

# Polarization, Fragmentation, and Democratic Deconsolidation in Interwar Europe <sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

Around the world, democracy seems to be under threat and polarization is considered one of the main culprits. In this study, we return the focus to ideological party polarization and conceptualize it as a multi-dimensional construct that encompasses different policy dimensions. Theoretically, we argue that the effect of polarization on democracy is neither linear nor unconditional: Both high and low levels of polarization have deleterious consequences for democracy, particularly at low levels of party fragmentation. When voters cannot meaningfully distinguish between two alternatives, democracies experience as much risk as when political opponents resent each other. Finally, we introduce novel data on election outcomes and party positions in 25 European interwar democracies, a period in which many democracies actually failed. Our observational analysis supports the predicted inverted U-curve relationship between ideological polarization and democracy across multiple measurement approaches and model specifications.

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Around the world, democracy seems to be under threat and polarization is considered one of the main culprits (McCoy and Somer, 2019; Svulik, 2019). Recent developments in countries as diverse as Brasil, India, Hungary, Turkey, and the United States have raised fears that democracy may fail in some of the largest and oldest democracies. Accompanying the diagnosis of democratic deconsolidation (Diamond, 2015; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019), which we define as the weakening of democratic rules and norms within democracies and the shift from democratic to autocratic regimes, are the successes of populists and right-wing nationalists that thrive on “us-vs-them” platforms (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012; Inglehart and Norris, 2017). Yet few contemporary, highly polarized democracies have failed outright. Out of four EU member states that faced threats of democratic deconsolidation, only Hungary’s democratic system seems to have suffered permanent damage (Bakke and Sitter, 2022). In the United States and Brazil, attacks on peaceful transfers of power have been rebutted. Moreover, both vote and seat shares of radical right-wing parties in Europe and objective indicators of democracy have exhibited surprising stability over the last thirty years (Art, 2022; Bartels, 2023; Little and Meng, Online First; Treisman, 2023). Is increasing polarization a problem for democracies or is it overhyped? And are the near misses of democratic failure in some countries cause for broader concern, or evidence that democracy remains resilient?

We argue that extreme levels of ideological polarization between parties contribute to democratic deconsolidation. When parties take extreme positions on at least one policy dimension, political deadlock, fear of government alternation, and weakened normative commitments towards democracy among elites become more likely, all of which spur deconsolidation. As polarization extends to multiple policy dimensions, these effects become exacerbated – a development that undercuts the democracy-enhancing effect of cross-cutting cleavages. In addition to extremely high levels of polarization, we contend that very low levels of polarization damage democracy. Too little differentiation between parties undermines accountability, and contributes to elite collusion and personalist politics. It might also be indicative of the exclusion of important opposition actors. Low party fragmentation magnifies the negative consequences of extreme polarization values. At high levels of polarization, competition between two parties increases the stakes of political competi-

tion, thus decreasing the chances of compromise and increasing fear of losing power. At low levels of polarization, decreasing the number of parties further limits the already constrained choice for citizens. In sum, we argue that the relationship between ideological polarization and democracy is curvilinear and conditional on party system fragmentation.

Whereas extensive work focuses on affective polarization between citizens (e.g., [Iyengar et al., 2019](#); [Reiljan, 2020](#); [Orhan, 2022](#)), we emphasize elite-level ideological polarization. We do so as recent research questions the relationship between affective polarization and individual political choices ([Broockman, Kalla and Westwood, 2023](#)), reveals that mass polarization follows elite cues ([Hahm, Hilpert and König, 2024](#); [Wagner and Praprotnik, 2024](#)), and underlines the critical role of elites in undermining democratic rules and norms ([Bartels, 2023](#)). Similarly, our decision to analytically separate the distance in party positions, i.e., polarization, from the number and size of parties, i.e., fragmentation stands in contrast to extant research and indices which equate high levels of polarization with large differences between two equally sized groups (e.g., [Esteban and Ray, 1994](#); [McCoy and Somer, 2019](#)). However, Sartori's (2005) classic study identified the greatest risk of democracy in high-polarization, high-fragmentation constellations. Moreover, summing up ideological or affective distances between groups along with the number and size of groups in one index conflates multiple theoretical constructs, and prohibits the identification of possibly separate effects.

