

The Polarization of Popular Culture: Tracing the Size, Shape, and Depth of the “Oil Spill”

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Recent research suggests that political polarization has spilled over into otherwise mundane areas of social life. And yet, the size, shape, and depth of that spillage into popular culture are generally unknown. Relying on a sample of 135 widely known movies, TV shows, musicians, sports, and leisure activities, we investigate these issues. We find the “oil spill” of polarization into popular culture is large but loosely organized into multiple fairly shallow pools. Cultural polarization is also asymmetric. Liberals like a wide variety of popular culture, do not dislike conservative popular culture, and their tastes are more rooted in their sociodemographics. Conservatives, on the other hand, like a much narrower range of popular culture, dislike the culture created and liked by Black and urban liberals, and their tastes seem to be more directly rooted in their political ideology. Potential implications of an asymmetric culture war, and ideas for future research, are discussed.

Keywords: polarization, popular culture, identity

Introduction

Polarization is a central topic of academic (Bail 2021; Levin, Milner, and Perrings 2021) and public interest (Hetherington and Weiler 2018; Klein 2020). Social and legacy media are regularly preoccupied by a parade of divisive issues and events, both overtly political (e.g., abortion,

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school curricula) and seemingly absurd (e.g., Mr Potato Head dolls, Green M&Ms). Indeed, by some measures political polarization in the United States has been increasing. Party elites have polarized (Liu and Srivastava 2015; McCarty 2019; Moody and Mucha 2013); voters have sorted into the “correct” political parties that match their politics on key issues (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008); partisans increasingly dislike each other (Iyengar et al. 2019); and individuals’ political beliefs have become more interconnected and therefore likely constrained in their ability to change (Axelrod, Daymude, and Forrest 2021; DellaPosta 2020).

And yet, despite growing polarization among political elites, as well as among the general public according to some measures, evidence for everyday Americans becoming increasingly polarized on political issues remains scant, inconclusive, or restricted to isolated and temporary “take-off” issues of political disagreement (Baldassarri and Bearman 2007; DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Park 2018). For example, some purported cases of polarization are instead just liberals and conservatives moving in the same political direction at different rates, suggesting that, at least on most moral issues, Americans seem to be *depolarizing* (Baldassarri and Park 2020). Despite substantial concerns about political polarization, when it comes to disagreement on political issues, as Converse famously surmised, most Americans remain “innocent of ideology” (Converse 1962: 47).

The degree to which Americans have *culturally* polarized—that is, become divided over attitudes, beliefs, and tastes that are more symbolic in nature—is similarly unclear. Thirty years since its publication, Hunter’s (1991) *Culture Wars* has maintained influence in popular discourse about culture and politics.¹ And yet, when it comes to culture wars, the empirical evidence overwhelmingly supports Layman and Green’s (2006: 61) conclusion that “cultural wars are waged by limited religious troops on narrow policy fronts under special political leadership, and a broader cultural conflagration is just a rumor” (e.g., Baker 2005; Baldassarri and Park 2020; DiMaggio 2003). Despite this, while research on cultural polarization has mostly focused on the more cultural side of overtly political attitudes (e.g., marriage equality, abortion), there does seem to be an oil spill of political polarization into a wider array of more mundane areas of social life (DellaPosta 2020).

Relying on a sample of 135 widely known movies, TV shows, musicians, sports, and leisure activities, we trace the size, shape, and depth of polarization in popular culture. We also investigate if the polarization of popular culture is more rooted in what Evans (1997) calls “worldviews” or “social groups”—that is, if tastes are shaped by different ideologies associated with different ways of understanding the world, or if they are shaped by the different experiences, environments, and dispositions associated with different sociodemographic niches in society. In what follows, we find significant asymmetries in the polarization of popular culture across the political divide. Consistent with the sociology of culture and its understanding of tastes and how they spread (e.g., Mark 1998, 2003), liberals’ tastes operate more through their sociodemographics and are more crosscutting, more open, and generally wider overall. In contrast, conservatives’ tastes are generally more filtered through the lens of their ideological worldviews, are narrower, and may display some of the political (Iyengar et al. 2019; Mason 2018) and racial (Már 2020) affective polarization understood by political scientists as more common among conservatives. In closing we discuss limitations, extensions, and ideas for future research.

Background

Although scholarly work on cultural polarization has mostly focused on the more cultural side of overtly political attitudes (Baldassarri and Park 2020; DiMaggio 2003; DiMaggio et al. 1996; Park 2018), recent research suggests that there has been a widening of political polarization into even the most mundane areas of social life (DellaPosta 2020), such that “liberals and conservatives differ systematically on lifestyle dimensions that have no apparent substantive relevance to political ideology” (DellaPosta, Shi, and Macy 2015: 1475). In what follows, we ask two questions. First, if political polarization has spilled over into otherwise mundane areas of social life, what

are the size, shape, and depth of that spillage? And second, to the degree that popular culture has been polarized, is that polarization more rooted in sociodemographic sorting into ideological camps, or more directly rooted in partisan political ideology?

Mapping the Spill

First, we examine the size, shape, and depth of contemporary cultural polarization. By size we mean proportionally how much of popular culture has become politicized. By politicized, we mean the degree to which cultural tastes are correlated with a liberal–conservative split in the population.²

From a production perspective, popular culture may be inhospitable to politicization because of the “mass” and “pluralistic” models under which it is made (DiMaggio 1977), and a general orientation toward political neutrality in order to attract wider audiences (Gitlin 1983). From a reception perspective, politicization may override the social purposes of popular culture, which is rooted in its “generalized conversion value” and usefulness in “forming connections with heterogenous others” across otherwise salient sociocultural divides (Lizardo 2006a: 783–4; see also Erickson 1996; Gamson 1998; Pachucki and Breiger 2010; Schultz and Breiger 2010; Sokolova and Sokolov 2020). And yet, in bivariate analyses, liberals and conservatives seem to prefer different TV shows (Carter 2012; Katz 2016), books (Shi et al. 2017), chain restaurants (Bishop 2008), musicians, sports, movies, and cars (Hetherington and Weiler 2018). For this reason, we believe the size of the oil spill—be it large or small—is an open question.

Research has frequently taken bivariate correlations—an indication of what we term politicization—as a sign of polarization (Baldassarri and Bearman 2007; DellaPosta et al. 2015; see also, Park 2018). However, significant correlations do not necessarily indicate a coherent package of liberal and conservative tastes across many independently politicized items. And such bivariate correlations may arise from a number of distributions, some of which are clearly more divisive and polarized (e.g., bimodal distributions). For these reasons, we go beyond bivariate correlations to further investigate the *shape* and *depth* of the oil spill.

By *shape*, we question if—to the degree that popular culture items are politicized—cultural tastes and practices have become fully interconnected and bifurcated into two oppositional clusters (one liberal and the other conservative), or if cultural division is occurring across multiple niches in some sort of structure that is also imbricated with political ideology. If the former, this type of oppositional social structure—which is consistent with being rooted in the dynamics of structural balance (Cartwright and Harary 1956; Heider 1946), as well as other social psychological models of oppositional group formation (e.g., Goldberg and Stein 2018; Sherif, Harvey, and White 1961)—would match culture wars claims that are regularly leveraged in the popular media and found in simulations (e.g., Axelrod et al. 2021; Stanton 2021). If the latter, multiple clusters arranged in a ridge-like structure of overlapping cultural niches would be more in line both with Mark’s (1998, 2003) model for how tastes for popular culture spread, as well as Blau’s (1974: 615) framework for why societies *do not* polarize—i.e., “crosscutting lines of differentiation thus foster processes of social integration.” To perhaps state the obvious, we believe the former (two bifurcated and oppositional camps) presents a more troubling scenario of cultural polarization than would the latter.

