Purpose and aims

There is growing evidence of an increasing trend in affective polarization (AP) across advanced democracies. AP means that citizens become increasingly hostile towards people with different (political) views or party preferences. Revealingly, the number of Americans who disapprove of a marriage between their children and somebody from the opposing political party has increased dramatically (Iyengar et al. 2012). Research suggests that in Europe, too, ideology and partisanship can function as a powerful cue to disregard or detest fellow citizens (Westwood et al. 2017; Huddy et al. 2018). Pluralist democracies are designed to solve disagreements in such a way that the solutions are acceptable also for those who are not in power. This presupposes a willingness to seek compromises with one’s political opponents, which in turn require a minimum degree of mutual understanding. AP is thus threatening the principles underpinning pluralist democracy.

Despite growing scholarly awareness of AP, we do not yet understand what factors shape it, nor how it affects democratic norms and support for liberal democracy. Indeed, we do not even know whether the trend in increasing AP found in the US exists in other advanced democracies. The proposed project aims to fill this gap in the literature by identifying the causes and consequences of affective polarization in Europe.

In terms of causes, we distinguish two types of factors that make some societies potentially more conducive to AP than others. First, we look at long-term structural changes in society, including changes in patterns of communication. Concretely, we investigate social sorting, the growing importance of social media, and the rise of identity politics. Second, we look at the role of political parties, and especially the rise of populist parties and mainstream parties’ response to this success.

In terms of consequences, we focus on the way in which AP affects, first, citizens’ democratic satisfaction and, second, democratic norms. If citizens perceive opposing parties as less legitimate, they will be less likely to accept defeat. In the long run, this might spill over into decreasing levels of diffuse democratic support where dissatisfied citizens are more likely to reject the principles and ideals of pluralist democracy.

We also let the concept of affective polarization travel, theoretically and empirically, from the US context to European multiparty systems.

The project will (1) combine cross-national surveys going back to the 1970s to map trends, short term fluctuations and cross-national variations in AP; (2) collect new survey data on European citizens’ feelings towards citizens with different partisan or ideological identities (compared to other social identities) to come up with novel ways of measuring AP; (3) combine the constructed data sets with data on the potential causes of AP; (4) conduct innovative conjoint experiments to isolate the causes of AP; (5) combine the constructed data sets with data on the potential consequences of AP; (6) utilize the experimental data to isolate the consequences causally; and (7) employ novel inductive text analysis approaches to explore discourses in online forums and social media and link it to AP. Together, this will contribute to a better understanding of today’s heated social and political divisions.

State-of-the-art

This project starts from the emergent scholarly awareness that Western democracies are experiencing AP, i.e. increasing hostility towards those holding different partisan or ideological preferences (Iyengar et al. 2012, 2015; Mason 2015, 2016; Crawford et al. 2017; Westwood et al. 2017). It involves perceiving citizens with different (political) views as a socially distant ‘outgroup’. This, in turn, leads people to attribute negative traits to, discriminate against, and discount information provided by this outgroup. In short, rather than merely disagreeing, which is central to democratic practice, citizens seem to more often outright disapprove of fellow citizens because of their views. Of course, partisanship has long been known to shape evaluations (Campbell et al. 1960), and democratic politics has gone through earlier periods of heated disagreement. However, there are strong reasons to suggest that out-party hostility – at the very least in the US – has become more virulent in the past decades (Iyengar et al. 2012).

This could potentially undermine the principles of pluralist democracy, which is based on the willingness to seek collaboration and compromises between actors who oppose each other. Such
collaboration requires a critical degree of shared understanding among political elites, but conceivably also among citizens (Dahl 1971). There is reason to fear that AP erodes citizens’ willingness to engage with opposing political views, to accept others’ democratic claims, and ultimately even to accept defeat in elections (Strickler 2017; Hetherington et al. 2015). If citizens start to question the legitimacy of opposing views, this can threaten the foundations of pluralist democracy and the cohesion of society.

