

# DIGITAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT

## Research Memo #3 Polarization and its Discontents

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# DIGITAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT

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The Digital Democracy Project is a joint initiative led by the Ottawa-based Public Policy Forum and the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University.

The project will study the media ecosystem in the run-up to and during Canada's October 2019 federal election by monitoring digital and social media and by conducting both regular national surveys and a study of a metered sample of online consumption. The project will communicate its preliminary research findings publicly on a regular basis from August to October 2019, and will work with journalists to analyze the spread and impact of misinformation. The study will culminate in a final report to be published by March 2020. Both the project's preliminary findings and final report will be publicly available.

The project director is Taylor Owen, Associate Professor and Beaverbrook Chair in Media, Ethics and Communications in the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University. The online data analysis team is led by Derek Ruths, Associate Professor in the School of Computer Science at McGill University, and the survey analysis team is led by Peter Loewen, Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto.

The project is funded by The Rossy Foundation, the McConnell Foundation, and the Luminate Group and with support from the Mozilla. The project is also participating in the Digital Elections Research Challenge, a collaborative research project led by Taylor Owen and Elizabeth Dubois, Assistant Professor at the University of Ottawa, and funded by a grant from Heritage Canada. The DDP will be sharing survey and online data with the 18 research projects funded through this collaboration and will highlight select findings from these projects in our regular briefings.

For enquiries, please contact [Stephanie MacLellan](#).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Researchers, pundits and armchair analysts have argued for some time now that Canada is becoming more like the United States when it comes to *polarization*—typically understood as the segmenting of society into increasingly isolated and mutually incomprehensible political tribes. It is also common to see at least some of the blame for polarization placed on the media, where increasingly partisan social media echo chambers amplify disagreement and distort the public conversation.

Yet while there is some evidence that Canadians are polarized, according to our data, the story is a bit more complicated than is often assumed. In particular, the usual narrative of social media-based echo chambers driving real-world polarization is not supported by our survey and online data. Yes, some small subset of Twitter users tend to create online echo chambers, but our survey findings suggest that the offline impact is very limited.

Ultimately, the biggest driver of polarization seems to be ideology and partisanship themselves. As our political parties have become more ideologically distinct, their strongest partisans have tended to feel more distant from each other. This echoes one of our findings from our [first research memo](#): it is the media consumers with strong partisan tendencies who are more likely to become misinformed with news exposure, especially via social media.

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1** We find evidence of *affective polarization*—dislike of parties or their supporters on the other end of the political spectrum simply because they belong to an opposing group—among the Canadian public.
- 2** Twitter users of all partisan stripes tend to create their own polarized spaces online. They are more likely to follow only candidates from their own party than others.
- 3** Media sources that draw a highly partisan audience are only viewed by a small percentage of Canadians who share those partisan leanings. What makes someone more likely to consume these news sources is not how partisan they are, but how much time they spend on social media.
- 4** However, polarization does not appear to be linked to media consumption—either for traditional media, social media, or media sources that are preferred by mostly left-leaning or right-leaning supporters.

## SURVEY RESULTS

When it comes to measuring polarization, researchers distinguish between *affective polarization*—a dislike of parties, or their supporters, on the other end of the political spectrum simply because they belong to an

opposing group—and *ideological polarization*, in which people hold divergent views on political issues that don't bleed into their feelings about the people or parties that support them. However, research has been limited on the degree to which Canadians are affectively polarized.

We measured affective polarization in three ways that are adapted from American public opinion research: *warmth gap*, which asks for survey respondents' feelings toward their own party and others; *affect gap*, which asks respondents to associate positive or negative words with the parties; and *social distance*, which asks how comfortable respondents would be having someone from a different social group as a friend, neighbour or in-law. We averaged feelings toward the NDP and Liberals to represent affect toward left-leaning parties and used feelings towards the Conservatives to represent affect toward right-leaning parties.

Our survey found clear signs of polarization across all three of these measures. We also found that Canadians do not appear to strongly distinguish between party officials and their voters. When looking at the affect gap, half of our respondents were randomly assigned questions asking them to describe party officials and candidates, while the other half were asked to describe the party's voters. There was no significant difference between respondents' feelings toward the opposing party's official representatives and supporters. This is troubling because it shows that polarization may not just influence people's opinions about the parties, but also how they view ordinary Canadians.

## SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

Canadians are also creating their own polarized spaces online. We looked at approximately 50,000 Twitter users who followed at least five Canadian election candidates and classified them as “partisans” of the party that includes most of the candidates they followed. No matter which party they supported, the vast majority of candidates they followed came from their own party. At the most-concentrated end of the spectrum, only 10 percent of the candidates followed by People's Party of Canada partisans belonged to parties other than the PPC. Even at the least-concentrated end, Green partisans followed non-Green Party candidates only 30 percent of the time. *This means it is much less likely that politically engaged Twitter users are receiving messages from parties other than their own.*

There have also been concerns about the rise of highly partisan media sources in the Canadian news environment. We looked at the extent to which Canadians at the right or left end of the political spectrum consume media that is mostly preferred by people with similar political leanings. To test for this, we took our partisan sample of Twitter users and examined the news sources they follow, identifying which sources were most likely to be followed by supporters of a given party. For example, PressProgress, Rabble.ca and The Tye were more likely to be followed by NDP and Green partisans, while True North News, The Post Millennial and The Rebel were more likely to be followed by PPC and Conservative partisans. Our survey showed that these partisan-favoured news sources were only viewed by a small percentage of respondents from the same

partisan group. Only 16% of partisan Canadians report any exposure to this type of media, and less than 1% report that more than half of their media diet comes from these sources. What made someone more likely to consume these news sources was not how partisan they were, but how much time they spend on social media.

Another common explanation for increased polarization is that individuals select into media environments that reinforce their political views – so-called filter bubbles or echo chambers, which can be exacerbated by social media. *However, our survey data show little difference in polarization between respondents who have high exposure to social media and those who have low exposure.* The same is true for traditional news sources, as well as media outlets that draw mostly left-leaning or right-leaning supporters.

Instead, those who saw themselves as stronger supporters of their own party were most likely to show signs of polarization, as well as those who perceive opposing parties to be ideologically remote from them.

## METHODOLOGY

Our survey data team conducted an online panel survey of 1,271 Canadian citizens 18 years and older using the online sample provider Qualtrics. The sample was gathered from Aug. 28-Sept. 5. Data was weighted within each region of Canada by gender and age to ensure it adequately represented the Canadian public. Survey respondents were asked questions related to basic demographics, as well as their partisan, ideological and issue preferences. We present 90% confidence intervals for each of our figures below.

For our online data research, we gathered a list of all the Twitter followers of all declared major party candidates (as of Sept. 8) alongside a list of followers of 612 news outlets and affiliated journalists. We first identified active partisan consumers in the election, which we defined as individuals who follow more than five rank-and-file candidates from major parties. (We exclude the top 5% most-followed individuals from each party to account for the very high numbers of followers of some party leaders, where a follow does not meaningfully indicate partisanship.) We labelled each of these approximately 50,000 Twitter users as partisans based on the party that includes most of the candidates they followed. We then looked at their follow patterns of other-party candidates and media organizations, as well as their sharing behaviour, to determine partisan-congenial sources of news.

More details about our methodology can be found in Appendix A.

# GENERAL FINDINGS: POLARIZATION

In the past few decades, political polarization has emerged as a growing source of public concern. It reduces the common ground that citizens have for deliberation in a democracy, driving them toward more partisan candidates and policies.<sup>1</sup> It can also exacerbate negative perceptions toward other groups, contributing to political alienation and making citizens more likely to believe falsehoods about those groups.<sup>2</sup>

To better understand the dynamics of political polarization in Canada, we examined both survey data and online political behaviour using Twitter data. In this report, we look at three measures: 1) the affective polarization of the overall Canadian population; 2) Twitter users' exposure to Canadian political party messaging; and 3) the extent to which the Canadian population receives information from a limited set of media sources.

## AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

In the United States, supporters of the two major parties actively dislike one another, while liking members of their own party. This is known as **affective polarization**, and it is distinct from ideological polarization, where Americans have increasingly divergent views on political issues.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have argued that Canadians are polarizing as well,<sup>4</sup> but research has been limited on the degree to which Canadians are affectively polarized. We measure affective polarization in three ways that are adapted from American public opinion research:

1. **Warmth gap:** We ask respondents to rate their feelings toward each of the major parties on 0-100 feeling thermometers. We then calculate the difference between partisan respondents' feelings toward ideologically-proximate parties (in-group), and those that are ideologically distant (out-group).
2. **Affect gap:** We ask respondents to rate how well a series of positive and negative words (eg. honest, intelligent, hypocritical, selfish) describe each party. We tally up the score for the positive words (positive affect) and negative words (negative affect) and take the difference to find their "net affect" toward in-group and out-group parties. We randomly assign respondents into two groups: one where the words they evaluate are being used to describe *voters* of the party, and another where they

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<sup>1</sup> Prior, M. (2013). Media and political polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16(1), 101-127.