By *depth*, we mean how deep is the divide in tastes for popular culture. Once again, bivariate correlations alone simply gage the strength of a relationship with political ideology. Because polarization implies two opposing sides, here we can conceptually differentiate between an “audience segmentation” model in which the depth of the divide would be relatively shallow, and a “symbolic exclusion” model in which the depth of the divide may be deeper. An audience segmentation model in which different audiences hold different tastes is “the workhorse approach of most analysts in the culture and consumption literature” (Lizardo and Skiles 2016a: 2) and generally presumes that cultural tastes are structured by things like age (Ma 2021; Reeves 2014), gender (Christin 2012; Lizardo 2006b), race (Banks 2009; Thomas 2017), education (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio and Useem 1978), income (Huddart Kennedy, Baumann, and Johnston 2019;

Sherman 2017), and geography (Griswold and Wright 2004; Silver et al. 2022). In this framework, cultural tastes may be additionally structured by political ideology.

In contrast, in a “symbolic exclusion” framework, individuals use cultural tastes and lifestyles to differentiate themselves from outgroups by actively *disliking* the perceived tastes and lifestyle markers of those outgroups. While this is often based on social class (Bourdieu 1984; Bryson 1996; Warde, Wright, and Gayo-Cal 2008), symbolic exclusion can occur through a wider array of difference markers (Bennett et al. 2009; Lizardo and Skiles 2016a; Tampubolon 2008), perhaps including politics as well. In parallel to a symbolic exclusion framework in the sociology of taste, in political science, scholars have noted a sharp rise in what is termed *affective polarization*, meaning an increase in animus toward partisan outgroup members (Carlin and Love 2013; Iyengar et al. 2019; Landy et al. 2021; Mason 2018; Nicholson et al. 2016). In this approach, the expression of outgroup animus is a driving force in the development of cultural bifurcation into two oppositional groups, such as when, say, “The Eagles” and “The Rattlers” staked out antagonistic positions on cursing in the Robber’s Cave experiment (Sherif et al. 1961). The symbolic exclusion of partisan outgroups would be evidence for a greater depth of cultural polarization than would be audience segmentation.

And yet, while affective polarization has been increasing, tastes for popular culture may be particularly resistant to soaking up the spill of outgroup animus, given the widely documented rise of cultural openness in individuals’ tastes as a general mark of social status (Lena 2019; Peterson 2005; Peterson and Kern 1996). Put another way, affective polarization may cause partisans to dislike each other, but they may still not disparage each other’s movie tastes, because to do so would be a mark of one’s own lower social status. In such a case, we might find a shallower oppositional structure in which one side is merely neutral toward the culture liked by the other side of the social divide. Again, we see reasons for why the spill could reasonably be somewhat deep, or if present, still quite shallow.

Combining Shape and Depth

So far we have treated the different aspects of the oil spill as independent facets of the same underlying phenomenon. To gain a fuller picture we also examine the combination of shape and depth. A shape consisting of two ideologically sorted clusters that deeply dislike each other’s popular culture would clearly be the most troubling scenario. Yet our approach leaves open the possibility of more complex structures, such that popular culture may be segmented into multiple sociodemographic audiences with varying levels of symbolic exclusion.

What Gives Rise to Politicized Tastes?

Finally, we move beyond descriptive analyses by seeking to explain what gives rise to the politicization of cultural items in our sample. Using Evans’ (1997) terminology, we ask if the politicization of items is more rooted in “worldviews” or in “social groups.” By “worldviews,” we question if there is a direct relationship between political ideology and cultural taste, such that ideological identities explain variance in cultural tastes even when controlling for sociodemographic differences. In other words, we directly question whether or not the bivariate correlations we find between politics and tastes are not, in fact, spurious. By “social groups,” we therefore mean that cultural tastes are structured by more traditional sociodemographic measures, which because of increased sociodemographic sorting into political parties (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Bishop 2008; Levendusky 2009) appear to be ideologically driven in bivariate analyses (e.g., Hetherington and Weiler 2018: 114). If this is the case, some of the oil spill may just be the result of sociodemographic sorting into ideological camps.

Asymmetric Cultural Polarization

For both of our central questions, we also raise the possibility of asymmetries across the political divide. This means that the size, shape, and depth of the oil spill may differ for liberals and conservatives, just as its rootedness in worldviews or social groups may differ for them as well. In

vacation activities, again across a spectrum of cultural consecration as also exogenously defined by our 500 US respondents. This resulted in a total of 135 items in our final survey.

While no survey of popular culture can be perfectly random, for our research question, our sampling procedures yielded widely known items that are unbiased with respect to polarization. Our approach also provides substantial advantages over prior methods which most typically either rely on (1) national surveys such as the General Social Survey or American National Election Survey (ANES) (and therefore either focus on broad tastes in genres, or the more cultural side of overtly political items, such as abortion, neither of which extend to concrete cultural tastes and practices), or (2) bivariate associations for convenience samples of nonrepresentative populations (which therefore cannot differentiate between sociodemographic or ideological effects on tastes). Finally, our sampling procedures are also validated by additional data we gathered in our survey. In our final surveys (presented below), we asked respondents to enter in from their online music accounts (e.g., Spotify, Apple Music) their ten most listened to songs of the past year, allowing us to confirm the effectiveness of our sampling strategy in deriving truly *popular* culture. From supplementary analysis of these data we confirmed that for music, all thirty-five musicians in our sample were in the top 200 most listened to in the last year by our respondents, with thirty of the musicians in our sample in the top 100, and sixteen in the top thirty.

Survey Data

We use the Qualtrics Data Panel with quotas to match the US population for age, race, gender, and education. The Qualtrics Data Panel is a high quality data source that has shown high reliability in meta-analyses (Walter et al. 2019), is atypically representative of the US population for both demographics and political ideology (Boas, Christenson, and Glick 2020), and has been used in research published in top journals in sociology (O'Brien 2017; Pedulla 2016; Quadlin 2018), political science (e.g., Djupe, Neiheisel, and Sokhey 2018), economics (Bhargava, Loewenstein, and Sydnor 2017), and management (e.g., Long, Bendersky, and Morrill 2011). Following best practices, we screened responses based on failed attention checks and unreasonably fast response times. These procedures resulted in 1821 respondents, collected in January 2018. Because of missing data on one or more of our sociodemographic variables, our effective sample size is reduced to 1697 in our final statistical models. We found no evidence that missing responses biased our sample. Our sample fits several known sociodemographic differences between liberals and conservatives as is shown in descriptive statistics in table A1 in the Appendix.

Measures

In our final survey, the order of objects from each domain (music, movies, TV, sports, and leisure) was randomized within blocks, with the ordering of those blocks of domains also randomized. For each item, respondents could mark “don’t know,” or mark how much they disliked/liked the object on a 7-point scale from “very much dislike” to “very much like” (with “neither like nor dislike” as the midpoint).

To measure *political ideology*, we reproduce the 7-point scale that has been used in the ANES since 1972. We do so not only because “ideology is one of the workhorse variables used by students of mass behavior” (Fiorina and Abrams 2008: 569), but also because “ideological identity” has been found “to be more central than party identity” in anchoring attitudes (Boutyline and Vaisey 2017: 1413; DellaPosta et al. 2015), although identities and attitudes have also increasingly converged (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Sociodemographic controls include *education, income, sex, race, age, and urban-rural* residency. We also asked respondents to indicate their *childhood arts exposure* based on the regularity of their arts exposure in childhood on a 7-point measure ranging from “never” to “all the time.” We do so because childhood arts exposure is a key measure of the socialization into a culturally open disposition that is expressed later in life through liking a wide variety of cultural objects across more traditional social boundaries (Childress et al. 2021; Lena 2019; Lizardo 2018). Scales, categories, and descriptive statistics are reported in table A2 in the appendix.

Analytic Strategy

The Oil Spill

Our first set of analyses focuses on characterizing the size, shape, and depth of the oil spill of political polarization into our sample of popular culture.

Size

In line with previous research on the spread of politics into nonideological attitudes, we begin our inquiry with bivariate correlations. Here, we perform pairwise correlations between the 7-point disliking/neutral/liking of each of our 135 cultural objects and the 7-point ideological self-identification variable. Cultural objects with positive or negative correlations that are statistically significant ($p < .05$) are considered to be politicized.

