

Online Appendix for: ‘How Does Media Coverage of
Partisan Polarization Affect Political Attitudes?’

February 3, 2015

Online Appendix 1: Treatment Stimuli

Polarized Stimulus:¹

Electorate as Divided as Ever

by Jefferson Graham (*USA Today*)

In the aftermath of the 2012 presidential election, interviews with voters at a diner in Smithfield, PA reveal an electorate as divided as ever. When asked about the importance of the election results, Republican Marlene Evers of nearby Fairchance said, “I can’t believe Obama won. He is a radical socialist. He will destroy the Christian values set forth by the Founding Fathers that have made this country great. If he gets his way, he’ll overturn 5,000 years of tradition and allow gay marriage, destroying the American family. We must stop him any way we can.” Later on that evening, Democratic voter and Obama supporter Dan Thompson of Masontown pointed to economic issues as influencing his vote in the election. “The Republican Party is for corporate greed and will do nothing but destroy the lives and hopes of regular working people in this country. They tried to use voter ID laws to steal this election, because they know the American people reject their ideas.” He added, “Bush was a complete idiot who bankrupted this nation with the Iraq War, and Romney would have been just as bad, destroying the economy. Republicans want to roll back women’s reproductive freedom by restricting access to contraception and labeling women who defend it sluts and prostitutes.” As we left Smithfield, it is clear that Republicans and Democrats in the area seem as divided as ever before.

This same pattern also holds nationally: Democrats and Republicans across the country are deeply divided. For example, Gallup data released last week shows that while nearly 9 in 10 Democratic voters (88 percent) approve of President Obama’s job as president, less than 1 in 10 Republicans (8 percent) approves. This 80 point gap between the parties in approval is among the largest ever recorded (see figure). “Differences in Obama’s approval reflect fundamental divides between the parties,” says [REDACTED] political science professor [REDACTED]. “Democrats and Republicans really do hold different beliefs.”

Moderate Condition Stimulus:

Electorate Remains Moderate

Jefferson Graham (*USA Today*)

In the aftermath of the 2012 presidential election, interviews with voters at a diner in Smithfield, PA reveal few real divisions in the electorate. When asked about Obama’s victory, Republican Marlene Evers of nearby Fairchance said, “I don’t agree with all of Obama’s economic policies, but he seems to be trying hard to resolve America’s economic problems. He’s doing things that we all agree with, like trying to bring down the deficit. He’s also trying to find a middle ground on social issues like his gay marriage decision. While

¹The graphics shown to respondents in the moderate and polarized conditions are given below in Figure 1.

he supports gay marriage, he did not push to change federal policy on this issue, knowing that it might upset some voters. I am pro-life, but I agree with President Obama that women need access to safe and affordable family planning tools.” Later on that evening, Democratic voter and Obama supporter Dan Thompson of Masontown pointed to economic issues as influencing his vote in the election. “I’m not an ideologue. I find myself mostly in the middle, and really just want the country to get back on track and find common-sense solutions to get our economy fixed.” Thompson also noted that he wanted a break from the culture wars, and wants politicians to stop focusing on controversial social issues like abortion. “Americans can all agree that, even if we support the right to abortion, it should be rare and avoided, and the President’s policies are trying to reduce the need for abortion in this country.” As we left Smithfield, it is surprising to find that Republicans and Democrats in the electorate seem to want the same things, very different from the picture we get from Washington.

This same pattern also holds nationally: Democrats and Republicans across the country are not really very divided. For example, recent data from the Pew Center for the People and the Press show that Democrats and Republicans alike overwhelmingly support leaders who compromise to get things done. 75 percent of Democrats feel this way, as do 79 percent of Republicans, a nearly identical level (see figure). “This shows that there is no divide between ordinary Democrats and Republicans,” says [REDACTED] political science professor [REDACTED]. “Democrats and Republicans really do want the same things.”

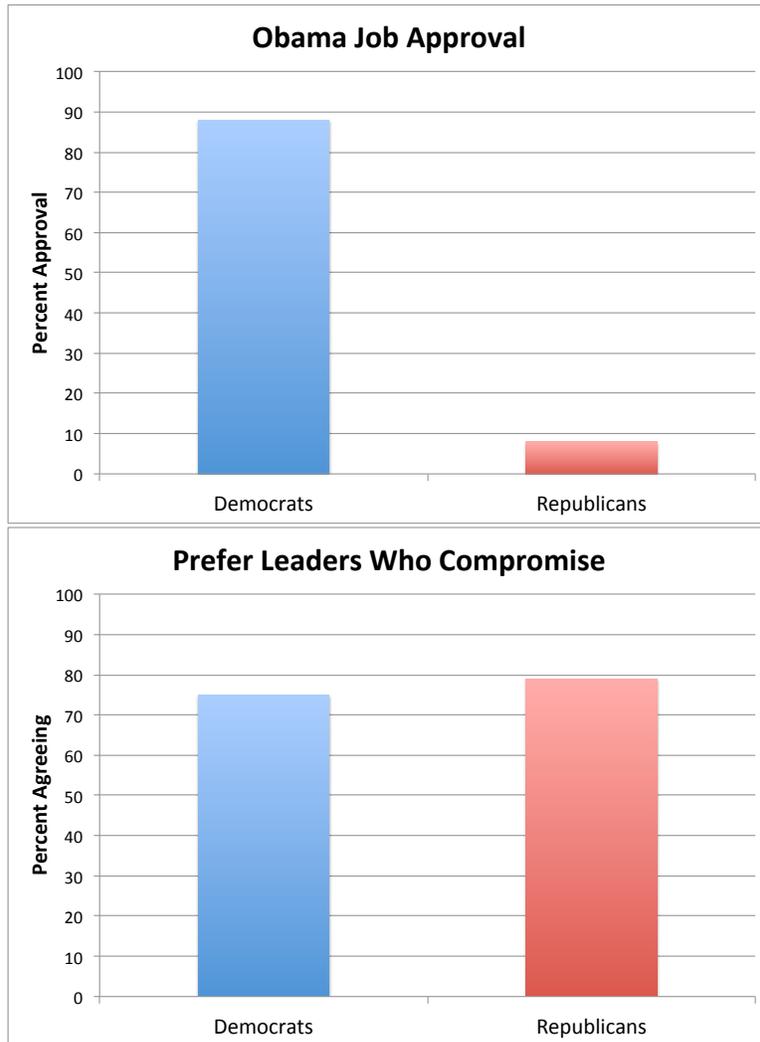


Figure 1: **Treatment Stimuli Graphics**

The upper panel displays the graphic shown to respondents in the polarized condition; the bottom panel shows the graphic shown to respondents in the moderate condition.