To test our theoretical propositions, we study 25 democracies in Europe's interwar period. Investigating democratic deconsolidation in the two decades between 1919 and 1939 provides us with ample variation on both the outcome and the explanatory factors. In contrast to prevailing disagreements about the extent of deconsolidation in individual cases and broader samples today ([Diamond, 2015](#); [Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019](#); [Levitsky and Way, 2023](#); [Treisman, 2023](#)), scholarly consensus exists around the fate of interwar democracies. The historical distance to the interwar period gives us the benefit of clarity on the actual outcome of regime journeys, and thus helps us tracing the effects of party polarization and fragmentation on democratic deconsolidation. Although others have already probed the origins of democratic survival in interwar Europe (e.g.,

Cornell, Møller and Skaaning, 2017), our study is the first to quantitatively analyze the effects of polarization on democracy during the interwar years. We introduce novel data on 461 political parties and alliances across 129 elections in 25 European democracies between 1919 and 1939. Our data provides information on party vote and seat shares, policy positions across multiple policy dimensions, including economic left-right, center-periphery, urban-rural, and regime cleavages. As polarization might occur along different cleavage types in different countries (Reiljan, 2020, 393), we construct measures of multi-dimensional polarization to capture different dimensions of political conflict across our set of diverse democracies.

We evaluate our theoretical arguments with conservative fixed effects-estimators. Relying on multiple estimation techniques, model specifications, and operationalizations of our explanatory and outcome variables, we probe the robustness of our results. Our findings confirm our non-linear and conditional polarization argument: both high and low levels of polarization are associated with declining democracy values, especially at low levels of party fragmentation. We conclude by discussing how our findings about party ideological polarization relate to recent debates about the consequences of affective polarization and about the relationship of different types of polarization to democratic deconsolidation.

## **Types & Consequences of Polarization**

Recent public and academic debates advance the idea that polarization negatively affects democratic rules and norms, and endangers its survival in new and established democracies alike. Political scientists highlight the role of mass polarization in processes of democratic deconsolidation—the weakening of democratic rules and norms within democracies and the shift from democratic to autocratic regimes (Diamond, 2015; Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019).<sup>1</sup> In the prevalent theoretical account, elected incumbents exploit or even foment deep group divisions to undermine

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<sup>1</sup>Other scholars use the terms “backsliding”, “decline”, or “erosion” to denote similar concepts (Puddington, 2010; Bermeo, 2016; Kaufman and Haggard, 2019), though some focus exclusively on variation within democracies (Waldner and Lust, 2018). Importantly, our definition requires a continuous rather than a categorical conceptualization of the differences between democracies and autocracies.

democracy from within (McCoy and Somer, 2019; Svolik, 2019). These anti-democratic elites use their supporters' rejection or dislike of opposition policies or identities to attack three key pillars of democracy: first, they assault horizontal accountability in a process called "executive aggrandizement" that sidelines other elite veto players; second, they challenge vertical accountability by tilting the playing field against incumbents; third, they subvert the principle of participation by attempting to exclude opposition supporters to vote. Voters tolerate anti-democratic behavior by in-group politicians because they value partisan interests more highly than democratic principles (Svolik, 2019; Graham and Svolik, 2020).

The polarization-deconsolidation link has been studied extensively, and various studies present evidence in line with the negative effects of polarization. However, open questions persist about which type of polarization threatens democracy, and at which level of analysis it should be studied. *Affective polarization*, the strong degree of dislike towards political opponents, is at the center of the debate about deconsolidation.<sup>2</sup> Rooted in social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1971), affective polarization increases when individuals like members of their in-group while feeling negative sentiment towards members of out-groups. At the extreme, individuals cluster into two groups of "us" versus "them" across one overarching line of division (see Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012; McCoy and Somer, 2019). Affective polarization might co-occur with ideological party polarization as in the United States (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2016; Webster and Abramowitz, 2017), but need not do so, as in most contemporary European democracies (Reiljan, 2020). Simple partisan differences, regardless of the ideological preferences of voters, suffice to induce dislike of out-groups (Mason, 2015; Hahm, Hilpert and König, 2024).