The evidence for AP and its causes and consequences is scattered and mainly limited to the US. Some 50 years ago, 5% of Republicans in the United States would feel “upset” if their son or daughter would marry a Democrat; this had increased to 40% in 2012. Around 30% of Americans now call the other party a “threat to the nation” (Pew 2014). Comparable ‘historical’ data do not exist in Europe, but recently it has been shown that citizens in Spain, Belgium, and the UK discriminate more against out-party voters than against other social outgroups in trust games, just like citizens in the US (Westwood et al. 2017). Huddy and colleagues (2018) also show that ‘expressive partisanship’ fosters out-party animosity in both Europe and the US. However, we do not know whether this has always been the case, or whether such reactions are a novelty – or have become stronger over time - in Europe. While there is at least some tradition in the US of measuring citizens’ feelings towards various groups, including partisan groups, there is only little data available in Europe to assess patterns of mutual hostility.

Importantly, there is little evidence for mass ideological polarization: the extent to which citizens disagree about actual issues. Regarding most topics, Americans’ and Europeans’ actual views have become less, rather than more, divided (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008; Adams et al. 2012; Nuesser et al. 2014; Fiorina & Abrams 2008). Mason’s (2015: 128) account of the United States rings true for many countries: “a nation that agrees on many things but is bitterly divided nonetheless”.

This observation highlights the fact that we know very little about the causes of AP. If ideological convergence coincides with affective polarization (as in the US) – what causes the latter? Various explanations have been proposed. Some scholars see AP as part of a spiraling process of socio-political sorting, in which the various components of citizens’ identities – partisanship, worldview, and geographical location – become ever more overlapping (e.g., Mason 2015). The emergence of social media networks that have developed into echo chambers, in which people chose to only consume news that confirm and strengthen pre-existing attitudes, has been suggested to accelerate this process (Garrett 2009; Sunstein 2001; Florian et. al. 2018). Another potential explanation is the increasing politicization of cultural issues (Kriesi et al 2008; Azmanova 2011; van der Brug & van Spanje 2009; de Vries et al 2013). Cultural issues have been shown to elicit stronger, and more immediate, responses among people (Johnson & Wronski 2015), and be more shaped by personal values than economic issues (Malka et al 2014; Graham et al 2013). Finally, other researchers suggest that political elites’ increasingly harsh rhetoric toward each other may be the most plausible explanation to why AP is increasing (Iyengar et al 2012: 427). In this context, it can be expected that rise of populist parties, who bring a markedly normative understanding of the relations between groups into the political area (Mudde 2013), and who in turn elicit strong reactions from mainstream parties, intensifies affective responses. However, no studies have actually systematically tested these hypotheses on European data. The narrow focus on the US in previous research has also rendered more thorough tests of the hypotheses impossible, given the limited variation provided by the US context.

We also know little about the consequences of AP for democratic legitimacy. Previous research provides much information about the determinants of dissatisfaction with the way democracy works, also known as specific democratic support. A number of studies have shown that electoral losers are on average significantly less satisfied with the way democracy works (Anderson et al 2005). It has also been shown that levels of dissatisfaction grow when losing repeatedly (Chang et. al. 2014). However, to our knowledge no one has studied whether levels of AP affect the winner-loser gap in democratic satisfaction, nor the way it affects support for democracy in the long run.

**Significance and scientific novelty**

While research has established the existence of AP, we do not yet understand its causes, nor its consequences for democratic norms and support for democracy. Neither has anyone systematically studied how AP has developed over time in Europe. Hence, we do not know whether the trend in
increasing AP is unique to the US, or a phenomenon affecting Western democracies in general. A preliminary study suggests the latter (see below).

Our project intends to make three important scientific contributions. First, we will provide a pioneering study on the extent, and development over time, of AP in Europe. As part of this, we develop and validate novel measures that can be of use for future research. Second, we will systematically explore various explanations for AP that have been suggested in the literature but that have been impossible to test, since the narrow focus on the US has resulted in a lack of contextual variation. In doing so we will also develop specific explanations for the origins of AP in multi-party systems of the European type. Third, we will provide a first study of how AP affects specific and diffuse regime support, and citizens' conception of democracy in Europe. This is of crucial importance to inform our understanding of present and future challenges to pluralist democracy. All this not only contributes to our understanding of electoral outcomes, partisanship, and social cohesion, but also allows political and societal actors to reflect on their role and to develop strategies to prevent potential societal and political dysfunction.