Shape

If popular culture is truly polarized this should be reflected both in how many cultural items are correlated with ideology *as well as* in how taste in one item implies tastes (both likes and dislikes) across items and domains. In short, cultural tastes should be organized around a bifurcated “us vs. them” pattern (Baker 2005). We use *k*-means clustering to determine the extent to which a two-cluster solution is optimal. We first create a pairwise correlation matrix of all cultural items based on their profiles of likes, dislikes, and neutrals for the 1821 individuals in our sample. This correlation matrix is subsequently transformed into a Euclidean distance matrix that is the input for a repeated *k*-means clustering algorithm. To determine the optimal number of clusters, we evaluated the gap statistic, which is a measure of the overall clumpiness of the cluster solution by evaluating the gap between the observed distribution and a random uniform distribution of points (i.e., the null hypothesis). The gap statistic is repeated at each level of *k* clusters and the optimal solution is the smallest value of *k* in which the *k* + 1 cluster solution does not offer a larger gap statistic (Tibshirani, Walther, and Hastie 2001).

To assess the results, the clusters and their relative positions are visualized in a two-dimensional space that maps the popular cultural items as points based on the first two principal components. As items were deliberately selected based on their consecration levels across “brows” and this is the workhorse approach by which scholars think about cultural tastes and difference, we would reasonably expect the first principal component to be structured along this dimension. Yet if political ideology is strongly constraining the pattern of tastes, we would expect the other dimension to correspond with a left–right political identity, and cultural items to be arrayed largely at opposing ends of this space.

Depth

We gauge the depth of polarization by evaluating how politically divided our items are by regressing tastes on ideological self-identification and using the intercepts and slopes from significant items. We consider tastes to be more deeply polarized when the slope of the predicted tastes crosses the neutral score of 4 on the Likert scale, thereby better fitting into a symbolic exclusion framework. Rather than report dozens of different regression coefficients for individual cultural items, we use Hierarchical Linear Models (HLMs) in which tastes are nested within individuals, so that each individual *i* has as many *j* observations as they have tastes for politicized items in the sample. We run separate HLMs for tastes that correlated with liberal vs. conservative tastes, as well as for each of the taste clusters identified in the *k*-means clustering procedure.⁴

The Shaping of Politicized Tastes

Our second set of analyses examines the extent to which politicized tastes are more rooted in worldviews or social groups. We do so by estimating: (1) a set of *multiple regression models* that predict cultural tastes while controlling for sociodemographics, and (2) a *disliking model* of tastes across the ideological divide.

Multiple regression models

Models outlined so far do not address the degree to which cultural polarization reported from bivariate models is instead just the result of increased sociodemographic sorting into political parties. Put another way, we still want to address the question of how much any taste differences between liberals and conservatives can be explained through their sociodemographic—rather than ideological—differences.

The most straightforward way to address this question is to estimate linear regression models for all politicized tastes that include sociodemographic controls, and to then compare the coefficients for ideological identity with the original correlations in bivariate models. Rather than report dozens of regression models, we simplify the matter by estimating HLMs for liberal- vs. conservative-leaning tastes with and without sociodemographic controls.

Disliking model

Our second multiple regression model gages the targeted disliking of cultural items across the ideological divide. While it would be tautological to predict that, on average, liberals like liberal items and conservatives like conservative items, it is not tautological to examine whether the correlations between ideology and taste are rooted in *disliking* the other side's culture (or, in contrast, simply liking items on one's own side more). To reiterate our earlier conceptual framework, as with prior work, we take disliking as a stronger indication of symbolic exclusion (Bourdieu 1984; Bryson 1996; Lizardo and Skiles 2016a) and further evidence that worldviews are directly shaping tastes.

For this model, we omit political moderates from our analyses, as they are not informative to understanding the disliking of items across the political divide. We transform the taste variable into an ordered *disliking* with the following values: 0 (neutral or liking of a given item), 1 (somewhat dislike), 2 (dislike), 3 (very much dislike). We can write the model in terms of y_{ji}^* , which is individual i 's unobserved continuous tendency to dislike an item j , and y_{ji} is the observed ordinal outcome. In predicting disliking, we once again nest j cultural item tastes within each individual i :

$$y_{ji}^* = \beta_{0i} + \beta_1 I_i + \beta_2 C_i + \beta_3 (I_i \times C_i) + \beta_4 L_j + \beta_5 (I_i \times L_j) + \beta_6 (I_i \times C_i \times L_j) + r_{ji} \quad (1a)$$

$$\beta_{0i} = \gamma_{00} + U_{0i}, \quad U_{0i} \sim \mathbf{N}(0, \sigma_0) \quad (1b)$$

$$y_{ji} = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if } y_{ji}^* \leq \alpha_1 \\ 1, & \text{if } \alpha_1 < y_{ji}^* \leq \alpha_2 \\ 2, & \text{if } \alpha_2 < y_{ji}^* \leq \alpha_3 \\ 3, & \text{if } \alpha_3 < y_{ji}^* \end{cases}, \quad (1c)$$

where individual i 's disliking of item j is a function of i 's average tastes when all predictors are zero, β_{0i} ; I_i gages individual i 's ideological intensity (1 = slightly liberal/conservative; 2 = liberal/conservative; 3 = extremely liberal/conservative); C_i is an indicator that individual i identifies as conservative; L_j is an indicator that cultural item j is a left-leaning item; and r_{ji} is a residual variance unique to individual i across all j tastes not captured in the model, which is distributed according to a standard logistic distribution. Equation (1b) models the random intercept for individual i as a function of a grand mean, γ_{00} , plus the random component related to that individual's tastes, U_{0i} (i.e., the difference between the grand mean and the average tastes for individual i). Equation (1c) maps the latent variable to the observed outcome, showing the different cut point parameters.

The coefficients from this model allow us to examine the extent to which individuals who identify as more liberal or more conservative are also more likely to express a stronger *disliking* of the items on the other side of the ideological divide. Because the model includes several interaction terms, the baseline is the following: the likelihood that individuals who identify as slightly liberal will dislike conservative-leaning items. The coefficient β_1 gages the tendency

for individuals who identify as more intensely liberal to dislike conservative-leaning items, β_2 gages the overall tendency for conservatives to dislike conservative-leaning items, β_3 gages the tendency for individuals who identify as more intensely conservative to dislike conservative-leaning items, β_4 gages the tendency for individuals in general to dislike liberal-leaning items, β_5 gages the tendency for individuals who identify as more intensely liberal to dislike liberal-leaning items, and β_6 gages the tendency for individuals who identify as more intensely conservative to dislike liberal-leaning items. In combination, these coefficients allow us to test if a statistically significant asymmetry exists between liberals and conservatives in terms of the disliking of the other side's culture.

Results

Tracing the Oil Spill and Its Contours: Size, Shape, Depth Size

In support of the oil spill perspective, [table 1](#) shows that politicization has spread quite extensively into popular culture—in fact, the majority of popular culture items drawn from a wide sample (80 of 135, or 59%) are significantly correlated with political ideology ($p < .05$). Of the eighty politicized cultural objects, sixty-two are positively correlated with identifying as liberal, whereas the remaining eighteen are positively correlated with identifying as conservative. Clearly, either liberals like more widely known popular culture than do conservatives, or our sampling procedure of identifying the most widely known popular culture derived more liberal-leaning items than conservative-leaning ones. We return to this in the discussion.

While the breadth of this politicization may be surprising from the standpoint of treating popular culture as purposefully apolitical “mass” culture that serves as a weak force of social cohesion ([DiMaggio 1977](#); [Erickson 1996](#); [Gitlin 1983](#); [Lizardo 2006a](#)), we do find evidence for the existence of such boundary spanning culture. Non-politicized objects and activities that are generally popular (i.e., have average liking scores above 4.5) include watching television, going sightseeing, and visiting amusement parks while on vacation, as well as two Steven Spielberg films. Americans are also largely unified in their dislikes of widely known but perhaps less widely engaged with objects, be they either very lowbrow (e.g., *Insane Clown Posse*) or very highbrow (e.g., rowing). In short, we find that popular culture does have a cohesive center and that Americans remain weakly united through shared tastes in leisure, feel-good blockbuster films, some classic rock artists, and football. However, the majority of items in our sample have some political leaning, suggesting that the oil spill of polarization may have substantially seeped into popular tastes.