<sup>2</sup> Vaccari, C. (2018). Online content and political polarization. In *Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature*, ed. Joshua Tucker. William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Iyengar, S, Sood, G., and Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(3), 405-431, DOI: 10.1093/poq/nfs038; Mason, L. (2016). A cross-cutting calm: How social sorting drives affective polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 351-377, DOI:10.1093/poq/nfw001

<sup>4</sup> Johnston, R. (2014). Canada is polarizing – and it's because of the parties. *Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/18/canada-is-polarizing-and-its-because-of-the-parties/>

describe *elected officials and candidates* for the party. This allows us to compare the difference between perceptions of party representatives and perceptions of ordinary voters.

- 3. Social distance:** We ask respondents how comfortable they would be if a member of a certain social group was 1) their neighbour; 2) a close friend; and 3) how upset they would be if a son or daughter married a member of a certain group. This was used to create an index of a respondent's social distance from each group (0-100), including in-group and out-group parties.

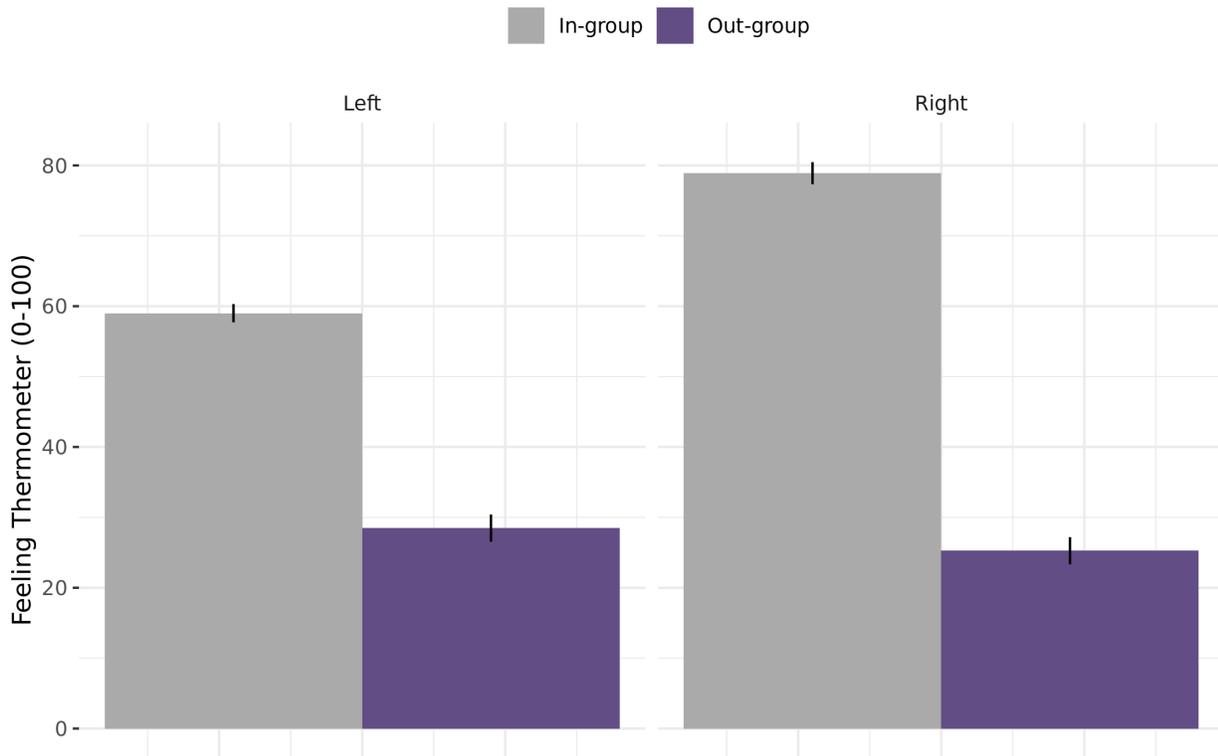
Each of these three measures address different dimensions of affective polarization. Further, we should expect social distance and affect measures to be tougher tests of affective polarization because they tap into stronger feelings of hostility and alienation, respectively.

Measuring affective polarization in a multi-party context is tricky. In the United States, there are clear in-groups and out-groups for partisans because there are only two main parties. For our purposes, we average feelings toward the NDP and Liberals to represent affect toward left-leaning parties and use feelings toward the Conservatives to represent affect toward right-leaning parties. From that, we can construct in-group and out-group measures based on the partisan identity of our respondents. We restrict these analyses to partisans of the three main parties. However, results are robust to including Green and Bloc supporters as well. There were too few People's Party of Canada supporters to include in a sample of this size.

We find that Canadians are affectively polarized according to our measure of the *warmth gap*. Partisans rate their in-group party as 67 degrees on a 0-100 feeling thermometer, with 0 meaning the coldest possible feeling and 100 the warmest. On average, partisans are more negative about the out-group party than they are positive about their own, rating them only 27 degrees on the same scale. The gap of 40 points is sizable given the 101-point scale.

### FIGURE 1. WARMTH TOWARDS PARTIES (0-100)

Note: Partisans of the three major parties included. Out-group evaluation is the Conservative Party for Liberal and NDP partisans, and an average of feelings towards the Liberal Party and NDP for Conservative partisans. The reverse is true for in-group evaluation.

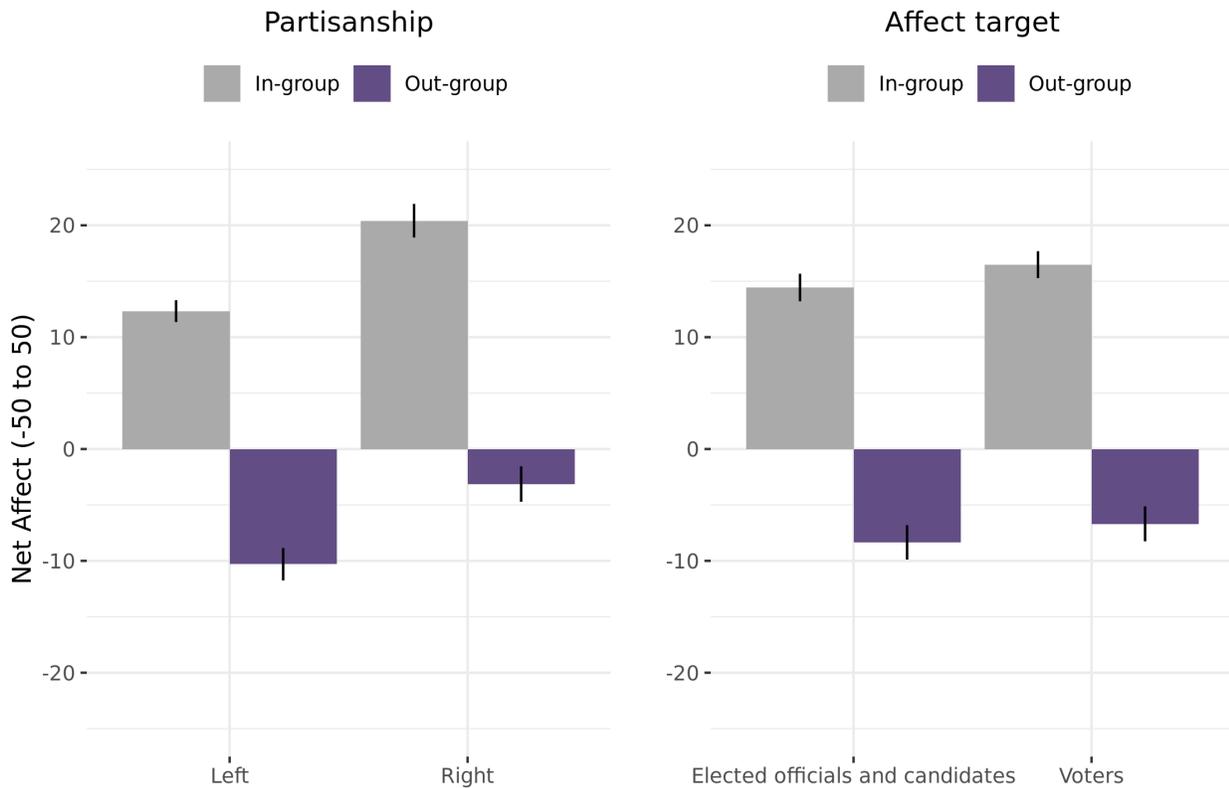


As Figure 1 shows, left- and right-partisans have similarly negative feelings toward the out-group party – 28 and 25 degrees, respectively – while right partisans have more positive feelings toward their own party (79 vs. 59). This is not surprising – fragmentation on the left ensures left-leaning voters are divided in their partisan loyalties.