Political scientists agree that affective polarization has been increasing at the mass level in the United States and several European countries (Reiljan, 2020, 386), that it induces negative interpersonal evaluations and behavior (Iyengar et al., 2019, 136-9), and that it even increases support for violence against out-group members among a minority of voters (Kalmoe and Mason, 2022). It is, however, disputed whether or not polarization actually leads voters to condone anti-democratic

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<sup>2</sup>Public discourse and some scholarly publications alternatively use the terms "tribalism" or "political sectarianism" (e.g., Finkel et al., 2020).

behavior. Case studies stress the centrality of polarization to democratic deconsolidation in states such as Turkey, Venezuela, India, or Hungary (McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018; Kaufman and Haggard, 2019). Similarly, cross-national studies find that affective polarization measured as a collective phenomenon weakens democracy and increases the frequency of political violence (Orhan, 2022; Piazza, 2023). In contrast, several recent survey experiments yield no evidence that affective polarization exerts a causal effect on political choices among participants in the United States (Santoro and Broockman, 2022; Broockman, Kalla and Westwood, 2023; Voelkel et al., 2023).

If the actual effects of affective polarization on democratic deconsolidation are in doubt, we know even less about the consequences of ideological polarization. *Ideological polarization* captures differences in economic interests, and more broadly different views of how society should be organized. Investigating the interwar and mid-20th century political conflict between the political left and right, Sartori (2005) argues that voters came to embrace the political extremes of communism and fascism. In Sartori's theoretical model of polarized pluralism, irresponsible policy claims by these radical political actors promised voters a better life against the backdrop of economic crises. A fragmented party system emerged in which moderate parties did not garner sufficient support to alternate in power. Voters became disillusioned with the ruling center parties, and turned to the ideological extremes in ever greater numbers. In turn, these anti-system parties blocked any political compromise, voters lost trust in the democratic system itself, and embraced authoritarian alternatives. However, recent empirical investigations find only subdued ideological polarization among voters in the United States and Europe (Mason, 2015; Hahm, Hilpert and König, 2024), thus questioning its relevance for purported trends of democratic decline. Moreover, existing correlational analyses between ideological polarization and democracy yield positive, negative, and null results (Wang, 2014; Arbatli and Rosenberg, 2021; Orhan, 2022).

The contradictory evidence on the relationship between mass polarization and deconsolidation opens up the question if political scientists have investigated the appropriate level of analysis. Studying democratic breakdown in interwar Europe and Cold War Latin America, Bermeo (2003) argues that elite rather than mass polarization led to democratic demise (also see Weyland, 2021).

Similarly recognizing the crucial role of elites, [Berman \(1997\)](#) and [Ertman \(1998\)](#) contend that the effect of civic activism on democracy critically hinges on the strength of political institutions and parties. Earlier work by [Luebbert \(1991\)](#) skips civil society and focuses exclusively on elite-driven class coalitions when explaining the emergence of interwar fascism and the survival of democracy. Echoing this skepticism of the culpability of ordinary people, recent research questions voter support for elite violations of democratic norms ([Grossman et al., 2022](#)), or interprets it as support for majoritarian as opposed to liberal forms of democracy ([Slater, 2013](#); [Albertus and Grossman, 2021](#)). Similarly, mass affective polarization seems to follow elite cues ([Hahm, Hilpert and König, 2024](#); [Wagner and Praprotnik, 2024](#)). Finally, [Bartels \(2023\)](#) argues that ideological mass preferences, including support for democracy, have changed little in Europe over the last thirty years. Instead, Bartels squarely blames elites for eroding democracy.

