

## **Report on “Media-Driven Polarization. Evidence from the US”**

### **Summary**

The authors intend to study how the media’s coverage of politics affects political polarization in the US states. For this purpose, the authors combine the data from an individual survey of political attitudes for year 2008 with the data on the political content of newspapers by Campante and Do (2014) for the US states. Political polarization is measured as the individual self-assessment as being “strongly liberal”, “liberal”, “conservative”, or “strongly conservative”. The results suggest that an indicator that the individual is “interested in following campaigns” and its interaction with the measure of newspaper political content in a given state has a positive impact on the likelihood that the individual is “polarized”. The authors perform a placebo test using the survey data for year 2000 to argue that the impact they found can be interpreted as causal.

### **Main Comments**

1. The main concern is about the interpretation of the main variable of interest. The authors use individual responses as a measure of polarization. Political polarization is usually defined as “disagreement in the society on the political matters.” According to this definition, if all individuals in the state are “extremely liberal”, for example, there would be no political polarization. Thus, a more appropriate name for the variable used by the authors would be “political opinion,” or “self placement on political scale,” but it is difficult to understand how the individual responses can be called political polarization.

The authors mention (in footnote 5) a polarization measure by Reynal-Querol (2002) and Esteban and Ray (1994), and note that it is “a more accurate measure”. However, they neither provide any justification behind the individual measure that they use, nor explain why they do not use the measure by Esteban and Ray (or any other, there are plenty political polarization measures based on aggregated individual data). Of course, aggregating the responses on the state level would require a different estimation approach, the sample would be reduced to 40 observations, and the estimation procedure would have to be changed. If the authors prefer not to consider data aggregation, they would have to rename their dependent variable.

2. The authors should explain in more detail the data they use. For example, it is not clear for people unfamiliar with ANES, what is meant by the statement “interest in following campaigns” or “read about campaign in newspaper.” If the survey is about a particular political campaign preceding elections in a given year, the authors should explain this, as the estimation results may be driven by these facts.
3. Following previous comment, the authors’ finding that “liberals’ political attitudes are more elastic to media exposure” (page 7) may be a result of the

government politics in the considered year or any other event in a particular data period considered in the study (e.g., it is 2008, the year of crisis, which party was in power, which party won the election, what kind of campaign was it, etc?) Again, a description of the survey data and the “campaign” to which the authors refer throughout the paper would be useful.

4. The authors cannot claim that they found a “mechanism through which the media reinforces citizens’ political involvement” (page 8). It may be that the individuals who are more interested in politics are more informed and therefore read more newspapers. In the same vein, the last sentence in the conclusion is an unjustified statement.

#### Other Comments

- a. More details about the data are needed. What is the survey the authors use; what is meant by “interest in campaign”? Which “campaign” do they refer to?
- b. Why “Interest” is not included in Column (2) of Table 1? Is the sample restricted to individuals interested in campaign in that case? If not, what is the reason for exclusion of “Interest”? Why not to consider the interaction of “Interest”, “Read paper” and “Media”?
- c. Following previous point, why the analysis of Column (2) is not repeated for liberals and conservatives, as currently done in Columns (3) and (4) for “Interest”?
- d. If the main question of interest is “political polarization,” the purpose of Tables 2 and 3 is not clear.
- e. The paper need to be edited and proofread, it is difficult to understand the text.