Preliminary and previous results
We have carried out a preliminary study of trends in affective and ideological polarization in Europe 1996-2016, using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (a collection of harmonized election studies). While lacking ideal measures of AP, the study suggests that European countries are experiencing something similar to the US pattern: little or no ideological divergence among citizens but nevertheless a decreasing sympathy for out-parties.

A lack of ideological polarization is visible if we look at self-placement on a Left-Right scale from 0 (Left) to 10 (Right). The percentage of Europeans that consider themselves centrist (4, 5 or 6) is very stable over the period (a trend from 60% in 1996-2001 to 62% in 2011-2016). The average extremity (absolute distance from 5) is also very stable: 1.9 in 1996-2001 and still 1.9 in 2011-2016.

There is, however, evidence for affective polarization if we look at respondents' sympathy for various parties on a scale from 0 (extremely dislike) to 10 (extremely like). Average sympathy for ideologically close parties (a distance of less than 3 on the Left-Right scale to the respondents' position) has remained roughly the same over the period, similar to US data used by Iyengar et al. (2014). Sympathy for ideologically distant parties, however, has decreased slowly but steadily in each 5-year period, with a significant overall downward trend between 1996 and 2016 from 3.5 to 3.2. While these findings are preliminary, they suggest that polarization in Europe, too, is primarily affective rather than ideological. This makes it highly relevant to study the nature, causes and consequences of AP in more detail.

Project description: theory
We start by exploring the nature and extent of AP in Europe, translating the concept theoretically and empirically from the American two-party to the European multiparty context (Part I). Subsequently, we look at two types of causes of AP: the social and media context and the role of parties (Part II). Finally, we look at how AP affects democratic norms and democratic satisfaction (Part III)

Part I: AP in Europe
The nature of AP can best be understood by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1970; Iyengar et al. 2012): if partisan and ideological positions become embedded in citizens' broader identity, this creates a psychological disposition to favor the in-group and dislike the out-group. While AP presupposes some level of ideological disagreement on social and political issues (Rogowski & Sutherland 2015), it seems likely that it originates from group dynamics.

The nature of AP in the US is influenced by the dynamics of a two-party system, which provides a clear (moral) dichotomy. Furthermore, the nature of political and societal cleavages in the US is historically unique. The manifestation of AP in multiparty European contexts will reflect these differences. Our project aims to adjust the conceptualization and measurement of AP accordingly.

In many European countries, the ballot offers a plethora of parties. Still, political alternatives are organized along a limited number of “packages” of related worldviews. On both the citizen and party level, a “left” and a “right”, and often a “progressive-multiculturalist” and a “conservative-nationalist”
camp, are discernable. These offer citizens a basis for their political identity. In European multiparty contexts, AP is likely to take the shape of animosity between (blocks of) parties that are strongly opposed on one or more ideological dimensions.

The role of partisanship differs as well. Party identities are generally weaker in European multiparty systems than in the US. Nevertheless, in Europe, too, partisanship does exist and it affects political behavior (see Bankert et al. 2017). Furthermore, AP can occur without strong party identities. Opposite ideological positions can generate identification with one of them, even if attachments to a particular party is weak. For instance, a citizen favoring harboring more refugees can feel strong disapproval of citizens opposing this, even if the specific party preference might switch (e.g., green or mainstream left versus radical or mainstream right). Conceptually as well as in operational terms, AP thus needs to include both partisan and ideological identities.

H1. In multiparty systems, AP takes the shape of animosity between citizens supporting (blocks of) parties that are distant on one or more ideological dimensions, as well as between citizens taking opposing positions on salient issues.

Part II: Causes of AP
We argue that AP is likely caused by two types of determinants. The first are long-term structural changes in society, including changes in patterns of communication. The second are political actors, in particular party leaders and the way in which they campaign. In this context, the role of populist parties and responses by mainstream parties seem crucial.

