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Can We All Just Get Along?: Affective Polarization and its Impact on College Campuses

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CAN WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?:

AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While the Trump presidency has been marked by one media storm after the next, one of the most potent controversies occurred in July, 2019, when President Trump suggested in a tweet that Democratic congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Talib, Ilhan Omar, and Ayanna Pressley should "go back" to their own countries and fix those problems before applying their brand of politics to the United States. That three of the four liberal congresswomen (now referred to as "the squad") were born in the United States and all are American citizens drew intense anger from the left, including numerous charges of racism against Trump. The president doubled down in response by criticizing Democrats' support for these congresswomen due to their far left brand of politics compared to the rest of their party. He tweeted that this support "means they are endorsing Socialism, hate of Israel and the USA!" (Davis 2019).

Given the unpredictability of Trump's Twitter activity, the accusation of socialism does not come as much surprise. Whether or not this tweet (or any of the president's tweets) was grounded in reality, a claim that an elected politician hates America has severe implications on our political system. Disagreements with the opposing political party would be expected across the aisle; accusations of them lacking patriotism would not. Though Republicans and Democrats might have different ideas about key policy issues, it's dubious that any elected official would run for office and enter a life of public service because of their hatred of the United States.

Three years earlier, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton drew ire from the right during a controversial campaign speech. In her remarks, she referred to a group of then candidate Donald Trump's supporters as belonging to the "basket of deplorables," which she claimed consisted of people who were drawn to Trump's rhetoric by their "racist, sexist, homophobic,

xenophobic, Islamophobic" beliefs. Just as with the prior example, it seems dubious to suggest that this substantial group of voters actually display such hatred to warrant this name-calling. Even if this portion of Trump supporters did hold such beliefs, it would seem that these accusations could be fundamentally incompatible with any candidate's desire to represent the entire American population.

The hatred and tension from this situation exemplify the current polarized state of American politics. Polarization refers to a deep division between two groups, sets of opinions, or beliefs. However, this definition addresses the general ideological division between Democrats and Republicans. These disagreements today may spill over into other aspects of our political and social lives, constituting a different kind of polarization called "affective polarization."

Iyengar and Westwood (2015) define affective polarization as "the tendency of people identifying as Republicans or Democrats to view opposing partisans negatively and co-partisans positively" (691). They highlight that biases of affective polarization can impact normally nonpartisan behavior. For instance, a Republican voter may be inclined not to hire a job candidate who is involved with their school's Young Democrats chapter, or vice versa (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). Indicating a partisan preference, even in this nonpolitical setting, can dissuade one from hiring or associating with another who supports the opposing party if they are motivated by affective polarization. Such behavior further sorts the American public into groups, bringing us closer to people we agree with and further from those we disagree with.

As a result of the social sorting described by Iyengar and Westwood (2015), our reactions to political messages have become more intense and emotional within these groups (Mason 2016). Some argue that this phenomenon exists because the strongest supporters of the

Democratic and Republican parties are moving farther to the left and right, respectively (Webster and Abramowitz 2017). Others suggest that divergences in policy preferences are actually minimal among voters and that affective polarization is driven by our elected representatives (Fiorina 2009).

Issue preferences only tell part of the story, however. Mason (2016) echoes much recent research in political science, noting that while it's difficult to conclude exactly how divided the electorate is on certain issues, analyses of issue positions fail to capture the emotional aspect of partisan politics. Regardless of its sources, affective polarization has likely hindered opportunities for Americans to find common ground or even have discussions about important issues. The existence of strong negative emotions toward "the other side" have flooded American politics: Americans are now less likely than at any time in recent history to want to have political discussions with people who disagree with them (Pew Research Center 2014).

These attitudes do not just come from purely political contexts. We see affective polarization when a generally apolitical situation becomes politicized. Perhaps the best example of this comes from the most recent season of HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. In the Season 10 premiere, "Happy New Year," protagonist (and satirical anti-hero) Larry David decides to buy a "Make America Great Again" hat in an effort to repel people. Living in the predominantly liberal Los Angeles area, David uses the hat to ward people off from sitting next to him at a bar, to get out of a meeting with an unpleasant acquaintance, and to appease a motorcyclist whom he cuts off in traffic. As comical as these scenes are, they demonstrate a true phenomenon in American society: People seem increasingly unwilling to associate with those who hold opposing viewpoints. This is born out in at least some quantitative data: Over 60% of citizens are living in

politically homogeneous neighborhoods that handed the election to one side by over a 20% margin (Wasserman 2017).

My thesis is about these divides. Following the 2016 presidential election, I experienced my own intense affective polarization. While an anger at the result eventually subsided, I continued exhibiting some of the behavior described above. At a certain point, I began to wonder why these feelings were so intense and how common such resentment was. Those feelings and questions ultimately served as the inspiration for this project. My thesis sets out to investigate the prevalence of affective polarization and uncover its implications, particularly on college campuses. Regardless of one's political beliefs, it seems wholly unproductive for Americans to dissociate or express such intense animosity towards the outgroup members. I will review literature and conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis to shed light on these topics.

Chapter 2 will delve further into scholarly literature on affective polarization and its implications on American society. In this chapter, I will investigate how scholars argue affective polarization has impacted our political discourse. I will also review existing research on how affective polarization specifically shapes political conversations on college campuses and to what extent it has hindered such conversations on campuses. I hope to reveal the breadth of the impact of affective polarization throughout this section.

Chapter 3 will introduce quantitative analysis. I plan to conduct analyses of several large-N, nationally representative surveys (including those conducted by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education and the Bucknell Institute for Public Policy) that explore (a) the idea of affective polarization in the American public, and (b) the public's perceptions of the climate for political discourse on college campuses. Are Americans really growing more angry at

those with whom they disagree, or less likely to have discussions with those who hold dissenting views? Who is most likely to feel this way? Do Americans think college campuses remain places for civil discourse and debate? Or do they think colleges have become echo chambers as well?

Chapter 4 will focus on qualitative evidence of polarization on college campuses. In this section, I will investigate a variety of topics, including how prevalent perceptions of political beliefs on campus lead to de facto self-censorship, and how much of this stems from affective polarization. In other words, I want to examine if students who refrain from voicing their political opinions do so because of fear of negative consequences of expressing an opposing viewpoint, or simply due to general apathy or a desire to stay away from controversial topics. This chapter will also analyze how media coverage on both ends of the political spectrum have influenced affective polarization. Moreover, this section will attempt to determine whether attitudes about political discourse stem from the current political climate or have existed long before the hyperpolarization of the 21st century United States.

Chapter 2: Literature Review on Affective Polarization

Section 2.1 Overview

In this chapter, I will review existing literature on affective polarization as well as extreme partisanship in the United States. This will begin with a general analysis of how these phenomena have increased over the past half century and have become even more prevalent in recent years. I will then discuss the effects of increased affective polarization in terms of both political and social interactions. Subsequently, I will highlight a number of advanced implications of affective polarization on American society and political discourse, including its impact on college campuses.

While polarization maintains a constant presence in contemporary political discourse, it's important to first put in perspective the effect that it has on our attitudes. According to the American National Election Study (ANES), citizens' support and approval of their own political party has remained relatively constant over the past 40 years. At the same time, the animosity Americans feel towards the other political party has increased significantly. These sentiments are measured as a "temperature," indicating how positively or negatively citizens feel towards a party, ranging from 100 degrees (most positive) to 0 degrees (most negative). In 1978, ANES data shows a difference of roughly 23 degrees between feelings towards one's own party and positive feelings towards the opposite party. By 2016, this gap widened to about 41 degrees (Iyengar et al. 2019). In keeping with this temperature metaphor, it seems that a sort of ideological climate change has taken place. Whereas we once felt only a marginal difference (or decline in temperature) between our own party and the opposing one, we now view the out-group as a brutally cold winter day when compared to a pleasant spring day.

What has caused this significant change in the partisan climate? One such reason is ideological realignment, the majority of which took place during the latter half of the 20th century. From the 1970s to the 1990s, citizens' party allegiance shifted from the party that their parents supported to the party that aligned with their policy preferences (Abramowitz and Sanders 1998). For instance, Abramowitz and Sanders note that Republican gains "have been greatest among members of groups with conservative policy preferences, such as white males and white southerners" (1998, 648). As a result, citizens today exhibit more loyalty to their own party through straight-ticket voting. Moreover, elections for Senate, the House of Representatives, and even state government have gained increasing national attention as negative partisanship drives citizens to want to prevent the out-group from gaining political power (Abramowitz and Webster 2016).

This affective nature of polarization extends well beyond electoral politics to generally nonpartisan behavior. For example, a Democratic voter may be inclined not to hire a job candidate who is involved with their school's Young Republicans chapter, or vice versa (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). According to Iyengar and Westwood's (2015) study, partisanship had a more demonstrable effect on respondents' hiring choices than race. Furthermore, they find that such affective polarization seems to have a relatively equal effect from both sides of the aisle. Ultimately, extreme partisanship is shown to reach into a number of our social and economic activities (see Engelhardt and Utych 2018; McConnell et al. 2018).[1]

In political debates, affective polarization has narrowed the path for common ground on key issues. Disdain of the opposite party inspires some citizens to prefer their representatives not

[1] I will revisit these examples in greater detail in Section 2.

to engage with that party's proposals at all, rather than potentially agreeable points to a solution. In fact, Wolf et al. (2012) suggest that "partisan beliefs are coupled with a commitment to political strategies that undercut the ability to negotiate political compromise" (1689). Such behavior is often utilized by our elected officials on the national stage. For instance, we can use this lense to analyze Republicans' refusal to consider President Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court or Democrats' vehement opposition to President Trump's immigration policies. Garland was highly qualified to serve as a Supreme Court Justice and Trump's border wall would barely register a fraction in the national budget. These displays of partisanship are not signs of how far apart the parties are on issues, but how much they are affectively polarized. In each case, we see hostility between Democrats and Republicans as the catalyst for their behavior instead of actual issue positions. Such strategies clearly play well to already polarized citizens of one side or the other, but a lack of willingness to compromise can have severe implications for the policy making process and inhibit important political debates.

Section 2.2 Analyzing Polarization

Though some contend that polarization does not have a deep impact on American society and only impacts elites or activists (e.g. Fiorina 2017), Abramowitz and Saunders (2006) demonstrate that the ideological distance between parties has nearly doubled since the 1970s. In addition, they suggest that most informed and politically active citizens are polarized while those who are not as informed tend to "cluste[r] near the center of the ideological spectrum" (554). Similar research shows that a plurality of citizens identify themselves as strong partisans, thus

indicating that American politics does not necessarily force a mass of ideological moderates to choose between extremes (Wolf et al. 2012).

Prior to the ideological realignment of political parties, the American Political Science Association (APSA) took a stance in their 1950 report, "Towards a More Responsible Two-Party System," that now reads rather ironically given the problems that polarization has since caused in our political discourse and policy making. In the report, APSA proposes to "keep the parties apart" by creating more cohesive platforms (1). Moreover, they argue the need for "organized party opposition" as well as party loyalty to their respective platforms (2). Since the publication of the report, party policies have become more salient and identifiable for citizens (Hetherington 2002), yet while APSA does govern the field of political science, they do not determine what actually happens in the realm of politics.[2] Nevertheless, this report has reentered public conversation as critics lament the polarizing nature of the current political climate (Wickham-Jones 2018).

The authors of the APSA report would be pleased to see the strong identities of today's major parties, but they might not view the side effects of gridlock and lack of compromise as a realization of their proposals. This polarization can have an especially negative effect on Independent voters, who show less interest and trust in the political process once polarization is identified as a salient issue. Research suggests that when polarization is framed as a hindrance to effective policy making, citizens are more likely to support bipartisanship and listen to arguments from the opposing party (Robinson and Mullinix 2016). However, it's clear from the words and actions of politicians from both sides that salience does not dissuade them from a fiery

[2] Among other proposed changes that have not come to fruition, the 1950 APSA report also suggested revisions to the electoral college and a completely unified party platform (Wickham-Jones 2018).

refusal to cooperate with the other's legislative agenda. Multiple examples come from just prior to the 2010 midterm elections, when House Minority Leader John Boehner claimed that Republicans would do "everything" to "kill," "stop," or "slow down" President Obama's legislative agenda. At the same time, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell stated that his party's goal was to make Obama a "one-term president" (Barr 2010). Democrats in Washington are guilty of similar offenses, to the point where compromise and bipartisan legislation is often portrayed as "rare" (e.g. Armour 2019).

How did American politics get to this point? In part, this came from the ideological sorting of political parties over the past half century. The Democratic Party used to consist of both Northern liberals and Southern conservatives remaining from the New Deal coalition, while the Republican Party also played home to a mix of ideologies. Starting in the 1970's, Republican leaders worked to reshape the party under a strictly conservative ideology, recruiting Southern Democrats and purging more moderate members. These developments created more ideologically homogeneous parties heading into the 21st century, with the Republicans adhering to conservatism and Democrats trending towards liberalism (Rosenfeld 2017). Likewise, geographic areas are becoming more ideologically homogeneous and have fostered divides throughout the country, particularly as the Northeast and West votes increasingly Democratic and the South and Interior West votes primarily Republican (Hopkins 2018). In addition to these changes, technological advances have proliferated the number of partisan or ideologically slanted news sources. Whereas Americans previously could have trusted Walter Cronkite to report the truth, now the electorate can turn to conservative-leaning outlets like FoxNews or liberal-leaning ones like MSNBC to hear news more favorable to their own party. Slanted news sources might

not have as strong of an impact on ideological moderates, but they appear to pull the American left and right further apart (Levendusky 2013). Each of these factors have had polarizing impacts on our political system and appear detrimental to coexistence between parties.

Section 2.3 Having a Conversation

How deep are the divisions between the Democratic and Republican parties? Is the hatred between them significant enough to prevent any sort of dialogue with members of the opposing party? Scholarship on this issue reaches a variety of different conclusions. It's possible that our divisions result not from tribalism but from "sincere disagreements over policy" (Webster and Abramowitz 2017, 635). These disagreements over issues are so fierce that they inspire emotional responses and affective polarization, but might be primarily confined to real disagreements over issues, not a simple hatred of "the other side." Still, intense negative reactions to the opposing party might stem only from the strongest of partisans (Webster and Abramowitz 2017).

Another possible explanation for these divides is that many Americans simply have a disdain for politics, rather than for a particular political party. Klar et al. (2018) suggest that some literature on affective polarization often conflates these two conclusions. Respondents to surveys on affective polarization may not dislike someone who is a vocal Republican because they are a liberal Democrat; however, they may dislike that individual because they have an aversion for politics and simply dislike how strongly politics pervades all aspects of American discourse. Perhaps, then, people are simply happier by avoiding conversations about politics, and are more willing to spend time with people who hold opposing political views as long as they do

not discuss politics (Klar et al. 2018). Although this social arrangement could produce a more civil relationship between partisans, it seems counterproductive to political discourse for individuals who disagree with each other to refrain from a discussion altogether.

