SOCIAL SORTING AND GEOGRAPHIC CLUSTERING

SUMMARY OF RELATIONSHIP

Americans tend to seek residence areas with similar lifestyles when considering where to live, a phenomenon coined by Bill Bishop as the "Big Sort." The divide is typically characterized as urban areas being more liberal versus rural areas being more conservative. Many scholars agree the "Big Sort," or geographic clustering based off of a sense of social identity exists, but disagree over why it occurs and to what extent it drives **political polarization in terms of ideological divergence.** Furthermore, self-identified liberals and conservatives vary in ideological intensity depending on geographic region

OBSERVATION: PARTISAN PREFERENCES ARE STRONGLY CORRELATED TO POPULATION DENSITY.

In urban areas where population is more dense, liberal ideology among residents tends to be more prominent, while in rural areas, conservative ideology tends to be more prominent, resulting in **ideological divergence split along geographic lines.**

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FROM TWO SCHOLARS

ELAZAR'S POLITICAL CULTURES AND GEOGRAPHIC REGION

Daniel Elazar argues that all states can be divided into one of three political cultures which describe how a state approaches policymaking: moralistic, traditionalistic, and individualistic. Moralistic states tend to approach politics with the philosophy that government can advance the public good, individualistic states tend to approach politics as a competing marketplace of ideas, and traditionalistic states tend to approach politics as a means to preserve existing values and the status quo. Conservative, southern states tend to have traditionalistic political cultures, while more liberal northern and western states tend to have moralistic political cultures. Some northern, more liberal states have individualistic political cultures, while midwestern more conservative states also tend to have individualistic political cultures.

INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEMS

Nall argues that the rise of the interstate in the 1950s led to an increase in affluent, white residents in suburban areas, residents who tended to be more ideologically conservative and thus less Democratic. In the South, a more racially segregated area, this effect was more pronounced (Nall 399).

PARTISAN GERRYMANDERING

McCarthy, Poole, and Rosenthal all argue that partisan gerrymandering is one of the "prime suspects" in increased political polarization by ideological divergence and a decrease in self-identified moderates (McCarthy, Poole, & Rosenhall 678). They argued that gerrymandering by the political party in power is more to blame for ideological divergence polarization that social clustering, and suggested that blind districting by a third party would mitigate this type of polarization.

IN RELATION TO AUTHORITARIANISM AND PERSONALITY

Mondak and Canache argue that differences in political culture and beliefs can be attributed to certain personality traits (using the "Big Five"commonly discussed in psychology fields: experience, conscientiousness, extraversion versus introversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism). These personality traits may explain what causes some people to cluster together rather than others (Mondak & Canache 2014), and connects to Bill Bishop's argument about the "Big Sort." This social sorting argument contrasts with arguments such as McCarthy, Poole, & Rosenthal's and Nall's, which emphasize that other outside factors, such as interstate highways and partisan gerrymandering, have a greater effect on polarization by ideological divergence than personality and social clustering.

IN RELATION TO SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND SOCIAL COGNITION

Liben- Nowell et al. argue that in our world, where people arbitrarily are connected to friends of friends, passing messages down social chains is prevalent. Liben-Nowell et al also found that one-third of relationships are independent of geography, suggesting that because many chains of communication are geographically-based, people's social identities may be shaped by the social sorting occurring in geographic clusters. This contradicts the research of McCarthy, Poole, & Rosenthal, suggesting that geographic clusters and social sorting is a bigger influence on ideological divergence polarization than outside factors, such as interstate highways and partisan gerrymandering.

SCHOLARLY DISAGREEMENTS

Scholars disagree over whether or not social sorting into geographic clusters is a legitimate phenomenon, as well as what unit of geography to study.

Sussell and Thompson- Counties Unhelpful Units of Measurement
Scholars such as Sussell and Thomson believe that counties are unhelpful units of measurement that are not telling of the types of people who inhabit them, while neighborhoods where social clustering is more deliberate are better indicators of ideological divergence by geographic location. **Jonathan Rauch**, a correspondent at *The Atlantic* would agree, explaining that the rising amount of independents makes election results be region ineffective measures of polarization in terms of ideological divergence.

Tuschman- Social Clustering Intertwined with Geographic Clustering
However, correspondents such as Tuschman argue that social clustering has an impact on ideological divergence, which is intertwined with geographic clustering. Tuschman argues that when liberals or conservatives seek higher education, they become more ideologically polarized, reinforced by the ideas of the group they selected. They then use the mobility that comes from receiving higher education to move to new states, where they will likely continue to seek like-minded neighbors (Tuschman 2014)

WORKS CITED

Ira Sharkansky, "The Utility of Elazar's Political Culture: A Research Note," Polity 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1969): 66-83.

"Is Partisan Geographic Clustering of the American Electorate a Reality?" Are Changing
    Constituencies Driving Rising Polarization in the U.S. House of Representatives?, by
    Jesse Sussell and James A. Thomson, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif., 2015,
    pp. 3–12. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt13x1fv7.10.

Liben-Nowell, David, et al. "Geographic Routing in Social Networks." Proceedings of the
    Liben-Nowell, David, et al. "Geographic Routing in Social Networks." Proceedings of the

McCarty, Nolan, et al. "Does Gerrymandering Cause Polarization?" American Journal
    of Political Science, vol. 53, no. 3, 2009, pp. 666–680. JSTOR,
    www.jstor.org/stable/25548144

Mondak, Jeffery J., and Damarys Canache. "Personality and Political Culture in the
    American States." Political Research Quarterly, vol. 67, no. 1, 2014, pp. 26–41. JSTOR,
    www.jstor.org/stable/23612033.

Nall, Clayton. "The Political Consequences of Spatial Policies: How Interstate Highways
    Facilitated Geographic Polarization." The Journal of Politics, vol. 77, no. 2, 2015, pp.
    394–406. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/679597.

This article depicts how the rise on the interstate in the 1950s led to shifts in
geographic clustering. The use of the interstate highway system led to more affluent
whites settling in suburban areas, creating clusters of conservative residents with
similar lifestyles and political beliefs. In the South, where geographic areas were
already fairly racially segregated, Nall argued that this effect was even more
pronounced. In terms of methods, Nall defined suburban counties as having 20-100
kilometer geographic centroids and measured the impacts of various political factors
on the placement of highways surrounding the area.

Rauch, Jonathan. "Bipolar Disorder." *The Atlantic,* February 2005.
    https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/01/bipolar-disorder/303665/