Structural developments
The first factor we expect to foster AP factor is socio-political sorting: the growing alignment of social identities. While scholars might disagree about the respective labels, a popular narrative is that society is crystallizing in subsections that are driving apart, upholding coherent but mutually incompatible sets of worldviews (and sometimes even facts), with their own political actors to speak on their behalf – all of which is re-enforced by selection into filter bubbles.

Of course, the notion of socio-political divides is far from new. However, there is a growing concern about the specific nature and intensity of the one currently developing. Cross-cutting cleavages have long been argued to mitigate social conflict (Lipset 1960). However, research in the US suggests that social identities of various sorts – educational, ideological, geographical, cultural, and partisan – increasingly overlap in a process of socio-political sorting (Mason 2016).

If like-minded individuals live increasingly similar lives with similar experiences, they become less accepting of those with divergent views (Mason 2016), as social identities (ideology, class, location, gender, education, party preference) are more powerful if they overlap. By contrast, non-aligned – or cross-cutting – cleavages mitigate social conflict (Lipset 1960). Hence,

H2. Socio-political sorting increases AP.

We hypothesize that this process of socio-political sorting has been accentuated by the growth of social media. Internet penetration is on average high in Europe and for every year larger shares of people gain access to social media and are exposed to debates in online forums (Internet World Stats 2017). The transformation from analog to digital media has led to a situation where citizens are more prone to select news and online forums that confirms their ideological predispositions. This in turn has led to a situation where pre-existing attitudes both are being confirmed and reinforced in echo chambers (Garrett 2009; Sunstein 2001; Florian et. al. 2018). We argue that it is likely that this process will increase AP. Hence,

H3. Social media usage increases AP.

A third factor that we expect contributes to intensified AP is the alleged rise of identity politics. Globalization has intensified discussions on immigration, European integration, racism, Islam, gender, and other identity-related (‘new’) cultural issues (Kriesi et al 2008; Azmanova 2011; van der Brug & van Spanje 2009; de Vries et al 2013). We expect this politicization of issues close to
citizens’ identities to strengthen affective responses, as cultural issues have been found to be more strongly shaped by personal values and moral foundations than economic issues (Malka et al 2014; Graham et al 2013). They also elicit stronger, and more immediate, responses among people (Johnson & Wronski 2015). Hence,

**H4. Higher salience of cultural issues increases AP.**

**The role of political elites**

A second set of factors potentially fostering AP is the role of political elites. We believe politicians to be important because they shape how citizens see politics. Iyengar and colleagues (2012: 427) propose that “the more plausible explanation of intensified inter-party animus lies in the rhetoric of political campaigns”. Politicians both reflect and feed AP among the electorate. In particular, we expect that the rise of, and other parties’ response to, populist parties stimulates a spiral of AP.

In the last decades, populist radical right (PRR) parties have persistently gained strength in Western countries. This process has culminated with populists winning (USA) or closely competing for the presidential office (Austria and France), and PRR parties joining governments (e.g. Hungary, Finland, and Norway) or acting as supporters of government (e.g. Denmark). ‘Populism’ is usually defined by its emphasis on the normative difference between the ‘true’ people and ‘corrupt’ elites and their allies (Mudde 2005). They thus bring a markedly normative understanding into politics, which is likely to make politics more affective. Rooduijn and co-authors (2016) show that PRR party voters lose trust in politics after they have started to vote for PRR-parties. It is likely voters also pick up the moral understanding of politics.

At the same time, the opponents of PRR parties have responded harshly to the threat from PRRs. In the US, there is talk about impeaching and prosecuting the president. In the UK, opponents of Brexit openly say they may migrate to other countries if Brexit becomes a reality. And in many other countries established parties have created a cordon sanitaire around successful PRR parties (i.e. refusing to talk and collaborate with them). Together these observations suggest that politics in the Western world have entered a cycle of increasing AP, in which especially supporters and opponents of PRRs provoke each other into ever more embittered responses.