In contrast to the above explanations, some research indicates that citizens exhibit the most emotional reactions to political messages when "social identities line up behind partisan identities" (Mason 2016, 352). According to Mason, this social sorting can result in our refusal to accommodate or even listen to those on the other side of an issue. In turn, some citizens drift further and further away from each other. This refusal to listen to opposing viewpoints might lead us to only seek out news and opinion articles from sources that have partisan leanings, while factors such as social media and search engines help fuel this ideological divide. Although this behavior might not fully insulate us from hearing outgroup opinions, it's clear that this social sorting contributes heavily to our ideological cleavages (Flaxman et al. 2016).

The other side of this social sorting is that citizens may self-censor themselves in order not to distinguish themselves as a member of the opposing party. Hayes et al. (2006) define self-censorship loosely as one's "reticence to express their opinions in a hostile opinion climate" (261). In other words, an individual might avoid discussing difficult issues for fear of censure or negative reactions from their peers. According to Hayes et al. (2006), those who self-censor also tend to be less politically active, since most expressions of political opinions, other than voting, have a public nature to them. For instance, a Trump supporter living in a predominantly Democratic community might withhold from wearing a "Make America Great Again" hat because of the risk of being ostracized by that community. Although like-minded conversations

have their benefits (Mutz 2002), self-censorship appears largely detrimental to American political discourse.

From these ideological and affective differences emerge two types of citizenship: an idealized model and a realistic model. While an ideal citizen is open to broad discussions about issues and approaches opposing perspectives with an open mind, many might not be willing to do so in practice. In today's politics, "calls for debate and open-mindedness are seen as efforts to delay and derail" and citizens tend to view compromise as a sign of weakness rather than as a sign of a successful, deliberative society (MacKuen et al. 2010, 440).

However, research suggests that contemporary American politics still allow for less hostile debate if we approach it with a certain mindset. Often citizens will respond to opposing policy ideas with either aversion or anxiety. While aversion inspires a more negative reaction and an inclination to hold fast to one's convictions, anxiety begets further investigation into an issue. Put differently, reacting in the latter way evokes a less intense, emotional response than the former (MacKuen et al. 2010; Weeks 2015). Furthermore, the anxious reaction towards outgroup policy ideas can motivate a desire to seek more information, therein opening citizens to the possibility of legitimate solutions coming from the other side of the aisle. Thus, affective polarization presents noticeable social barriers between partisans, although these barriers are not impossible to overcome.

Section 2.4 Advanced Implications

Of course, affective polarization extends beyond an emotional disdain for the outgroup. Research on the subject suggests affective polarization can act as a powerful motivator for our

economic and social behavior in a variety of contexts. It's possible that such phenomena are occurring since partisanship has taken on a deeper meaning; rather than simply indicating one's policy or party preferences, the term now seems to evoke one's identity, values, and worldview. Just as aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, and religion can strongly influence one's actions, partisanship can also drive economic and nonpolitical behavior (McConnell et al. 2018). For example, one might demand a lower reservation wage when hired by ingroup partisans because they are effectively compensated further by the favorable work environment

Affective polarization remains salient even in relation to other divisive, though perhaps less serious, situations. For instance, Engelhardt and Utych (2018) find that college football fans demonstrate stronger price discrimination against outgroup partisans than against fans of the opposing team. Such results are striking given the passion of college football rivalries, particularly the Alabama-Auburn one used in their example. While in theory a Republican Alabama fan should be much more averse to selling his or her neighboring seats to an Auburn fan irrespective of that fan's political affiliation, this study suggests that a Democrat would be more susceptible to price gouging in this scenario than a copartisan. Engelhardt and Utych (2018) argue that these "results suggest that the mere mention of partisan attachment is sufficient for it to shape outcomes in nonpolitical settings, but the question remains whether partisanship matters in areas where it is not mentioned at all" (18). This assertion recalls Hayes' (et al. 2006) claims about self-censorship and the inevitably public nature of political activity. In this case, the fan's identification as a member of a political party brought the issue to light for the ticket seller, opening the door for partisanship to motivate this fundamentally nonpartisan interaction.

Scholarship on affective polarization also suggests that our partisan leanings can trump even our own economic gain. In one study, respondents were offered the option of receiving $3 for completing a survey or receiving $6 plus an additional $4 donated to their rival political party. According to McConnell et al. (2018), 75.4% of respondents were willing to turn down their own additional economic gains for the sake of preventing a further gain for the outgroup. When offered even more money matched with a donation to the opposing political party, only a small percentage (roughly 4%) of respondents reneged on their partisan affiliations to accept the money. A follow-up experiment confirms that intense partisan attitudes, not an aversion to politics, were the driving factor behind such behavior. In that study, roughly 85% of respondents chose to receive more money with a small sum also donated to their own political party (McConnell et al. 2018). Hence, strong partisan attitudes have a demonstrable impact on our economic behavior, regardless of whether this behavior has anything to do with politics in the first place.

Likewise, this polarization contributes to how we view our peers on a number of levels. For one, affective polarization might impact our impressions of an individual's attractiveness. One study from the 2012 election cycle shows that Democrats found an individual more attractive when he or she was introduced as an Obama supporter and less attractive when he or she was introduced as a Romney supporter. The same pattern occurred in reverse for Republican respondents. Not only did individuals find their co-partisans more attractive, they also expressed more negative feelings towards the descriptions of outgroup partisans (Nicholson et al. 2016).

Even more powerful than attraction is our intense aversion to the opposing party, which can lead us as far as to dehumanize the other side. Scholarship on this topic highlights two main

ways of dehumanization: mechanistic dehumanization, which portrays the other side as "having no feelings" or "like robots," as well as animalistic dehumanization, which deems the other side as "uncivilized" or "like animals" (Martherus et al. 2019, 18). Though the most polarized individuals are the most likely to dehumanize opposing partisans, citizens are much more likely to give outgroup members a lower rating on a feeling thermometer (see Iyengar et al. 2019) than to strongly dehumanize them in their opinions (Martherus et al. 2019).

Cassese (2019) highlights that there are also two levels of dehumanization: subtle and blatant. While subtle dehumanization consists of both mechanistic and animalistic perceptions of the other party, blatant dehumanization was measured based on how evolved one thought members of the other party are. This scale ranged from "subhuman" beings from early in our species' evolution to humans today (Cassese 2019, 9). Blatant dehumanization suggests a significant social and moral distance from outgroup partisans, so it's possible that those who harbor such strong negative feelings reside in echo chambers, far from dissenting opposing viewpoints. Still, given the observational nature of this blatant dehumanization metric, it's not worth focusing our concern on that matter (Cassese 2019).

Conversely, it's important to note that citizens may be more willing to demean outgroup partisans in animalistic terms rather than mechanistic ones (Martherus et al. 2019). We can observe this behavior on the national stage. Take President Trump's infamous rhetoric on immigration: He opened his campaign accusing that Mexicans illegally immigrating to the United States were "bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists, and some I assume are good people…" (Neate 2015). In 2018, Trump said "You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals" in reference to illegal immigrants,

specifically (according to President Trump) those who had come and became members of the MS-13 Gang (Qiu 2018). While these instances do not dehumanize on the basis of party affiliation, they do exemplify how today's rhetoric can actively paint others as animals.[3] This dehumanization as often been used against Trump as well, with many politicians and opinion articles describing his character with epithets that range from more human but demeaning ones (like "racist" and "sexist") to animalistic ones that call him an outright "monster" (e.g. Jenkins 2017).

Section 2.5 Affective Polarization on College Campuses

Political Beliefs on Campus

How do these issues manifest on college campuses? Do college students seem open to grappling with opposing viewpoints? To consider this first question, it's necessary to confront the perception of "liberal bias" on college campuses. While consensus indicates that the majority of professors vote Democratic, these professors are not necessarily "the lockstep, party-line lefties that you've read about in the national press" (Zimmerman 2016, 11). Moreover, professors have jumped further to the ideological left over time, as a comparable percentage of academics identified as Democrats (roughly 50 percent) in the 1950s and 1960s as do today. Zimmerman (2016) also downplays the perceived radicalism of professors, noting that the majority of those who identify as Marxists "came of age amid the revolutionary fervor of the 1960s" (13). Thus, radicalism does not seem to be increasing as younger professors enter the field.

[3] As does the "deplorables" comment from Hillary Clinton, mentioned in Chapter 1.

Still, a certain liberal bias does fuel affective polarization in academia. Some conservative professors refrain from revealing their personal politics until receiving tenure, at which point they might still be ostracized from their colleagues once they are ideologically "out." Consider the following example:

> When he was a junior professor, one conservative reported, a senior colleague flatly announced that no Republican would get tenure in his department. The professor bit his tongue until he was tenured, of course. Then he revealed his true politics, at which point several members of the department stopped talking to him (Zimmerman 2016, 14).

Perhaps this situation is not the norm, yet it still seems shocking to see how far some might carry their distaste for outgroup partisans. Paradoxically, few professors would "openly [admit] a bias against racial minorities on campus…. By contrast, many faculty feel perfectly free to announce their prejudices against the political minority in their midst" (Zimmerman 2016, 14). From these accounts, we can see how college campuses might privilege liberal ideas while discounting conservative ones.

Despite the validity of such qualitative evidence, it's difficult to arrive at a conclusion on how prominent this anti-conservative bias is within university faculty. One survey found that Democrats "frequently" or "sometimes" self-censored slightly more than Republicans (30 percent compared to 23 percent), although it also found that 35 percent of independents reported this level of self-censorship (Rothman et al. 2011). These results produce more questions than answers, namely whether independent voters fundamentally are worried about offending their fellow faculty members or if individuals with such concerns identify as independents for that very reason. As Rothman et al. (2011) suggest, "Identification as an 'Independent' may, itself, be an indication that one avoids taking positions" (179). Moreover, the implications of these

statistics are unclear because the survey it comes from analyzes schools from across the country. Liberal bias might be a bigger deal at elite liberal arts institutions, so the data might be skewed by the subjects included. Whatever the internal politics of a university might be, it's possible that perceived left-leaning bias of professors is blown out of proportion. Zimmerman (2016) contends that "The more that conservatives attack the university, the less attractive it becomes as a career option to members of their own camp" (16). He might be correct, to an extent, that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy, but some of the attitudes of liberal professors detailed above seem ethically unjustifiable, especially if one of the goals of academia is to truly foster critical analysis of ideas.

The other half of the "liberal bias" is the politics of the students themselves. In terms of party affiliation, Rothman et al. (2011) report that 32 percent of students identify themselves as supporters of the Democratic Party, while 26 percent side with the Republican Party. In general, students tend to have liberal views on social issues, such as climate change, abortion, or LGBTQ rights, yet many students "don't fit our standard conceptions of 'liberal' or 'conservative' at all" (Zimmerman 2016, 17). Zimmerman and Rothman et al. cite students' beliefs on issues such as afffirmative action, illegal immigration, and the death penalty as examples of student politics that might land to the right of traditional liberal beliefs or to the left of traditional conservative ones. In addition, many students might even feel disappointed with the state of American politics or an apathy towards their ability to make a difference (Zimmerman 2016).[4]

[4] In Chapter 4, I will investigate how this apathy might impact Bucknell University's student body.

Political Correctness, Microaggressions, and Victimhood

The most prominent, and perhaps most scrutinized, liberal beliefs on college campuses might stem from attitudes on political correctness and a plethora of areas that branch off of this concept, including microaggressions and victimhood. Political correctness generally refers to "efforts to replace unkind or offensive terms with more neutral ones" (Zimmerman 2016, 24). Over the course of the past half century, political correctness has sought to phase words out of our vocabulary in favor of "less stigmatizing" phrases, such as "disabled" for "crippled" or "Asian" for "Oriental" (Zimmerman 2016, 25). However, the concept extends far beyond obviously derogatory words. Starbucks, for example, used neutral red cups during the holiday season in 2015 to "welcome all of our stories" in place of their tradition to use cups that said "Merry Christmas" on them (Whitten 2015). The implication was that the traditional message excluded Americans who do not celebrate Christmas, though the politics of inclusivity ultimately drew ire from then presidential candidate Donald Trump, who suggested a boycott of the coffee company, and many Christian groups. Popular evangelist speaker Joshua Feuerstein went as far as to suggest that "in the age of political correctness, we've become so open-minded our brains have literally fallen out of our head" (Whitten 2015). As a result, a good intention to promote a nondenominational holiday message effectively sparked a "War on Christmas" in American popular culture. However, this case might better embody elite polarization than behavior prevalent among the general electorate.

Still, this Starbucks case extends far beyond college campuses, but political correctness can pervade through academia as well. Some students may take issue with English syllabi that favor Western, white male authors over a more diverse selection of works (Zimmerman 2016).

Such a perspective suggests that students might be reading too much of Shakespeare and Hobbes without focusing on influential pieces by women and people of color. Moreover, political correctness seems to label certain ideas as taboo in academia. One of the more famous instances of this occurred in 2006, when Harvard University's president Larry Summers contended that "one possible explanation for the lack of women in science fields might be attributed to differences in intrinsic aptitude" (Rothman et al. 2011, 160). Reacting to what was presumably interpreted as a statement discounting female intellect, the Harvard faculty ousted Summers that same year. Reports suggest that Summers' statement was far from the start of his divide with the university's faculty, but expressing this idea fueled the motivation to remove him from office.

Fifteen years prior to Summers' removal, President George H.W. Bush observed how political correctness represents a double-edged sword in a speech at the University of Michigan. During this commencement address, Bush argued that "although the [political correctness] arises from the laudable desire to sweep away the debris of racism and sexism and hatred, it replaces old prejudice with new ones…." (Rothman et al. 2011, 162). In other words, the quest to rid our vocabulary of symbols of discrimination create a new oppression, or even "censorship" in Bush's words, against those with opposing viewpoints or who are not as careful with their word choice. Bush added that "disputants treat sheer force, getting their foes punished or expelled for instance, as a substitute for the power of ideas. They've invited people to look for an insult in every word, gesture, action" (Rothman et al. 2011, 162). Bush's speech seems to directly foreshadow Summers' downfall at Harvard. Moreover, his remarks forecast the state of political discourse on college campuses taking place over a quarter century later.

The possibility of an insult in every word, as Bush mentions, begins to explain microaggressions. Stated differently, microaggressions "are small actions or word choices that seem on their face to have no malicious intent but that are thought of as a kind of violence nonetheless" (Lukianoff and Haidt 2015). Some microaggressions represent more obvious and contentious offenses, such as how Summers' suggestion about women in science implies a gender disparity in affinity for the hard sciences. Summers likely did not intend to demean women's intellectual capabilities with his remarks, but it seems clear how such an assertion could be interpreted in this way. Other microaggressions may be less clear in how they embody violence. For instance, the phrase "you guys" directed towards a group of males and females has been identified as a microaggression (Campbell and Manning 2018). The offense in this case is to refer to the mixed group as a masculine whole, though this complaint appears to nitpick at a phrase used colloquially by countless individuals rather than point out a true bias or lack of perspective as seen in the Summers example.