For stronger tests of the intensity of affective polarization, we turn to our *affect gap* measure. Respondents were asked to rate how well a number of positive (e.g. honest) and negative words (e.g. selfish) described a party’s voters or their candidates and elected officials. The *net affect* is the difference between the positive and negative measures, with a larger gap indicating a greater degree of polarization. On a -50 to 50 scale, with 0 being neutral, our partisan respondents view their in-group party 15 points more positively, while they see their out-group 8 points more negatively. This 23-point gap in net affect is sizable given the 101-point scale.

## FIGURE 2: NET AFFECT (-50 TO 50)

Difference between left and right partisans (left panel). Difference between groups receiving questions asking about voters or party elites (right panel).



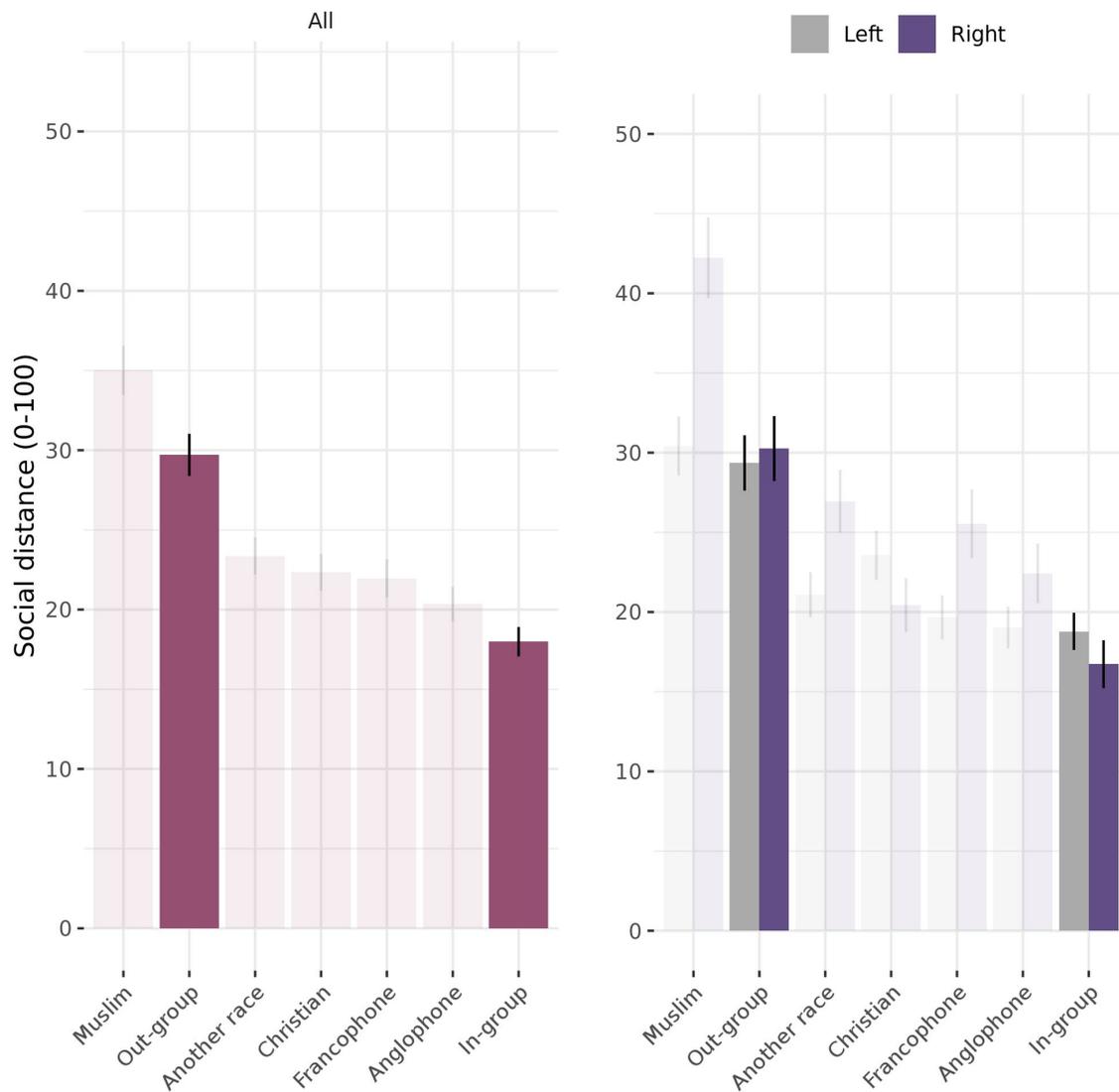
This measure reveals some interesting partisan differences. Left- and right-partisans have virtually identical affect gaps (22 and 23 points, respectively), but right-partisans are more positive toward their own party than they are negative toward the left (20 and -3 points, respectively). Left-partisans are more equally balanced in their like of their own parties and dislike of the right (12 and -10 points, respectively). This is shown in the left panel of Figure 2.

Second, Canadians do not appear to strongly distinguish between party elites and their voters. We randomly assigned our respondents to receive either questions asking them to describe party officials and candidates, or voters for the party. These results are shown in the right panel of Figure 2. Partisans had slightly less positive feelings towards in-group elites compared to in-group voters, but the effect is small. There is no significant difference between their feelings towards out-group voters and elites. This is troubling because polarization does not just influence people's opinions about the parties, but also how they view ordinary Canadians.

Social distance gives us perhaps our strongest test yet. This measure is designed less to capture affective polarization, than to capture a possible negative consequence of affective polarization that is detrimental to society – the level of comfort people have with those in out-groups in their day-to-day lives. Respondents were asked to rate their level of comfort with a member of a social group becoming their neighbour; being a close friend; and how upset they would be if a son or daughter married someone from a social group. These questions were used to construct a scale of social distance (0-100). It allows us to compare not just the social distance of our respondents to in-group and out-group partisans, but to other groups in society, including Anglophones, Francophones, Christians, Muslims, and people from other races.

**FIGURE 3. SOCIAL DISTANCE (0-100)**

All partisan respondents (left panel). Left and right partisans (right panel).



The social distance score for all partisans from out-group party supporters is 30 points, compared to 18 points for the in-group party. These results are displayed in the left panel of Figure 3. This is a modest 12-point gap. What is perhaps most striking is that the social distance partisans feel towards supporters of the out-group party is higher than all of the other social groups listed, except for Muslims. The results are substantively similar when broken down by partisan group in the right panel of Figure 3, though right-partisans are slightly more socially proximate to supporters of their own party.

In summary, Canadians are affectively polarized. Partisans have substantially colder and more negative feelings about ideologically-opposed parties, compared to those that are ideologically-proximate. These feelings apply both to voters and party elites. Out-group partisans are also seen as more socially distant, both in comparison to in-group partisans, and compared to other groups in Canadian society.

# FINDINGS: ONLINE AND MEDIA POLARIZATION

Online data can offer additional insight into the drivers of affective polarization. While we cannot offer a strong causal test here, we can describe the nature of the consumption and production of political news among online communities that might be conducive to polarization. We consider two alternative but compatible hypotheses that may contribute to polarization: 1) that partisans receive messaging from *only their preferred party*, or 2) that partisans are being exposed to information from *only select media sources*. We construct two measures to evaluate echo chambers and partisan divides: follower networks to measure exposure across partisan groupings, and measures of media and journalist followership and content sharing.

## PARTY FOLLOWER NETWORKS

We gathered a list of all the Twitter followers of all declared major party candidates (as of Sept. 8) alongside a list of followers of 612 news outlets and affiliated journalists. We first identified active partisan consumers in the election, which we defined as individuals who follow more than five rank-and-file candidates from major parties. We labelled each of these approximately 50,000 Twitter users as “partisans” based on the party that includes most of the candidates they followed.<sup>5</sup> We then computed measures of homophily—or likelihood to associate with members of one’s own group—in the follower networks among these partisans.

We first show the polarization among Twitter-using partisans in Figure 4 below. The figure shows the percentage of other-party accounts followed by partisans of each party. The PPC are the most information-isolated group: the candidate accounts followed by PPC partisans are comprised of 90% PPC candidates, and only 10% candidates from other parties. They are followed by the Liberals, who follow 16% from other parties, and the Conservatives at 19%. NDP, Green and Bloc Québécois partisans are more likely to follow candidates from other parties, but even the Greens, the party whose Twitter supporters follow the largest percentage of other-party candidates, follow 70% Green candidates and only 30% from other parties.