In short, if politicians radiate more hostility about political and ideological opponents – i.e. if elites are themselves affectively polarized – this sends a cue to voters, who will adopt their parties’ discourse (Rooduijn et al 2016; Harteveld et al 2017). Both the accusatory stance of populists and the often vilifying responses by mainstream parties are likely to induce a spiral of AP. Hence,

**H5. Populist party success increases AP.**

However, we hypothesize that populist success does not have a uniform effect on AP. More specifically, we argue that the effects will vary depending on whether established parties choose a strategy of isolation or collaboration with regards to the PRR parties in question. The first reason is that PRRs are likely to moderate their rhetoric when they start cooperating with established parties (Berman 2008). The same is true for those mainstream parties that cooperate with PRR parties. The second reason is that the cues PRRs still send will be less convincing when the parties become part of the ordinary political blame game between the government and the opposition and their coalition partners do not longer confirm their anti-elite rhetoric, i.e. treating the PRR party as a ‘pariah’ (Van Spanje 2010). We expect these mechanisms to increase PRR-voters’ capacity and willingness to identify with political opponents and parties. For similar reasons, it is likely that established parties’ voters will increase their capacity and willingness to identify with PRR party voters if their parties stop isolating PRR parties. Hence,

**H6. Mainstream party collaboration with populist parties decreases AP.**

**Part III: Consequences of AP**

AP has been argued to erode citizens’ willingness to engage with opposing political views and to accept defeat in elections (Strickler 2017; Hetherington & Rudolph 2017). However, there is surprisingly little research conducted on how AP affects public perceptions of democracy. We
expect AP to have an effect on both citizens’ perceptions of the way democracy works (democratic satisfaction) and people’s views about democracy as a system of government (democratic norms).

In democracies, the way the losers react to political loss is crucial for the legitimacy of the political system. Losing parties and voters are expected to accept their defeat, participate in the opposition to the new government, and try to win power in the next election. We believe the level of AP to be crucial for how electoral losers – both political elites and citizens – live up to this ideal. Numerous studies have shown a discrepancy in satisfaction between electoral winners and losers, where those on the losing side evaluate the functioning of democracy less positive than the winners (Anderson et al. 2005). In a situation with high levels of AP this may be accentuated. Indeed, Hetherington and Rudolph (2017) show that, over time, trust in the government has become polarized along party lines in the US. On the elite level, political leaders that accuse opponents of ill intentions (or even corruption and electoral fraud) send cues to their voters, who will be more likely to question the legitimacy of the government – and subsequently become more discontent with the way democracy works. In addition, it is likely that AP also will affect the winners in a – for democracy – negative way. A functioning democracy does not only require good losers but also good winners that treat the opposition in a fair and respectful way. To sum up, we expect that increased AP will make a larger share of the “non-winners” dissatisfied, leading to lower levels of satisfaction in general, and a more substantial gap in support between winners and losers. Thus,

H7: AP erodes democratic support.

AP is also likely to affect democratic norms, i.e. notions of what democracy is and ought to be. After all, a system that might transfer power to strongly despised opponents might be inferior to alternatives, especially if one finds oneself on the losing side. It is the supportive attitudes of citizens towards the core constitutive values of a democratic system that creates legitimacy and “the extent to which people in a particular polity share these basic principles is essential for the democratic quality of a political regime” (Thomassen 2007, 419). In a strongly polarized society there will likely be contrasting notions of democracy, contingent on which side people identify themselves with. Thus, we aim to test the following hypothesis:

H8: AP erodes support for democratic norms.

Project description: method, time plan and implementation

Our aim is to, first, conceptualize and describe the nature and trend of AP in European contexts (studies 1-2). Second, we ask what causes AP (studies 3-5). Third, we ask what consequences AP has for satisfaction with democracy and support for democratic norms (studies 6-7).

Package I: What is AP and is there a trend?

Study 1: The big picture (PI: Andrej Kokkonen)
We will combine several existing national election surveys (e.g. CSES) to create a longitudinal (repeated cross-sectional) dataset going back to the 1970s to create a measure of AP. This measure provides higher scores to the extent that respondents in a given country and year assign greater inter-party distances in sympathy scores. While this refers to parties rather than partisans these measures have been shown to correlate strongly (Iyengar et al. 2012). We will also combine the scarce measures of evaluations of partisans and ideological groups. This allows us to map the trend and variation in AP (i.e. test H1).