Campbell and Manning (2018) suggest that microaggressions have created a new "moral culture" marked by hypersensitivity, the need to "handle conflicts through complaints to authorities and other third parties," and the cultivation of "an image of being victims who deserve assistance" (11). On college campuses, such a culture can establish a limited spectrum for acceptable stances in debate. Even if political correctness seeks to protect students from hate speech, some interpret efforts to avoid microaggressions as a way of insulating students from real world problems (Lukianoff and Haidt 2015).

The above literature makes it clear that the culture of political correctness has many critics, but how does it impact students? A 2017 YouGov survey reached 1,250 undergraduates

at both two-year and four-year colleges to uncover results. While this sample is representative of the college population overall, it might not fully capture behavior seen at elite institutions which tend to play host to more speech-related controversy. According to this survey, an overwhelming majority of students were generally comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions in college classrooms. However, on the more extreme ends of the ideological spectrum, very liberal students felt significantly more comfortable than very conservative students about speaking their mind in class (about 14 percentage points higher).[5] In addition, over half of survey respondents felt that they have exhibited self-censorship in the classroom, preventing themselves from expressing their true viewpoints (FIRE 2017). The latter statistics, particularly on self-censorship, hint at the effect of political correctness and the consequences of microaggressions on college students. A similar 2019 study confirms how much influence this culture holds. The most telling statistic finds that "57% of students think colleges should be able to restrict student expression of political views that seem hurtful or offensive" (FIRE 2019, 3).[6] It's possible to interpret these results as an endorsement of political correctness, or that students want action taken against those who hold potentially controversial views.

Some may defend the value in stopping particularly hateful views from permeating campuses, but Campbell and Manning (2018) would argue that this response fits the mold they describe: students looking for a third party, their college administration, to deal with situations they feel victimized by. Irrespective of this argument, it seems that political correctness can significantly affect discourse on campus both in theory and in practice. Zimmerman (2016) affirms this notion, highlighting research that finds how liberal arts students may either feel

[5] I will revisit this idea with qualitative data in Chapter 4.
[6] This question as well as others from both the 2017 and 2019 FIRE reports will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

silenced by the basis of discussion or be fearful of the "ridicule" they might face for "expressing unpopular opinions" (35). Ultimately, hostility towards these viewpoints seems paradoxical, given that a majority of college students and faculty see the exploration of new ideas as one of the central purposes of higher education (Rothman et al. 2011).

The 2016 Election and its Aftermath on Campus

The above issues do not occur in a vacuum, and the clear inflection point for many of these developments is the 2016 presidential election. Following confirmation of Trump's victory, protests and walkouts occurred at a number of universities across the country. Among other complaints about the president-elect's qualifications and character, many students expressed how they no longer felt safe. For some, these qualms stemmed from anxiety for the future of the country. For others, their worries demonstrated a serious concern for their livelihood in the wake of the election (Mele and Correal 2016). One social media post shared across all demographics but especially visible to college students stated "IF YOU VOTED FOR TRUMP TODAY, make sure to explain to your LGBT+, female, black, latino/a, Muslim friends why they don't matter to you." Evidently, this outcry only tells one side of the story, that of more vocal Democrats who vehemently opposed Trump's candidacy. However, these examples do encapsulate the sentiments that reverberated across campuses on election night and beyond.

College administrations also took action to support students distraught by the election results. Across the country, universities released statements supporting diversity on campus and held events that invited students to reflect or vent (Dickerson and Saul 2016). At Harvard, President Drew Faust- ironically, the president who succeeded Summers- opened her office to all

"concerned students" who wished to speak with her (Campbell and Manning 2018, xii). These acts of solidarity responded in part to immature acts by Trump supporters on campus, ranging from driving around campuses with Trump flags to derogatory comments towards minority students to literally spitting at Clinton supporters protesting on campus (Dickerson and Saul 2016).

On the one hand, colleges' responses to the election seem appropriate given the worries of their students. At the time, many students felt threatened by Trump's rhetoric and behavior on the campaign trail. To this group, his election was an endorsement of such actions. On the other hand, such analysis discounts the fact that the 2016 election presented two historically unpopular candidates, effectively leaving Americans with a choice of "the lesser of two evils" (Long 2016). Therefore, Trump's victory did not necessarily mean the public's endorsement of his baggage. Rather, more Americans in key states might have felt that he represented the slightly better option in a choice between a loud-mouthed reality television star an establishment politician attached to a number of controversies. Furthermore, some would contend that administrative responses to the election were unnecessary and shield students from grappling with serious issues (e.g. Lukianoff and Haidt 2015).

Given this backdrop for politics on college campuses, one can understand why political correctness and the vocal reaction to the 2016 election might create intense divisions on campus. Perhaps these divisions are quite noticeable, particularly when students gather to advocate for or against critical policy developments in Washington or to protest controversial speakers visiting campus (see Zimmerman 2016, Campbell and Manning 2018). Or maybe these divisions go largely unseen, as students refrain from expressing their true beliefs for fear that outing

themselves will ostracize them from classmates or even friends. The qualitative research component of my thesis aims to investigate this question and explore the attitudes and divisions that affect political discourse on college campuses.

Section 2.6 Conclusion

At the national level, American political parties seem more divided than ever. Although scholarship once suggested the benefits of more polarized parties, the transition from the loose coalitions of the mid-20th century to the hyperpartisan behavior in Washington today has demonstrated the severe effects of such a system. Sometimes our elected representatives or regular citizens are able to overcome these differences, but polarization often creates barriers that extend far beyond the realm of actual policy. Ultimately, party affiliation can influence social behavior, causing one to treat another differently on the basis of their political beliefs despite the apolitical nature of a situation.

Affective polarization also manifests on college campuses. Some divisions appear in the form of actual ideological differences among faculty or students on public policy issues. Others stem from concerns about political correctness and maintaining a particular environment on campus. In 2016, these factors combined to produce intense reactions to the results of the presidential election. As colleges struggle to bridge the gap between both sides of the ideological spectrum, students feel uncomfortable expressing their true opinions for risk of backlash from their peers or professors. While an overarching solution is necessary to reduce hatred between opposing camps, it's particularly critical to address this problem on college campuses, places intended to foster respectful debate and to challenge students to grapple with important issues.

Chapter 3: Quantitative Research

Section 3.1 Overview

Having reviewed a breadth of scholarship on affective polarization, I will now highlight national survey data that reflects college students attitudes on the topic. I will draw mainly from two surveys conducted by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) and one conducted by the Bucknell Institute for Public Policy (BIPP). The first FIRE study, titled "Speaking Freely," was published in 2017 and focuses on "what students think about expression at American colleges." It surveys 1,250 undergraduate students from both two-year and four-year colleges. The second FIRE study, "What Students Think About," was published in 2019 and explores similar themes of expression and association on college campuses. This study uses YouGov survey data from 2,225 undergraduate students, also from both two-year and four-year colleges. The BIPP survey hits on similar issues, supplementing data found in FIRE's research. However, the BIPP survey is a nationally representative survey (with a sample of 1,200 respondents) that includes respondents who are college students, faculty, and the general population.

This section will begin with anecdotal evidence of affective polarization on college campuses before analyzing specific data from national surveys. I will also break down the significance of these results based on factors such as political affiliation, ideology, race, and gender. The goal of this chapter will be to find patterns of agreement and disagreement along these subgroups of the student population. This quantitative data will then be used to guide my qualitative research on Bucknell students, providing points of further investigation or raising questions that may be best answered by real discussions rather than through a survey lab.

Section 3.2 Setting the Scene- Guest Speakers

Though political activism might become more prevalent on college campuses during election cycles, one of the best thermometers for student's opinions is their reactions to guest speakers on campus and to national news stories. For instance, when right-wing political commentator Ben Shapiro came to speak at Boston University in November of 2019, he was met by hecklers in the audience and protesters outside the event. Some interrupted Shapiro's speech with shouts or whistles, while others walked out of the event (or were escorted out of the event by security). The talk, "America wasn't built on slavery, it was built on freedom," drew ire from the group Black BU as well as other student organizations. Shapiro had been criticized in the past for his views on race, and "urged attendees to 'stop conflating the past' history of slavery 'with the present'" (Saric 2019). The student group that invited him, Young Americans for Freedom, stated that "Ben Shapiro has repeatedly and vehemently condemned racism, and he is by no means denying the historical existence and significance of slavery" (Saric 2019). Regardless of the merits (or lack thereof) of Shapiro's speech, his message was clearly controversial. Still, given that Shapiro runs the right-wing *Daily Wire* website and is somewhat known for provoking the left (Tavernise 2017), the reactions he was met with should not have come as a surprise.

However, it's not just provocateurs who can be met with student outrage. In 2014, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was invited to give Rutgers University's commencement address. University President Robert Barchi said to the Rutgers community that "Whatever your personal feelings or political views about our commencement speaker, there can be no doubt that Condoleezza Rice is one of the most influential intellectual and political figures of the last 50

years" (Fitzsimmons 2014). Rice was the first female to serve as National Security Advisor (2001-2005) and the first African-American female to serve as Secretary of State (2005-2009), both under the Bush administration. Her resume suggests she was a trailblazer who paved the way for women in politics who would come later, particularly in the national security sector.

Ultimately, the student body felt Rice's involvement in the Iraq War outweighed her credentials for delivering a moving commencement speech. Students pressured Brachi and faculty condemned her invitation until Rice decided not to follow through with the speech, not wanting to become a "distraction" for the graduating students and their families (Fitzsimmons 2014). While it's possible that some in the Rutgers community were simply averse to a politician speaking at commencement, Rice was far from an ideologue. Moreover, complaints of Rice's role in the Bush administration's ulterior motives for the invasion of Iraq, while valid, might place a disproportionate amount of the blame on Rice compared to other American leaders who pushed heavily for military action.[7] Ironically, when President Obama spoke at Rutgers' commencement ceremony two years later, he criticized the university community for their response to Rice's invitation. In his speech, Obama noted that while he too disagreed with Rice's policies, it would be "misguided" to declare that it was not worth listening to her perspective (Tani 2016).

It's not just conservative figures who students are protesting against for speaking on campus. Madeleine Albright, who served as Secretary of State under President Clinton and became the first female in history to lead the State Department, faced backlash from students for

[7] History has not reflected well on then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney for their roles in this effort, wanting perhaps to "finish the job" after the George H.W. Bush administration stopped before taking out Saddam Hussein once and for all.

her 2016 commencement speech at Scripps College.[8] Albright's visit was controversial both for her recent comments about female support for Hillary Clinton and, similar to Rice, for events she oversaw while at the State Department (Sahagun 2016). Moreover, Drexel University Professor George Ciccariello-Maher resigned after a series of controversial, far-left tweets, including remarks that disrespected the military and a post that read "All I Want for Christmas is White Genocide" (Gray 2017). The Drexel campus (and the internet) quickly punished Ciccariello-Maher for his statements, making his departure inevitable. Overall, these examples seem to suggest that guest speakers must walk a tightrope, both prior to and during their visit, to appear acceptable to a university community. Controversial guest speakers are not a new phenomena on college campuses (e.g. Rothman et al. 2011, Zimmerman 2017), but their appearances and the reactions they are met with have attracted a lot more attention in recent years (Lukianoff and Haidt 2015).

Section 3.3 College Students on Guest Speakers

Are these examples representative of how college students react to speakers? Can this really speak to the level of polarization on college campuses? On the one hand, FIRE research found that 93% of students agree that their college should invite a variety of guest speakers to campus (2017). Additionally, over half (64%) of students reported changing an attitude or opinion on an issue after hearing what a guest speaker has to offer. Meanwhile, just 2% of respondents said that they would make noise to disrupt these events (FIRE 2017). In principal,

[8] Albright also delivered the commencement address at Bucknell University in 2019.

this would suggest that students are not only open to guest speakers with whom they disagree on important issues, many of them actually benefit from listening to such opposing viewpoints.

On the other hand, national survey data tells a different story. In part of BIPP's nationally representative survey, they tested reactions to three different guest speakers suggesting the importance of free expression and speech on campus. Respondents were told that the speaker was either President Obama, Vice President Mike Pence, or a University president. In the neutral condition, about three-quarters of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents supported the University president's ideal. There was a gap between male support (79%) and female support (68%) of the speech's message, but given the partisan implications of the other conditions this data may serve better as a baseline than as evidence of general attitudes towards free expression. In the Obama condition, we begin to see partisan divides in the reactions to this message. A sizable majority (83%) of Democrats supported the idea of free expression when presented by the former president, while just over half (58%) of Republicans and two-thirds of Independents (67%) agreed with the sentiment. For the Pence condition, the results flip along partisan lines. Only 58% of Democrats agreed in this condition with Pence's points about free expression while a substantial number of Republicans (85%) supported it. Independents also sided slightly more with Pence in this condition (70%) than in the Obama condition (BIPP 2017).

Ultimately, the above results suggest that students are more open to free expression when it is advocated for by someone of their own party. Even though a majority of each subgroup agreed with this message in all conditions, the disparity between partisan responses shows how the message resonates more from figures with whom we already agree. Moreover, respondents were more likely to feel lukewarm about free expression if the message came from an outgroup

partisan. In the Pence condition, over one-third (35%) of Democrats neither agreed nor disagreed with the message of his statement, while only 15% of Republicans reported this indecision. In the Obama condition, we again see inverse results, as 33% of Republicans neither agreed nor disagreed with the free expression sentiment as opposed to 15% of Democrats. For reference, about 20% of both partisan groups expressed this indecision in the control situation (BIPP 2017). Overall, partisans appear more willing to support free speech when an ingroup partisan advocates for it, while outgroup partisans tend to be more indecisive on the subject. Keeping in mind the prior examples, we can imagine that Obama's speech at Rutgers was mostly directed at liberal students who had previously rejected Condoleezza Rice's appearance, although conservative students may have still been more skeptical of his comments. On the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, Shapiro might have had a difficult time convincing liberal students to listen to his perspective as his calls for different perspectives resonated with conservative students. Nevertheless, the end of this section will demonstrate evidence contrary to the hypothesis that partisans are more receptive to ingroup members than outgroup ones.

Withdrawing Invitations and Hate Speech

A majority of students (56%) think there are times when an institution should withdraw a guest speaker's invitation. Possible reasons for disinvitation include a speaker's history of criminal activity or professional misconduct, a lack of security at the event, or an abundance of protesters against the event. Nevertheless, the most prominent reason students would want an invitation withdrawn is if the speaker has made racist or hateful comments. Over two-thirds (69%) of students agreed with this reasoning, perhaps including those who reacted so sharply to

Shapiro at Boston University and Albright at Scripps College. This logic extends across virtually all subgroups of students. Very liberal students expressed the most support (79.2%) for this reasoning, while over half of conservative students at the other end of the spectrum (56.2%) also agreed. Male students (60.4%) were less likely than their female peers (75%) to view racist or hateful comments as cause for a withdrawn invitation, though this difference seems more or less negligible given that both overwhelmingly supported this reasoning. One interesting finding from the FIRE survey was that white students (71.4%) were slightly more likely to treat racist or hateful comments as grounds for disinvitation than black (70.7%) or Hispanic (65.2%) students (FIRE 2017). Although it seems curious that students of color did not provide as strong of a response as white students, the small margin between them might indicate this is more an anomaly than a significant point.