Online Appendix 2: Question Wording

GfK/KN Study: This study was conducted 29 November through 12 December 2012. The data were collected by GfK/Knowledge Networks, which uses random digit dialing and addressed-based sampling methods to recruit respondents; the resulting data are therefore a random sample of the U.S. adult population. N=2459 panelists from their KnowledgePanel were invited to take the study, with N=1587 completing the study, for a final-stage completion rate of 64.5%. Here, 4.1% of respondents broke off while taking the study (and are not included in our sample). The recruitment rate reported by GfK/Knowledge Networks, is 14.9%, and the profile response rate was 65.1%, for a cumulative response rate of 6.3%. The party ID item was asked before the experimental stimulus; all other items were administered after the stimulus.

Party ID: “Generally speaking, I think of myself as a:” Response options: “Democrat”, “Republican”, or “Independent.” If respondents said they were Democrats or Republicans, they were asked “Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat / Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat / Republican]?” Respondents who indicated they were an Independent were asked “Do you think of ourself as closer to the Democratic Party or closer to the Republican Party?”

Story Frequency: “How often do you see these sorts of stories reported in the news?” Response options: “All the time”, “Often”, “Sometimes”, “Not too often”, “Never.”

Opposition Party Likes and Dislikes: “Is there anything in particular you like (dislike) about the [Democratic / Republican] Party?” Subjects were only asked about the opposing party (with pure Independents randomly assigned to a party); subjects were first asked about likes, then about dislikes.

Capital Gains Taxes: “The tax rates on the profits people make from selling stocks and bonds, called capital gains taxes, are currently lower than the income tax rates many people pay. Do you think that capital gains tax rates should be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?” Response options: “Increased a lot”, “Increased somewhat”, “Increased a little”, “Kept the same”, “Decreased a little”, “Decreased somewhat”, “Decreased a lot.”

Typical Democrat/Republican: “What do you think the TYPICAL DEMOCRATIC VOTER would want to happen to capital gains tax rates?” The response options are the same as the respondent’s self-placement above, and the item is repeated for the typical Republican voter. Respondents are randomly assigned to answer either the “typical Democrat” or the “typical Republican” prompt first. Subjects respond to the parallel items for the immigration, trade, and public financing items below.

Immigration: “There is some debate about whether or not undocumented immigrants who were brought to this country illegally as children should be deported. Which of the following positions on the scale below best represents your position on this issue?” Response options: “Very strongly oppose deportation”, “Somewhat strongly oppose deportation”, “Not so strongly oppose deportation”, “Neither support nor oppose deportation”, “Not so strongly support deportation”, “Somewhat strongly support deportation”, “Very strongly support deportation.” All respondents answered both the immigration and capital gains taxes items, the order of these items was randomized.

Trade: “The United States is currently considering signing additional free trade agreements with Central American, South American, and Asian countries. The Democratic Party wants

to make it more difficult for the U.S. to enter into such agreements. The Republican Party wants to make it easier to do so. What do you think? Do you support or oppose the United States signing more free trade agreements with Central American, South American, and Asian countries?” Response options: “Very strongly oppose trade”, “Somewhat strongly oppose trade”, “Not so strongly oppose trade”, “Neither support nor oppose trade”, “Not so strongly support trade”, “Somewhat strongly support trade”, “Very strongly support trade.”

Public Election Financing: “Public financing of elections is when the government pays for the cost of campaigning for various offices, rather than the campaigns relying on donations from the general public, corporations, or unions. Democrats typically support public financing plans while Republicans have wanted to eliminate them. What do you think? Do you support or oppose the government paying for the public financing of elections?” Response options: “Very strongly oppose public financing”, “Somewhat strongly oppose public financing”, “Not so strongly oppose public financing”, “Neither support nor oppose public financing”, “Not so strongly support public financing”, “Somewhat strongly support public financing”, “Very strongly support public financing.” Subjects were randomly assigned to answer either the trade or public election financing items.

Feeling Thermometer: “We’d like you to rate how you feel towards the [Democratic Republican] Party on a scale of 0 to 100. Zero means very unfavorable and 100 means very favorable. Fifty means you do not feel favorable or unfavorable. How would you rate your feeling toward the [Democratic Republican] Party?” Respondents entered a number in the [0,100] range; subjects only evaluated the opposite party.

Uncomfortable Being Friends: “How comfortable are you having close personal friends that are [Democrats Republicans]?” Response options: “Very comfortable”, “Somewhat comfortable”, “Not at all comfortable.”

Mechanism Study (Mechanical Turk Study): This study was conducted on 15 January 2013 through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. The sample was 67% Democratic, 59% male, 43% were ages 18-29, 47% have at least a college degree, and 78% were Caucasian.

Emotional Reactions: “How angry did the statements of Marlene Evers, the Republican voter mentioned in the article, make you feel?” Response options: “extremely angry”, “somewhat angry”, “not too angry”, “not at all angry.” Respondents were asked a parallel question about “Dan Thompson, the Democratic voter mentioned in the article” as well. Respondents were also asked to rate how sad and hopeful each of these individuals made them as well.

Similarity to Self: “To what extent are the voters mentioned in the article similar to yourself?” Response options: “extremely similar”, “somewhat similar”, “Not too similar”, “Not at all similar.”

Similarity to Politics: “In terms of your approach to politics, how similar are you to the voters described in the article?” Response options: “Extremely similar”, “Somewhat similar”, “Not too similar”, “Not at all similar.”

Typicality: “To what extent is Marlene Evers, the Republican voter described in the article, a typical Republican?” Response options: “extremely typical Republican”, “somewhat typical Republican”, “not too typical a Republican”, “Not at all a typical Republican.” Respondents were also asked the same item about “Dan Thompson, the Democratic voter described in the article.”