The centrality of elite actions closely fits the common mechanisms by which contemporary democracies deconsolidate. In contrast to the Cold War period when military coups made up almost half of all democratic breakdowns, the vast majority of recent episodes of democratic deconsolidation results from incumbent actions ([Bermeo, 2016](#); [Svolik, 2019](#)). Political leaders slowly subvert democratic norms and rules from within the system in a process commonly denoted as executive aggrandizement. Placing allies in key oversight institutions such as electoral commissions, courts, and state media boards, they undermine horizontal accountability. Once the guardrails of democracy have been loosened, anti-democratic leaders exploit electoral reforms, one-sided media coverage, and illicit campaign financing to stack the playing field against opposition forces, thus weakening vertical accountability. Finally, anti-democratic incumbents restrict participation of likely opposition voters, impairing democratic inclusion ([Bermeo, 2016](#); [Waldner and Lust, 2018](#)). In light of these findings, we argue for a greater focus on ideological polarization between parties, and its consequences for democratic deconsolidation.

## Conceptualizing Polarization & Fragmentation

Before outlining our argument of how ideological polarization affects democratic deconsolidation, we define our concept of interest. Typically, political scientists understand polarization as a structural variable describing the social distribution of attitudes towards out-groups (affective polarization) or the distribution of preferences towards ideas about social organization (ideological polarization). Crucially, polarization has three distinct elements: (1) the number and size of social groups, (2) the homogeneity of groups, and (3) the distance in attitudes or preferences between groups (Esteban and Ray, 1994, 824). According to the recent deconsolidation literature, polarization is most damaging to democracy when it divides individuals into two internally homogeneous and separate camps (e.g., McCoy et al. 2018, 18; Iyengar et al. 2019, 130).

We argue that we need to investigate these elements of polarization separately. First, much of the recent literature on polarization draws on the United States. Yet the United States has had a two-party system for almost its entire history. Polarization now arguably poses a threat to US democracy, because of greater within-party homogeneity and greater affective/ideological distance between parties, not due to variation in their number or size (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012; Webster and Abramowitz, 2017). To better understand the consequences of polarization elsewhere, we need to disentangle the effects induced by increasing distances between groups for one, and movements towards dyadic competition for another. Second, political scientists argue that the number and size of parties, their fragmentation, has its own, independent effect on democratic survival and quality (for a review, see Valentim and Dinas, 2024, 152-3). Similarly, ideological distance might have independent effects on democratic deconsolidation, as we will discuss in greater detail below. Where these two effects move in opposite directions, aggregate measures of polarization do not vary. Third, polarization, understood as ideological distance, and party fragmentation might even interact in bringing about deconsolidation as suggested by Sartori's (2005) famous model of "polarized pluralism."

We conceptualize ideological polarization as the distance on policy issues between political parties (Sartori, 2005, 111). Parties continue to be the key institutions of elite expression and orga-



nization in democracies (Valentim and Dinas, 2024, 152). Moreover, they constitute the “anchor” of group identity in measures of polarization (Reiljan, 2020, 377). Importantly, parties vary in their ideological distance across policy areas and issue dimensions. Although the economic left-right conflict has been the dominant political divide in the twentieth century, its intensity differs between regions and has waned over time (Kriesi et al., 2006). Evoking a long research tradition that recognizes ethnic differences as more conflictual than other social divisions, Reiljan (2020, 393) suggests a potentially important role of ethnic cleavages in aggravating affective polarization in Europe. Racial divisions are frequently cited as the root cause of polarization in the United States (Bartels, 2020). Yet others argue that affective polarization can emerge on top of any social division, such as urban-rural differences (Cramer, 2016; Patana, 2022). Therefore, we focus on party ideological polarization along multiple dimensions of political conflict. In our understanding, ideological polarization reaches its maximum, when parties are far apart on multiple policy dimensions. In line with this understanding, interwar elections in Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Lithuania exhibit the highest levels of polarization, even in fragmented party systems.