While strong reactions to a guest speaker who has made such comments in the past are understandable, they may also be shortsighted. For one, less than half (46%) of survey respondents recognize that the First Amendment protects hate speech and about one-third (31%) of those students think that hate speech should not be protected. More than half of conservative (55%) and very conservative (58%) students were aware of this protection, compared to less than half of liberal and very liberal students. The same pattern plays out, though with less of a gap between them, when comparing Republican and Democratic students. Looking at these same groups' opinions, over 60% of liberal and very liberal students and over 55% of each Democratic subgroup (i.e. strong, weak, and lean Democratic) said that hate speech should not be protected under the First Amendment. Aside from the strongest partisans, conservative and Republican students fell somewhere in the middle on this issue, with no resounding preference for or against

this protection (FIRE 2017). This survey data points to two possible conclusions. First, conservative and Republican students have a better understanding of free speech issues than liberal and Democratic students. Second, left-leaning students appear to be far more inclined to reject hate speech, or what they perceive as hate speech, than right-leaning students. In the following chapter, I attempt to find qualitative evidence whether questions of hate speech on campus truly skew in these directions.

While a student may find a speaker's history or ideas objectionable, that does not make these actions wrong in the eyes of the law. Of course, many students- myself included- might be unsettled that a university has invited a speaker with such a track record. Students are entitled to their own opinion, but it's possible that activity leads to these negative reactions against speakers. Other FIRE survey data on peer to peer interactions help illustrate this point. For instance, fewer students might try to understand the point of view of their peers when they hear an offensive statement (35%) than when they hear a statement with which they strongly disagree (59%). In other words, students are less likely to comprehend a viewpoint that they find hurtful or racist (FIRE 2017). Yet these perceptions are unique to each student; what is offensive to one student might not be to another. Since indications of racism or hatred are different for each student, a speaker might have little margin for error in their past comments and ideas to be deemed acceptable by the student body.

Benefits of Open Expression

Public figures have spoken out against the negative reception that some speakers are met with. In 2016, President Obama delivered the commencement address at Rutgers and criticized the university community for withdrawing Condaleezza Rice's invitation two years earlier:

> "I don't think it's a secret that I disagree with many of the policies of Dr. Rice and the previous administration. But the notion that this community or this country would be better served by not hearing a former secretary of state or not hearing what she had to say — I believe that's misguided," Obama said. "I don't think that's how democracy works best, when we're not even willing to listen to each other" (Tani 2016)

For Obama, students stand to gain more by listening to a regarded speaker than by refusing to listen to her perspective. While students might vehemently disagree with an opinion, they can still benefit from hearing out the other side. And as the above research shows, students might leave an event with an understanding of how a speaker can hold views so different from their own, or even agreeing to an extent with the speaker. In a similar vein, Madeleine Albright told Scripps graduates that she sought not to "defend a particular policy, but to talk about the importance of hearing from — and actually listening to — all perspectives" (Sahagun 2016). Even if a guest speaker leaves an audience member feeling the same way about an issue, there appears to be value in hearing that perspective.

It's possible that this logic falls short for true provocateurs, but does hold up for most established speakers. Some might place Shapiro in the former category, while most would argue that Milo Yiannopolous (whose polemical nature has inspired fierce protests during visits to the detriment of all students' safety) lies squarely within it. Such invitations might be unproductive, yet guest speakers are often far less controversial than made out to be. As mentioned at the

beginning of this section, about 64% of students reported having changed their attitude or opinion after attending a guest speakers event. This includes 56% of very liberal students, 71% of liberal students, and 68% of moderates. About 65% of strong Democrats and 71% of weak Democrats shared this response. Such results do not promise that a student will enter opposed and leave in support of a guest speaker's message; however, they do confirm that the majority of students stand to gain more from listening to a guest speaker than from avoiding or protesting one. As Obama and Albright assert, there is substantial value in attempting to understand opposing perspectives.

Section 3.4 College Students and Charlottesville

Just as attitudes toward guest speakers provide insight into the minds of college students, so too can their reactions to current events. The 2019 FIRE report asked their sample of college students their opinion on the violent protests in August 2017 between white nationalists and counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia. White nationalists had organized a "Unite the Right" rally protesting the removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in a Charlottesville park. Police cancelled the event and dispersed protestors from the park, leading white nationalists to spread throughout the city as tensions rose between them and counter-protesters. This violence culminated with a car crashing into a group of counter-protesters, killing a 32-year-old woman and injuring 19 others (Belkin, Kesling, and McWhirter 2017).

The FIRE survey results suggest that "students' opinions on whether individuals should be able to engage in peaceful protest depends on who is protesting" (FIRE 2019, 18). According

to the results, nearly three-quarters (71%) of students agreed that those protesting against white nationalists should be allowed to do so peacefully. Meanwhile, just over half (52%) of respondents felt the white nationalists should be allowed to protest peacefully (FIRE 2019). Even though a majority of students recognize each group's right to protest, they clearly sympathize more with the counter-protester cause. This should be expected given that respondents know in hindsight that the protesters' violence caused the death of a civilian. While the question asked about allowing each side to "peacefully protest," it's inherently difficult to separate that ideal from the tragedy that actually occurred. Also, the "white nationalist" cause of the protestors likely prevented some from viewing their cause in a positive light, regardless of their right to free assembly.

At least two-thirds of each partisan group would allow those protesting against the white nationalists to do so peacefully. With Democrats and Independents, there was a more noticeable gap between their support for peaceful counter-protests and their support for peaceful white nationalist protests (28% for Democrats and 17% for Independents). About 68% of Republican students supported the peaceful counter-protests while just 3% less (65%) shared this view towards the white nationalists. Roughly half of students of color (49% of blacks and 50% of Hispanics) surveyed support the peaceful protests of white nationalist, a statistic that may seem lukewarm considering the motivations of these protesters. This support lags far behind that for the counter-protesters- 67% of blacks and 70% of Hispanics- but still feels surprisingly high (FIRE 2019). Overall, students were more likely to approve of the counter-protests than the white nationalist protests themselves, though more conservative and Republican students were

more inclined to support both causes. This finding appears consistent with right-leaning students' recognition of hate speech as expression protected by the First Amendment (FIRE 2017).[9]

Finally, the FIRE survey investigated whether the events in Charlottesville had changed attitudes about speech and protest on campus. For the most part, the violence did not change students' attitudes; only about 35% of respondents reported changes in their views on campus either speech or protest. Results remained consistent across ideology, party identity, and gender. Along racial divides, however, there was a 15% gap between black students and their white peers who reported changing their attitude on campus expression (FIRE 2019). The subject matter of the Charlottesville protests helps explain this gap, though it appears the events had little impact on students except along racial lines. Small gaps between left-leaning and right-leaning responses might shed light on affective polarization, but such evidence speaks more to general opinions on the protesters and counter-protesters.

Section 3.5 Political Attitudes on Campus

Having examined what college students think about guest speakers and current events, we can now look further into their opinions on general expression on campus. Over half (54%) of students reported that they have stopped themselves from sharing opinions in classes. Although the most common reported reason for self-censorship was a worry of being mistaken, just under half (48%) of students thought that students might judge them for their opinions and about one-third (30%) of students felt others might see their views as offensive (FIRE 2017).

[9] See Section 3.3.

It's easy to imagine how this self-censorship plays out in college classrooms. Perhaps a liberal student (or professor) expresses dismay for a certain conservative policy on race. A conservative student in the class might want to voice a dissenting opinion, but fears that adding their two cents might come across as closed-minded at best or "racist" at worst. In such a scenario the calculus is simple; it makes more sense to withhold one's opinion rather than to face potentially harsh judgment from peers. The reverse situation (a liberal student hesitant to share amongst a conservative crowd) could produce similar troubles, though survey data indicates that comfort in the classroom skews in a liberal direction. In fact, very liberal students were 21% more comfortable sharing their opinions in the classroom than their very conservative peers (FIRE 2017).

Such behavior extends beyond the classroom as well. According to FIRE's research, about 44% of students reported to have stopped themselves from sharing an opinion outside of the classroom. Closer inspection of ideological subgroups on this question reflects the opposite side of very liberal students' comfort. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of very conservative students reported this self-censorship, compared to about half (51%) of very liberal students. Curiously, fear of backlash appears more tied to ideology than to party. Students who lean Republican said they stopped themselves from sharing at a higher rate (61%) than weak or strong Republicans (57% each). Perhaps those who more vocally identify as Republican are more self-assured in their beliefs. However, the more likely explanation is that those who were less willing to admit their party preference on the survey would also be less willing to share their thoughts on important issues.

Another interesting finding from this question is that almost half (48%) of college seniors self-censored outside of the classroom while just 38% of first-year students did so (FIRE 2017). It's unclear why students withhold from expressing their opinions over time. Maybe students come into college more energized to argue their positions, but over time they feel their arguments falling on deaf ears or producing negative reactions. Or perhaps students eventually just want to put politics and other issues on the back-burner outside of the classroom, preferring cordiality to controversial arguments.

Whatever the case, this behavior does not happen in a vacuum. The severe affective polarization seen along the 2016 presidential campaign likely warded off some students' willingness to share their opinions, both at the time of this survey and beyond. Yet this argument fails to explain why roughly half of students in each ideological, racial, and gender subgroup reported self-censorship. Hence, an additional reason for the prevalence of self-censorship is that a small subset of students create an atmosphere where students are afraid to share dissenting opinions. Even if many students are politically engaged, they might feel threatened to express opinions deviating from the precedents set by their most vocal peers. It's as if these students are acting as Fiorina's elites, in this case polarizing the classroom and leaving the general student population to choose between agreement, silence, or resentment.

Hypocrisy and Student Atmosphere

Hypocrisy lies somewhere in the college student population's attitudes towards expression and tolerance. According to the FIRE 2019 survey, "What Students Think About," a decisive majority of students (89%) think it's important for their institution to encourage students

to openly share their ideas and opinions among each other. Moreover, three-quarters of respondents (75%) feel that free speech should be allowed on campus regardless of whether that speech offends other members of the community. At the same time, a majority of students (57%) believed colleges should have the ability to restrict expression of "hurtful" or "offensive" political views. While about half of most subgroups agreed with this statement, the most resounding support came from left-leaning groups and minorities. Roughly 63% of Democrats and 64% of very liberal students would grant this responsibility to colleges, compared to about 51% of Republicans and 56% of Independents. Just over half (51%) of white students agree, noticeably less than black (68%) and Hispanic (65%) students (FIRE 2019).

Such details do not suggest that restricting speech is simply a wish of the "woke" students on the left. When differentiating by strength of responses, over 30% of very conservative students "strongly agree" with this proposition. In comparison, just 26% of very liberal students "strongly agree" along with about 20% of liberals, conservatives, and moderates. These results suggest that affective polarization can touch all ideologies on campus; it's not just one side that feels strong hostility towards the other. Furthermore, the only ideological or racial subgroup that recorded a more forceful endorsement were black students, of whom 34% strongly agreed with the statement (FIRE 2019). It seems the takeaway from this data is that those who feel strongest about restricting offensive language tend to be those with the most extreme ideological positions (or those likely to be the targets of such language).

The data from the 2017 BIPP national survey delves further into the details of student thoughts on restricting speech. Rather than focusing on the general idea of restricting speech, this data targets specific categories of speech. Such data is useful to determine the issues students are

most (or least) supportive of restricting. For instance, nearly 90% of both Democrats and Republicans support restricting speech that threatens violence against others- a logical answer given the implications of such a message. Such consensus does not extend to other issues. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Democrats think colleges should be able to restrict speech that might be perceived as offensive to minorities compared with just one-third (33%) of Republicans and about 38% of Independents.

Likewise, a majority (56%) of Democrats said that colleges should be able to restrict speech that may be perceived as sexist, while just about one-third of Republicans and Independents (35% and 34%, respectively) would support this measure. There is not as large of a gap on the issue of language that might make certain students feel uncomfortable or unsafe, perhaps because this option opens the door for more unsettling speech as highlighted in the "threat of violence" option. While 60% of Democrats supported this restriction, nearly half (46%) of Republicans supported it as well (BIPP 2017).

Finally, the BIPP survey asked whether colleges should be able to restrict speech that challenges the dominant political perspective on campus. In this case, all partisan groups offered a resounding rejection. Two-thirds (66%) of Democrats and three-quarters of Republicans and Independents (76% and 75%, respectively) responded that colleges should not reject such speech (BIPP 2017). At first glance, this appears to reflect more consensus and common ground between partisan camps. Upon further analysis, however, this response affirms students' hypocrisy. Even though Democrats here convey an openness to other perspectives, they implicitly reject those perspectives by showing strong support for restricting speech that may be perceived as sexist, racist, or discomforting. I do not mean to make a normative judgment on

speech embodying those characteristics. Rather, I mean to suggest that certain forms of speech critical towards the dominant political perspective might be perceived as connoting such traits. Consequently, these perspectives might be labeled as "sexist," "racist," or "discomforting." In theory, students might be wary of boxing out certain ideologies, but the same survey evidence shows that they may do so regularly.

This sentiment also extends to extracurricular involvement. About 70% of respondents think students "should be excluded from extracurricular activities if they publicly express intolerant, hurtful, or offensive viewpoints" (FIRE 2019, 7). Although a majority of all ideological subgroups agreed with the statement, the strongest responses came from very liberal and liberal students. An overwhelming 85% of very liberal students and 74% of liberal students supported this statement. Over 60% of moderate, conservative, and very conservative students stand by this statement as well, so we cannot assume that protecting against hurtful viewpoints is a wholly liberal project. Nevertheless, the resounding support from very liberal students is indicative of similar behavior found in the survey that seems to privilege those perspectives over others.

Additional Disparities Between Parties

Thus, students seem to believe in open expression of ideas except for those with which they disagree. It's not particularly surprising that they would counter an idealistic view of free expression with opinions that contradict that view. Defining offensive and hurtful language tends to be a subjective matter. Furthermore, while responses from the survey on free expression and restricting expression are mutually exclusive in theory, they do not guarantee such results in

practice. Due to this lack of dichotomy, nearly 90% of students claim the importance of free expression while more than half (55%) also believe that "the climate on campus makes it difficult for students to have conversations about important issues such as race, politics, and gender" (FIRE 2019, 7).

Although a majority of students report an uncomfortable climate for discussion, Republican students seem to be disproportionately affected. They are 14% more likely than Democratic students to think the campus climate is not conducive to having civil conversations about key issues (FIRE 2019). At the same time, three-quarters of Republicans (75%) and Independents (68%) said that college students are too easily offended. These statistics are significantly greater than the overall data and the Democratic reaction; about 58% of all respondents and a minority of Democrats (43%) agreed that college students are too easily offended. Male and female responses demonstrate a similar gap in support (65% compared to 51%, respectively), but this disparity seems less telling than the partisan one because a majority of both subgroups still agreed with the statement (BIPP 2017).