Online Appendix 3: Randomization Checks

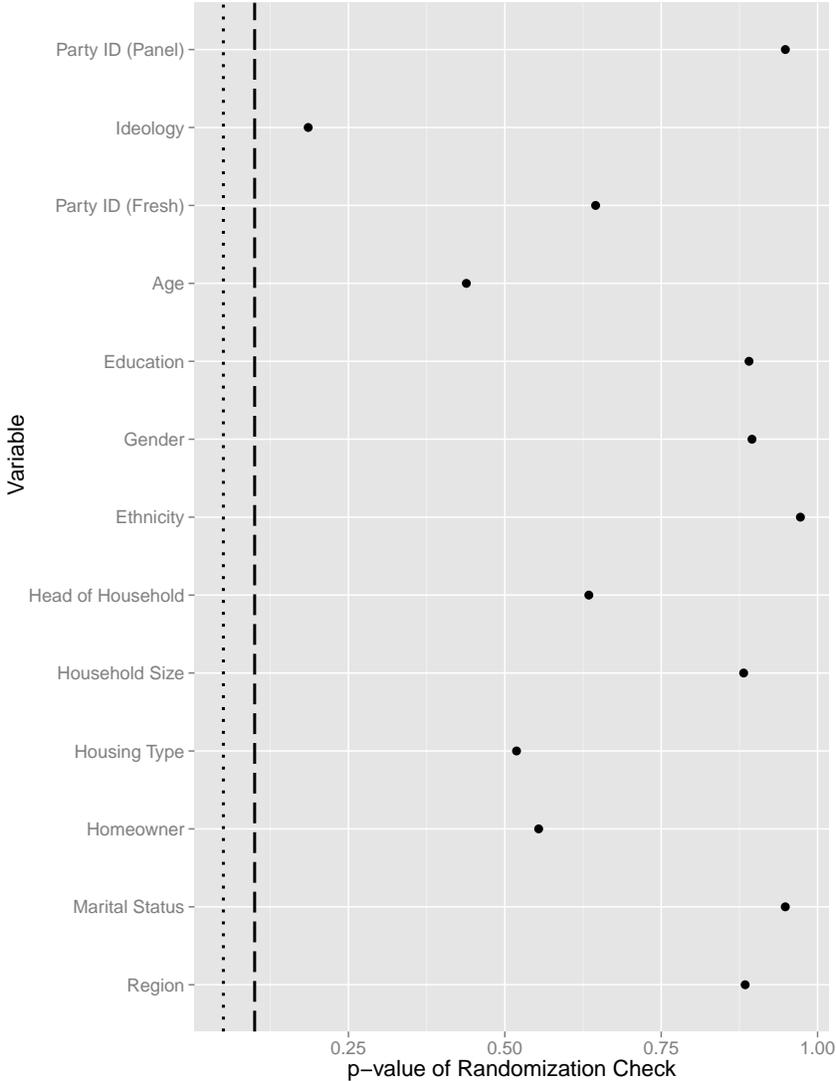


Figure 2: **Randomization Checks**

P-values from chi-square tests of the independence of treatment assignment and observed covariates; note that all p-values are well above standard cutoffs for statistical significance. The dotted line indicates the $p < .05$ level; the dashed line indicates the $p < .01$ level.

Online Appendix 4: Results Including Partisan Leaners

In the main text, we excluded partisan leaners from our analysis. Here, we reproduce our results including leaners. Note that none of our primary substantive conclusions change with the inclusion of leaners.

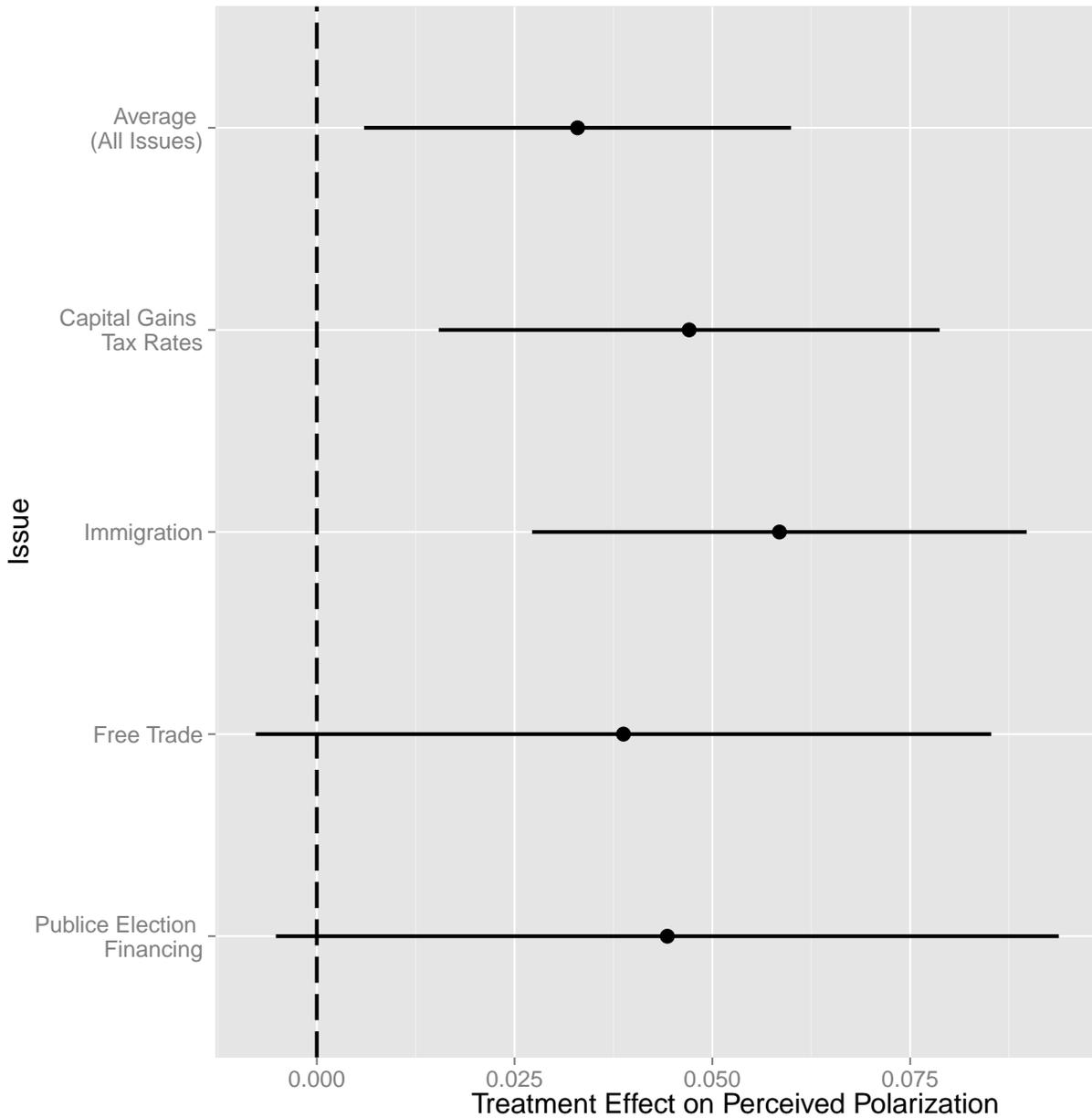


Figure 1: **Media Coverage of Mass Polarization Increases Perceived Polarization**
Differences in perceived polarization between the polarized and moderate conditions (the dark circles are point estimates and the thin lines are 90% confidence intervals).