## **Polarization, Fragmentation & Democratic Deconsolidation**

What is the effect of party ideological polarization on democratic deconsolidation? We sketch several mechanisms at the inter-elite level and at the interaction between elites and voters. Regarding inter-elite effects, we first emphasize how increasing ideological polarization might spur processes of deconsolidation by inducing political deadlock. Large distances in ideological positions between parties make it more difficult to find political compromise (McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018, 18), and keep parties from forming stable governments (Warwick, 1992). Unable to solve political problems through parliamentary majorities, politicians might opt to choose extra-constitutional means, for example, through rule by executive decree as in Weimar Germany (Bermeo, 2003, 38). Even if radical parties are still small, their mere parliamentary representation moves moderate parties towards adopting culturally protectionist, or nationalist, positions (Abou-Chadi and Krause,

2020).<sup>3</sup>

Second, extreme levels of ideological polarization also increase the fear of government alternation. The potential loss of executive power to political competitors that aim to implement “radical social transformations” proves intolerable to incumbents who seek to preempt the transfer of power with “all-out efforts” of non-democratic means (Weyland, 2021, 317). Although this fear-of-alternation argument has been primarily associated with voters (Svolik, 2019), it equally pertains to political elites. In the words of Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013, 125): “When some actors fear that the continuation of a competitive regime will lead to their destruction or to major losses because the government has a radical agenda—whether this agenda is transformative or reactionary—the costs of tolerating the existing regime increase.” Third, a lack of normative commitment to democracy among key leaders suffices to render deconsolidation possible (cf. Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). As soon as political elites are unwilling to incur policy costs to protect democratic principles, the survival of democracy is at risk (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, 2013, 126).

The three mechanisms of deadlock, fear of alternation, and normative commitments towards democracy can be reinforced through feedback effects from the electorate. Once radical right-wing parties enter parliament, and thereby increase ideological polarization, the electorate polarizes as well (e.g., Bischof and Wagner, 2019). Similarly, once radical right parties gain representation, norms that made radical right supporters conceal their views crumble (Valentim, 2021). When these positions become normalized, voters increasingly express more polarized attitudes and preferences, raising demand for greater party polarization. Thus, the interaction between elite and mass polarization in a process that (2005, 120) calls “centrifugal drives.” In turn, increased party polarization activates the three mechanisms leading to deconsolidation discussed above.

Theorists of affective and ideological polarization predict a linear, negative relationship between polarization and democracy. As argued above, we embrace the view that extreme levels of ideological polarization induce deconsolidation. However, we argue that democracy requires

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<sup>3</sup>The irrelevance of size in the influence of radical parties on moderate positions underlines the importance of conceptually separating ideological distance and party size.

moderate levels of party polarization and the absence of elite ideological divisions might similarly induce deconsolidation.<sup>4</sup> Intermediate levels of ideological polarization energizes the electorate and increases participation (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008). In younger democracies, ideological polarization creates lasting voter-party alignments that strengthens elite responsiveness to voters in the long run (Bornschieer, 2019). By deduction, lack of political conflict reduces participation and responsiveness. Discussing the rise of cartel parties Katz and Mair (1995, 22) capture the threat of low polarization: “as the distinction between parties in office and those out of office becomes more blurred, the degree to which voters can punish parties . . . is reduced.” Moreover, lacking ideological differences could induce party collusion to secure powerful positions for elites, thus undermining their commitments to voters and damaging democratic accountability (Slater and Simmons, 2012). In the absence of party ideological differentiation, personalist and clientelist politics prevail (Kitschelt, 2000). In turn, the absence of elite responsiveness and accountability induces democratic deconsolidation, as elites start bending institutional rules to their own advantage (Stokes et al., 2013; Frantz et al., 2021). Finally, low levels of polarization might also imply one-party domination as in Orban’s Hungary. Without a credible opposition, it becomes more likely that a dominant government further undermines democratic institutions. We thus posit our primary hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Party ideological polarization at very high and very low levels is associated with democratic deconsolidation.*

At the beginning of this section, we argued that two elements of party polarization—the distance in ideas between parties as well as the the number and size of groups—should be investigated independently. So far, our argument focused exclusively on ideological polarization. We now turn to the second dimension, the number and size of relevant parties. For most political scientists, the verdict is clear. Polarization reaches its theoretical peak and is most threatening to democracy, when two groups of similar size oppose each other (Esteban and Ray, 1994; Iyengar, Sood