These results seem to confirm the prior data regarding self-censorship. Since very liberal students felt significantly more comfortable sharing their opinions than very conservative students, it would make sense that Republican students report a more hostile climate for discussion and an environment in which students are too easily offended. Evidently, comparing the two extreme ends of the ideological spectrum might not be fully representative of how students of both parties feel about free expression. Nevertheless, this data still provides an idea of biases against and animosity towards certain viewpoints on campus.

Section 3.6 Conclusion

The survey results reviewed in this chapter demonstrate a few areas of agreement across ideological and partisan lines. Some of this consensus came on tangible issues such as the disinvitation of guest speakers based on stains in their background. However, most agreement came on abstract issues of free expression and peaceful protest. On these issues, there was a much greater variety in what students claim to believe versus how they actually behave. Students appear to support an ideal but contradict that support with other survey responses. Given the subjective nature of the survey questions, some hypocritical responses should be expected. Still, it's interesting to find that students, especially left-leaning ones, are mostly unaware of these contradictions.

These results also add an important perspective for political scientists' debates on elite and mass polarization. For instance, the BIPP survey data found students taking cues from partisan elites regarding free speech, where one was more receptive to the message when it came from a co-partisan. In contemporary politics, we observe students who reject certain guest speakers for their ideological positions as they are simultaneously chastised by elite partisans of their own party for their lack of openness to ideas. Such behavior shows that college students may be more affectively polarized in practice than they are in theory.

In the following chapter, I will ask Bucknell students questions that hit on similar themes as the above survey data. My qualitative research will attempt to find consistent themes from student opinions on contemporary politics at the national level and on college campuses. Through this inquiry, I will see how prominent an issue political discourse is on college campuses. Furthermore, I will try to uncover whether the divisions observed in my quantitative

data are a result of mass divisions among students or deep disagreements between the most vocal students, with the majority either not willing to speak up or not really caring.

Chapter 4: Qualitative Research

Section 4.1: Overview

Since my thesis was inspired by affective polarization I have both observed and experienced during my time at Bucknell, one of the ultimate goals of this project has been to discover more about University students' attitudes towards national politics as well as political discourse on campus. To this point, my thesis has reviewed the powerful impacts that affective polarization can have on citizens in both political and apolitical aspects of their lives. It has also observed nationally representative surveys of college students' opinions on a variety of topics including free speech, guest speakers, and other important issues on campus. In addition to providing a window into what Bucknell students think, my qualitative research seeks to find matches and discrepancies between themes from the surveys in Chapter 3 and student opinions gathered from interviews.

Overall, these interviews revealed that affective polarization was prominent in some areas of student's lives, but not others. Many students tended to either socialize mainly with peers of the same ideology or to keep political conversations to a minimum. However, some did express worry about revealing their ideology to friends or having a political argument get out of hand. Some subjects also noted that while Bucknell had a mostly welcoming environment for both ends of the political spectrum, a vocal minority detracted from this setup. While some participants added unique perspectives to my research on polarization, I was generally surprised by others' lack of attention or strong opinions on contemporary politics.

In the fall, I received approval from Bucknell's Institutional Review Board to conduct my qualitative research in this manner. Interview participants consisted of members of Professor

Ellis' POLS 140 class, friends from my fraternity, and students from more vocal political groups on campus. The POLS 140 students received extra credit for participating in these interviews. For students outside of the class, I reached out personally to student leaders from what are generally considered the more vocal groups on campus. This included students involved in Bucknell Student Government, *The Bucknellian*, and the Bucknell Program for American Leadership and Citizenship. I conducted interviews with 27 students in total. Most interviews were conducted in study rooms in Academic West, though a few were conducted in private settings at MacDonald Commons.

Although these interviews played an instrumental role in my research, I recognize that Bucknell students are not representative of college students in general. A plurality of students hail from affluent suburbs, and while different ideologies dominate across these areas, many students are affected by this part of their political socialization. As a private institution, Bucknell also attracts a different demographic of students than public universities, community colleges, or vocational schools. Moreover, I interviewed only three students of color, including one international student. Though Bucknell might not have a sizable minority presence within its student body, it's important to note that this demographic was not fully represented in my sample. I'm not sure how a larger sample of this demographic would reflect affective polarization, but it's likely that this would have led to a more left-leaning pool of interviewees. In addition, I deliberately interviewed some students (from outside of Professor Ellis' class) specifically to gain an understanding of what the most politically engaged or passionate students think. Evidently, they do not represent the average level of political consciousness of the student body.

I recognize that many students might not be as informed on political issues, or simply do not care as much as these interviewees. Moreover, some participants from the POLS 140 class also might represent a more informed demographic of the student body because of their enrollment in an introductory political science course. On the contrary, a few of these students explained to me that they were taking this class in order to gain a better understanding of American politics, not because they were already informed. Nevertheless, even a student taking such a course without much knowledge of or interest in politics is probably more informed on political issues than a student with a similar disinterest but a different academic focus.

Section 4.2 Questions Asked

At the start of each conversation, I introduced myself as a senior writing an honors thesis on polarization on college campuses. I explained that part of my research involved looking at national survey data of college students and the other main component was to interview Bucknell students to see how what they think relates to that data. It's possible that this context might have primed students in a way that impacted answers to my first question, but I viewed informing them as a necessary step in transparency. I would then ask students to sign an Informed Consent Form from the University's Institutional Review Board, noting that I would be recording our conversation but that I would not be using the students' names when referencing their thoughts and opinions in my thesis.

Each interview began with a question on what the participant thought of the current political climate. If hesitant to answer at first, students were primed on issues such as impeachment, the State of the Union address, and the presidential primaries. I started with this

question as a means of warming students up for later answers as well as to implicitly gage their level of interest in political issues. In some cases, students' answers led naturally to my next two questions. The first asked where the student would place themselves on the ideological spectrum and if they supported one of the two major political parties. The second asked what the participant thought of Donald Trump's presidency so far. While the latter question served to contextualize the student's political beliefs and act as a de facto feeling thermometer, the former helped prompt later ideological questions.

For the first few interviews, I followed up by asking whether the student thought political conversations and the political climate in general have changed since the 2016 election. However, it became apparent that most of the underclassmen interviewed (who were sophomores or juniors in high school at the time) were not as politically conscious at the time as those who were of voting age. Subsequently, I saved this question only for students who were of voting age during the last presidential campaign. Another question I used initially but gradually withdrew unless a student exhibited particularly forceful beliefs dealt with feelings of the opposing party's politicians or supporters. Though a handful of participants had strong negative perceptions of outgroup partisans' behavior in Washington, the majority did not demonstrate signs of affective polarization with regards to national politics. It's unclear whether this was because of genuine indifference, lack of attention to the details of the current political climate, or fear of the social consequences that could arise from a strong opinion in either direction.

After gathering these initial readings on a student's political beliefs, I asked whether they thought Bucknell's student body leans more liberal, more conservative, or somewhere in the middle. I then asked students to explain how their party or ideological identity affected dialogues

on campus. This set of questions would begin by investigating if participants had friends whom they knew supported the opposing party (or ideology). For students with friends who leaned the other way, I asked if they discussed politics with those friends and about the nature of those conversations. For those who did not have close relationships with outgroup partisans, I asked how their opinion of a friend might change if they learned they were a member of the outgroup. These questions were the most crucial for my research, as I aimed to learn more about how students approach political discussions with members of the opposing party and if students shied away from such difficult conversations.

Following this line of questioning, I asked participants about self-censorship. Specifically, I tried to see how students would or would not respond to an opposing viewpoint in various social settings. I deliberately left this question open-ended so that students would bring up the experiences that were most salient for them. Some participants elaborated on the likelihood of them sharing their political opinions within their friend group, while others touched on how hearing an opposing viewpoint in class or club meetings affected their decision to respond. Next, I asked for students' thoughts about the importance of hearing opposing viewpoints on college campuses- a question which sometimes invited follow-ups and other times ended with generic responses on the issue.

I would begin the final series of questions by asking if the participant thought that Bucknell had a welcoming environment for both ends of the ideological spectrum. If the respondent focused solely on in-class environments, I would ask them whether they thought their answer applied to the overall campus climate. Regardless of the participant's initial answer, I would ask them what steps the University could take (leaving the University to be interpreted as

the Bucknell administration, its student body, or some combination of the two) to promote a more welcoming environment.

When interviewees responded with particularly unique perspectives, I follow up with improvised questions to collect a more detailed opinion. Likewise, I frequently added follow-ups to questions throughout the interview when I thought it was appropriate. Additional questions were generally used either to better understand a student's response or to encourage a student to elaborate on a shorter answer. While doing so for the latter situation usually did not provide more sophisticated results, these follow-ups were revealing in that they suggested a student's indifference or lack of information on the topic Ultimately, deviating from the script was a necessary tool for making the most of each interview.

Section 4.3 Identifying Factors

Given the caveat that the sample of students interviewed might not necessarily be representative of Bucknell's student body as a whole, it's important to contextualize their political beliefs. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA conducted a panel study of the Class of 2019 at Bucknell and other private non-profit institutions. When surveyed during their freshman year, 37% of Bucknell students identified as liberal, another 37% identified as "middle-of-the-road," and 21% identified as conservative. These results are noticeably more conservative than at other selective private non-sectarian universities. The comparison group reported as being 6 percentage points more liberal, 4 percentage points less moderate, and 8 percentage points less conservative (CIRP 2016).

When surveyed again prior to graduation, almost half (45%) of Bucknell students identified as liberal, one-third (34%) identified as middle-of-the-road, and 13% identified as conservative. The comparison group for the Class of 2019 at similar institutions identified as 5 percentage points more liberal, 8 percentage points less moderate, and 5 percentage points less conservative (CIRP 2019). Both the first-year and senior year results demonstrate that while Bucknell's student body leans liberal, it does so to a much lesser extent than comparable elite universities. Furthermore, a higher proportion of Bucknell students hold conservative political views throughout their four years than at similar universities.[10]

To an extent, my interviews reflect these ideological differences. Of the 27 students interviewed, there was a roughly 50-50 split between liberals and conservatives. Some participants represented other ideologies not captured in the CIRP survey; two students identified as being squarely in the middle-of-the-road and two identified as libertarian. Other students identified as moderates as well, but when pressed they admitted to leaning more towards a particular party.

Likewise, there were some discrepancies when a student may have identified as a liberal but not a Democrat, or a conservative but not a Republican. My best guess is that the students who identified more with their ideological convictions than a party affiliation felt a disconnect

[10] The increase in Bucknell students who identified as liberal over their four years is the same as that of the comparison group (roughly 7 percentage points). Meanwhile, Bucknell exhibited a greater decrease in the proportion of students holding conservative views than the comparison group and a lower decrease in the proportion of middle-of-the-road students. It's important to note these swings in a liberal direction at Bucknell and beyond, which might hint at some form of liberal indoctrination, perhaps caused by the faculty or administration. However, the timing of the survey might also have played a key role in these changes. The polarizing nature of the Trump presidency (which began after the Class of 2019 took the first-year survey) may have challenged conservative students' beliefs or moved moderate students in a more liberal direction. There are important implications for both this potential indoctrination and the Trump presidency on student ideology, but it would be difficult to separate out these variables. For this reason, I focus more on the absolute proportions than on the significance behind changes in ideology.

with the actions and policies of that party. I think these students have an easier time interpreting politics through the lens of ideology, and do not (at least from what I observed) exhibit a "conflicted" ideology- where one symbolically identifies with one ideology but in practice prefers policies that closer align with the other ideology's modus operandi (Ellis and Stimson 2012). On the left, this preference for ideology over party might help explain some of Bernie Sanders' appeal with younger voters.

The moderate or Independent identifying students complicated some of the outgroup questions I prepared, though most ultimately provided valuable responses. Whether a student identified more with an ideology or a party, they felt comfortable for the purposes of this interview to say that they did not support the opposing ideology or party. For libertarian students, I asked questions referring to Democrats and liberals as the outgroup. For the moderate students, I asked questions focusing on the extremes of both the left and the right.

Participants had difficulty coming to a consensus about the overall ideology of Bucknell's student body. "Compared to the rest of the nation we're probably liberal, but compared to most like [sic] undergraduate institutions we're probably more conservative," a senior participant said. "Before coming here I thought it was more conservative. That's just the general feel I got or from people I spoke with, but I think it leans more towards the left," a sophomore said. Meanwhile, another participant said "I think it leans more conservative. That's just based off my friends though. I'm also a freshman, so I don't know, it's hard to tell." As seen above, students arrived at a wide variety of conclusions about our ideological makeup. Roughly the same number of participants said Bucknell students lean to the left as those who said they

lean to the right. Others expressed an ideological imbalance between the faculty or administration and the student body.

Despite the varying opinions, the common theme across answers matched with the CIRP data; Bucknell leans more conservative than other selective universities, but many of its students (whether because of true preferences or general apathy) identify as middle-of-the-road. Students were quick to point out schools such as Middlebury, Williams, and Wesleyan as counterexamples where the student body was either more politically active or more vocally liberal. Though this general analysis confirms what I have found quantitatively about Bucknell students, their responses on important issues (both in national and campus politics) provide a clearer picture.

Section 4.4 Attitudes Regarding National Political Landscape

While prompting students about President Trump produced some variety of answers, most did not express significant negative attitudes towards outgroup partisan politicians. In both cases, responses were quite revealing about levels of affective polarization among Bucknell students. This section will begin by reviewing student attitudes on President Trump. It will then pivot to those attitudes, or lack thereof, directed at other salient political issues.

The majority of participants offered similar responses about their feelings on President Trump, regardless of their own ideology. Such responses were almost robotic in their uniformity as interviewees continually prefaced their thoughts by saying “he’s been very good for the economy,” as one first-year did. From there, participants tailed off in different directions. Some noted how they agreed with his agenda but not his personal behavior. Participants also pointed to

weaknesses in foreign policy or other character traits as qualifications, but tended to note the state of the economy first. Most liberals gave stronger responses, with one student calling Trump's presidency a "disaster" and another saying the president was "incompetent and fairly moronic." Still, even one of the more liberal students interviewed conceded that "if anything, it's benefited [my family] because of the tax cuts." Ultimately, a number of interviewees did express some form of affective polarization against Trump. Liberals demonstrated significant resentment and even a few conservative students expressed frustration with Trump's rhetoric or personal conduct. Nevertheless, I was surprised at how frequently students qualified these emotional responses by referring to the strong economy. It's possible that interviewees on both ends of the ideological spectrum gave such answers because they were unsure of their interviewer's politics, [11] but I think this response stems more from an environment that conditions them towards a "neither-here-nor-there" response.

This indecision about the president trended more towards indifference or lack of knowledge about the American political scene at large. When asked what he or she thought about the current political climate, a majority of students gave default answers that began with "I think things are definitely really polarized." To an extent, I should have expected such responses. After all, students were implicitly primed to talk about polarization when I had explained to them the nature of my research. One first-year student said "I don't pay a ton of attention on the news, but I feel like it's [the political climate] obviously really controversial," representative of a few conversations with POLS 140 students who were either taking the class to learn more about American politics or were just generally uninformed. Despite those instances, other students

[11] I neither revealed nor hinted at my beliefs to interviewees, though some friends interviewed were already aware of my personal politics.

gave far more nuanced takes on the political climate. These opinions ranged from critiques of the media and Nancy Pelosi (for tearing up a copy of Trump's State of the Union address) to comments on the "dehumanization" and personality based brands of politics observed in the nation's capital. In practice, this question served as a "warm up" to prepare students for more in-depth responses later in the interview.