Results on the size of the oil spill support other research using bivariate correlations as the window into polarization ([Baldassarri and Gelman 2008](#); [DellaPosta 2020](#); [DellaPosta et al. 2015](#); [Kozlowski 2022](#); [Kozlowski and Murphy 2021](#)). However, by extending these findings into non-opinion based tastes across a wide swath of cultural domains, we offer stronger evidence of a shift in attitude structures in which political identity is playing an increasingly central role ([Boutyline and Vaisey 2017](#)). Popular cultural tastes, as with numerous opinions not previously identified with a political leaning, seem to have become pulled into this correlational structure in which political identity is a central node.

Shape

Moving beyond pairwise correlations, we next examine the shape of cultural polarization. In an ideal-typical polarized scenario, we would expect two incommensurate lifestyles and worldviews, one liberal and the other conservative. [Figure 1](#) shows the results of the k-means cluster analysis. In contrast to the completely bifurcated ideal type, the gap statistic found a ten-cluster solution as optimal.⁵ Clusters in [figure 1](#) are shaded according to their average correlations with ideological identity: darker shades of blue indicating stronger liberal correlations, purple indicating a mix of liberal and conservative items, and red indicating conservative correlations. The first dimension,

Table 1. Popular Culture Items by Bivariate Correlations with Ideological Identity

Lean liberal items		Neutral items		Lean conservative items	
Oprah Winfrey Show	-.29	No Country for Old Men	-.06	Final Destiny	Kid Rock .15
Jimmy Kimmel Show	-.29	Go to a Spa	-.06	E-Sports	Rodeo .14
The View	-.27	Bladerunner	-.06	The Sopranos	Florida-Georgia Line .14
Ellen DeGeneres Show	-.25	Soccer	-.06	Go Wine Tasting	Rascal Flatts .13
Get Out	-.23	Red Hot Chili Peppers	-.06	Coldplay	Carrie Underwood .13
Beyoncé	-.23	The Godfather	-.05	The Real Housewives	Johnny Cash .12
DaVID Letterman Show	-.22	Mixed Martial Arts (MMA)	-.03	Pink Floyd	Nascar .12
Tupac Shakur	-.21			The X-Files	Sugarland .10
Pharell Williams	-.21			Limp Bizkit	Antiques Roadshow .10
Twelve Years a Slave	-.21			Hell's Kitchen	Pawn Stars .08
Orange is the New Black	-.19			The Blair Witch Project	Patsy Cline .08
Kendrick Lamar	-.19			Olympus Has Fallen	Golf .08
Puff Daddy	-.18			2001	Lynyrd Skynyrd .07
Lauryn Hill	-.18			The Last Airbender	Pearl Harbor .07
Ja Rule	-.17			Twilight	Mötley Crüe .06
Grand Budapest Hotel	-.17			Two Broke Girls	Willy Nelson .06
Eco-Tourism	-.16			One Direction	Ride ATVs .06
Stranger Things	-.16			I Know What You Did Last Summer	True Grit .06
Adele	-.16			Grimm	
Katie Perry	-.15			Bob Dylan	
Attend an Opera	-.14			Top Chef	
Curb Your Enthusiasm	-.13			Boxing	
Mad Men	-.13			Two and a Half Men	
The Shining	-.13			Insane Clown Posse	
Flo Rida	-.13			Go to Casinos	
The Office	-.13			Go Sightseeing	
Crouching Tiger/ Hidden Dragon	-.12			The Transformers	
Go to Bars	-.12			King of Queens	
Go to Museums	-.12			Gone in 60 Seconds	
Annie Hall	-.10			Tour de France	
The Foo Fighters	-.10			The Human Centipede	
Taste Authentic Cuisine	-.09			The Amazing Race	
Suicide Squad	-.09			Go to Amusement Parks	
Justin Bieber	-.09			E.T.	
Gossip Girl	-.09			The Ghost Whisperer	
I am Sam	-.09			Watch TV	
Being John Malkovich	-.09			Bones	
Architecture Tour	-.08			The Bachelor	
The Martian	-.08			The Rolling Stones	
Supergirl	-.08			Dr. Phil	
Scary Movie	-.08			Go to the Pool	
The Hangover	-.08			Joe Dirt	
Downton Abbey	-.08			Saving Private Ryan	
Tyler Perry	-.08			Rowing	
Britney Spears	-.08			Skiing	
Greys Anatomy	-.08			Go to the Fair	
Jerry Springer	-.08			AC/DC	
Supernatural	-.07			Football	
U2	-.07			The Notebook	
Game of Thrones	-.07			Paul Blart	
Basketball	-.07			Air Force One	
Tennis	-.07			KISS	
How I Met Your Mother	-.07			Baseball	
The Sixth Sense	-.07			Motocross	
One Tree Hill	-.07			Nickelback	

Note: Correlations with ideological identity scale (1 = "Very Liberal" to 7 = "Very Conservative") shown where significant ($p < .05$).

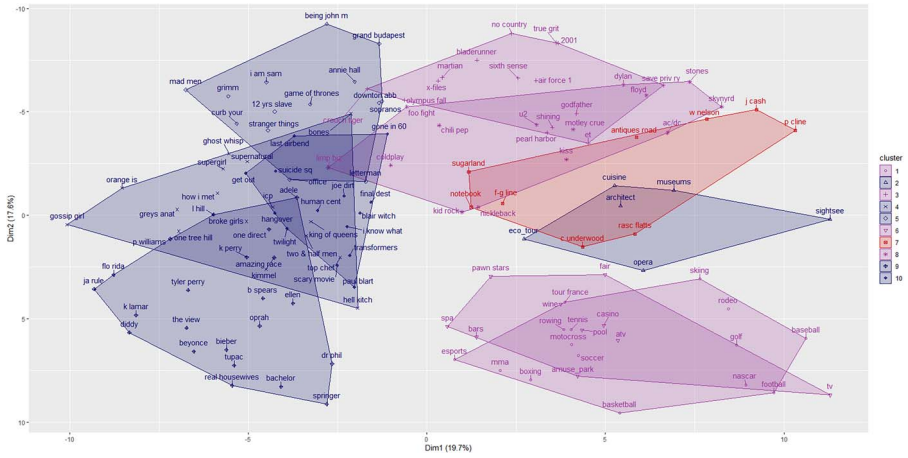


Figure 1. Results of *k*-means clustering procedure.

running along the *x*-axis, shows a left–right split, and represents the largest principal component (20% of variance explained). The *y*-axis shows that the clustering is also shaped by the degree of cultural consecration of an object, with objects higher on this dimension being more generally held in higher esteem. Put another way, while we as researchers were fully “innocent of [political] ideology” (Converse 1962: 47) in selecting items and instead deliberately selected them based on how widely known they were and breadth of consecration, it is instead political ideology that most structures the space of popular culture. Yet within this two-dimensional space we find that the clustering of the 135 tastes does not easily divide into two oppositional positions. Instead, we find five clearly liberal but distinct clusters (Clusters 2, 4, 5, 9, and 10), several wide clusters that have liberal and conservative ends, and one clearly conservative (Cluster 7) taste cluster.

The overall shape of the oil spill suggests an incomplete ideological bifurcation of tastes and lifestyles. Cultural items that at the bivariate level are politicized do not always fall into clusters within the same ideological domain—for example, individuals who like Kid Rock (the most conservative taste at the bivariate level) also tend to like other rock artists, several of whom have politically liberal correlations at the bivariate level (e.g., U2). Here, again, we see an asymmetry: for liberals, tastes are clustered within domains with some overlap, whereas, for conservatives, tastes are clustered within a single domain.