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<sup>4</sup>This is not an argument for majoritarian democracy. Clear electoral alternatives are compatible with elite coalitions in consociational democracies. In fact, Lijphart (1977) argued for the need of elite coalitions to overcome deep societal divisions.

and Lelkes, 2012; McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018). Yet Sartori (2005, 118-122), one of the most important theorists of ideological polarization, emphasizes the combination of ideological extremes with a fragmented party system as the most threatening constellation for democracies. Similarly, others highlight the negative effects of fragmentation irrespective of polarized ideas, especially during the interwar period and in presidential systems (e.g., Shugart and Carey, 1992; Karvonen and Quenter, 2002). This view of fragmentation and polarization stands diametrically opposed to the “us versus them” dynamic highlighted by the most recent literature on polarization.

We argue that two ideologically distant camps are most damaging for democracy. At high levels of party polarization, increasing fragmentation has no clear effect on political deadlock, but it decreases fear of alternation, and blunts the impact of lacking normative commitments to democracy. First, high levels of party fragmentation should make it more difficult to form stable governments because coalition formation requires greater compromise. Yet, a higher number of parties in a given ideological space implies closer ideological distances between the remaining parties, thus facilitating coalition building. Which effect dominates is an open empirical question.<sup>5</sup> Second, high levels of fragmentation imply that ideologically extreme parties cannot govern alone, thus making elections less of an all or nothing contest, and thereby reducing fear of alternation. Third, where high ideological polarization between parties induces weakened normative commitments to democracy, higher party fragmentation means that the number of elites who do not value democracy in itself should be smaller.

Similarly, at low levels of polarization, increased fragmentation should counteract deconsolidation pressures. Low fragmentation scores may describe a dominant party system where the opposition is weak as in Orbán’s Hungary, which threatens accountability.<sup>6</sup> Low fragmentation

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<sup>5</sup>The conjecture does not hold in the extreme case that each additional pair of parties represents a new policy dimension, and all parties position themselves in the extreme corners of the policy space. Importantly, theoretical approaches that conceptualize polarization as a combination of policy distance and the number of parties would classify this exception as one of intermediate polarization due to the higher number of parties, even if politicians adopt radical positions.

<sup>6</sup>A common concern voiced by observers of deconsolidation processes in Hungary, Turkey, and other cases is opposition fragmentation (McCoy and Somer, 2019, 255-6), which is conceptually distinct from party system fragmentation. Both Hungary and Turkey still feature small party fragmentation due to the dominant position of the ruling parties, even if opposition forces were fragmented at relevant elections.

combined with barely existing elite differentiation in two-party systems means voters do not face much of a choice. A weak or weakly visible opposition decreases voter participation, enables elite collusion, and decreases responsiveness. In contrast, increased party fragmentation should induce additional choice and additional policy positions in cases of low party polarization, thus mobilizing voters and improving accountability. Combining our argument about the effect of polarization conditional on fragmentation, we posit our second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** *Party ideological polarization at very high and very low levels is associated with democratic deconsolidation, specifically at lower levels of party fragmentation*

## Case Selection and New Data

We evaluate our hypotheses on a sample of democracies from Europe's interwar period. Recent debates about deconsolidation dynamics in contemporary democracies feature two outstanding characteristics. First, developments in the United States and some EU members raise fears that older democracies, previously thought to be established, might be at risk of deconsolidation. Second, the primary risk of deconsolidation emanates from elected incumbents who undermine the system from within, frequently using legal means. [Bermeo \(2016, 15\)](#) diagnoses a "profound ambiguity" in these deconsolidation processes under which "proving that a change in institutions has a nefarious purpose is often difficult." Unsurprisingly, scholars and empirical indicators disagree over the extent of deconsolidation ([Diamond, 2015](#); [Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019](#); [Levitsky and Way, 2023](#); [Treisman, 2023](#)).