Across the board, most participants did not display noticeably strong feelings against the opposing party's agenda or members of Congress. I had expected that students who held strong opinions about President Trump or the Democratic primary campaigns would also have a lot to say about figures like Nancy Pelosi and Mitch McConnell or the impeachment proceedings. Two liberal students did provide forceful rejections of McConnell, but for the most part subjects lamented the prevalence of both inter-party and intra-party conflict rather than expressing serious resentment towards individual politicians. More vocal students provided stronger responses, such as "I would hate or dislike Republicans less if they did things constructively that believe in" or "I feel like the administration is… very obvious with their political beliefs and I feel like they tend to support one side [referring to liberals] more than the other when it comes to having speakers on campus." Given that a noticeable portion of the POLS 140 students interviewed didn't indicate much loyalty to a particular party (due to identifying as an Independent who leaned in a particular direction or as a libertarian), perhaps I should have expected to receive a lot of lukewarm responses.

Maybe the affective polarization observed by Zimmerman (2016) only occurs at the elite level. This would not be Fiorina's real political elites, but would instead refer to the most vocal (and likely most polarized) students on campus who might hail from groups with particularly

amplified voices, such as student government, media, and political activism groups. Though these students tended to have the most information about political issues, they were not alone in expressing strong opinions as they related to political discourse among students. College "elites" may be especially polarized, but other participants expressed similarly strong opinions when the discussion shifted away from the national scene and towards campus politics.

Section 4.5 Conversations on Campus

The students I interviewed can be more or less divided into three categories regarding political conversations. The first group included students whose friend groups consisted solely of people with similar ideological beliefs. The second group included participants with friends who held different ideological beliefs from their own, but who were willing to engage in political discussions with these friends (at least to a certain extent). The third group consisted of students who, like the previous group, had friends on the other end of the political spectrum. Members of this group, for varying reasons, would not talk politics with those friends.

In practice, most of the first group was composed of students who did not associate with outgroup partisans because of genuine disagreements. "I think it's difficult because we have like a different idea of what the country's goals should be and different values," a first-year student said. One liberal sophomore student echoed this sentiment but in different terms. She did not have any outwardly conservatives friends, but offered a distinction between "if [a friend] was just a general Republican- because my family is half Republican and half Democrats" and the "morality" of someone who is a "big Donald Trump supporter." In line with this reasoning, Bucknell seniors- who voted in the 2016 election during their freshman fall- pointed to Trump's

election and its aftermath as a critical juncture in campus politics. A moderate senior thought there had been a "common consensus that Hillary was going to win in 2016" in tandem with "more silent support for Trump." Before the election, he observed that campus talks and speakers were more based more on facts than opinions, while events since then have focused on more divisive issues. A conservative senior agreed that Trump has changed the landscape of political conversations, but that such divisions were brewing earlier. "I feel like the eight years under Obama there was kind of like a false sense of consensus that Democrats thought he was the greatest thing and Republicans didn't. And those differences never really had to meet each other- to a great extent- until 2016," he said.

It's possible that Trump is the inflection point for campus affective polarization, but it's unclear if liberal students who did not mention him when talking about Republicans were more influenced more by ire against Trump, the Republican agenda, or actual on-campus politics. One liberal junior said that she has tried and failed to get along with people from the other side of the aisle. "I think that part of the reason that I am not close with people, especially those who are really right-leaning, is because when we talk politics it makes us angry. And we don't get along and we realize we don't really want to be friends," she said. From this conversation, for instance, it was difficult to attribute the participant's negative feelings towards outgroup partisans to any one specific element.

While strong opinions dictated most of the first group's social circumstances, a few students noted that they had surrounded themselves with co-partisans by coincidence. One conservative freshman said that she did not have any liberal friends, yet this was not by design.

"I guess in my day-to-day life politics doesn't really come up, like you can kind of stray away from talking about politics," she said. Another conservative student said that he had a few acquaintances who "if I were to guess maybe I'd say they're Democrats," but the majority of people he interacted with were conservatives (this participant was an engineering student who was taking POLS 140 as an elective class). My conversation with him also suggested that politics just does not come up frequently in many areas of a Bucknell education. Overall, these conversations (as well as the one from the above paragraph) reflected trends occurring at the national level: Some Americans express hostility towards outgroup partisans, while others simply resent how polarizing politics (and those who are intensely passionate about it) can be.

Participants who fell into the second category I described shared similar thoughts as those in the first one. These students reported being more open in the past to discussing politics with friends from the other end of the political spectrum, but had since been turned off from it. This dissuasion came from multiple angles. One student who identified as a libertarian said that "it's frustrating" talking to a liberal friend. Though these discussions never get "heated," as he described it, he and the friend would often talk past each other and failed to see common ground.

In similar fashion, a moderate first-year said that when he and his conservative roommate do try to talk politics, they "don't make up any ground on each other." Likewise, a liberal first-year student said that trying to engage in political discussions with her conservative friends was "kind of pointless because nothing they say is going to make me Republican and nothing I say is going to make them a Democrat." It's possible that some of this student's hesitance to converse with the other side, like those from the first group, stemmed from attitudes about the current administration. Of her conservative friends, she said "I don't love that they are [Trump

supporters], but I wouldn't completely cut them off." Whether or not a student would look at someone differently upon learning their political leanings, the fear of such repercussions resonated with at least one interviewee. This conservative sophomore noted that if she were to discuss politics with her Democratic friends, it would be in more factual terms, such as an event in the presidential race. She said that after discussing her opinions with acquaintances she "felt like there was sort of a wall that went up after that… I felt like once I expressed my opinion they sort of maybe looked at me differently or viewed my other thoughts on things a little different [sic]." Among the hours I spent conducting these interviews, this quote might have been the one that best encapsulated how affective polarization manifests on campus. This is the Republican Alabama fan who prefers to sit next to an Auburn fan than a Democrat (Engelhardt and Utych 2018), or the Democrat who would find someone less attractive for supporting Mitt Romney (Nicholson et. al 2016). While these repercussions might not be on every student's mind, this student's story exemplifies the tangible impact that affective polarization can have on campus.

The third group of students provided hope for both the importance of political discourse on college campuses and the potential for respect between disagreeing parties. One participant who described himself as slightly left of center lamented that his friends on both ends of the political spectrum sometimes struggle to listen to each other and "ignore facts." However, he also reported that these conversations can be rewarding and that he and his friends may leave them with a better understanding of each other's beliefs. "After a while I think you can find common ground. You know, once you both present your side and you actually show them what you mean."

A conservative student emphasized civility as a key ingredient for having productive political conversations. In fact, he said that under certain conditions it's easy to discuss such issues with his liberal friends:

> "All you need to do is… I think political conversations should start with a declaration of ends. And like 95 percent of the time those ends will line up. And so you start with this basis of understanding, or of agreement, from then forth you can get into your actual disagreement which is over the means. Just if you… if you make the other person understand that you're not a bad person, or you're not the caricature that like they think of when they think of the opposing party, then they're [the conversations] easy to have."

This statement ties back to my example in Chapter 1- when President Trump claimed that a group of politicians "hated" the United States. Evidently, it seems rather dubious at that level that someone who truly hates the country would run for public office and work as a public servant. As this participant sees it, these politicians (as well as Bucknell students) share the same goals for the country; they just happen to disagree on how the "means" for accomplishing such goals.

Of course, it's easier said than done for a student- especially one who leans strongly to the left or right- to believe that outgroup partisans seek similar ends as their own. In addition, the controversial nature of Trump's presidency might make it understandably difficult for liberal students to even consider hearing out conservative perspectives. At the same time, there is reason to suspect that plenty of students do view those of the opposing party as the "caricatures" described above. Maybe Bucknell students let these preconceived notions influence their interactions, in turn leading to more dysfunction and an inherent distrust or resentment towards outgroup members. Though some aspects of my research questions were personal, they do not

fully uncover what plays into a student's perception of the opposing party past inferences deduced from their responses and their political socialization.

One conservative first-year proposed the value of having political debates with her roommate. "If we both have very strong opinions, it's not really going to change their mind, but it might open their eyes to understand the other side." Opening one's eyes to a different perspective captures the sentiment of the "declaration of ends" described by the previous student. For this participant, there is inherent value in having cross-aisle conversations for both students involved. Not only does a student receive the context of another perspective, such conversations can also "in a way strengthened my own views because I was forced to explain them to someone else," the first-year said. Although starting these conversations might be difficult, the possibility of clarifying and strengthening one's own values appears to be a tangible benefit for all parties involved. Even one Democratic student who did not have Republican friends emphasized the need for backing up opinions with evidence and exposing them to scrutiny. Despite the potentially unsettling thought of debating those with whom one has deep disagreements, it seems that these conversations can truly benefit students regardless of whether they find common ground. At the least, students might avoid groupthink or echo chambers. At best, a student might walk away from these situations knowing how to better articulate their beliefs. Both of these benefits essentially describe the goal of liberal arts institutions: to develop critical thinking skills.

One final interesting perspective from the third group came from an independent student who leans Democratic. After she had told me that she has friends who lean more conservative, I asked her if she ever talks politics with them. Without missing a beat, the student said, "I do, and I kind of regret it because it's like talking to a wall." In spite of the apparent immovability of

some of her friends, she suggested that gender might play into how we express political opinions. When having conversations with female friends, she thought that even friends with whom she disagreed could find common ground or at least respect each other's perspective. In contrast, the majority of Bucknell males she had spoken with were conservative and unyielding in their opinion. According to her, these males would be adamant and borderline arrogant in upholding their own beliefs and rejecting hers, yet they demanded their opinion be respected.

I would hesitate to say this instance is anything close to representative of political expression at Bucknell. The CIRP first-year survey of Bucknell students reported that approximately one-third (31%) of the Class of 2019 males were conservative. This figure is higher than the percentage of the class overall (21%) and female students (16%), as well as the proportion of conservative first-year males at comparable private, nonsectarian colleges (19%). In relative terms, these numbers appear significant, but in absolute terms two-thirds of the Class of 2019's males still did not identify as conservative. While one academic study found that men were more likely than women to exhibit confidence in defending their political opinions (Albarracín, Wang, and Albarracín 2012), I would reject that as a sufficient explanation for the behavior the participant describes. Since I cannot show any overarching data on Bucknell male students (or college-aged males in general) being more steadfast in their beliefs, I will maintain that this is a useful example, but not a representative one.

By breaking down interviewees into different (yet interrelated) groups, we see that Bucknell students appear divided by those who are willing to engage in political discussions with outgroup partisans and those who are not. Some of these students have attempted to talk politics across the aisle and have since renounced it, while others feel there is either room for common

ground or value in hearing opposing perspectives. These discussions lead to my next section, regarding the campus environment for varying political beliefs.

Section 4.6 Beliefs on Campus: What Is and Is Not Welcomed

Despite a wide variety of student perceptions on campus ideology and a consensus around the importance of hearing opposing viewpoints, many interviewees shared a sense that some political ideas were not welcomed at the University. This included overall political discussion as well as concrete examples of guest speakers who were invited to campus. For the most part, participants expressed that the ideas that were not welcomed came from the conservative end of the spectrum, as liberal ideas enjoyed more leeway. Some students thought that Bucknell allows for both ends of the political spectrum to be heard, though others, especially those more informed on campus events and politics, disagreed with this notion.

My interviews painted a clear picture that students felt campus was not as receptive to ideas coming from the political right. “I think there’s more backlash towards conservative speakers,” one student said, pointing to the most visible evidence of this divide. For students who mentioned guest speakers, the most notable events came were two guest speakers who visited Bucknell during the fall 2019 semester. In September, liberal historian Mark Bray visited campus to discuss his book *Antifa: The Anti-fascist Handbook*. His visit generated minimal reactions from the campus community, aside from a letter to the editor in the student newspaper. In November, conservative political commentator Heather Mac Donald spoke about her recent publication, *The Diversity Delusion: How Race and Gender Pandering Corrupt the University and Undermine Our Culture*. In contrast to Bray’s visit, Mac Donald’s talk incited controversy

and even condemnation among some members of the student body. Students from the University's Democratic Socialists club organized a peaceful protest across the street from the venue of the Mac Donald talk. Meanwhile, the campus sexual assault prevention organization held an alternative event in response to Mac Donald's talk. Simply stated, though Bray's visit barely registered on students' radars, Mac Donald's event produced shockwaves[12]

Right-leaning students pointed to the disparity in reactions to these two speakers as a sign that certain perspectives were not fully welcomed at Bucknell. One student described the reaction to Mac Donald's visit as "an attack on the conservative side of things." Another conservative student thought how liberal students responded to each event was hypocritical. "We didn't protest Mark Bray when he came. We went and listened to him talk. We didn't have any protest outside," she said. Similarly, an additional conservative student noted that "conservatives usually get a bad rap" on campus and said that such protests are "limiting your education and limiting what you're exposed to."

Though the prevailing consensus among participants suggested a bias against conservatives, one student contended that far left perspectives faced similar challenges on campus. "I've seen other students who identify as socialist or communist or anarchist be like mocked by administrators, professors, students," he said. While this participant noted that these perspectives were still legally welcomed at the University, he thought that the majority of the campus community was not receptive to such ideas. This student attributed such attitudes to overwhelming capitalist beliefs among students on both the left and right. According to him, the

[12] In fact, after Mac Donald's visit to Bucknell, she penned an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal titled "Why Are College Students So Afraid of Me?" In the article, she describes the reception she was met with at Bucknell as well as a recent event at College of the Holy Cross. While the Holy Cross students seem to have demonstrated more antagonistic behavior and the article is an opinion piece, it does provide interesting insight into the University's environment for conservative speakers.

middle 85-90% of Bucknell students fall into this category. Perspectives to the left or right of this group were either not welcome or not taken seriously. Ultimately, this student agreed that all political perspectives expressed at Bucknell should be subject to scrutiny; however, he took issue with "preemptive" scrutiny in which a student may be viewed as "radical" before explaining the logic behind their stance. Of course, this perspective is not fully representative of student opinions. Still, it's important to recognize that radical views on the left might feel just as unwelcome as conservative (though not necessarily radical) views on the right.

Other students made more specified arguments about how welcoming Bucknell is for political debate and what issues are most important. For instance, one first-year student said that "especially on a college campus, the social issues are definitely bigger than economic issues in [terms of] range of importance to you." If true, such priorities help explain why Heather Mac Donald's visit warranted such an intense reaction. Mac Donald writes on social issues relating to race and gender, as well as college pedagogy, so it makes sense why her appearance fostered resentment among some students. However, my research has indicated that social issues, even if they are more salient to certain students, do not define the boundaries of campus political discussion. After all, Rutgers did not reject Condoleezza Rice's potential commencement speech for her positions on social issues, they did so for her foreign policy decisions (Fitzsimmons 2014). Likewise, many of the liberal students I spoke with emphasized the need for government to address economic inequality- sometimes in relation to President Trump's job performance, other times referring to general political issues. These conversations suggest that a rejection of conservative viewpoints is not exclusive to a particular issue area.