Figure 4 also shows the percentage of other-party follows for each of the six main parties. The Liberals are most likely to follow Conservative and NDP candidates. The Conservatives follow many Liberals and follow an equal number of NDP and PPC candidates. The NDP are far more likely to follow Liberal candidates and almost equally likely to follow Greens and Conservatives. The Bloc Québécois and the Greens follow candidates from

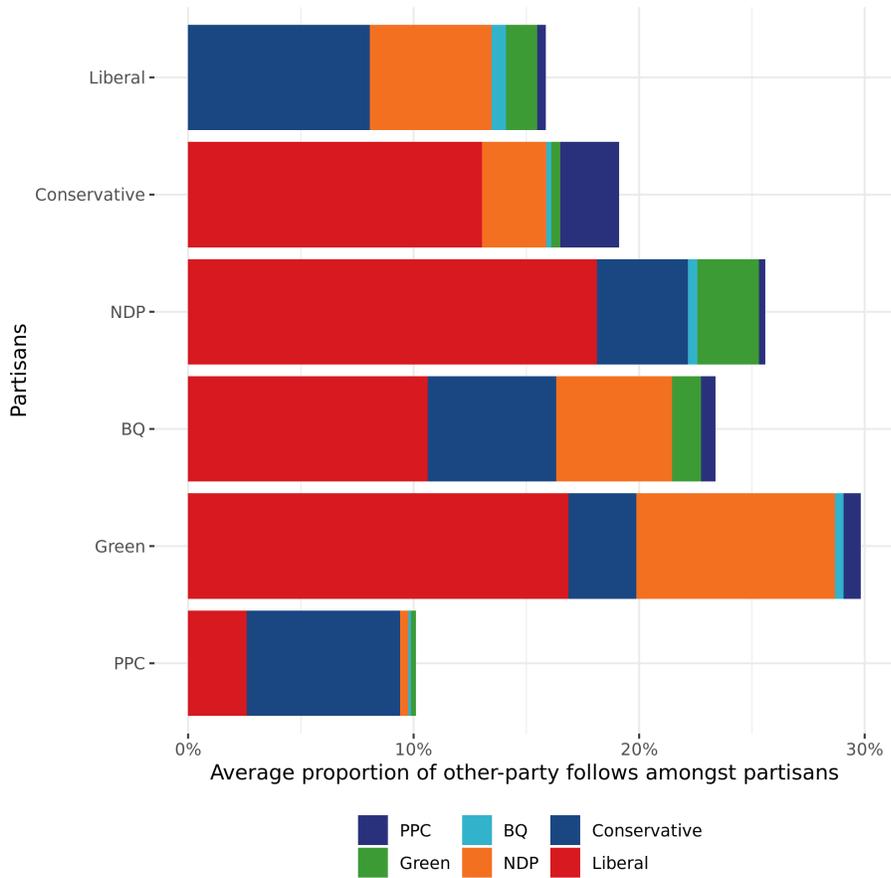
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<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere candidate follows have been used as a measure of engagement (Bodes and Dalrymple 2016), but the plurality measure is novel to this report. In order to ensure our results were not an artefact of this method, we tested a variety of thresholds (majority, more than double the next party, 60%+, and 70%+) with no substantive changes in the results.

the Liberals, NDP and Conservatives, although the Figure does show some variance there. For their part, PPC partisans follow some Conservatives but almost no one else.

**FIGURE 4: PARTY HOMOPHILY (0-100)**

The bar shows the percentage of other-party follows among partisans of the six main parties. Colours represent the percentages from each other out-group; same-party follows are not shown.



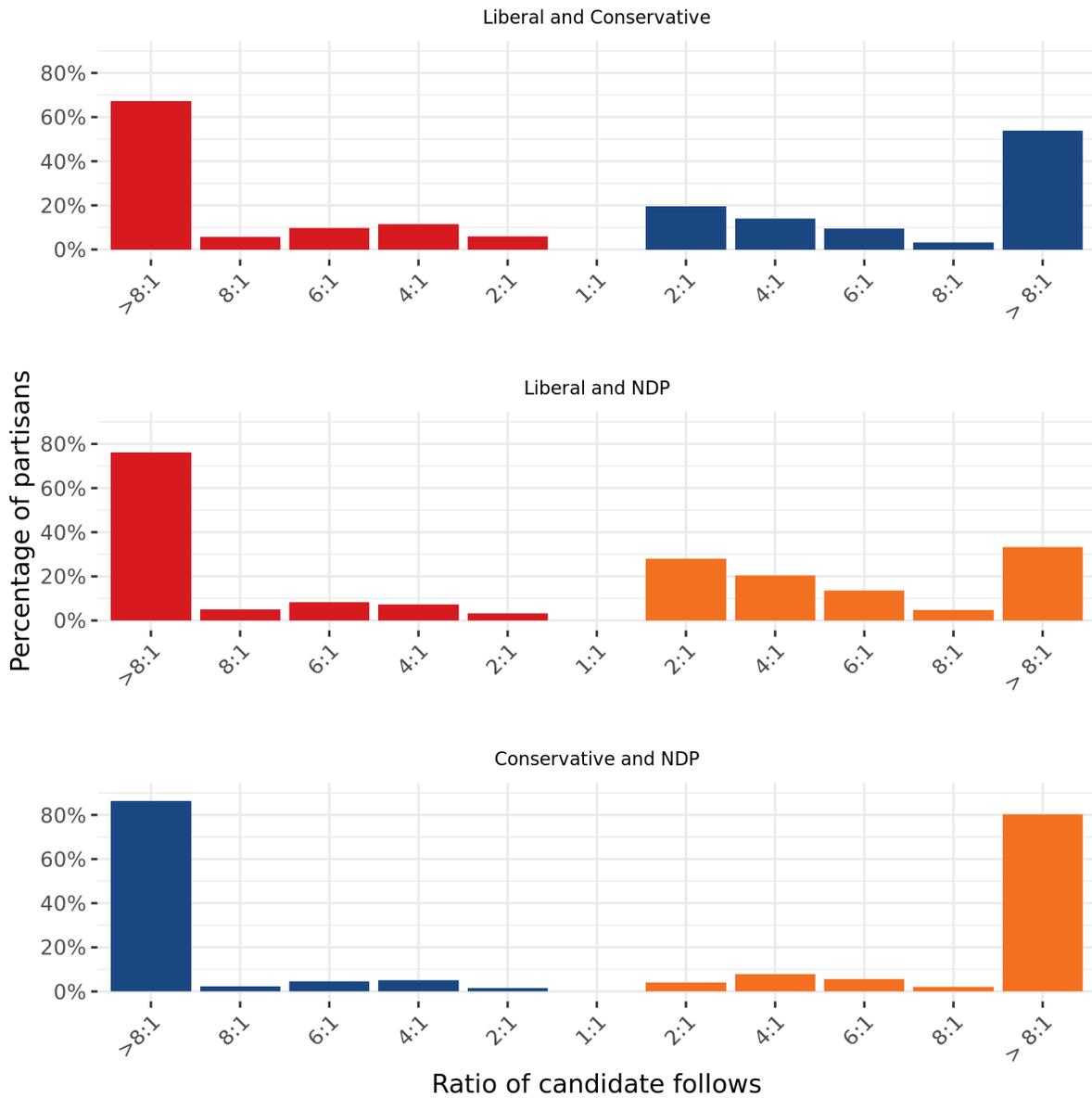
We can drill deeper to measure two-party homophily, or the extent to which partisans of a given two parties are likely to follow one another. Figure 5 shows the follower ratio between Liberals, Conservatives and NDPers (see Appendix B for the other two-party pairings). As expected, the Conservative and NDP partisans are the least likely to follow one another, with 80% of Conservatives and NDP supporters not following a single candidate from the other party. The Liberals, meanwhile, tend to follow more Conservatives than NDP candidates.

These data indicate substantial differences in cross-party information that Canadian Twitter users are receiving, with the vast majority of the accounts that follow candidates *only* following those from their preferred party. A

digital media environment where people only hear from the party they already agree with may be conducive to polarization.

**FIGURE 5: RATIO OF CANDIDATE FOLLOWS**

The bars show the percentage of partisans of a particular party that have the stated follow ratio between their preferred party and the other party featured on the plot. Following no one from the other party is categorized as greater than an 8:1 ratio.