Study 2: Novel ways of measuring AP (PI: Andrej Kokkonen)
In a second study we will first focus on constructing and testing novel measures of AP using the facilities offered by the Scandinavian citizen panels DIGSSCORE (Norway) and LORE (Sweden). The aim of the survey questions is to assess which ideological and partisan dyads of citizens report highest social distance, anger, prejudice etc. towards each other, and why.

1 More specifically, the extent to which respondents show greater differences in their (dis)like – often on a 11-point scale – of ‘inparties’ and ‘outparties’, controlled for the ideological distance to these parties, weighing for the size of parties.
While there is some tradition in the US to measure “temperature” or “feeling” scores of respondents towards groups in general and people belong to these groups, there is little data of this kind for Europe. We will expand our knowledge by measuring temperature scores and social distance measures in Europe. Compared to “like-dislike” measurement of parties, this gets directly at negative affective towards people with various politically relevant attributes.

Because we have access to the DIGSSCORE and LORE infrastructures, we can test variations of questions, given that it is not a priori clear which fits the European context best. We will explore variation in two ways. First, we will measure affect towards various groups, including partisan identities (e.g. “a Sweden Democrat voter”) and ideological identities (“a nationalist”; “somebody who opposes refugees”). We will compare this with other out-groups (such as ethnic, regional or class outgroups) as a ‘benchmark’ (see Iyengar et al 2014; Westwood et al 2017). Second, we will test various measurements of affect. This can include feeling scales (from “cold” to “warm”), like-dislike extended to hate (“hate-indifferent-like”); the marriage question (“how would you feel if your son or daughter would marry...” or neighbor question; trait attribution (“how would you generally describe people from X? intelligent; selfish; ignorant; betrayer”, etc.). This study will thus nuance the findings of the first study on the big picture.

Package 2: What causes AP?

Study 3: Socio-political causes of AP (PI: Eelco Harteveld)
In study 3 we will add indicators of the hypothesized socio-political causes of AP to the dataset we created in study 1. The first is the nature of social divisions. Recent developments in measurement make it possible to estimate the cross-cutting or reinforcing nature of a multitude of social divisions using existing data (Selway 2011). Second, we will add data on internet coverage and social media usage (e.g. ITU)) to test how these factors correlate with AP both at the aggregate level and for subgroups (e.g. test whether groups – such as youths – who use social media more than other groups – such as seniors – express higher levels of AP). Third, we will add salience of cultural issues. We will here utilize CSES questions on issue saliency as well as models on voter behavior that measure how important cultural and economic issues are for vote choices. This data will allow us to track how the politicization of cultural issues are related to AP both at the individual and the aggregate level. The resulting dataset will allow us to establish, with great external validity, the socio-political correlates of AP (i.e. to test hypotheses H2 and H3).

Study 4: Elite polarization and AP (PI: Wouter van der Brug)
A fourth study will concentrate on mapping elite polarization over time and test who it affects. First, we will map PRR party success and how mainstream parties have responded to it. To do so we will collect data on electoral results and government coalitions (e.g. ParlGov), as well as mainstream party responses to these successes and changes in immigration policy (e.g. MIPEX). Second, in order to study more nuanced shifts and transformations in elite polarization, we will use big online social media data collected from various sources such as blogs, forums, news sites, as well as web communities. The idea here is to trace over time divergences in associations and language use between parliamentary debates, established editorial media and nativist characterised social forums. This data will help us get more fine-grained measurements of elite polarization, as well as studying the importance of social media for fuelling AP. The resulting datasets will be used to test hypotheses H3 and H4 on how political elites fuel AP – and to test how AP in the electorate affects elite polarization. We will do so both using the dataset created in Study 1 as well as panel data in available countries (such as the Netherlands (LISS), Norway (DIGSSCORE) and Sweden (LORE)) that follows voters over time.

Study 5: Isolating the causes in a survey experiment (PI: Eelco Harteveld)
Having thus mapped the proposed causes extensively in studies 3 & 4, we will increase the internal validity by constructing survey (conjoint) experiments to causally isolate the hypothesized mechanisms that increase and dampen such feelings. We will do so using the infrastructure that DIGSSCORE and LORE provides. Conjoint experiments allow for a simultaneous test of multiple stimuli and their interactions while reducing social desirability bias. Respondents are presented with
a fictitious person of which randomized characteristics (ideological, partisan, but also based on other social identities such as ethnicity or region) are expected to affect respondents’ affective responses. Furthermore, we include politician’s messages about these groups. Respondents subsequently answer questions about this person (as well as general questions).