Even though this bias may dissuade certain political expression at Bucknell, most participants lamented how certain ideas do not seem not welcome. “It is, I think, intrinsically valuable to have people from the other side to talk to,” one senior said. Other students echoed this sentiment, noting the importance of having discussions despite the campus’ apparent inability to actually engage in them. In the same vein, some complained about those who were unwilling to engage with alternative perspectives or only listen to opinions for the sake of “confirmation bias.” Furthermore, participants argued that part of the problem with welcoming different viewpoints at the University stems from peers assuming the extreme about them. “When I say I lean more towards a liberal point of view, they expect that I’m like an extreme liberal, which isn’t necessarily true,” one first-year said. “Because of the political environment I feel like everyone just kind of assumes the worst almost.” This statement captures fears of both Bucknell’s left and right: the fear of ostracism or other negative consequences from sharing certain perspectives.

Moreover, it’s possible that the politically active on campus have also created a gulf between them and those who do not care about politics. “I think in today’s day and age, there’s less and less people that are apolitical,” one conservative student said. “And I think you hear a lot of things coming out of the left saying like, ‘if you’re apolitical, that’s bad.’” Though it’s unclear whether being apolitical is a left versus right issue as this student argued, we can see how this statement carries similar themes to the first-year mentioned in the previous paragraph. That student describes people assuming the worst about those who are political, while this conservative student points out how people also do so for those who are not political at all. Is the latter truly a manifestation of affective polarization? In short, it is not, but the prevalence of

apolitical attitudes sheds light on what seems to be the biggest source of division at Bucknell and perhaps at other colleges too.

Section 4.7 Who Cares?

Rather than causing division in itself, apolitical students represent only a segment of the student body. In fact, those who seem apolitical may not actually hold such indifference towards political issues. My interviews conveyed the presence of four categories of students at Bucknell with respect to their political expression. The first group is a small subset of students who are exceptionally vocal about their political opinions. Most of these students appear to hail from the left, although this definition encompasses both ends of Bucknell's ideological spectrum. The second group includes students who are politically engaged but are scared to speak. These are the students who, like some of my interviewees, took a great deal of interest in politics but felt like they were "walking on eggshells" or that people would "assume the extreme" about their positions. The third group, relatively similar to the second one, consists of students who are disgusted by the behavior of the vocal students and tend to lie more towards the middle of the ideological spectrum. The fourth group is students who are legitimately apolitical. I failed to come across such students in my interviews because of the selection bias involved in using a political science class for the majority of my participants. Obviously, an apolitical student is unlikely to enroll in "Introduction to American Politics." At the same time, it's worth recognizing that these students do not necessarily ignore American politics, they just do not have strong opinions about its issues or outcomes.

Referring to this last group, one participant noted that many Bucknell students are apathetic about political issues. “A lot of people don’t care what their friends’ political views are. Compared to other schools that I’ve seen, people here really don’t care about politics as much,” she said. Other participants reiterated this perspective. “I think there’s a large amount of students that are not really loyal to one party or another. They’re kind of in the middle or they don’t really have a political opinion,” a conservative first-year said. “That’s been the case with at least half of my friends that I’ve talked to- they aren’t really involved in politics.” Evidently, politics are not on the forefront of many members of the campus community.The former student also provided a description of the vocal subset of Bucknell students, saying that “I think there’s a small group… of people on campus who are politically active and who kind of are separate from the majority of campus, or not separate but distanced from the majority of campus.” This majority might not describe the same 85-90% between the extremes as a previously mentioned participant had said, though it does accurately represent the latter three groups of students.

Where does this apathy come from? Interviewees who brought up the indifference of their peers pointed mainly to demographics and the “Bucknell bubble” as reasons for such behavior. “It seems like Bucknellians are just in general more apathetic, and that might be because we’re sort of on this fast track where we’re going to get where we’re going to go regardless,” one sophomore participant said. This “fast track” refers to the upper middle class backgrounds of a plurality of students. Multiple interviewees said that the socioeconomic status of many Bucknell students leads to their inattention to politics. These participants implied that because these students do not stand to lose significantly in the current political system, they feel comfortable with adhering to an apolitical lifestyle. Students had mixed reactions as to whether

this was a net positive or negative for the campus. For example, one liberal participant said that "If I was really into activism, I don't know if I'd go here." This was not to say that the student was upset with a lack of activism on campus, but seemed to indicate that those seeking such an environment might be disappointed at Bucknell.

Whether or not activism is prevalent at Bucknell, many interviewees brought up the aforementioned vocal minority of Bucknell students. Participants noted that this group drives the majority of the activism that exists on campus, as well as much of the political conversation. "The majority isn't very loud. You have a smaller group that's just louder… that leans more left," one first-year student said. Another student hit on this theme, saying a vocal minority of liberals at Bucknell "is like 5% of the population, if that… I think there's a big silent majority that is conservative."

My interviewees proposed varying implications from this subset of students. Many contended that the vocal minority created an impression that the student body leaned more left than it actually did. They also suggested that the campus left is more expressive than others by nature, creating situations where their perspectives appear more welcome and amplified. Others noted the impact that the vocal minority had on other groups of students. For instance, one liberal first-year offered that politically active conservative students might not "want to get into it" with the liberal students driving the conversation. A more outspoken conservative student agreed, to an extent, with this notion. Though usually eager to share his opinions, this student said that he might "back off" in a political debate if he finds himself outnumbered. However, this student expressed more worry about the presence of liberal faculty than vocal liberal students with regards to any self-censorship.

How Professors Contribute

At this point, it's worth briefly exploring the impact of faculty on affective polarization on campus.[13] When describing campus ideology, many interviewees suggested that Bucknell's professors leaned further left than the student body. According to some, this dynamic can put conservative students in difficult situations. "They're the keepers of your grades," the conservative student from the previous paragraph said. "You're not going to try to piss off the people that are evaluating your performance and ultimately dictating whether or not you're going to be successful in the world." This power dynamic can lead to conservative students "catering" to their professors or being generally "hesitant" to share their opposing viewpoint, as two other conservative participants put it. Thus, some students appear more fearful of the negative impacts of affective polarization from their professors than from their peers.

In spite of these reactions, other students- including conservatives- shared that their professors were good at offering opposing perspectives. "I'd say the professors I've had have done a good job of not favoring one viewpoint," one Democratic student said. "I think they really try… to be bipartisan and not take one side and are always playing devil's advocate." Some students also emphasized the importance of professors acting in such a manner to moderate classroom discussion, as one student noted that "If professors show both sides, or are required to even if they do lean one way, it helps educate everyone." It's quite possible that conservative students were more cognizant of a liberal bias emanating from professors, and were thus more likely to bring it up in interviews. Since most participants did not mention professors' impact on

[13] While not directly relevant to my main discussion of affective polarization among students, I felt that a discussion of faculty ideology warranted more coverage than a footnote.

campus politics (outside of the context of Bucknell's overall ideology), I find it difficult to reach a conclusion on this matter other than that faculty ideology can have tangible effects on student participation and performance.

The Middle Ground

Returning to the earlier discussion, a few participants from the second and third groups I mentioned felt boxed out by their most vocal peers. One moderate student noted that he tailored his political rhetoric "all the time" to the specific audience. For this student, such behavior extended beyond the classroom- where he advocates more to the left- to his internship experiences- where he voiced a more conservative tone. Another participant, this one a conservative, said that she would be more inclined to express her opinion in an individual, private setting. "But if it was in front of a class, I would probably just sit there," she said. I followed up with this student by asking why she would be so hesitant to speak up in class. In response, she said "It's less personal and I guess there's more people to kind of judge what you think. And while there could be a lot of people to support you, there could also be a lot of people who, I don't know, would come at you and maybe make defending yourself a little harder."

While this seems like valid reasoning for not wanting to participate, this hesitance seems surprising because the same student had said that the student body leans more conservative and did not have any vocally liberal friends. Moreover, she noted that politics did not come up in her daily life. On the other hand, this student showed pessimism towards her peers' reactions to guest speakers on campus. According to her, guest speakers are somewhat of an exercise in futility; she thought that minds would not change from hearing different perspectives, if students

even opened themselves up to these viewpoints. Of course, this participant does not speak for all of my interviewees nor for the campus at large. Still, by understanding this perspective, we can see how those on the right or in the middle of campus ideology may feel crowded out of political discussions.

A flawed explanation for this sentiment would suggest that liberal students are simply more steadfast in their convictions. After all, one conservative first-year said that participating in political discourse "depends more so how strongly you believe in your views. Because if you hear something that strongly contradicts anything that you think, then I believe you'll have a strong feeling to interject." However, the mere presence of vocal conservatives seems to at least partially disprove this notion. What's more plausible is that the more vocal liberals are more involved on campus in politically active groups. A number of conservative and moderate students mentioned this prevalence in their interviews. Involvement in such groups amplifies these liberal voices, effectively pulling the student body's ideology more to the left.[14] I doubt that most members of the more politically involved and active groups intend to create an uncomfortable climate for conservative students to voice their opinions.[15] Nevertheless, it's easy to see how these groups appear to influence (regardless of whether they do so in practice) the climate for speech and affective polarization at Bucknell. In addition to the most vocal groups, student perceptions seem to play an enormous role in dictating political conversation. In this

[14] As the former Editor-in-Chief of the campus newspaper, I can personally attest to this behavior. I first joined *The Bucknellian* as an opinions writer and frequent critic of the political climate and the Trump administration. I did so as a form of expressing my own opinion rather than projecting it onto others, but I understand how these more visible, active groups could have a perceived power to dictate the campus conversation.

[15] Though it's possible that the most extreme students might want to make liberal ideas the new normal and conservative ones more taboo.

case, conservative and moderate students might perceive an unwelcoming environment even if liberal students actually want to listen to and understand opposing viewpoints.

Section 4.8 Conclusion

Overall, interviewees struggled to come to a consensus regarding the campus' ideology. Across ideologies, students found it difficult to put their finger on the pulse of what their peers truly believed, and this uncertainty factored into political discourse at Bucknell. The majority of the students I interviewed did not display extreme levels of affective polarization to the point where they would not associate with people from the other side of the aisle. However, some students did express such concerns and expressed resentment, or at least frustration, with outgroup partisans. Participants frequently mentioned a plurality of apathetic students, but it's unclear to what extent this group is truly apathetic as opposed to those who have political opinions but do not feel comfortable expressing them. In other words, some of these students may have actually felt "neither-here-nor-there" about important issues, but others may just give off that impression because they perceive this lack of position as the status quo. Moreover, interviewees pointed to a vocal minority that at least seemed to shift campus discourse to the left and at most made for an unwelcoming environment for conservative students.

In the next chapter, I will analyze how my qualitative findings align with my quantitative research and literature review. This comparison will bring about conclusions as to how prevalent affective polarization is on college campuses and at Bucknell. In general, I find that affective polarization is far more prevalent at other campuses and across the country than it is at Bucknell. The University's environment still exemplifies affective polarization, sometimes showing intense

divisions, but our campus displays fewer problems than other institutions and America as a whole. Moreover, the resentment found at Bucknell is still potent because the setting of a college campus magnifies such disagreement. After synthesizing these data, I will end by suggesting the implications of my research on political conversations and general polarization in the age of Trump.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Polarization has a clear and tremendous impact on today's political climate. At the national level, we often see gridlock and borderline child-like behavior from our elected officials in lieu of political solutions. Though the extent of polarization on the country as a whole is up for debate, we can see tangible effects of these intense social divisions on at least part of the general public (Mason 2016). In my interviews, I spoke with a number of students who reflected some level of disdain towards outgroup partisans. Most of these participants did not overtly express the serious affective polarization seen in studies such as Engelhardt and Utych (2018) or McConnell et al. (2018). However, they did note their own tendencies to self-censor their political opinions. My qualitative findings here align with the FIRE survey data, which found that over half of college students self-censored in class. Interview participants from both ends of the ideological spectrum admitted to self-censoring. They did so fearful of the social repercussions of saying something controversial or against the grain, not just in class but in some interactions with peers as well. Again, this agrees with college student survey data that found 48% of respondents feared facing judgment for their opinions and 30% thought peers would find their own view "offensive" (FIRE 2017). Ultimately, self-censorship stands as a byproduct of affective polarization. Altering the opinions one expresses acts as a shield to the negativity and animosity that the current political climate would normally project on such ideas.

On the more extreme end of polarization, partisans may subtly or even blatantly dehumanize members of the outgroup (Cassese 2019). However, this may be more of an elite phenomenon, as citizens are more likely to simply express negative feelings towards the outgroup than to actually describe them in animalistic or mechanistic terms (Martherus et al.

2019). My quantitative data suggests that a great deal of the polarization seen on college campuses stems from student hypocrisy (especially from the left), rather than the strong emotional responses captured in the studies mentioned above. In other words, some students may express support for free speech on campus, but continually qualify such remarks when faced with controversial speakers or subject matter. For instance, national survey data found that three-quarters (75%) of students supported free speech regardless of whether it offends members of the community. At the same time, over half (57%) of respondents thought colleges should be able to restrict speech found to be "hurtful" or "offensive" (FIRE 2019). I observed this same behavior in my student interviews, though not as frequently as I expected. While almost every participant was quick to emphasize the importance of viewpoint diversity at Bucknell, only some explicitly contradicted their prior opinions in the process.

My qualitative research suggested the presence of de facto "elites" at Bucknell who were dictating the campus' political conversations. Many students noted how this vocal minority of very liberal students created the impression that the campus leans farther to the left than it does in reality. Interviewees pointed to some members of this vocal group who protested Heather Mac Donald's visit to Bucknell in November. I would assume that it is this same demographic of students who have pushed for the cancellation of guest speakers at other schools, such as Condoleezza Rice at Rutgers and Madeleine Albright at Scripps. Nevertheless, it's important to recognize that objection to a guest speaker does not directly correlate with membership in this vocal group. For instance, a speaker such as Milo Yiannopoulos or, to a lesser extent, Ben Shapiro is more likely to incite a strong response from the student body due to their provocative nature. Survey data confirms this notion, as speakers whose remarks may be perceived as

"racist" or "hateful" (FIRE 2017). Thus, the vocal minority of students might be in line with campus beliefs in some instances but are more likely to protest speakers who the middle 80 percent- to paraphrase from my interviews- feels are not objectionable.

To reiterate, this vocal minority of students (at least at Bucknell) is not representative of the overall campus ideology. The political landscape at Bucknell leans to the left, but not as far to the left as students in this subset do. Many participants were quick to mention how Bucknell's student body was noticeably more conservative than similar liberal arts colleges. Survey data confirms that Bucknell students lean more to the right than the student body of other four-year private colleges and universities (CIRP 2016). Additionally, students at Bucknell remain more conservative over their college careers, experiencing less of a leftward shift in ideology than students at peer institutions (CIRP 2019). As a result, it's possible that the views of the most vocal liberal students at Bucknell appear more like outliers than they would at other campuses.