Depth

Results so far indicate that the oil spill of polarization into popular culture is wide but also somewhat unconsolidated. While we have found multiple overlapping clusters, for liberals or conservatives, we still do not know the depth of divisiveness across or within any pools identified in the *k*-means clustering procedure.

Figure 2 illustrates regression lines from bivariate HLMS predicting average tastes for cultural items based on individuals’ ideological self-identification (see table A3 in the Appendix for full models). These models predict average tastes by ideological identity for each subset of items. We consider the oil spill of polarization to be deep to the extent that (1) the slope of the effect is steep, and (2) the predicted tastes cross the neutral midpoint. Results show that, on average, the oil spill of polarization into popular culture is fairly shallow. For both liberal- and conservative-leaning items, the regression line does not cross the neutral point, and in most taste clusters, individuals who are more ideological in their identities tend to be more neutral toward the culture of the other side. Of course, some individuals do actively dislike the other side’s culture. We examine patterns of disliking in greater detail later in this section.

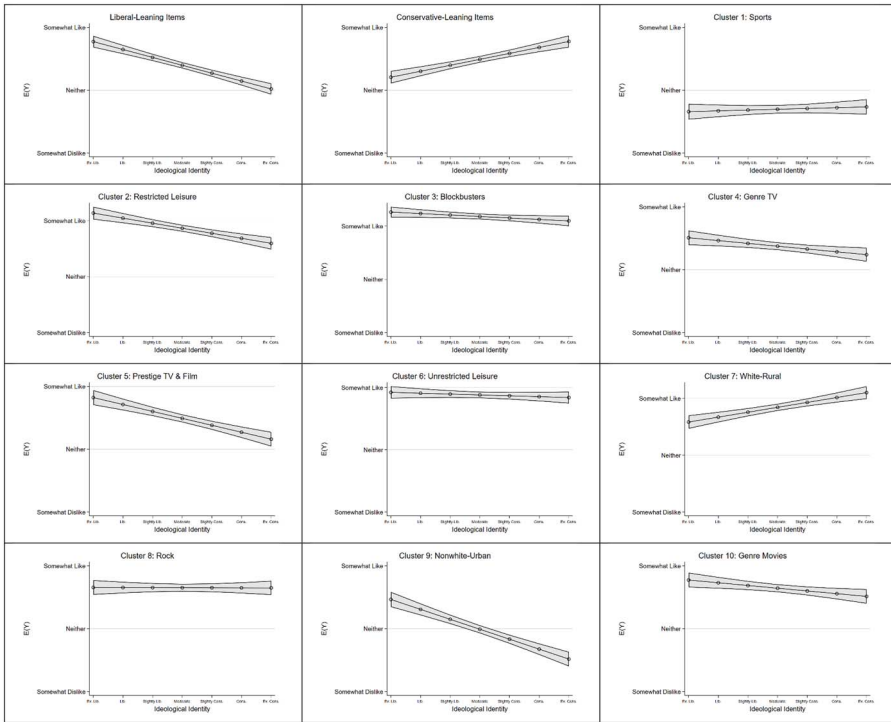


Figure 2. Predicted tastes in clustered popular culture items by ideological identity.

In general, one might see these results as supporting the view that most polarization of popular culture is not deeply ingrained and instead comes from fleeting “take-off” issues that spark attention (Baldassari and Bearman 2007). However, there is one cluster that fits the definition we set forth as indicating being more deeply polarized and operating within a symbolic exclusion framework—namely, the items in the non-White-urban cluster. Here, we see a strong correlation, which suggests that some combination of worldviews and social groups is likely at work in giving rise to the shape and depth of polarization.

Worldviews and Social Groups

To gauge how much of the politicization of cultural items can be explained by sociodemographic differences between liberals and conservatives, we estimated separate regressions for the eighty politicized items in table 1, including the full set of sociodemographic controls. For the sixty-two liberal-leaning items, we found the correlation with ideological identity remains significant when controlling for sociodemographics for thirty-three items (53%); whereas, for the eighteen conservative-leaning items, we found thirteen remain significant (72%). The items most robust to the inclusion of sociodemographic controls are unevenly distributed across taste clusters (see items with alphabets in table 2). Nearly all of the politicized items in blockbuster movies, genre TV shows, and genre movies are no longer significantly correlated with ideological identity after including sociodemographic controls. Items in three clusters—prestige TV and movies, White-Rural, and Non-White-Urban—retain the most politicized items after including sociodemographic controls.

Table 3 shows results from HLMs predicting tastes in liberal- and conservative-leaning items without and with controls. For liberal-leaning items, the average correlation is reduced from $-.12$ to $-.07$ when including sociodemographic controls, whereas for conservative-leaning items, the average correlation remains unchanged at $.09$. For liberal-leaning items, a greater number of

Table 2. Ten Taste Clusters

1	2	3	4	5
Sports	Restricted leisure	Blockbusters	Genre TV	Prestige TV and film
Baseball	Architecture (L)	2001	Amazing Race	12 Years a slave (L) ^a
Basketball (L)	Cuisine (L) ^a	Air Force 1	Bones	Annie Hall (L) ^a
Boxing	Ecotourism (L) ^a	Bladerunner (L)	Broke Girls	Being John Malkovich (L)
E-sports	Museums (L) ^a	Crouching Tiger (L)	Ghost Whisperer	Curb Your Enthusiasm (L) ^a
Football	Opera (L) ^a	E.T.	Gossip Girl (L)	Downton Abbey (L)
Golf (C) ^a	Sightsee	The Godfather (L)	Greys Anatomy (L)	Game of Thrones (L)
MMA (L)		The Martian (L) ^a	Hell's Kitchen	Grand Budapest Hotel (L) ^a
Motocross		No Country for Old Men (L)	How I Met Your Mother (L)	Grimm
Nascar (C) ^a		Olympus Has Fallen	Insane Clown Posse	I am Sam (L)
Rodeo (C) ^a		Pearl Harbor (C)	King of Queens	Letterman (L) ^a
Rowing		Saving Private Ryan	One Tree Hill (L)	Mad Men (L) ^a
Skiing		The Shining (L) ^a	Orange is the New Black (L) ^a	The Office (L) ^a
Soccer (L) ^a		The Sixth Sense (L)	Supergirl (L)	The Sopranos
Tennis (L)		True Grit	Supernatural (L)	Stranger Things (L) ^a
Tour de France		The X-Files	Top Chef	
			Two and a Half Men	
6	7	8	9	10
Unrestricted Leisure	White-Rural	Rock	Non-White-Urban	Genre Movies
Amusement Parks	Antiques Roadshow (C) ^a	AC/DC	Adele (L) ^a	The Blair Witch Project
ATV (C) ^a	Carrie Underwood (C) ^a	Red Hot Chili Peppers (L)	Britney Spears (L)	Final Destiny
Bars (L) ^a	Florida-Georgia Line (C) ^a	Coldplay	The Bachelor	Get Out (L) ^a
Casino	Johnny Cash (C) ^a	Bob Dylan	Beyoncé (L) ^a	Gone in 60 Seconds
Fair	The Notebook	Pink Floyd	Justin Bieber (L)	The Hangover (L)
Pawn Stars (C) ^a	Patsy Cline (C)	Foo Fighters (L) ^a	Puff Daddy (L) ^a	The Human Centipede
Pool	Rascal Flatts (C) ^a	Kid Rock (C) ^a	Dr. Phil (L)	I Know What You Did Last Summer
Spa (L)	Sugarland (C) ^a	Kiss	Ellen DeGeneres (L) ^a	Joe Dirt
TV	Willie Nelson (C)	Limp Bizkit	Flo Rida (L)	The Last Airbender
Wine Tasting		Mötley Crüe (C) ^a	Ja Rule (L) ^a	Paul Blart
		Nickelback	Kendrick Lamar (L) ^a	Scary Movie (L)
		Lynyrd Skynyrd (C)	Katie Perry (L) ^a	Suicide Squad (L)
		The Rolling Stones	Jimmy Kimmel (L) ^a	Transformers
		U2 (L) ^a	Lauryn Hill (L) ^a	Twilight
			One Direction	
			Oprah (L) ^a	
			Pharrell	
			Williams (L) ^a	
			The Real	
			Housewives (L)	
			Jerry Springer (L)	
			The View (L) ^a	
			Tupac (L) ^a	
			Tyler Perry (L)	

Note: Items that lean liberal are marked with (L) and items that lean conservative are marked with (C). Items marked with an alphabet remain politicized after controlling for sociodemographics.

sociodemographic controls are significant predictors, and their magnitudes are in general greater than for conservative-leaning items. In short, the “social groups” explanation fits well for how numerous liberal tastes become politicized, whereas conservatives share similar tastes with other conservatives, regardless of their social group, suggesting a stronger direct connection with their shared worldview.

