

Political Polarization and Authoritarianism in the United States

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Source Project - The New Authoritarianism

Background

- Political polarization has increased dramatically in the United States over the last several decades
 - **Ideological Polarization**
 - **Affective Polarization**
- Polarization has been linked to **rises in authoritarianism**

Questions:

- How has affective polarization in the twenty-first century led to the polarization of the two parties in the 2024 presidential election?
- **How has this election changed the discussion surrounding polarization?**

Methods

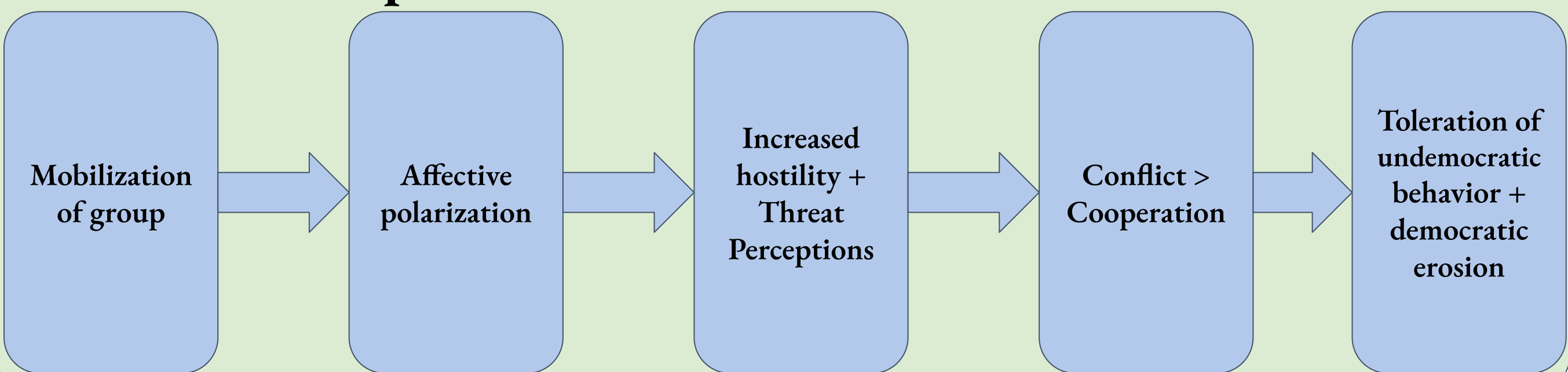
- Application of literature linking polarization and authoritarianism to the last several American election cycles
- Examination of exit polls
 - 2024 presidential election + past presidential elections
 - Other election data
- Examination of recent presidential and congressional activity

Predicted Patterns:

Electoral Perspective:

- “In polarized electorates, voters are willing to trade off democratic principles for partisan interests.”¹
- The US electorate will see a furthered increase in partisanship and competition fueled by racial, ideological, and cultural division.

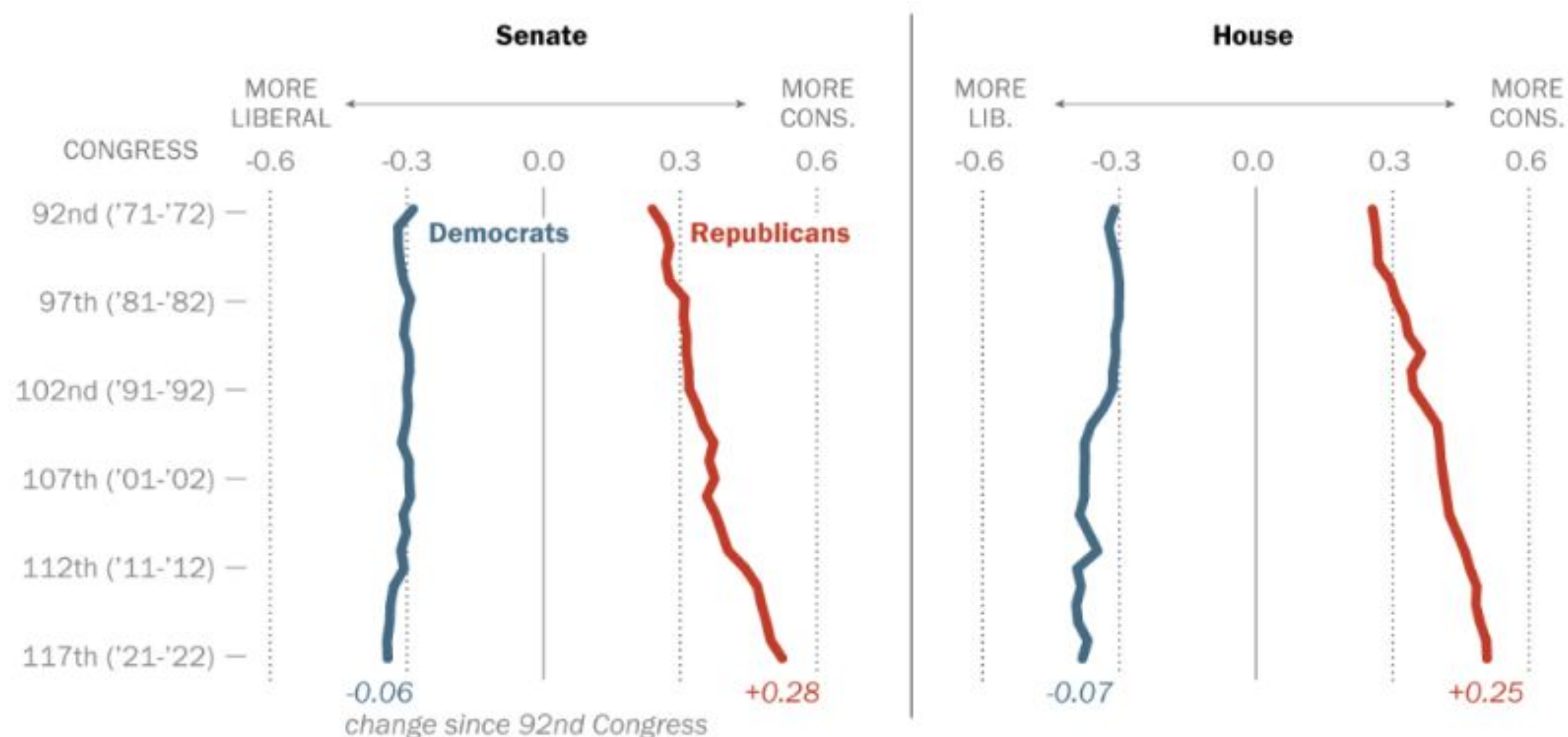
Partisan Perspective:



¹ Svobik, Milan W. "Polarization Versus Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 3 (2019): 20-32. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/729166>.

The environment of polarization from electoral, congressional, and presidential perspectives have placed American democracy in danger.

Average ideology of members, by Congress



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Results

- Trends of polarization from the last two decades steadily **increased** in the 2024 election
- **Non-white voters** in the 2024 presidential election became more **ideologically polarized**
- Some Trump voters were willing to continue their support despite predicting failures of checks and balances
- Increased **partisan hostility** in Congress in 2025 term
- Authoritarian behavior by Donald Trump is reflective of polarized environment

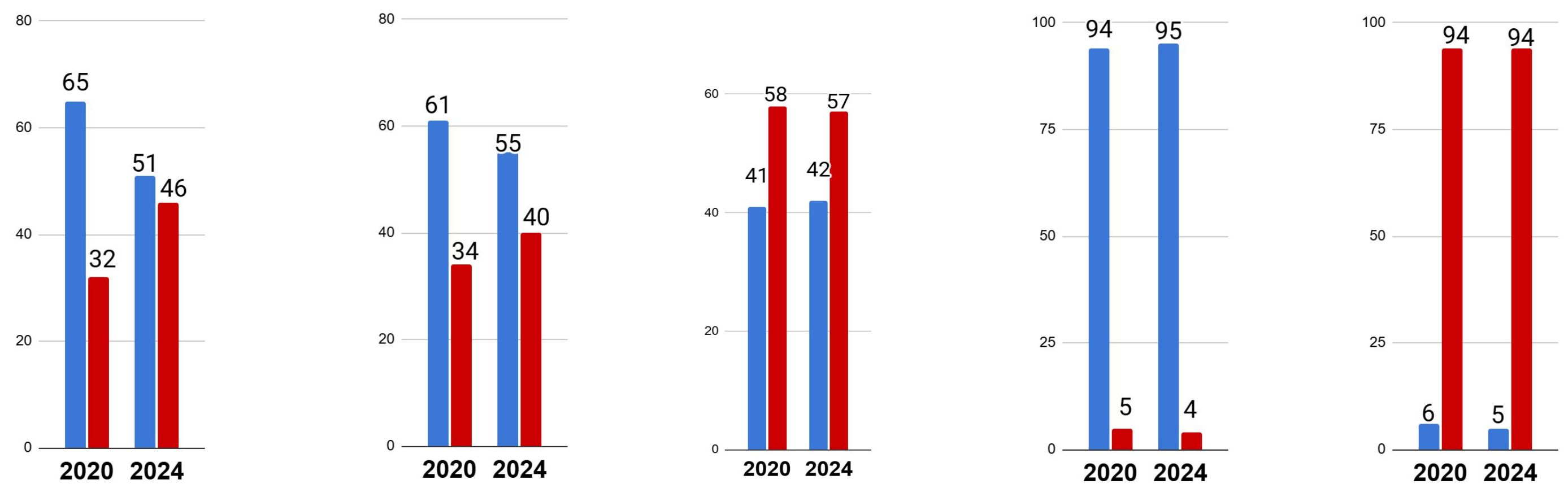
Implications

The realization of trends of polarization may have the implication of democratic backsliding and/or authoritarianism.

- Toleration of undemocratic behavior due to partisan allegiance may lead to authoritarianism

Exit Poll Data

Hispanic Voters: Asian Voters: White Voters: Democrats: Republicans:



TM3285Y24_d_6.How likely do you think it is that the following things will happen when Donald Trump takes office as president? U.S institutions will not be able to effectively check President Trump's power

	Total (N=1,471)	Registered Voter (RV) (N=1,254)	Democrat RV (N=453)	Republican RV (N=403)	Independent RV (N=336)
Extremely likely	19%	22%	46%	3%	19%
Very likely	14%	14%	25%	6%	13%
Somewhat likely	23%	22%	19%	16%	26%
Not likely	39%	41%	9%	73%	42%
Refused	4%	1%	0%	2%	1%
Likely (Net)	57%	58%	90%	25%	58%