## MEDIA CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

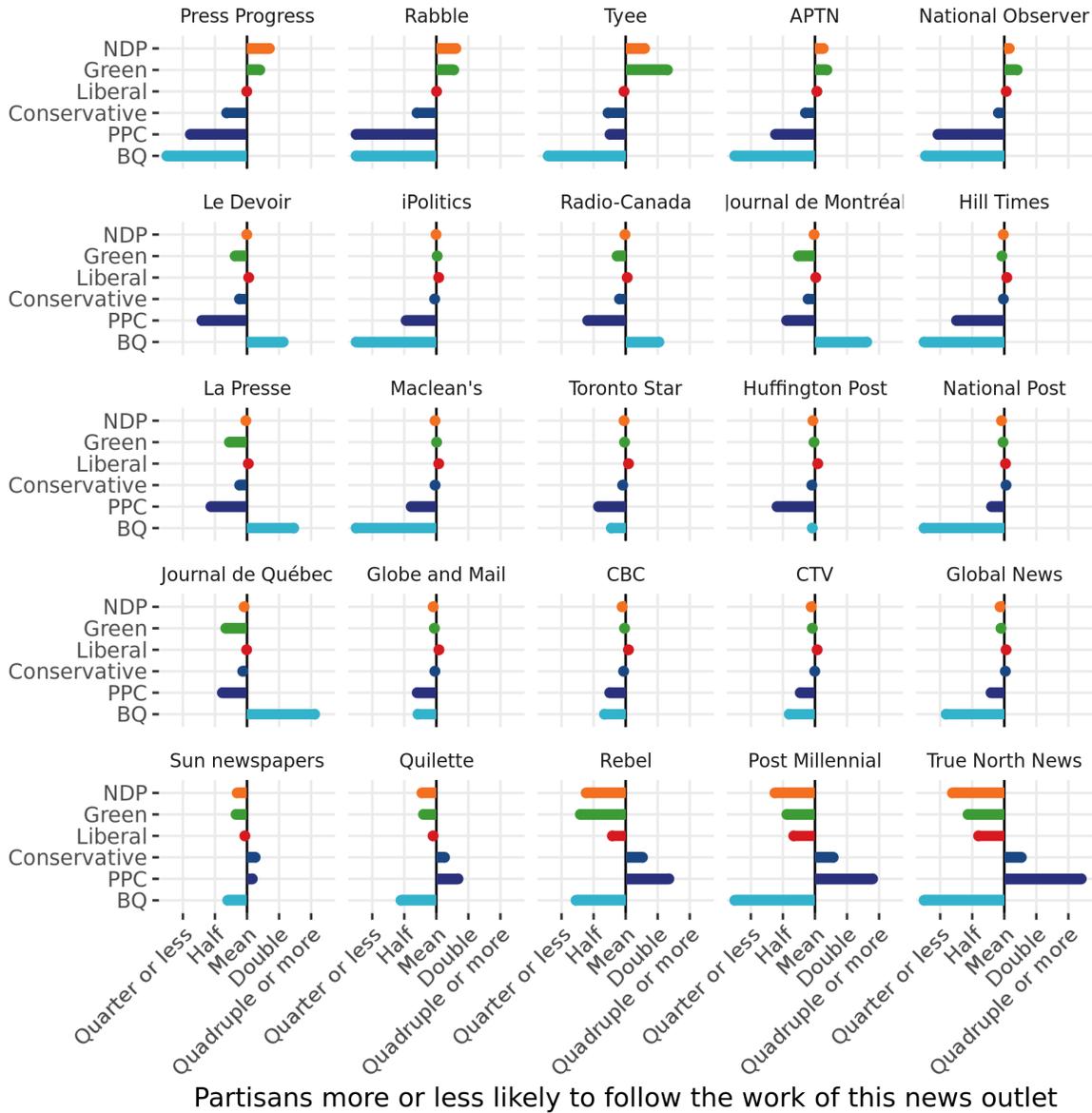
Another common explanation for increased polarization is that individuals are selecting into media environments that emphasize particular issues or are themselves partisan/ideological. To test for this, we took our sample of partisan Twitter users and examined the news sources with which they engage. Overall, we find that there are partisan divides across media outlets with a few partisan-congenial news sources on both ends of the political spectrum. However, a much larger number of outlets are followed or shared by partisans across the political spectrum, particularly among Liberal, Conservative and NDP partisans.

We perform two tests: examining the relative likelihood that a partisan follows an outlet's official account, or a journalist from the outlet; and the relative likelihood that a partisan shares a link to content produced by the outlet. Figure 6 shows the follower measure for a selection of 25 outlets (selected based on a combination of popularity and variance in partisan following/sharing). The outlets have been rank-ordered based on NDP partisans' likelihood to be exposed to their content to illustrate the left-right divide.

The five outlets that are the most followed by NDP Twitter partisans are PressProgress, Rabble.ca, The Tyee, APTN and the National Observer; while the Sun news chain, Quillette, The Rebel, The Post Millennial and True North News are the least followed. Green and NDP exposure is similar, with the major difference being that Green partisans are more likely to follow French-language publications. Liberal partisans generally are exposed to a range of outlets, however, are about half as likely to follow content favoured by Conservative and PPC partisans. Meanwhile, Conservative and PPC partisans generally align directionally, with PPC partisans demonstrating more exaggerated preferences—either barely following certain outlets or much more likely to follow others. The Bloc Québécois, meanwhile, acts as expected, following almost exclusively French-language sources with Journal de Montréal and Journal de Québec the most frequently followed.

**FIGURE 6. PARTISAN PREFERENCE FOR NEWS DOMAINS**

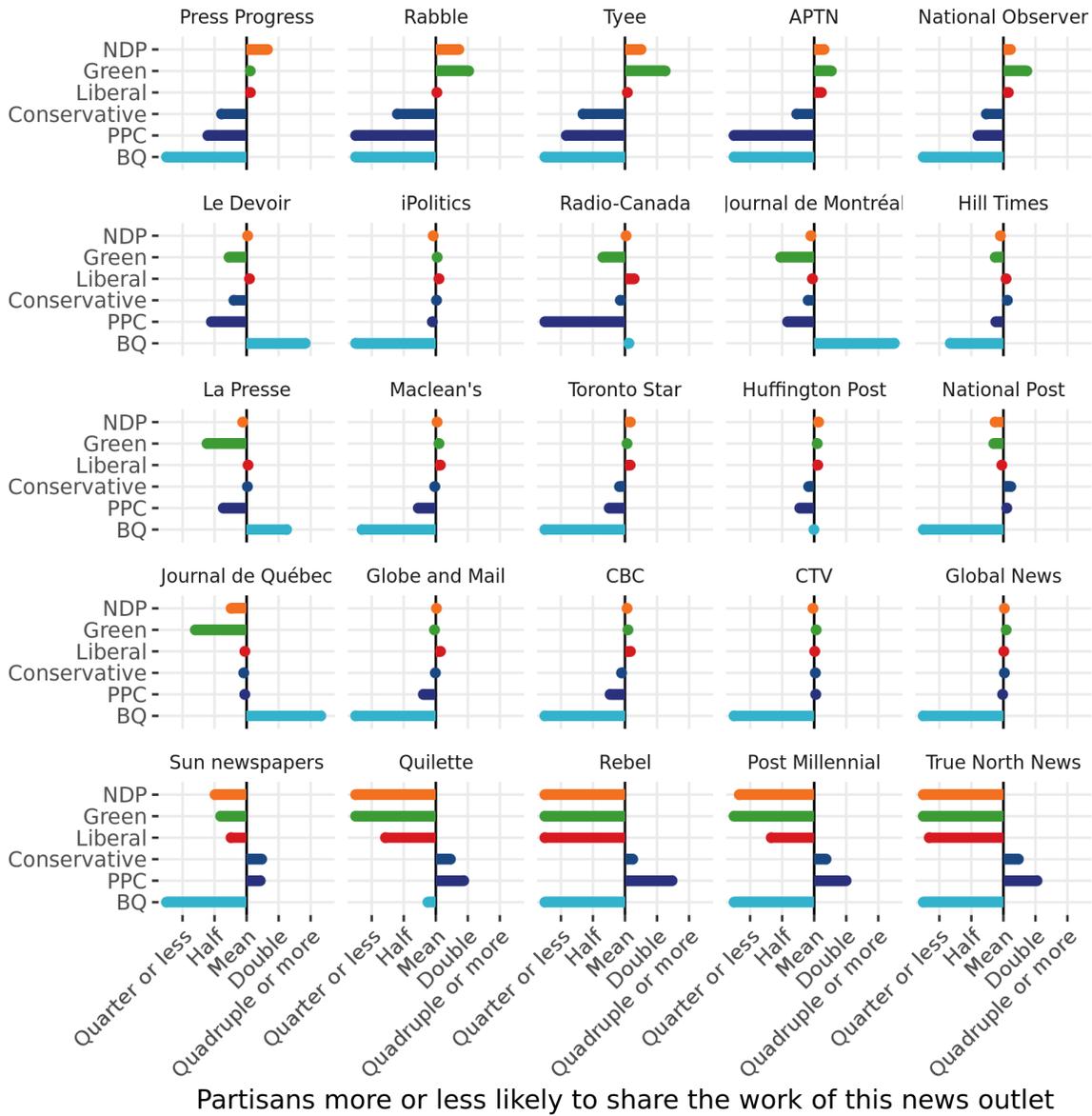
Each rounded bar indicates the relative likelihood for partisans of that party to follow at least one journalist or the official account from the outlet.