Another consequence of this dynamic is that Bucknell students demonstrated lower levels of affective polarization than I had expected. Some students did not socialize (whether intentionally or not) with outgroup partisans, while others did have friends from the other side of the aisle but shied away from discussing politics with them. More interview participants said either that politics did not come up in conversation with their friends or that ideology was not that important of a factor in forming their social circle. With regards to the former, I had expected a plurality of students to mention their frustration with outgroup partisan behavior in Congress, the White House, or the presidential primaries. Although some students did express strong opinions on these actors without being prompted, a larger portion only made general remarks about polarization in Washington. It's possible these measured attitudes stemmed from

the sizable number of Bucknell students who identify as "middle-of-the-road," but other students contended that apathy or indifference towards politics was the true explanation.

Of course, there is a third possible explanation for these attitudes: Perhaps Bucknell students simply have a disdain for political issues. After all, research demonstrates that people with an aversion to politics may just want to avoid political people, and they express negative feelings towards those vocal partisans on both sides of the aisle (Klar et al. 2018). We see more evidence of this in that Independents were more likely to agree with a message if delivered by their college president (a de facto neutral party) than if it came from either President Obama or Vice President Pence (BIPP 2017). Ultimately, I think Bucknell's student body represents a sum of these three pieces. Some students were truly moderates or libertarians who did not fit cleanly into one political party or the other. Other students may truly not be that cognizant of everyday politics. The students I interviewed represented a more politically informed subgroup, regardless of whether they were majoring in political science or had simply taken the course to learn more about the subject. Meanwhile, as at least one engineering student told me, a number of students do not encounter politics in their day-to-day lives. For some, this is because their courses do not concern politics, especially if they fall outside of the humanities or social sciences. For others, this is because their social circles do not discuss or are not interested in the topic.

Students may also appear apathetic because they truly do not care about the issues at hand in Washington. A few interviewees were quick to mention the white, upper-middle class demographic that makes up a noticeable proportion of Bucknell's student body. These students proposed that since this demographic would likely be unaffected by any major political decisions, they had little incentive to care. I did not speak with any students who fit into this

description, but I would guess this conjecture does describe some of the University's student population.

Although my qualitative interviews were revealing, they demonstrated that the characteristics of Bucknell's political climate did not necessarily overlap with national trends of polarization with the general public and on college campuses. If I were making a Venn diagram, the overlap would consist of self-censoring, liberal bias, and some disdain for outgroup partisans. Bucknell then differs from the general college population in terms of overall ideology (leaning more to the right than most campuses), student body demographics (trending more towards white, upper-middle class), and climate for political discussion. To the last point, Bucknell shares other institutions' problems with fostering civil political discourse due to factors such as liberal bias and self-censorship. Still, our campus diverges in that conversations are often dominated by a vocal minority of very liberal students, which is comparatively smaller than the population of further left ideologies at other colleges. It's also important to recognize data showing that Bucknell's student body is more moderate and more conservative than comparable four-year private colleges (CIRP 2016, 2019). Because of these differences, my data from Bucknell should not be interpreted as representative of the general college population. However, these interviews are integral for anecdotal evidence and gauging the feelings of the student body- and some of these experiences describe behavior on many other campuses.

Vocal Minority: Final Thoughts

In addition to the students I interviewed from Professor Ellis' class, I deliberately sought out a handful of students who were more outspoken in their beliefs from both sides of the aisle.

Though their perspectives were crucial for understanding how "the vocal minority" itself interprets the political climate on campus, it's difficult to say that these individuals represented the full scope of this subset. Therein lies a double-edged sword. Giving these students more attention would better contextualize their perspectives, but also inflate their true influence on campus. On the other hand, not delving further into this subset necessitates conjecture, and would have seemed inappropriate considering the frequency with which the vocal minority was mentioned in interviews. Though a few of my original interview subjects were strong partisans, I felt it was essential to represent the breadth of Bucknell's ideological spectrum via a few students who would be considered part of the most politically vocal on campus.

Had I shifted more of my focus on these vocal students, I would guess they would show the greatest levels of affective polarization. Like a number of other students I heard from, they would surely have strong opinions about the Trump administration, but I would expect they also have deeper sentiments than their peers about other political actors (such as Mitch McConnell, Mike Pence, and Nancy Pelosi). I would also expect that these students would show more disdain for their peers of the opposing ideology, rejecting conservatism and not wanting to associate with people who- at least openly- subscribe to that ideology.

I'm less confident in predicting whether a larger sample size of vocal, liberal students would tend to self-censor their opinions. Despite their prevalence, these students felt they had far from a perceived monopoly on political discourse. In fact, one individual who I interviewed said that he felt his "leftist" ideas were more taboo than most conservative ideas. Would other vocal students agree? It seems oxymoronic that anyone in this subset would hesitate to express their opinion, but I would imagine some of this has to do with how outnumbered that student is in a

classroom. The survey data I reviewed found that very liberal students felt about 10% more comfortable expressing their opinions (measured by lack of self-censorship) than very conservative students; however, a majority (51%) of very liberal students still self-censored (FIRE 2017). Thus, there is substantive data behind the argument that far left students might feel just as uncomfortable expressing opinions as students on the right. In general, a more in-depth focus on these students would have told a different story and produced far different results.

Other Forms of Politics

While my thesis has focused mainly on political discourse from ideological and partisan perspectives, this only captures part of the story on campus discourse. Much of the literature on affective polarization speaks in partisan or ideological terms. This makes sense given what surveys like ANES aim to accomplish; however, it does not encompass the various issues that would register on a college student's "feeling thermometer." I found many interview participants were hesitant to describe themselves as Democrats or Republicans. They preferred to be referred to by their ideology, rather than their partisan identity. It's possible that this stemmed from students simply being more loyal to ideological principles than party. Another explanation would suggest that conservative and libertarian students who felt lukewarm (or worse) towards President Trump wanted to distance themselves from the Republican Party. Likewise, some liberal students might hesitate to admit support for the Democratic Party if they did not condone its performance.

Regardless of what the correct explanation may be, it's clear that the climate on campus hinges on issues more nuanced than left-right politics. For instance, sexual assault and

harassment has become a hot-button issue especially in the past decade. On this issue, we see division between those who argue for the need to believe victims of such violence and those who argue that Title IX regulations neglect due process rights of the accused. Students may align on these issues in the same way they do on political issues (with the left more leaning towards the former and the right leaning towards the latter), but sexual assault is not necessarily as ideological of an issue. A closer look into how colleges address sexual assault lies outside the scope of my research, yet further investigation could shed light on how prevalent affective polarization is on the matter and how this might impact campus discourse.

Another issue that may mirror left-right politics but is not exclusively so is climate change. Across the nation, students are taking notice of where their universities are investing their endowments. In an effort to send a message about combating climate change, many students have called for university divestment from the fossil fuel industry. Most notably, students from Harvard and Yale staged a protest on the issue during halftime ceremonies at the schools' traditional football rivalry this past November.[16] The protest delayed the game for almost an hour and garnered national news attention about divestment. Signs on the field and around the stadium included messages such as "President Bacow and Salovey: Our Future Demands Action Now" and "Harvard & Yale Complicit" (O'Daly 2019).

Calls for divestment have also been seen at Bucknell. In September, student activist groups organized a rally that attracted hundreds from the University and Lewisburg communities (Nicolai and Rosenblatt 2019). Among the demands of the main organizers, Green New Deal Lewisburg, one was for the University to divest from the fossil fuel industry and another was to

[16] I actually witnessed this protest in person, attending The Game while visiting a friend at Yale over Thanksgiving Break.

transition away from the school's on-campus co-generation power plant by 2030 (Green New Deal Lewisburg 2020). Divestment may appear to be one-sided with respect to the activism around them. However, applying the interpretative data from my research, I would expect that a plurality of students (at Bucknell and perhaps elsewhere) may either be silently opposed or indifferent to this issue.

Faculty and Administration

Angling my research more towards polarization among students has its limits in describing the political climate on a college campus. As I mentioned earlier, many interview participants brought up how the faculty and administration impacts student life and political rhetoric. Some students mentioned how the faculty and administration leaned further to the left than the student body. Others admitted that they self-censored because they feared that their professors, not necessarily their peers, would see them differently or even use grades to punish them accordingly. One student who was a member of Bucknell Student Government went as far as to suggest that the administration injects their own left-leaning politics into issues where it's not necessary. Last November, a number of Bucknell professors spoke out along with student activists against Heather Mac Donald's visit to campus. Some professors were involved in a panel discussion at the alternative event provided that night. Overall, it seemed to be common knowledge among my interview participants (and probably a broader section of the University community) that the majority of Bucknell professors leaned left, and you could count the number of vocal, conservative faculty on one hand. Such an ideological imbalance is not specific to Bucknell, as Zimmerman (2016) shows how this trend exists across academia. In fact, it's

difficult to say whether this is a growing trend of a phenomenon that has persisted throughout academia for decades (Zimmerman 2016; Rothman et al. 2011).

To provide a full political ethnography of a college campus, it would be worth gathering information from a number of faculty perspectives and survey data on relations with faculty (e.g. FIRE 2017, 2018). Additionally, future research should delve further into when the notion (or stereotype) of academia's liberal bias first set in and how it has changed. Mirroring my search for unique student perspectives could yield a similar variety of opinions among liberal, moderate, and conservative professors. Would these professors be frustrated with the idea that certain topics are "off limits" or taboo in college classrooms? Would they encourage students from all over the ideological spectrum to speak up, even if they are out of line with their personal beliefs? I hope faculty would be fed up with the affective polarization they see on their campuses and would work to mitigate the political cleavages in our society through their interactions with students. Yet, this idealism might be met in practice with professors who show even more disdain for outgroup ideology than their twenty-something year-old disciples.

Moreover, learning administrative perspectives would add important context to these issues. It's a near-impossible task for college administrators to please all sides, especially if there is a tangible level of animosity along ideological divides in the student body. Perhaps administrators make decisions that appear ideological for the sake of preventing ideological conflict. For instance, one could see why an administration would not want a particular guest speaker to come to campus if they were certain to ignite controversy. Some propose that administrators lean further left than faculty (see Abrams 2018), but more research is needed to arrive at a stronger conclusion.

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My reactions to the 2016 election and Donald Trump's presidency inspired me to pursue this project. It's possible our current age of social media and 24-hour news cycles inflated perceptions of divisions on campus that had really existed for years, but I still believe 2016 represented a turning point of sorts in how American youth view and interpret American politics. As we approach the presidential election this coming fall, I am most interested to see whether affective polarization will remain on the rise in its aftermath. If Trump wins reelection, I am confident that our country and our college campuses will continue on a course of more intense polarization. At Bucknell, four more years of Trump would charge up liberal students (perhaps beyond the vocal minority) and might further amplify the voices of the most passionate students. In general, I would expect Trump's presidency, and more significantly his rhetoric, to foster greater levels of affective polarization to the detriment of civility across the United States.

If the Democrats take the White House in November, I'm more uncertain how it will impact political discourse. Are liberals and Democrats more vocal now because they are out of power? This might explain behavior at the elite level, but I'm less convinced that a Democrat in the Oval Office would fully mend divisions in our society. For one, I would think that a Biden presidency would do little to quiet down Sanders supporters who are disillusioned with the party's nomination choice. Most of Bucknell's vocal minority appear firmly in the Sanders camp, so I would not expect their influence to diminish in such a situation. Furthermore, a Democrat in the White House would not resolve issues on college campuses. Controversial guest speakers will continue to make appearances, and presumably they will continue to be met with a mix of interest, indifference, and outrage. Faculty ideology will not change, though some might

not feel the same necessity to project their beliefs once Trump is out of office. Finally, the makeup of the student body will not shift, so the same students who feel resentment for outgroup partisans will continue, as will the frequency of self-censorship. The greatest impact of Trump's ouster would be a return to decency at the top of American leadership; it's unclear how this would or would not transform colleges and universities. The data I've examined indicate that problems of polarization on campus are not simply a symptom of Trump's leadership and rhetoric.

No matter what happens in the 2020 election, I believe an environment in which college students feel afraid to express their true opinion or excessive resentment towards outgroup members is wholly unproductive for the United States. It seems contrary to the mission of American colleges for their students to exhibit this behavior rather than engaging in debate or learning how to interact with those with whom one shares intense disagreements. These alternatives are not easy, and it's difficult to isolate our own political attitudes from the broader landscape of issues in Washington and on college campuses. Moreover, some students might simply not care for politics and the partisan bickering that comes along with it. Yet in a world filled with so much hate, college theoretically seems like the perfect place to address these conflicts. Affective polarization is not policy, and it's not a life or death issue. However, I believe a more welcoming environment for discussion would be instrumental in helping to unite a divided country.

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM:

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me for my research. As Professor Ellis mentioned to you in class, I am writing my thesis on affective polarization and its impact on college campuses. For this study, I am attempting to understand how students view members of an opposing political party. I will also ask you a few questions about your own political preferences.

This interview should take approximately twenty-five minutes. Your participation in this research will be completely confidential. With your permission, I will record your responses, but will transcribe them to a document without any information that could be used to identify you. I will then delete the recording. Your answers will not be linked to your name in any part of the project.

If at any point during our conversation you decide you would like to stop participating in this study, or not answer a particular question, you may certainly do so without penalty.

If you have any questions about the experiment or your possible participation, you may contact me at shr005@bucknell.edu. If you have any questions regarding the rights of human participants in research you may contact Professor Slater, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at matthew.slater@bucknell.edu or (570) 577 2767.

If you consent to participate in this study, please print and sign your name below. By signing your name below, you are also confirming that you are at least 18 years of age.

_____ _____

Name Signature

Qualitative research interview script

1. What do you think about the current political climate?
2. Would you say you tend to lean more liberal or conservative?
    a. Do you support the Democratic or Republican Party?
3. How would you describe Donald Trump's presidency so far?
    a. How much do you think political conversations have changed since the 2016 presidential election?
4. Do you think Bucknell's student body leans more liberal, more conservative or somewhere in the middle? Why?
5. What do you think about people who belong to the [opposite party]?
    a. What do you think about that party's politicians?
    b. What do you think about that party's voters?
6. Do you have any friends that you know support the [opposite party]?
    a. If yes:
        i. Do you discuss politics with them? Is it easy to talk about political issues with them?
        ii. If you talk about politics with them, do you feel like you can find any common ground with them (is it a productive discussion)?
    b. If no:
        i. Would your opinion of a friend change if you knew they supported that party?
7. If you were to talk about politics with a group of students, do you think you expressing a strong opinion would deter other students from sharing an opposing viewpoint?
    a. In other words, do you ever stop yourself from expressing your political opinion?
8. How important is it to listen to an opposing viewpoint on political issues, specifically on college campuses?
    a. What would make you more inclined to listen to an opposing viewpoint?
9. How can we create a more welcoming environment for a range of political perspectives on college campuses (both in class and in other settings)?