Table 3. HLMs Predicting Tastes in Politicized Popular Culture Items Without and With Sociodemographic Controls

	Liberal leaning items				Conservative leaning items			
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Ideological Identity	-.12***	(.01)	-.07***	(.01)	.09***	(.01)	.09***	(.01)
Education			.05**	(.02)			-.03	(.02)
Childhood Arts Exposure			.13***	(.01)			.10***	(.02)
Income			.01	(.01)			0	(.01)
Sex = Male			-.01	(.05)			.14*	(.06)
Age			-.01***	(.00)			.00*	(.00)
Race (White Omitted)								
Black			.60***	(.08)			-.09	(.09)
Hispanic			.22**	(.08)			-.33***	(.09)
Asian			.15	(.10)			-.22	(.12)
Other			-.12	(.18)			-.08	(.20)
Urban–Rural			-.09**	(.03)			.04	(.04)
Constant	4.88***	(.06)	4.53***	(.16)	4.13***	(.07)	3.45***	(.18)
Random Effects Parameters	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Var(r_{ji})	2.69	(.01)	2.69	(.01)	2.61	(.03)	2.61	(.03)
Var(U_{0i})	.84	(.03)	.68	(.03)	.84	(.04)	.80	(.04)
Number of Observations	68,900		68,900		21,524		21,524	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4 shows results from hierarchical ordered logistic regression models predicting the disliking of politicized cultural items. The first model examines all eighty politicized items, whereas the second model looks specifically at the deepest pools of polarization—i.e., the politicized items in White-Rural and Non-White-Urban taste clusters. To facilitate interpretation, figure 3 uses the coefficients in these models to predict the likelihood that ideological intensity increases the disliking of the other side’s culture. To illustrate, we show the likelihood of “very much” disliking, although the pattern holds, but is less pronounced, for other response categories. Results show a clear asymmetry: ideological intensity predicts a greater likelihood of strongly disliking liberal culture by extreme conservatives, but not the inverse. This asymmetry is considerably more pronounced when looking at the difference between the disliking of Non-White-Urban cultural items by conservatives vs. the disliking of White-Rural cultural items by liberals. In short, identifying more strongly as conservative is tied to a disliking of liberal culture in general, and a focused disliking of items oriented around Black and urban liberals.

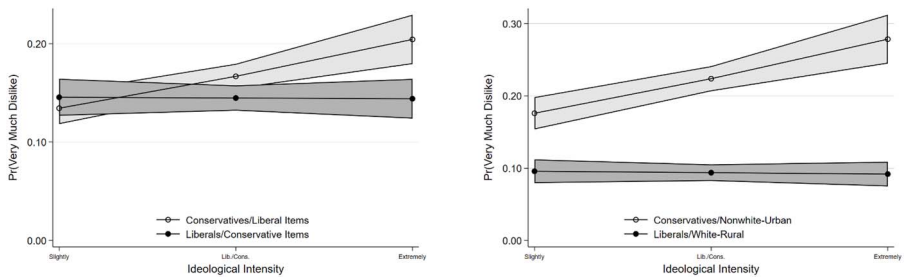
Discussion

Recent research suggests that there has been a spillage of political polarization into otherwise mundane areas of social life (DellaPosta 2020). Here, we have investigated the size, shape, and depth of the oil spill into tastes for popular culture across a wide array of cultural domains: tastes for television, music, movies, sports, and leisure activities. While the size of the oil spill into popular culture is extensive, we find its shape to be only loosely organized into a bifurcated “us vs. them” structure, and to contain only one deeply divisive pool. We also find evidence of asymmetric cultural polarization across the political divide. Liberals like more popular culture, like culture across many different clusters, do not actively dislike the popular culture conservatives do like, and have tastes that are more rooted in their sociodemographics. Conservatives, on the other hand, like less popular culture, are less heterogeneous in their tastes, are more likely to dislike other groups’ popular culture, and are more ideologically rooted in their tastes. In what follows,

Table 4. Hierarchical Ordered Logistic Regression Models Predicting Disliking of Politicized Popular Culture Items

	All politicized items		Cluster 7 and 9 items	
	β	SE	β	SE
Ideological Intensity	-.01	(.08)	-.03	(.09)
Conservative	-.78***	(.22)	-.91**	(.29)
Ideological Intensity \times Conservative	.17	(.11)	.2	(.14)
Liberal Item	-.36***	(.03)	.40***	(.05)
Liberal Item \times Conservative	.70***	(.08)	.98***	(.15)
Liberal Item \times Conservative \times Ideological Intensity	.16***	(.04)	.24***	(.07)
Constant (1)	1.18***	(.16)	1.81***	(.20)
Constant (2)	1.75***	(.16)	2.43***	(.20)
Constant (3)	2.33***	(.16)	3.11***	(.20)
Var(U_{0i})	1.93***	(.09)	2.71***	(.14)
Number of Observations	87,002		29,040	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

**Figure 3.** Predicted probabilities of “very much” disliking politicized cultural items across the ideological divide.

we first provide some ideas for what may be behind the asymmetries we find, followed by ideas for future research.

We are confident in our findings of asymmetries between liberals and conservatives for four main reasons. First, in our data, left-leaning respondents have more childhood arts exposure than do right-leaning respondents, and childhood arts exposure is one of (if not *the*) key predictor in inculcation of an omnivorous disposition that is predicated on liking more (and more diverse) forms of culture (Childress et al. 2021; Dumais 2019; Lena 2019; Lizardo 2018). Younger individuals and non-White individuals are also less likely to say they dislike *any* culture (Lizardo and Skiles 2016b), and for high education elites, being culturally open across most social boundaries is a mark of social status (Fridman and Ollivier 2004; Prieur and Savage 2013). For all of these reasons, we believe liberals may report liking more items of popular culture than do others. Second, with the exception of Nashville and country music (Mann 2008), and at least since the “rural purge” in television in the 1970s, American media industries have more oriented programming (and market segmentation) around diverse, younger, and more urban audiences. As a result, media industries, in targeting these sociodemographic groups, may be making popular culture that is concomitantly (and indirectly) more popular among liberals, and more popular among more diverse groups of liberals, who are themselves more of a crosscutting coalition across different sociodemographic groups than are conservatives (Grossman and Hopkins 2016).

Third, even when controlling for an individual’s age, the popular culture in our data that is liked by conservatives is *older*.⁶ This suggests that conservatives liking less popular culture may not just be because of shifts in media industries and targeted audience demographics, but rather may also be because conservatives are more oriented toward tradition and nostalgia, and the

“constant revolution” (Bourdieu 2017) of popular culture is incongruent with a more conservative disposition that disfavors the cycling through of stylistic fads and fashions. This would explain why conservatives in our data like Bob Dylan and Willie Nelson, whereas it seems less likely that these now older liberal iconoclasts were like by conservatives of the 1960s and 1970s. Data designed to look at older and newer popular culture more systematically might answer this question.

