0.14**	0.25**	0.26**	0.16**
	(1.913)	(0.068)	(0.082)	(0.077)	(0.062)
Observations	345	341	340	334	345
R-squared	N/A	0.42	0.32	0.41	0.71
Adj. R-squared	N/A	0.40	0.30	0.39	0.70

Standard errors in parentheses; column 1 contains logistic regression coefficient estimates. Remaining columns present OLS regression coefficient estimates.

** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. *Saturday Night Live*, "The Bubble," YouTube video, 2:20, November 20, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKOb-kmOgpI.

2. "Partisan stereotypes, views of Republicans and Democrats as neighbors," *Partisanship and political animosity in 2016*, Pew Research Center, June 22, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/06/22/4-partisan-stereotypes-views-of-republicans-and-democrats-as-neighbors/.

3. While many applications of Big Five personality traits to political attitudes exclude explicitly political questions in the measurement of openness to experience, this does not completely eliminate the problems, since the openness trait was conceptualized partly in terms of political beliefs (see Brad Verhulst's comments in Maria Konnikova, "Politics and personality: Most of what you read is malarkey," *New Yorker*, August 23, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/politics-and-personality-most-of-what-you-read-is-malarkey).

4. There are other potential challenges with the child-rearing measure of authoritarianism—namely, that it could be endogenous to political preferences (Bakker, Lelkes, and Malka 2021; Goren and Chapp 2019; Luttig 2021; Smith et al. 2021) or that it lacks construct validity (Pietryka and MacIntosh 2022).

5. Other research has shown, however, that the effects of NFCC—in this case on intergroup conflict and hostility—are concentrated more among conservatives than liberals (De Zavala et al. 2010).

1. THE CLOSING OF THE PARTISAN MIND

1. This statistic is taken from Knight Foundation, "Indicators of news media trust," September 11, 2018, https://www.knightfoundation.org/reports/indicators-of-news-media-trust.

2. Johnston, Lavine, and Federico (2017, 47) note that the correlation between a scale based on these two survey questions of political self-expression and an index based on measures of political interest and political knowledge is a moderately strong 0.49.

3. Anthony Salvanto, Jennifer De Pinto, Fred Backus, and Kabir Khanna, "Mueller report: Majorities across party lines want full report released, CBS News poll says," CBS News, March 27, 2019, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mueller-report-majorities-across-party-lines-want-full-report-released-says-cbs-news-poll/.

2. THE NEED FOR COGNITIVE CLOSURE AND PARTISAN GROUP-CENTRISM

1. The type of analysis varies depending on the structure of the dependent variable. If the dependent variable is continuous or resembles a continuous variable (such as the feeling thermometer, which ranges from 0 to 100), I use OLS regression. If the dependent variable is binary or has limited response options (such as those that distinguish strong partisans from not-strong partisans and partisan leaners), I use MLE models like logistic regression.

2. The measure uses a "branching" structure, such that people are first asked which party, if any, they identify with, then subsequently asked the strength of their

identification (if they indicate a partisan identity in response to the first question) or whether or not they lean toward a party (if they claim not to identify with either party in response to the first question).

3. In the Knowledge Networks survey, the policy extremism index is based on preferences regarding eight issues: government services, defense spending, government jobs, government aid to Black people, gender equality, government regulation on business, abortion rights, and protection for gays and lesbians from discrimination

4. YouGov uses sample matching techniques to generate "representative" samples from nonrandomly selected pools of respondents. For this study, YouGov interviewed 1,358 respondents who were then matched down to 1,200 respondents on the basis of gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2010 American Community Survey. Although YouGov samples contain nonrandomly selected respondents, they can in some respects be treated like random samples and frequently produce estimates comparable to random samples, such as the American National Election Studies (Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013; Vavreck and Rivers 2008). In all of the following analyses, I apply the available survey weights.

5. The survey questions also included an experimental component that varied the frequency with which the hypothetical marital partner discussed politics (Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan 2018). One-third of respondents were told that the marital partner discussed politics rarely, one-third that the partner discussed politics frequently, and one-third contained no information. Consistent with Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan (2018), I find that people are more accepting of interparty marriage if politics is discussed rarely. This manipulation, however, did not consistently alter the relationship between the need for closure and attitudes toward partisanship and marriage. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis I include all three experimental manipulations in the analysis.

6. The interaction between NFCC and political interest, as well as the interaction between NFCC and political-identity centrality, is insignificant in this data set. There is also not a significant main effect of NFCC on pure partisan identification in this data set. For this reason, I urge viewing these findings as suggestive rather than definitive.

3. CLEAR CHOICES, GROUP-CENTRIC PARTISANS

1. Analyses based on the GSS data make use of the survey weights provided by the GSS in its cumulative data file.

2. Empirical models, available in full in appendix B, tables 7–9, also include control variables for demographics: age, race, income, and sex.

3. I code "leaners" as independents in this analysis, to distinguish most clearly between those who identify as partisans and those who do not but who may lean toward a party. The results do not change, however, if leaners are instead classified as partisans.

4. I slightly changed the manipulations across issues to increase the believability of the experiment. The full manipulations for each issue are available upon request.

5. Interested readers can consult Luttig (2018) for a look at the graphical representations of low and high polarization that accompanied these verbal descriptions.

6. For a similar approach, see Johnston, Lavine, and Federico (2017, 65). Running the analyses on both variables separately reports essentially identical findings (in both cases the coefficient for the interaction term is $p < 0.05$).

4. THE DYNAMICS OF PARTISAN CLOSURE AND THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

1. A *Washington Post*/ABC News poll from 2016 found that 65 percent of registered voters viewed Trump as not having "the kind of personality and temperament to serve

effectively as president." Dan Balz and Scott Clement, "Poll finds Clinton has widened lead ahead of Trump to 8 points," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/poll-after-conventions-clinton-leads-trump-by-8-points/2016/08/06/517999c0-5b33-11e6-9aee-8075993d73a2_story.html.

2. A *Washington Post*/ABC News poll from 2016 found that 60 percent of registered voters viewed Clinton as not "honest and trustworthy." Balz and Clement, "Poll finds Clinton has widened lead."

3. The first virtue is that panel data provide multiple measures of the same construct, which can reduce measurement error that emerges from a single measure. This virtue is not irrelevant, but all of the measures included in this study are based on multiple questions and have high internal reliability, or measure attitudes that tend to be highly stable over time (e.g., partisanship) and that are thus less vulnerable to problems that emerge due to poor measurement.

4. The fourth wave, however, did not include the relevant measures of partisan group-centrism. Therefore, I focus below on analysis of the first three waves of the study.

5. In addition, the analyses reported below include similar control variables as before: demographic characteristics, ideological self-identification, and policy extremism. In the 2016 Minnesota panel study, there are ten policy issues included in the policy extremism scale: raising taxes to support Social Security and Medicare, raising taxes to reduce income inequality, raising the federal minimum wage, requiring employers to offer paid leave, banning Muslims from entering the United States, deporting undocumented immigrants, allowing transgender individuals to use bathrooms corresponding to their identity, instituting a ban on assault weapons, restricting suspects on the "no-fly list" from purchasing guns, and imposing tariffs on China.

6. Wave 1 was in the field from July 1, 2016, to July 18, 2016.

CONCLUSION

1. The 2014 YouGov study described at various points throughout this book included a five-item measure of the need for cognition. This construct correlates with the need-for-cognitive-closure measure at only −0.11. Therefore, people with a high need for closure tend to have a lower need for cognition. But the two constructs are by no means interchangeable with each other.

2. Woolf to Ethel Smyth, July 29, 1934, in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 5, *1932–1935*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 319.

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