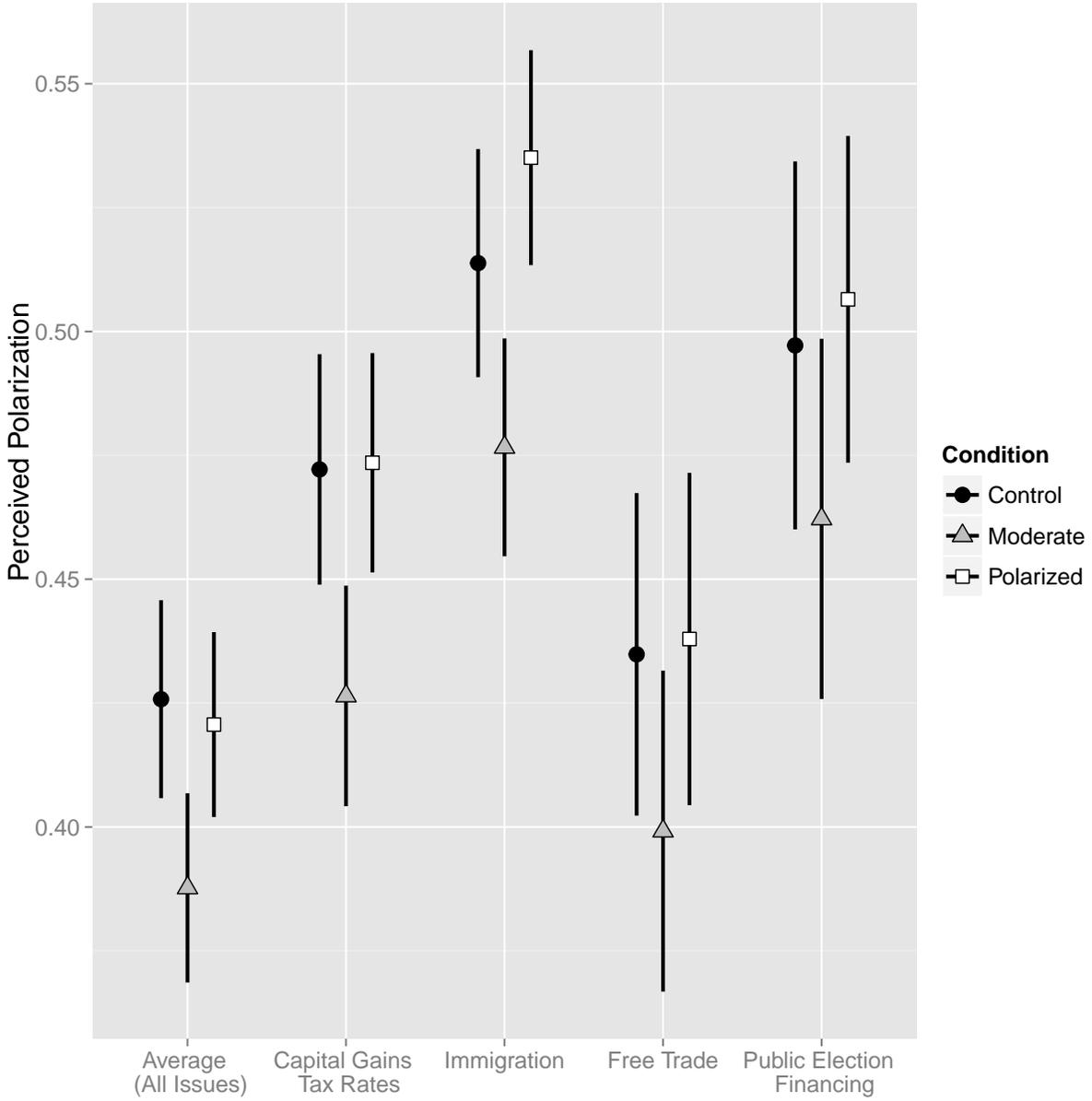


Figure 2: Media Coverage of Mass Polarization Increases Perceived Polarization
Average levels of perceived polarization by treatment condition (the dark circles are point estimates and the thin lines are 90% confidence intervals).