Package 3: What are the consequences of AP?

Study 6: Exploring online social media data and open-ended survey questions (PI: Stefan Dalhberg)
To assess the extent to which voters are transforming their notions of democracy, as well as their evaluations of other groups in society, we propose an innovative, more inductive methodological approach. We will rely on two different data sources. First, we will collect language data from open-ended survey questions where we ask participants to express their thoughts on the concept of democracy. We then use structural topic modelling (STM) to assess whether conceptions of democracy (topics) vary across groups of voters and according to respondents’ political trust.

Second, in order to study shifts and transformations over time and across contexts, we will use online social media data collected from online sources such as blogs, forums, news sites, as well as nativist and non-nativist web communities. Applying distributional semantics to these data will enable us to uncover potential meaning differences in the use of the term democracy across internet forums and actors (Turney & Pantel 2010). The aim of the study is to uncover whether the processes studied above result in diverging conceptions of democracy. If so, this would potentially provide an even more fundamental challenge to representative democracy than mere political discontent. At the same time, the study aims to uncover meanings and values that are shared by PRR voters and opponents, nativists and non-nativists, satisfied and dissatisfied citizens, which thus may provide a starting point for inclusive strategies to de-escalate societal polarization.

Study 7: Measuring consequences through surveys (PI: Jonas Linde)
In this study, we use the inductive insights of Study 6 to test the consequences of AP. We use it to refine and expand a battery of questions on democratic satisfaction and democratic norms in the survey of Study 2. This will also include more standard measures such as satisfaction with democracy and support for democracy and non-democratic alternatives. Some of these will also be available in the comparative, existing data of Study 1. Furthermore, we will include the most relevant questions in the experiment mentioned in Study 5. Combined, this will allow us to correlate AP with its consequences across time and space (comparative data), using refined measures (collecting survey data) and with high causal leverage (conjoint experiments).

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Project organization
The research team is well prepared for carrying out the tasks outlined above. The principal investigator Andrej Kokkonen, is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg and the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University. He has published extensively on PRRs, prejudice, group threat, out-group trust, social sorting and Social Identity Theory in top journals in political science and sociology. He has also written several popular scientific articles and blog posts disseminating research to a wider audience.

Stefan Dalhberg is an Associate Professor at the Department of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen and the University of Gothenburg. He is Research Director at the Digital Social Science Core Facility (DIGSSCORE) and has previously been the coordinator of the Swedish Citizen Panel. He has considerable experience on organizing and designing survey experiments and analyzing panel data. He has published extensively on voter behaviour and political support.
Jonas Linde is a Professor at the Department of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen. Linde has experience of research on a wide range of topics within comparative politics. His research on political support/trust, legitimacy, democratic discontent and quality of government has been published in several high-ranked international journals.

Eelco Harteveld is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam. He wrote his dissertation on gender differences in support for Radical Right parties (RRPs) and is currently involved in a project on regional differences in support for RRPs. He has already published several articles in leading international journals.

Wouter van der Brug is arguably one of the world’s leading experts on RRPs. He has a strong record in publishing about electoral behaviour, political communication, political trust and support, and political parties.

Together the team members have both the theoretical knowledge, the methodological skills and the contacts within the research community necessary for carrying out the proposed project.

International and national collaboration
The project is an international collaboration between researchers from the University of Gothenburg, the University of Amsterdam and the University of Bergen. In addition, we will take advantage of our extensive international networks for disseminating, and getting feedback on, our studies. Among the scholars we are currently working with on related topics can be mentioned Kai Arzheimer, Elisabeth Ivarsflaten, Rune Stubager, Matthijs Rooduijn, and Sarah de Lange.

Other applications: We are applying with a smaller related project to Forte. If both projects would be funded, they could be synthesized and they would complement each other.

References