Fourth, and as we demonstrate in greater detail in Appendix B, liberals in our data are less likely to know of the popular culture liked by conservatives than vice-versa, leaving open the possibility that conservatives may not like less entertainment media overall than do liberals, but rather more of the entertainment media they do like is too unknown by liberals to enter our data. Liberals’ seeming unfamiliarity with the very popular (among conservatives) Christian Rock bands Mercy Me or Counting Crowns, or the late-night satirical news show *Gutfeld!* (which regularly gets higher ratings than *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, and *The Daily Show*) may be examples of this phenomenon. Yet liberals still do not dislike the conservative popular culture they do know. Instead, in our data, disliking is asymmetric and targeted, aligning with Már’s (2020) finding that conservatives’ outgroup animus is particularly anti-Black. We are unsure what the liberal corollary of this finding—should it exist—would be. Future work might more directly look for this potential corollary.

More generally, cultural sociologists and political sociologists (and by extension, political scientists) have much to benefit from increased cross-pollination. Our work most centrally contributes to a growing literature—still largely in political science and political psychology—on asymmetric polarization. More research of everyday culture (rather than the “cultural side” of overtly political items) that does not rely on nonrepresentative convenience samples are surely needed. Scholars of consumption and taste would also be well served by accounting for political ideology in their models. Here we remind the reader that while our data were explicitly gathered to capture hierarchical divisions in artistic consecration for widely known cultural objects, as shown in figure 2, it is instead a left/right political divide in tastes that explains the most variance. By ignoring ideological identity, scholars of symbolic exclusion and social boundary making through culture and taste may be missing a significant dimension of the story. While culture and networks scholars generally orient toward the “generalized conversion value” of popular culture (Lizardo 2006a: 783–4; see also Erickson 1996; Gamson 1998; Pachucki and Breiger 2010; Schultz and Breiger 2010; Sokolova and Sokolov 2020), in our data, the most widely known cultural is also the most polarized. It may be that shared interest in niche culture could supersede partisan animus in ways that more generalized culture cannot.

Given the rise of sociodemographic sorting into political parties, we also raise the possibility of reverse causation. By this, we mean that cultural objects may become “liberal” or “conservative” because of their emergence and spread within groups, rather than because of anything particular about their encoded contents. We also note that our findings occur at time when Americans are *depolarizing* on some of the issues that make up the usual culture wars hypothesis (Baldassarri and Park 2020). We think this inconsistency—polarized taste for popular culture and depolarizing political beliefs on cultural items—may be explained by the same juxtaposition of rising rates of affective polarization despite more generally flat rates of issue polarization (Mason 2015). While fairly narrow bands of highly educated, highly engaged “political hobbyists” are polarizing on political issues (Hersh 2020), for most Americans (who are not politically engaged), and particularly for those who may feel they lack “political competence” (Bourdieu 1984; Laurison 2015), polarizing around popular culture may be a low-barrier form of quasi-political engagement along a different if parallel track.⁷

Endnotes

1. Although popularized by Hunter, the term “culture war” was first introduced by Todd Gitlin and Ruth Rosen in a 1987 *New York Times* opinion editorial (DiMaggio 2003).

2. Thank you to a reviewer for clarifying this point.
3. For the use of MetaCritic as a data source in sociology see [Friedman and Reeves \(2020\)](#), [Lindner, Lindquist, and Arnold \(2015\)](#), and [van Venrooij, Miller, and Schmutz \(2022\)](#), among others.
4. Our results for predicting tastes are robust across alternative specifications, including dyadic models with multiway clustered standard errors and numerous interaction effects (available on request).
5. Our use of *k*-means clustering with Hierarchical Cluster Analyses is robust across alternative procedures (Ward's, Average Link, Nearest Neighbor).
6. Models available upon request.
7. More recently, symbolic mobilization (and counter-mobilization) around Jason Aldean's "Try that in a Small Town" and Oliver Anthony's "Rich Men North of Richmond" could be considered as examples of this phenomenon.

Appendix A

Appendix B: Popular Culture Awareness Asymmetry

In the Discussion, we question if asymmetric awareness may be partially driving asymmetry in animus.

Table B1 shows results from dyadic logistic regression models predicting when individual *i* reports not knowing item *j* based on the political leaning of item *j*, the ideological identity of individual *i*, and the interaction of these two variables. [Figure B1](#) shows predicted probabilities of not knowing from the coefficients in this model. Clearly, the ignorance of the other side's popular culture is asymmetric. Conservatives are only slightly more likely than are liberals to not know liberal-leaning items, whereas liberals are considerably less likely to report knowing of conservative-leaning items. Although the overall magnitude of these effects is small (roughly translating to 1 fewer item), we consider this a lower-bound, since these relatively few conservative-leaning items are undoubtedly some of the most widely-known.

Table A1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Liberal and Conservative Respondents in Sample

Variable	Liberal respondents					Conservative respondents					T-test Sig.
	N	μ	SD	Min	Max	N	μ	SD	Min	Max	
Education	565	4.56	1.43	2	7	908	4.12	1.36	1	7	***
Childhood Arts Exposure	565	3.48	1.74	1	7	908	2.95	1.63	1	7	***
Income	565	5.44	3.12	1	12	908	5.21	3.12	1	12	n.s.
Sex = Male	565	1.52	.50	1	2	908	1.47	.50	1	2	*
Age in Years	565	45.56	16.27	19	82	908	46.71	16.43	18	90	n.s.
Race White	565	.54	.50	0	1	908	.68	.47	0	1	***
Race Black	565	.17	.37	0	1	908	.07	.26	0	1	***
Race Hispanic	565	.13	.34	0	1	908	.12	.32	0	1	n.s.
Race Asian	565	.05	.22	0	1	908	.04	.20	0	1	n.s.
Race Other	565	.01	.10	0	1	908	.03	.16	0	1	*
Urban to Rural	565	1.81	.70	1	3	908	2.05	.74	1	3	***

n.s. = not significant. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

Table A2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Variables Used in Models

	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) Ideological Identity	1525	4.08	1.88	1	7	1.00									
(2) Education	1525	4.41	1.43	1	7	-.05	1.00								
(3) Childhood Arts	1518	3.25	1.65	1	7	-.14	.13	1.00							
(4) Income	1467	5.54	3.12	1	12	.05	.33	.04	1.00						
(5) Sex = Male	1523	1.52	.50	1	2	.01	.04	-.01	.10	1.00					
(6) Age Years Old	1496	47.41	16.41	18	90	.14	.22	-.20	.06	.00	1.00				
(7) Race White	1525	.61	.49	0	1	.13	.02	-.13	.05	-.26	.33	1.00			
(8) Race Black	1525	.12	.33	0	1	-.14	-.01	.08	-.08	.07	-.06	-.46	1.00		
(9) Race Hispanic	1525	.12	.32	0	1	-.04	-.13	.06	-.02	.21	-.30	-.45	-.13	1.00	
(10) Race Asian	1525	.05	.22	0	1	.01	.17	.00	.07	.05	-.05	-.30	-.09	-.09	1.00
(11) Race Other	1525	.02	.12	0	1	.04	-.01	.01	-.01	.04	-.01	-.16	-.05	-.05	-.03
(12) Urban-Rural	1525	1.94	.73	1	4	.15	-.02	-.09	-.01	-.15	.16	.30	-.20	-.15	-.09
(13) Cluster 1 Tastes	1524	3.70	1.30	1	7	.03	.04	.25	.07	.24	-.15	-.23	.17	.14	.05
(14) Cluster 2 Tastes	1518	4.86	1.17	1	7	-.14	.21	.38	.08	-.10	-.03	-.05	.05	.02	.01
(15) Cluster 3 Tastes	1521	5.18	1.03	1	7	-.07	.10	.13	.06	.14	.09	-.03	.09	-.02	-.03
(16) Cluster 4 Tastes	1516	4.38	1.18	1	7	-.07	.02	.19	-.02	-.06	-.19	-.10	.13	.05	.02
(17) Cluster 5 Tastes	1509	4.50	1.24	1	7	-.18	.14	.23	.08	.02	-.08	-.07	.10	.02	.02
(18) Cluster 6 Tastes	1523	4.88	1.01	1	7	-.02	-.04	.22	.01	-.01	-.23	-.10	.10	.08	-.04
(19) Cluster 7 Tastes	1521	4.85	1.20	1	7	.13	.06	.05	.02	-.14	.22	.21	-.07	-.17	-.02
(20) Cluster 8 Tastes	1521	4.65	1.21	1	7	.01	-.01	.14	.01	.05	-.03	.06	-.03	-.03	-.03
(21) Cluster 9 Tastes	1524	3.97	1.27	1	7	-.24	-.01	.24	-.04	-.06	-.31	-.31	.31	.09	.08
(22) Cluster 10 Tastes	1505	4.62	1.23	1	7	-.07	-.13	.09	-.05	.11	-.23	-.17	.17	.09	-.06
(23) Lean-Liberal Tastes	1525	4.38	.97	1.08	6.9	-.25	.09	.32	.02	.03	-.26	-.25	.23	.10	.04
(24) Lean-Conservative Tastes	1525	4.49	1.03	1	7	.18	.00	.11	.02	.03	.10	.13	-.03	-.09	-.03