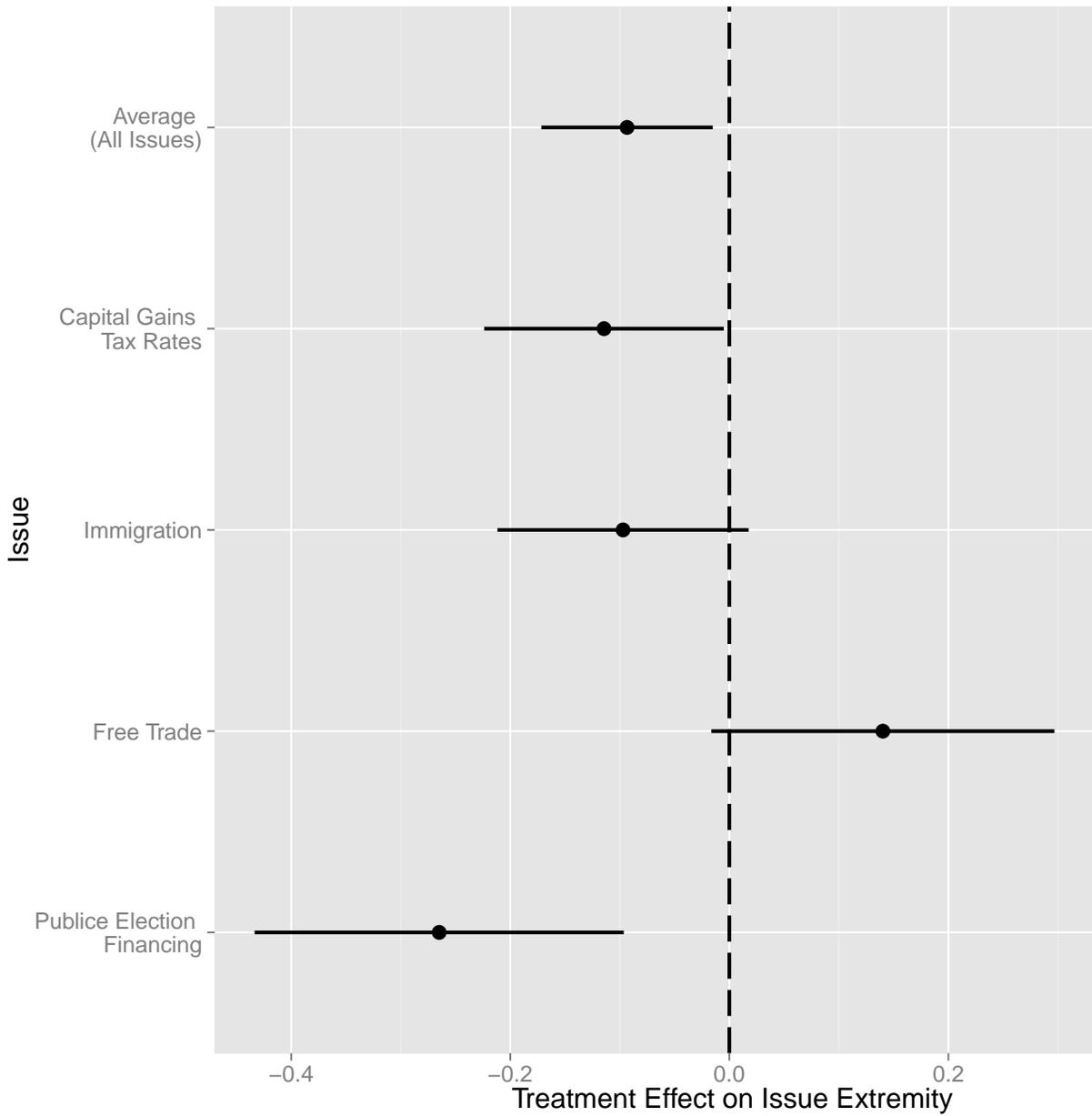


Figure 3: Media Coverage of Mass Polarization Moderates Issue Positions
Differences in issue extremity between the polarized and moderate conditions (the dark circles are point estimates and the thin lines are 90% confidence intervals).

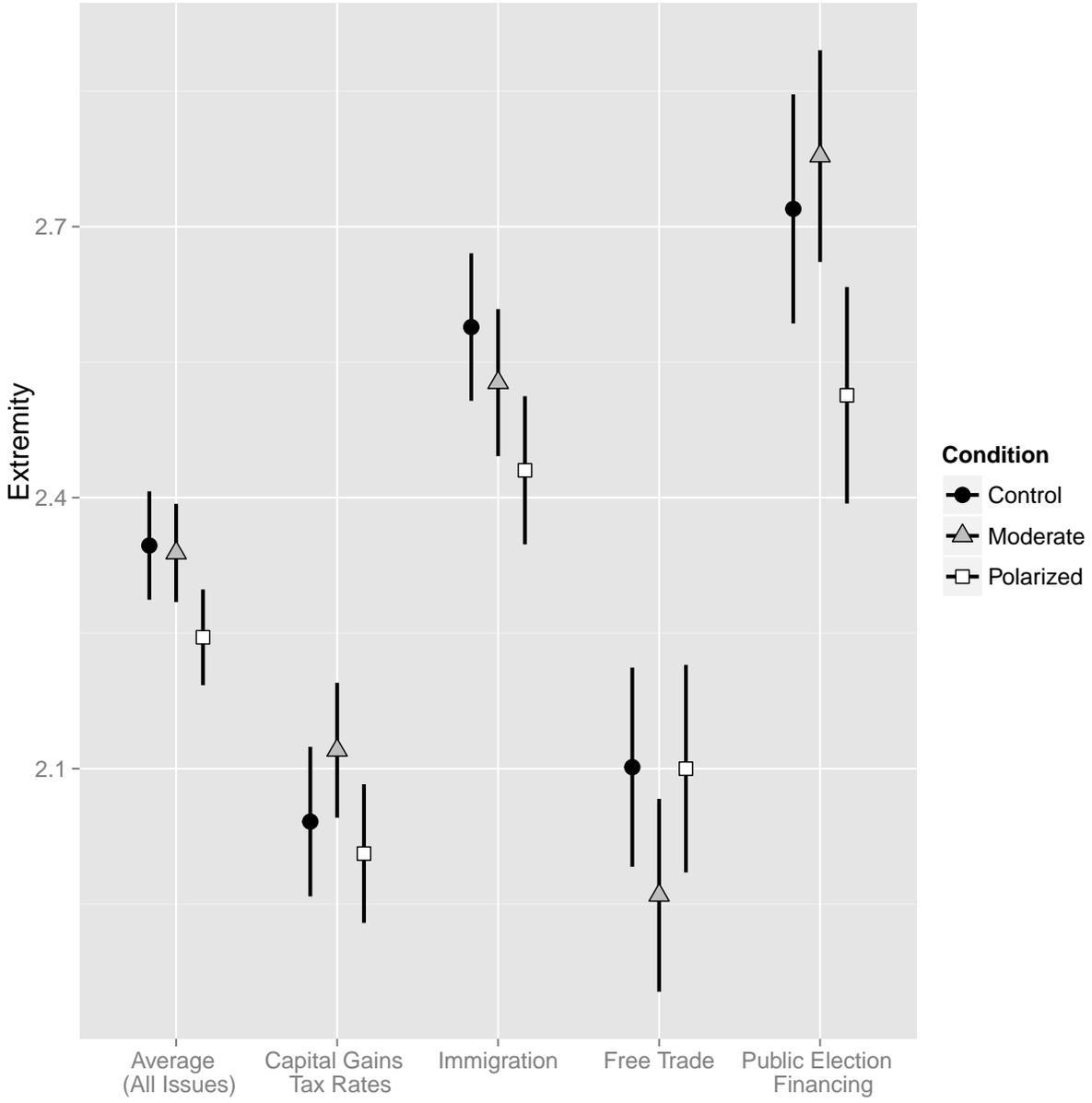


Figure 4: Media Coverage of Mass Polarization Moderates Issue Positions
Average levels of issue extremity by treatment condition (the dark circles are point estimates and the thin lines are 90% confidence intervals).