A second measure looks at the sharing of content. Being exposed to content and exposing others are politically differentiated acts and we might expect more extreme behaviour in shares. It could be that partisan networks are diffusing media more aligned with their issue emphasis or ideological positions. To get this measure, we looked at the occurrence of content sharing by the same 25 outlets by partisans from each party.

### FIGURE 7. PARTISAN SHARING OF NEWS DOMAINS

Each rounded bar indicates the relative likelihood for partisans of that party to have shared at least one piece of content from that source either on a Canadian political hashtag or directed at a political elite.



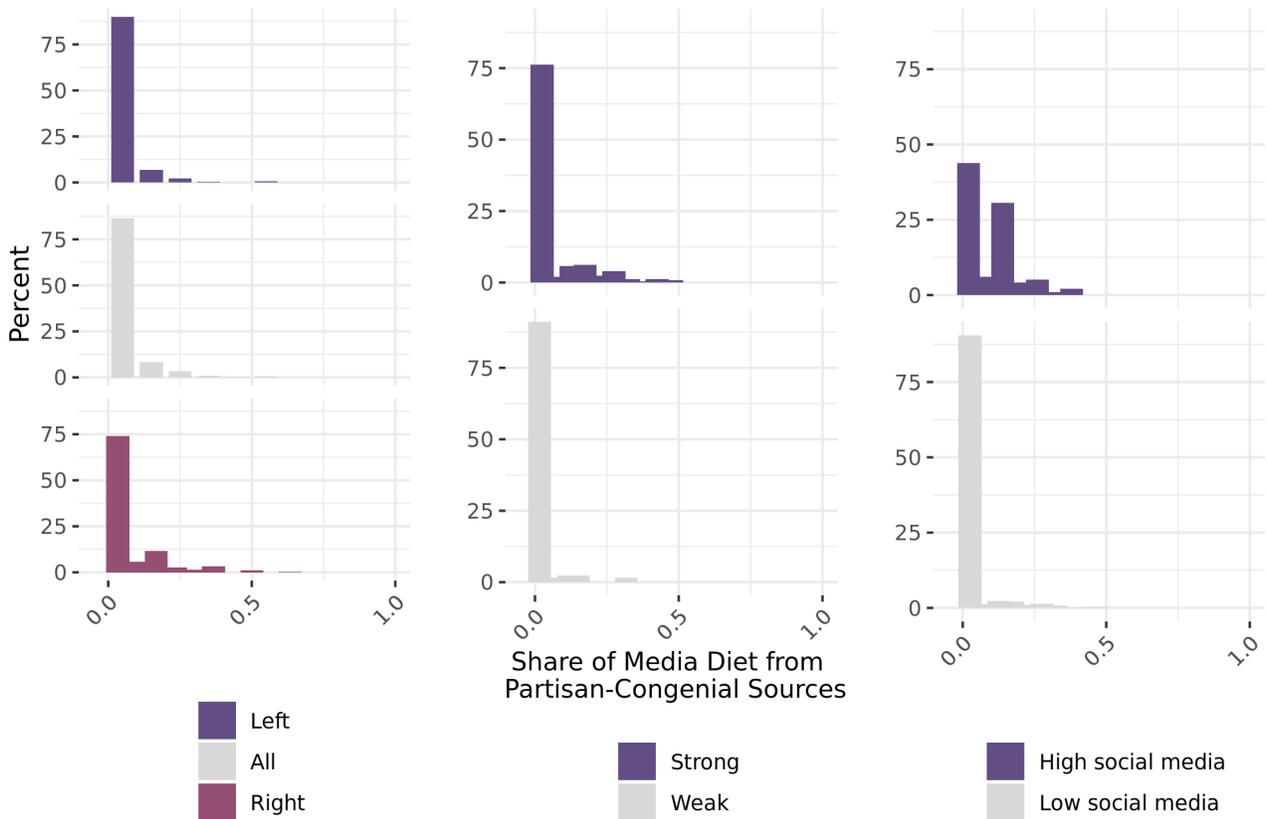
Indeed, we do find more extreme behaviour here, particularly for the publications preferred by right-leaning partisans along the bottom row in Figure 7. Four of these outlets are barely shared by any Liberal, NDP, Green or Bloc Québécois partisans, whereas they are the most shared by Conservative and PPC partisans. That behaviour is somewhat replicated for the publications preferred by left-leaning partisans along the top row, where Green and NDP partisans are far more likely to share content while Conservatives and PPC partisans

barely share any content from these sources. But again, while there is a partisan divide across a set of sources, the overall sharing landscape shows that partisans across the spectrum often share content from the same core outlets.

Our two tests show that partisans selectively follow political parties and thus are exposed to a narrow range of partisan perspectives. However, despite this limited political diet, partisans from across the political divide continue to engage with a broad range of mainstream media sources.

**FIGURE 8. SHARE OF MEDIA DIET FROM PARTISAN-CONGENIAL SOURCES**

All respondents by partisan affiliation (left panel). By degree of partisanship (centre panel). By level of social media engagement (right panel).



This limited amount of selective engagement with news sources on Twitter appears to mirror news consumption patterns in the general public. We asked our survey respondents to report their news consumption over the past week for a variety of different online news outlets. We took four publications that were selectively followed by left-partisans (the Tyee, Rabble.ca, the National Observer and PressProgress) and right-partisans (Toronto Sun, The Rebel, The Post Millennial and True North News) to construct a measure of

the share of news outlets consumed by respondents that are partisan-congenial—that is, that are selectively followed and shared by fellow partisans on Twitter. From this, we can get a sense of how much of the news diet of a typical Canadian is from partisan-congenial sources, and also provide an estimate of how many Canadians are in “echo chambers,” where most of the news they are consuming is from partisan-congenial sources.

The results are striking. Figure 8 presents the distributions of partisan-congenial media consumption by partisanship, strength of partisanship, and social media exposure. Only 16% of partisan Canadians report any exposure to partisan-congenial media, and less than 1% report that more than half of their media diet comes from partisan-congenial sources. Partisan-congenial media consumption is modestly higher among right-partisans (26%) compared to left-partisans (12%), but even still, the baseline is very low, and only 1% of right-partisans get more than half of their news diet from partisan-congenial sources.

Interestingly, partisan media consumption is not much more prevalent among strong partisans (24%), but it is more frequent among those who are highly exposed to social media (56%). However, even for frequent social media users, partisan-congenial news media makes up merely 9% of their news diet on average. There is limited evidence that the echo chamber phenomenon applies to a meaningful number of people in the general public, at least as far as their media consumption is concerned.

## FINDINGS: PREDICTORS OF POLARIZATION

So, what is driving affective polarization? In the U.S., there have been three dominant explanations presented in recent scholarly research. First, it is possible that the increasing affective charge of polarization is the result of increasing perceived ideological differences between the parties.<sup>6</sup> There is some evidence that the parties have become more polarized in Canada, with the Liberals converging with the NDP based on a coding of party platforms.<sup>7</sup> Second, there might also be a closer alignment between partisan identities and other social identities such as race, ethnicity, religion and class.<sup>8</sup> Third, there may be drivers related to changes in information technology and changing patterns of media consumption. As some have argued, social media and fragmentation in the news environment could allow partisans to selectively expose themselves to information that confirms their prior beliefs, which may limit their ability to understand and empathize with the other side.<sup>9</sup>

We look at whether these factors are correlated with our measures of affective polarization in Table 1 below. First, it does not appear that media consumption plays an important role in driving affective polarization. The differences between respondents who have high exposure to traditional news or social media and those who have low exposure are substantively small, and generally signed in the wrong direction. If anything, there is some suggestion that news media consumption *dampens* affective polarization, but these differences aren't significant. Partisan-congenial media exposure, for its part, also isn't strongly associated with affective polarization.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rogowski, J.C. & Sutherland, J.L. (2016). How ideology fuels affective polarization. *Political Behavior*, 38, 485-508. DOI: 10.1007/s11109-015-9323-7

<sup>7</sup> Cochrane, C. (2015). *Left and right: The small world of political ideas*. McGill-Queens University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Mason, L. (2016). A cross-cutting calm: How social sorting drives affective polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 351-377, DOI:10.1093/poq/nfw001

<sup>9</sup> Levendusky, M.S. (2013). Partisan media exposure and attitudes toward the opposition. *Political Communication*, 30(4), 565-581. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2012.737435.; Stroud, N.J. (2010). Polarization and partisan selective exposure. *Journal of Communication*, 60(3), 556-576. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01497.x

<sup>10</sup> We are tracking a self-reported exposure to a number of different traditional news outlets and social media applications, which is described more fully in our first report. We classify those who have high exposure as being in the top third of the distribution and those who have low exposure as being in the bottom third. For partisan-congenial media exposure, we are comparing those without any exposure in the past week to partisan-congenial sources to those who did have some exposure.