	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)	(24)
(11) Race Other	1.00													
(12) Urban-Rural	.02	1.00												
(13) Cluster 1 Tastes	.01	-.14	1.00											
(14) Cluster 2 Tastes	-.03	-.06	.31	1.00										
(15) Cluster 3 Tastes	-.02	-.06	.33	.36	1.00									
(16) Cluster 4 Tastes	-.05	-.08	.41	.34	.52	1.00								
(17) Cluster 5 Tastes	-.06	-.10	.35	.44	.66	.67	1.00							
(18) Cluster 6 Tastes	-.01	-.08	.46	.49	.33	.52	.36	1.00						
(19) Cluster 7 Tastes	-.01	.13	.30	.30	.44	.49	.40	.33	1.00					
(20) Cluster 8 Tastes	.03	.03	.37	.32	.52	.52	.45	.41	.53	1.00				
(21) Cluster 9 Tastes	-.03	-.23	.46	.32	.34	.66	.53	.50	.34	.39	1.00			
(22) Cluster 10 Tastes	.03	-.10	.39	.18	.62	.62	.51	.47	.32	.49	.55	1.00		
(23) Lean-Liberal Tastes	-.04	-.19	.57	.55	.64	.78	.79	.60	.43	.57	.85	.69	1.00	
(24) Lean-Conservative Tastes	.01	.09	.58	.35	.52	.55	.41	.51	.86	.68	.40	.46	.53	1.00

Table A3. Bivariate HLMs Predicting Average Tastes in Popular Culture Items by Ideological Self-Identification (Liberal–Conservative)

Subset of items	β	SE	α	SE	Var(r_{ji})	SE	Var(U_{0i})	SE	N
<i>Political Leaning</i>									
Liberal-Leaning Items	-.13***	(.01)	4.90***	(.06)	2.69	(.01)	.84	(.03)	78,140
Conservative-Leaning Items	.09***	(.01)	4.11***	(.06)	2.61	(.02)	.86	(.04)	24,283
<i>Taste Clusters</i>									
Cluster 1 Items: Sports	.01	(.02)	3.65***	(.08)	2.58	(.03)	1.50	(.06)	22,237
Cluster 2 Items: Restricted Leisure	-.09***	(.02)	5.23***	(.07)	2.02	(.03)	1.00	(.05)	8734
Cluster 3 Items: Blockbusters	-.03*	(.01)	5.29***	(.06)	1.87	(.02)	.89	(.04)	18,703
Cluster 4 Items: Genre TV	-.04**	(.02)	4.55***	(.07)	2.31	(.02)	1.18	(.05)	19,278
Cluster 5 Items: Prestige TV and Film	-.11***	(.02)	4.93***	(.07)	1.99	(.02)	1.22	(.05)	15,327
Cluster 6 Items: Unrestricted Leisure	-.01	(.01)	4.94***	(.06)	2.51	(.03)	.76	(.04)	14,701
Cluster 7 Items: White-Rural	.09***	(.02)	4.49***	(.07)	1.81	(.03)	1.18	(.05)	11,775
Cluster 8 Items: Rock	0	(.02)	4.66***	(.07)	1.84	(.02)	1.26	(.05)	18,808
Cluster 9 Items: Non-White-Urban	-.16***	(.02)	4.62***	(.08)	2.43	(.02)	1.39	(.06)	28,959
Cluster 10 Items: Genre Movies	-.04**	(.02)	4.82***	(.07)	2.29	(.03)	1.20	(.05)	16,449

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Note: Each row is a separate HLM using a subset of items; β is the estimate for ideological self-identification; α is the intercept; Var(r_{ji}) is the variance between tastes within the same individual; Var(U_{0i}) is the variance between individuals; N is the total number of observations (individual-cultural items).

Table B1. Dyadic Logistic Regression Models Predicting Not Knowing 135 Popular Culture Items

	β	SE
Ideological Identity	-.01	(.02)
Item Political Leaning (Neutral Omitted)		
Liberal Leaning	.21	(.16)
× Ideological Identity	.02*	(.01)
Conservative Leaning	.07	(.23)
× Ideological Identity	-.07***	(.02)
Individual Sociodemographics		
Education	.10***	(.03)
Childhood Arts Exposure	-.09***	(.02)
Income	-.01	(.01)
Sex = Male	-.33***	(.08)
Age	.02***	(.00)
Race (White Omitted)		
Black	-.17	(.14)
Hispanic	-.28	(.16)
Asian	-.14	(.20)
Other	-.19	(.20)
Urban–Rural Residence	.09	(.05)
Constant	-2.37***	(.29)
Number of Observations	181,170	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

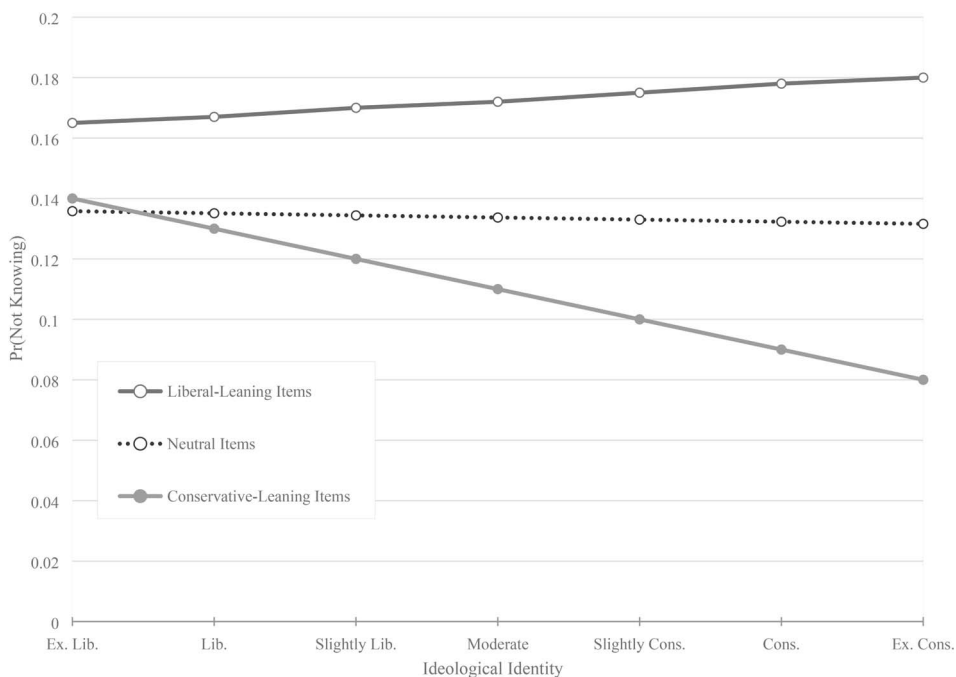


Figure B1. Predicted probabilities of not knowing popular culture by items' political leaning and individuals' ideological identity.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at *Social Forces* online.

Data Availability

The data underlying this article will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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