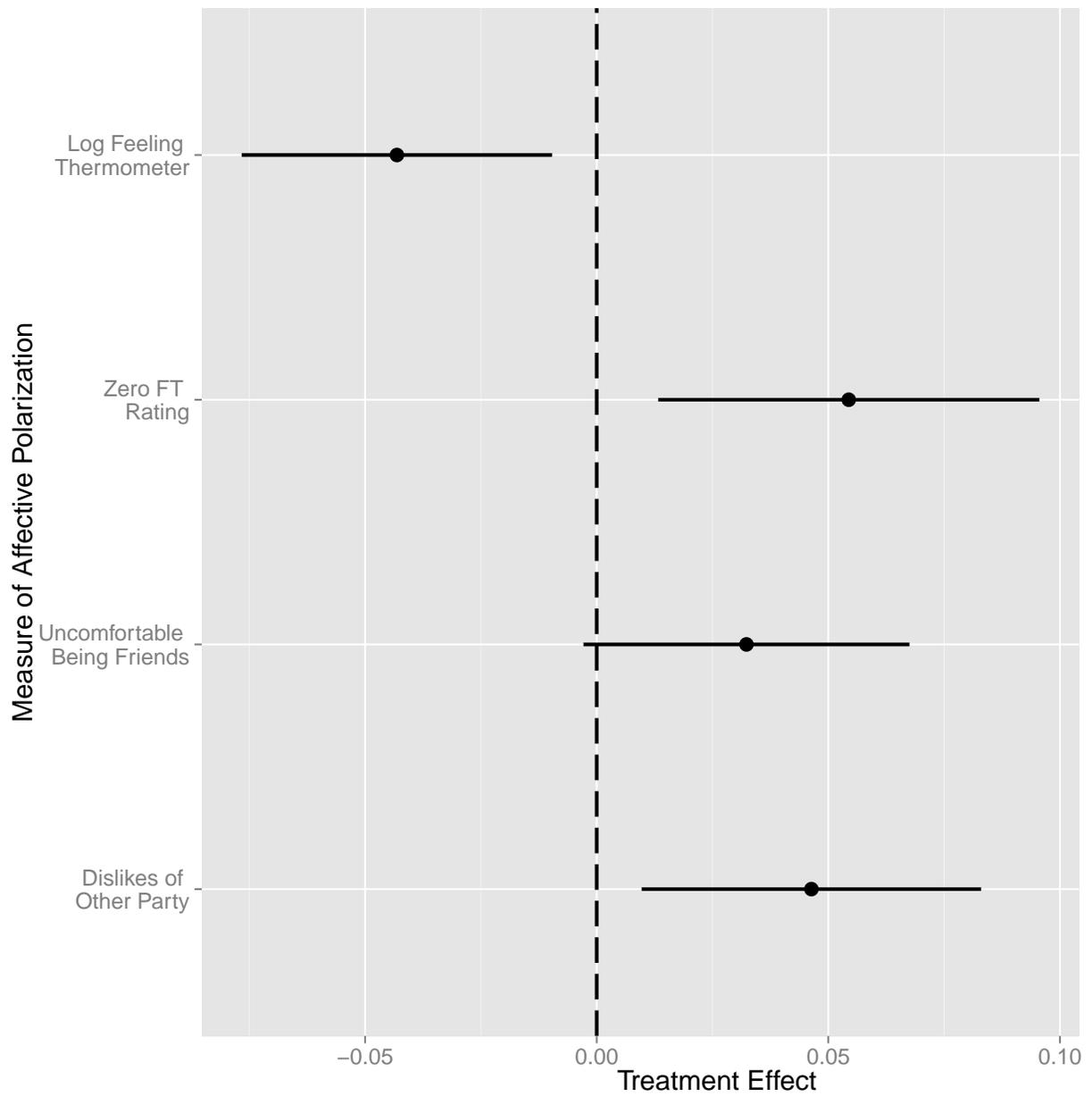


Figure 5: **Media Coverage of Mass Polarization Increases Affective Polarization**
Differences in the attitudinal polarization measures (rescaled to lie between 0 and 1) between the polarized and moderate conditions (the dark circles are point estimates and the thin lines are 90% confidence intervals).

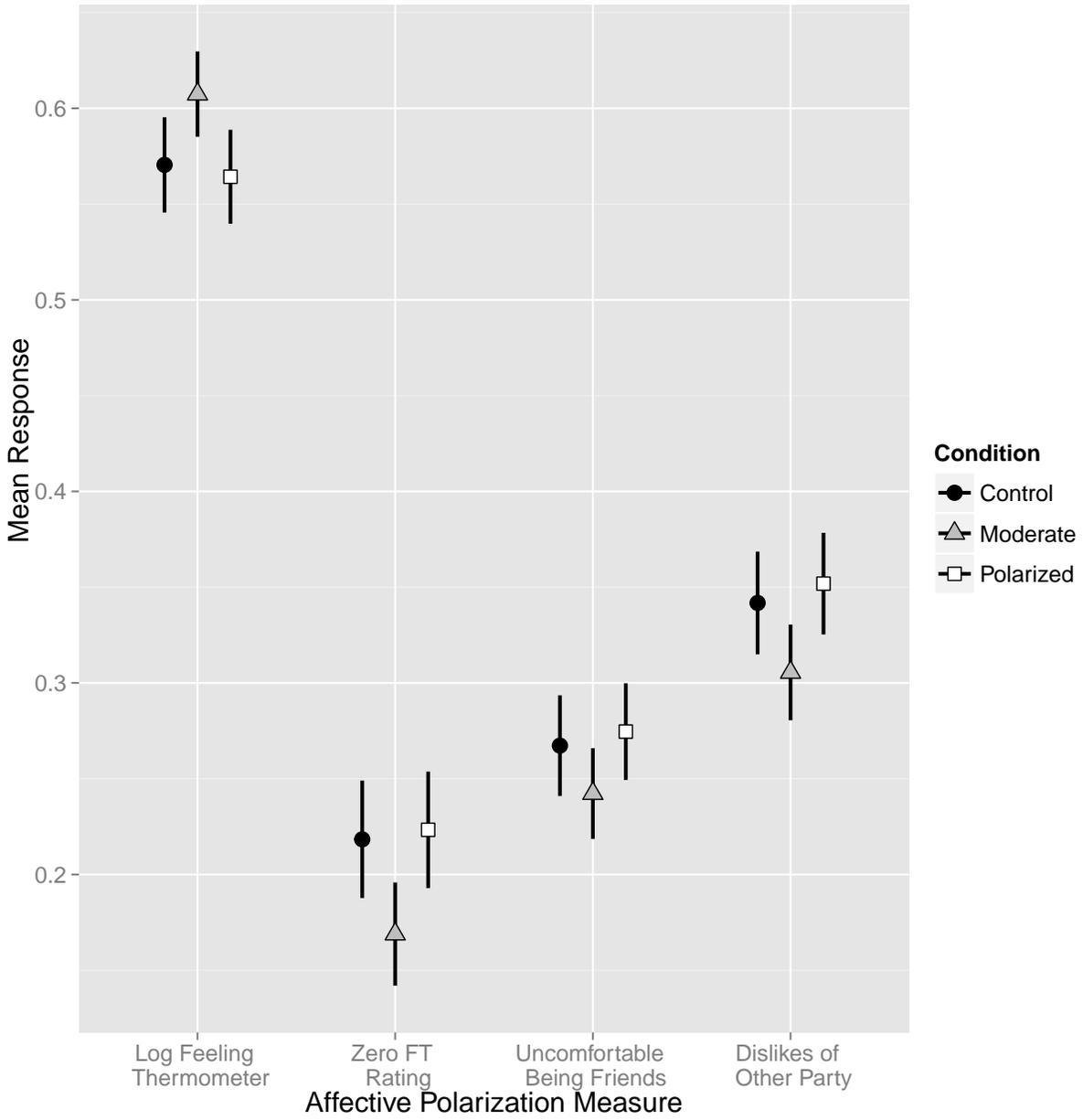


Figure 6: **Media Coverage of Mass Polarization Increases Affective Polarization**
Average levels of the attitudinal polarization measures (rescaled to lie between 0 and 1) by treatment condition (the dark circles are point estimates and the thin lines are 90% confidence intervals).