**TABLE 1. PREDICTORS OF AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION MEASURES**

	Warmth Gap	Affect Gap	Social Distance
High news exposure	37.0	20.5	10.8
Low news exposure	39.2	23.1	11.3
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-2.2</b>	<b>-2.6</b>	<b>-0.5</b>
High social media exposure	33.8	16.8	12.0
Low social media exposure	39.2	22.8	11.1
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-5.4</b>	<b>-6.0</b>	<b>0.9</b>
Partisan-congenial media exposure	38.0	18.8	12.3
No partisan-congenial media exposure	40.5	24.4	11.5
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-2.5</b>	<b>-5.6</b>	<b>0.8</b>
High interest	41.8	24.8	12.2
Low interest	36.1	20.2	11.0
<b>Difference</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>1.2</b>
High knowledge	44.9	26.3	14.6
Low knowledge	31.8	19.4	8.4
<b>Difference</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>6.2</b>
Very strong partisan	55.1	32.6	17.1
Weak partisan	17.8	11.5	6.0
<b>Difference</b>	<b>37.3</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>11.1</b>
High relative ideological distance of out-group	52.2	29.8	15.7
Low relative ideological distance of out-group	23.0	12.8	5.8
<b>Difference</b>	<b>29.2</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>9.9</b>

This finding is even more remarkable considering that there appear to be strong associations between affective polarization and other concepts that are typically associated with news consumption, such as political interest

and knowledge.<sup>11</sup> The warmth gap among politically interested respondents was 6 points higher than among those who are less interested. The affect gap was 5 points higher, and social distance was 1 point higher among these respondents. Similarly, more politically knowledgeable respondents had a warmth gap 13 points higher than less knowledgeable respondents. Their affect gap and social distance were 7 and 6 points higher, respectively.

More than anything, affective polarization is correlated with partisan strength and ideology. Strong partisans have a warmth gap 37 points higher than weak partisans. Their affect gap and social distance are also 21 and 11 points higher, respectively. Partisans who perceive the out-group party as much more ideologically distant than the in-group party have a warmth gap that is 29 points higher than those who perceive there to be little difference between the parties. Their affect gap and social distance are also 17 and 10 points higher, respectively.

There appear to be two threads to affective polarization in Canada. Part of it is reflexive partisan loyalty, but part of it is also a larger perceived ideological distance between partisans and the out-group party. As Cochrane (2015) notes, Canadian parties have polarized. It appears that Canadians are picking up on this and adjusting their feelings towards the parties and their supporters accordingly.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Respondents rated their general interest in politics on a 0-10 scale. The distinction between high and low interest was made by splitting respondents at the median of the scale. Respondents were asked a series of fact-based questions about politics, including the unemployment rate, the name of the Secretary General of the United Nations, and the relative ideological placement of the political parties. Respondents in the bottom third of the distribution were classified as low in political knowledge, while respondents in the top third were labelled as high in knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> We asked partisan respondent to rate their strength of partisanship as “not very strong” (weak partisans), fairly strong, and very strong (strong partisans). We measure ideological distance by asking respondents to place themselves and each of the parties on a 0-10 scale of ideology from left to right. The measure created was the difference of the distance to the out-group party and the distance of the in-group party. This scale was split at the median to classify those who perceive a high relative ideological distance of the out-party or little relative difference.

# APPENDIX A: DETAILED METHODOLOGY

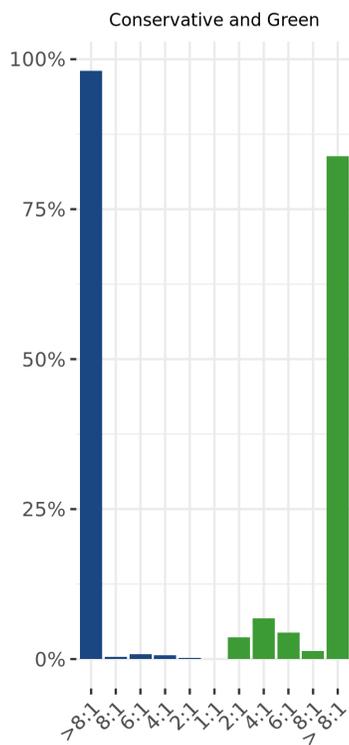
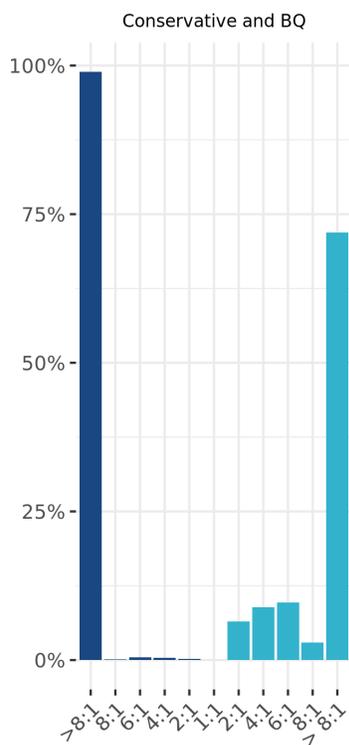
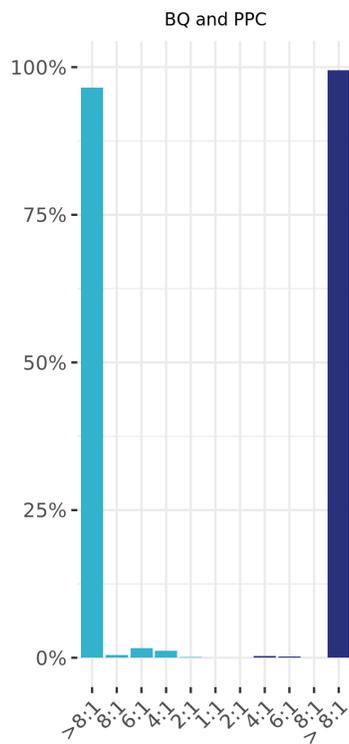
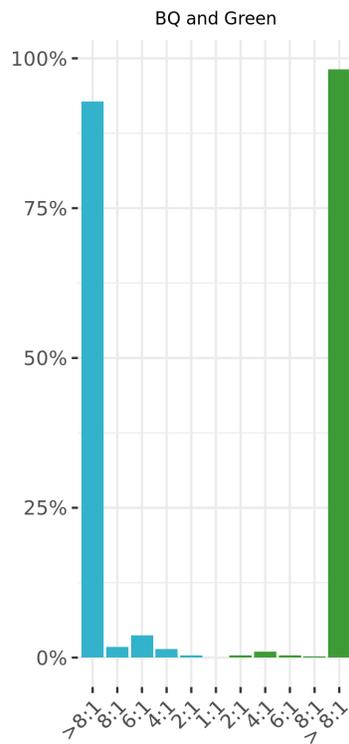
Our survey data team conducted an online panel survey of 1,271 Canadian citizens 18 years and older using the sample provider Qualtrics. The sample was gathered from Aug. 28-Sept. 5. Data was weighted within each region of Canada by gender and age based on data from the 2016 Canadian census. We used an iterative proportional fitting algorithm for our weighting procedure with a minimum weight of 0.48 (N=8) and a maximum weight of 1.57 (N=8).