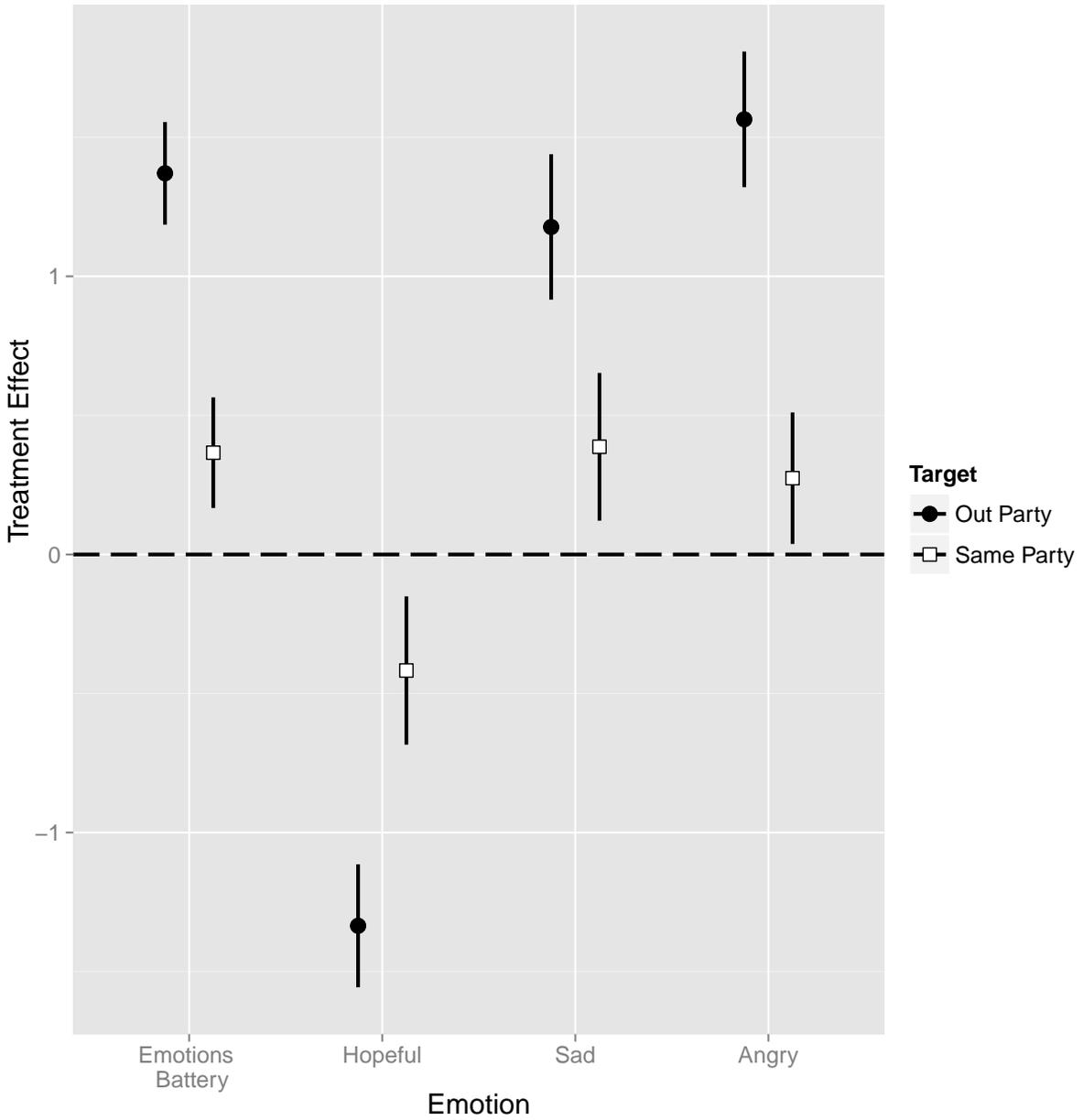


Figure 7: Media Coverage of Mass Polarization Elicits Negative Emotional Reactions

Differences in respondents' emotional reactions to the story exemplars between the polarized and moderate conditions (point estimates and 90% confidence intervals).

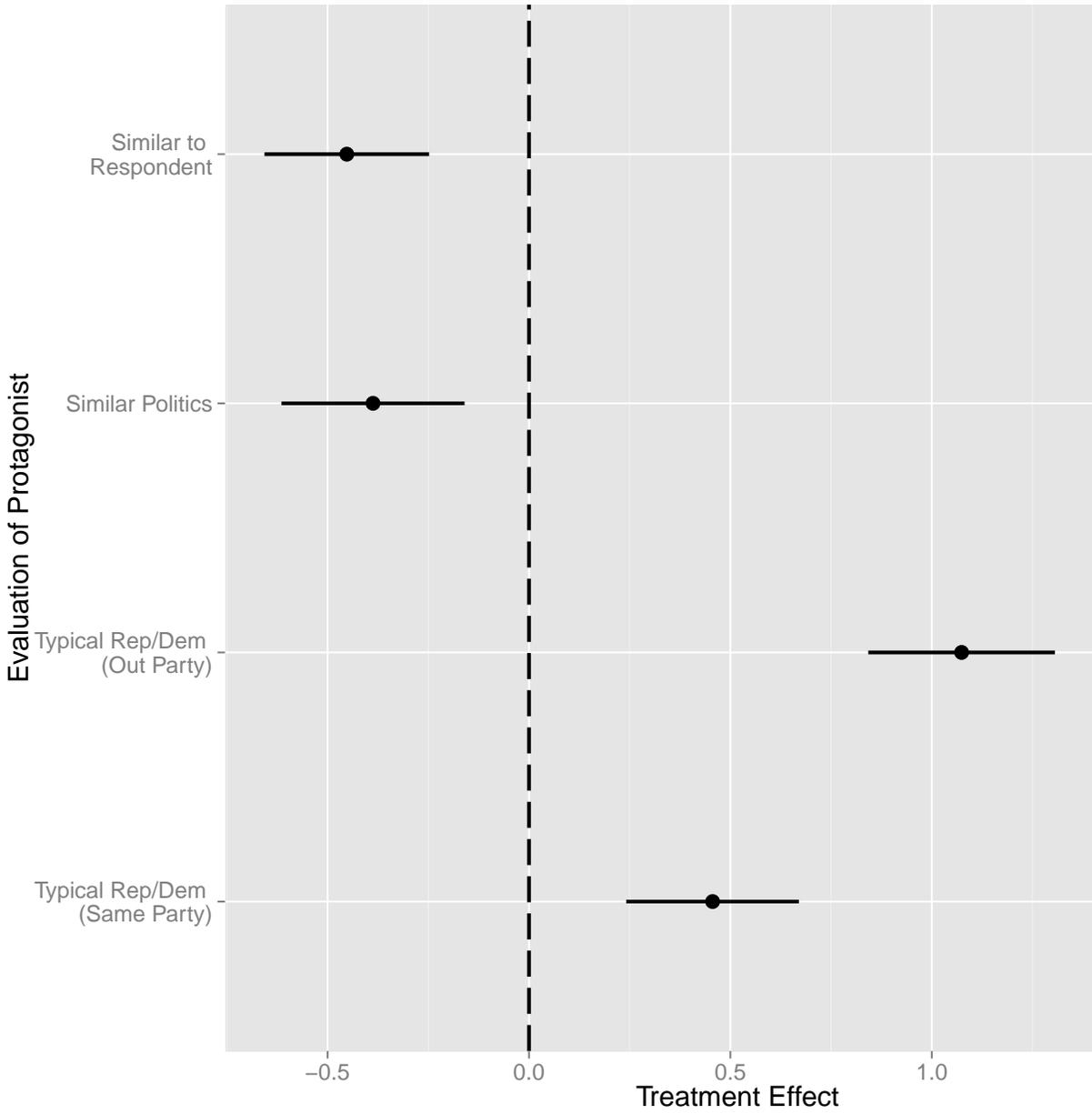


Figure 8: **Media Coverage of Mass Polarization Changes Perceptions of Exemplars** *Differences between the polarized and moderate conditions in respondents' assessments of how typical the story exemplars are of partisans and how similar they are to the respondent (point estimates and 90% confidence intervals).*

Online Appendix 5: Results in Tabular Form

Table 1: OLS Regressions Predicting Perceived Polarization (Analogue to Figures 2-3)

	<u>Average</u> <u>(All Issues)</u>	<u>Capital Gains</u> <u>Tax Rates</u>	<u>Immigration</u>	<u>Free Trade</u>	<u>Public Election</u> <u>Financing</u>
Polarized Condition	0.036 (0.019)	0.057 (0.023)	0.063 (0.023)	0.019 (0.033)	0.059 (0.035)
Control Condition	0.051 (0.019)	0.052 (0.023)	0.042 (0.023)	0.022 (0.033)	0.05 (0.036)
Constant	0.381 (0.014)	0.419 (0.016)	0.475 (0.016)	0.414 (0.024)	0.454 (0.025)
N	1093	1063	1069	522	546

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is absolute value of perceived difference between typical Republican and Democratic voter on seven-point scale, rescaled to lie between 0 and 1. Omitted category is the moderate condition.

Table 2: OLS Regressions Predicting Attitude Extremity (Analogue to Figure 4-5)

	<u>Average</u> <u>(All Issues)</u>	<u>Capital Gains</u> <u>Tax Rates</u>	<u>Immigration</u>	<u>Free Trade</u>	<u>Public Election</u> <u>Financing</u>
Polarized Condition	-0.135 (0.056)	-0.117 (0.078)	-0.155 (0.083)	0.098 (0.113)	-0.331 (0.12)
Control Condition	0.018 (0.056)	-0.057 (0.078)	0.102 (0.084)	0.129 (0.112)	-0.084 (0.123)
Constant	2.341 (0.039)	2.114 (0.055)	2.529 (0.059)	1.943 (0.08)	2.802 (0.084)
N	1093	1079	1083	529	556

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable is folded seven-point issue scale scaled to lie between moderates (1) and extremists (4). Omitted category is the moderate condition.

Table 3: OLS Regressions Predicting Affective Polarization (Analogue to Figure 6-7)

	<u>Log Feeling</u> <u>Thermometer</u>	<u>Zero FT</u> <u>Rating</u>	<u>Uncomfortable</u> <u>Being Friends</u>	<u>Dislikes of</u> <u>Other Party</u>
Polarized Condition	-0.064 (0.025)	0.073 (0.03)	0.054 (0.025)	0.053 (0.026)
Control Condition	-0.055 (0.025)	0.065 (0.031)	0.028 (0.025)	0.051 (0.027)
Constant	0.605 (0.017)	0.174 (0.021)	0.245 (0.018)	0.298 (0.019)
N	1095	1095	1095	1108

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. All dependent variables recoded to lie between 0 and 1. Omitted category is the moderate condition.

Table 4: OLS Regressions Predicting Emotional Reactions to Story, Out Party Protagonist (Analogue to Figure 8)

	<u>Emotions</u> <u>Battery</u>	<u>Hopeful</u>	<u>Sad</u>	<u>Angry</u>
Polarized Condition	1.37 (0.11)	-1.34 (0.13)	1.18 (0.16)	1.56 (0.15)
Constant	1.70 (.080)	2.79 (0.10)	1.53 (0.11)	1.39 (0.11)
N	123	123	124	124

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables coded to lie between 1 (low on emotion) to 4 (high on emotion). Omitted category is the moderate condition.

Table 5: OLS Regressions Predicting Emotional Reactions to Story, Same Party Protagonist (Analogue to Figure 8)

	<u>Emotions</u> <u>Battery</u>	<u>Hopeful</u>	<u>Sad</u>	<u>Angry</u>
Polarized Condition	0.37 (0.12)	-0.42 (0.16)	0.39 (0.16)	0.27 (0.14)
Constant	1.65 (0.09)	2.87 (0.12)	1.47 (0.11)	1.37 (0.10)
N	123	123	124	124

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables coded to lie between 1 (low on emotion) to 4 (high on emotion). Omitted category is the moderate condition.

Table 6: OLS Regressions Predicting Evaluations of Story Protagonists (Analogue to Figure 9)

	<u>Similar to</u> <u>Respondent</u>	<u>Similar</u> <u>Politics</u>	<u>Typical Dem/Rep</u> <u>(Out Party)</u>	<u>Typical Dem/Rep</u> <u>(Same Party)</u>
Polarized Condition	-0.45 (0.12)	-0.39 (0.14)	1.07 (0.14)	0.46 (0.13)
Constant	3.05 (0.09)	3.02 (0.10)	2.41 (0.10)	2.74 (0.09)
N	123	123	123	123

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. All dependent variables lie between 1 (dissimilar/atypical) to 4 (similar/typical). Omitted category is the moderate condition.