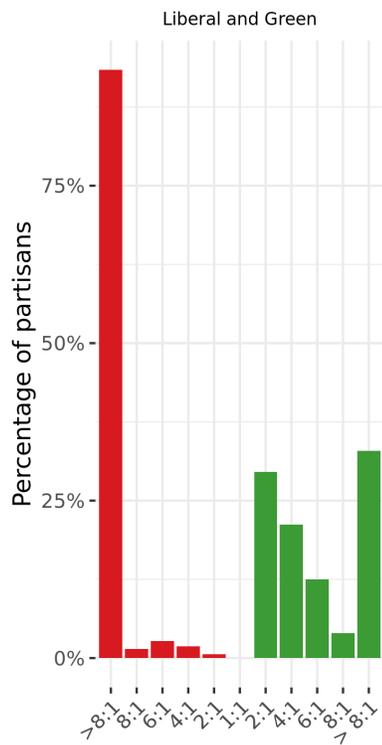
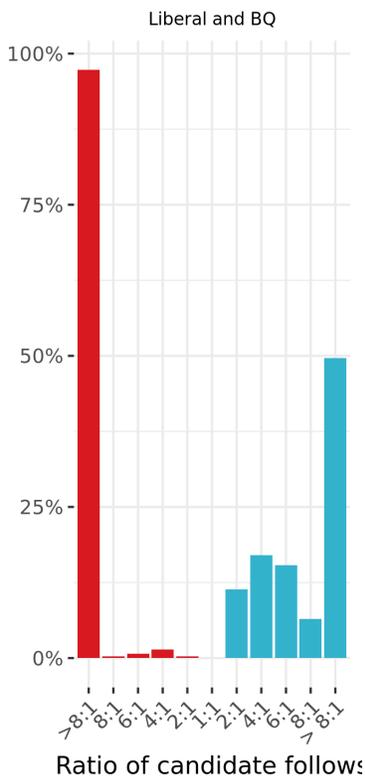
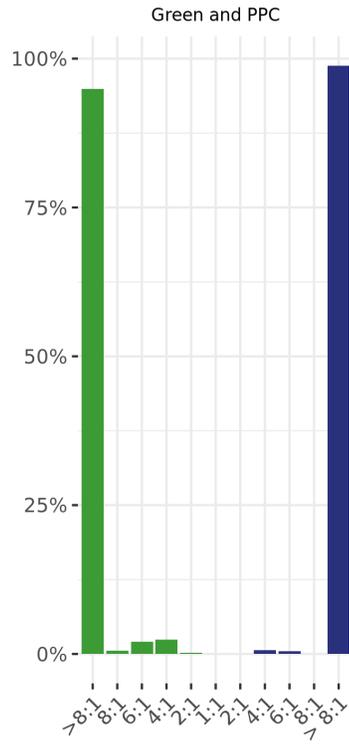
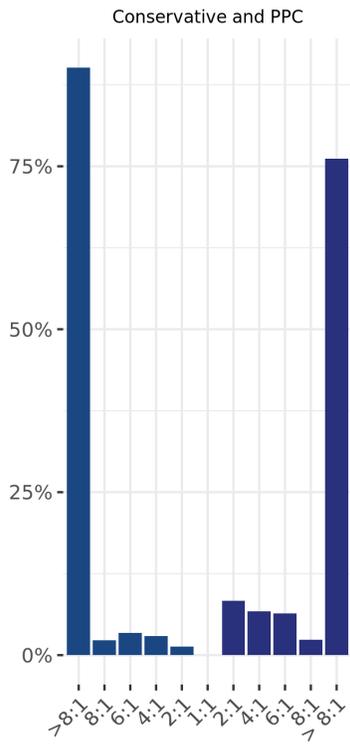
Survey respondents were asked questions related to basic demographics, as well as their partisan, ideological and issue preferences. They were also asked to identify their recent exposure to the news media. The median time it took respondents to complete the survey was 23 minutes. The survey instrument is available upon request. We present 90% confidence intervals for each of our figures. Our analyses of the correlates of the warm gap can be generalized to the full population +/- 4-5 at 90% confidence. Our analyses of the correlates of the affect gap can be generalized to the full population +/- 2 at 90% confidence. Finally, our analyses of the correlates of social distance can be generalized to the full population +/- 1-2 at 90% confidence.

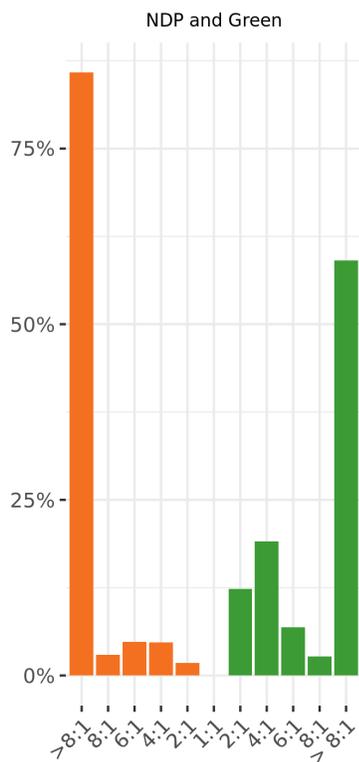
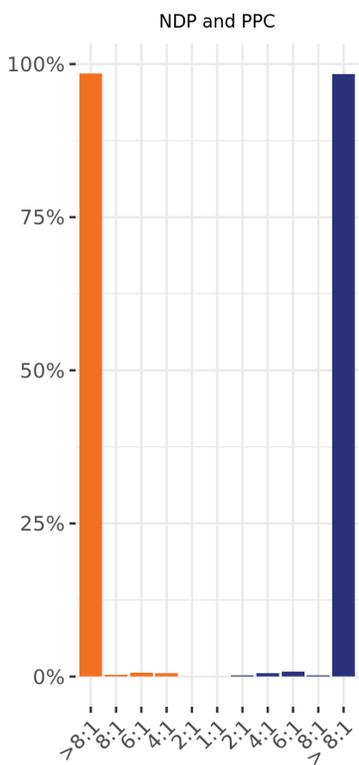
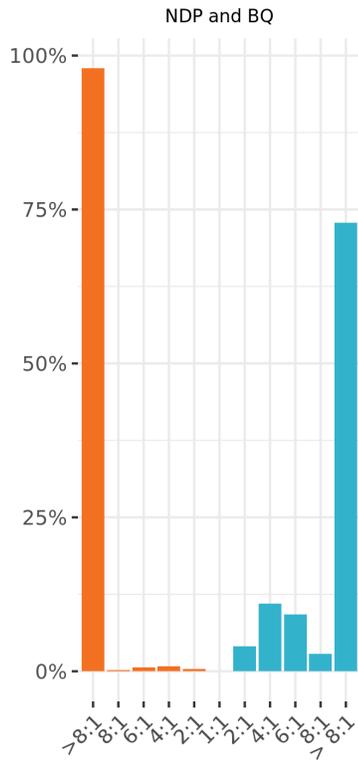
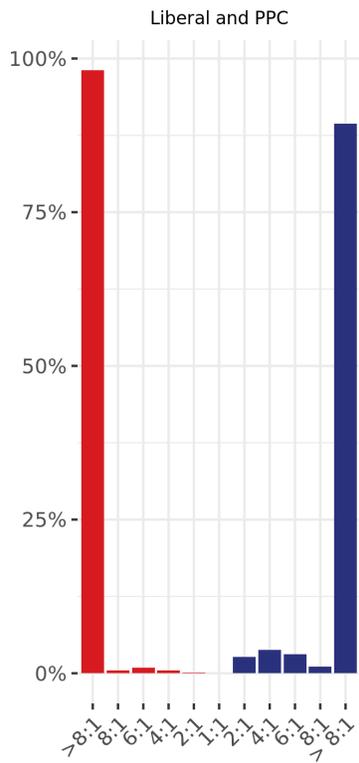
Twitter data was collected from accounts belonging to five categories of Twitter users: 1) major party candidates, for a total of approximately 1,047 candidates (including the two high-profile independent candidates, Jody Wilson-Raybould and Jane Philpott); 2) a list of more than 450 political journalists; 3) approximately 300 politically relevant third parties (including third parties registered with Elections Canada); 4) members of the public who included Canadian political hashtags in their tweets (e.g. #cdnpoli, #polcan, #elxn43); and 5) 153 official Twitter accounts of news organizations that cover Canadian politics. The initial seed lists and hashtags have been expanded by looking at co-occurrence and engagement with existing accounts. For hashtags, if two hashtags appear in a tweet, it is then flagged and manually reviewed for applicability. For additional handles, each individual who replies to or is replied to by someone either on the seed list or a candidate is then added to a list which is reviewed manually and added to the data collection. The Twitter data used in this report consists of approximately 11 million tweets and 46 million follower relationships.

Results shown focus on 25 selected publications which either display high variance in the follower network across the parties or are the most-followed outlets. Additional publications are available upon request.

# APPENDIX B: OTHER TWO-PARTY PAIRINGS







**DIGITAL  
DEMOCRACY  
PROJECT**

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