Given the limited variation in democracy scores in contemporary European and Anglo-Saxon democracies, comparativists have two options. They can study democratic decline in other world regions to extrapolate the influence of risk factors such as polarization ([Kaufman and Haggard, 2019](#); [McCoy and Somer, 2019](#); [Arbatli and Rosenberg, 2021](#); [Orhan, 2022](#)). Yet how much can be learned from the fate of low and middle-income democracies for risks faced by the high income economies of the United States and Europe ([Treisman, 2023](#))? The main alternative is to

turn towards history and draw lessons from past versions of democracies at risk (Cornell, Møller and Skaaning, 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Berman, 2019; Treisman, 2023). We adopt the latter option in this study.

We introduce new data on governments, parliaments, parties and electoral systems for all 25 European democracies between 1st January 1919 and 31st August 1939. We rely on Boix, Miller and Rosato's (2013) minimal definition of democracy to classify interwar European regimes. Accordingly, a state is democratic if (1) it holds free and fair elections to select its legislature, (2) holds direct or indirect elections for its executive, and (3) a majority of adult men has the right to vote. Based on this definition we identify 25 interwar European democracies, for which we collected data on 129 elections and 461 parliamentary parties (388 parties, 29 alliances, and 44 (groups of) independents).<sup>7</sup> In 14 out of 25 countries, we relied on existing election results and party lists from the ParlGov database, and only corrected minor mistakes (Döring and Manow, 2016). In the remaining eleven predominantly eastern and southern European democracies, we collected original data on electoral results, the list of competing parties, and their government status. Together with two PhD students with specific regional expertise, we consulted election compendiums (Mackie and Rose, 1991; Nohlen and Stöver, 2010), national parliamentary websites, archives, historical newspapers, national libraries, electoral commissions, and other academic experts to compile and clean the electoral results.

Additionally, we assembled new information on policy goals and organizational characteristics for all political parties and electoral , but not independents. Specifically, our data provides information on parties' seats and vote shares, their status as government or opposition parties, their position on the economic left-right dimension, their nationalist, territorial, rural and anti-system claims, the presence of violent wings, and the number of party factions. Unlike contemporary efforts to classify party's policy positions, our data on party characteristics is time-invariant. Given the inconsistent publication of party manifestos during Europe's interwar period, to say nothing of election manifestos, and the paucity of digitally accessible speeches and/or newspaper procla-

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<sup>7</sup>We provide detailed information on our sample in Appendix A.

mations, we were unable to uncover election-by-election updates on party policy positions. While unchanging for each party, our data nevertheless features temporal variation through parties entering and exiting parliament. We point to the rise of contemporary populist or radical challenger parties and argue that the temporal variation in policy positions induced by new parties is more consequential to democratic stability than policy changes within parties.<sup>8</sup>

Combining expert input for specific countries with the research expertise of the team mentioned above, we implemented a multi-stage classification process to ensure data reliability and validity. After developing a codebook and an online data entry portal that helps prevent typos and other forms of entry errors, we trained several research assistants across three rounds of feedback and test cases. Where standardized party or party system case studies were available (e.g., [Wende, 1981](#); [McHale and Skowronski, 1983](#)), the research assistants extracted relevant information for parties and classified the variables of interest. The authors reviewed these decisions and weighed in on critical cases for which information was sparse or contradictory. In a second round, the authors themselves and two regional experts classified more challenging cases, specifically younger and short-lived democracies in eastern and southern Europe. In these cases, we relied on primary sources such as newspaper articles contemporary books, and election manifestos as well as historical case studies.<sup>9</sup> To classify the remaining cases, including countries for which we lacked linguistic expertise and small parties that were only represented in parliament for a single period, we contacted historians and political scientists who specialized in interwar European politics.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>According to [Abou-Chadi and Krause \(2020, 839\)](#), radical right parties entering parliament move moderate parties' policy positions along the cultural dimension on average by the distance between the center-left Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) and the center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) during the 2010 election. Yet the distance to the radical right Party for Freedom (PVV) is more than three times that difference in the same year ([Lehmann et al., 2023](#)).

<sup>9</sup>The languages spoken within our research team allowed us to consult primary sources in Czech, Dutch, English, French, Finnish, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Portuguese, and Serbo-Croatian.

<sup>10</sup>We are specifically grateful to anonymous for their expertise on Greece.

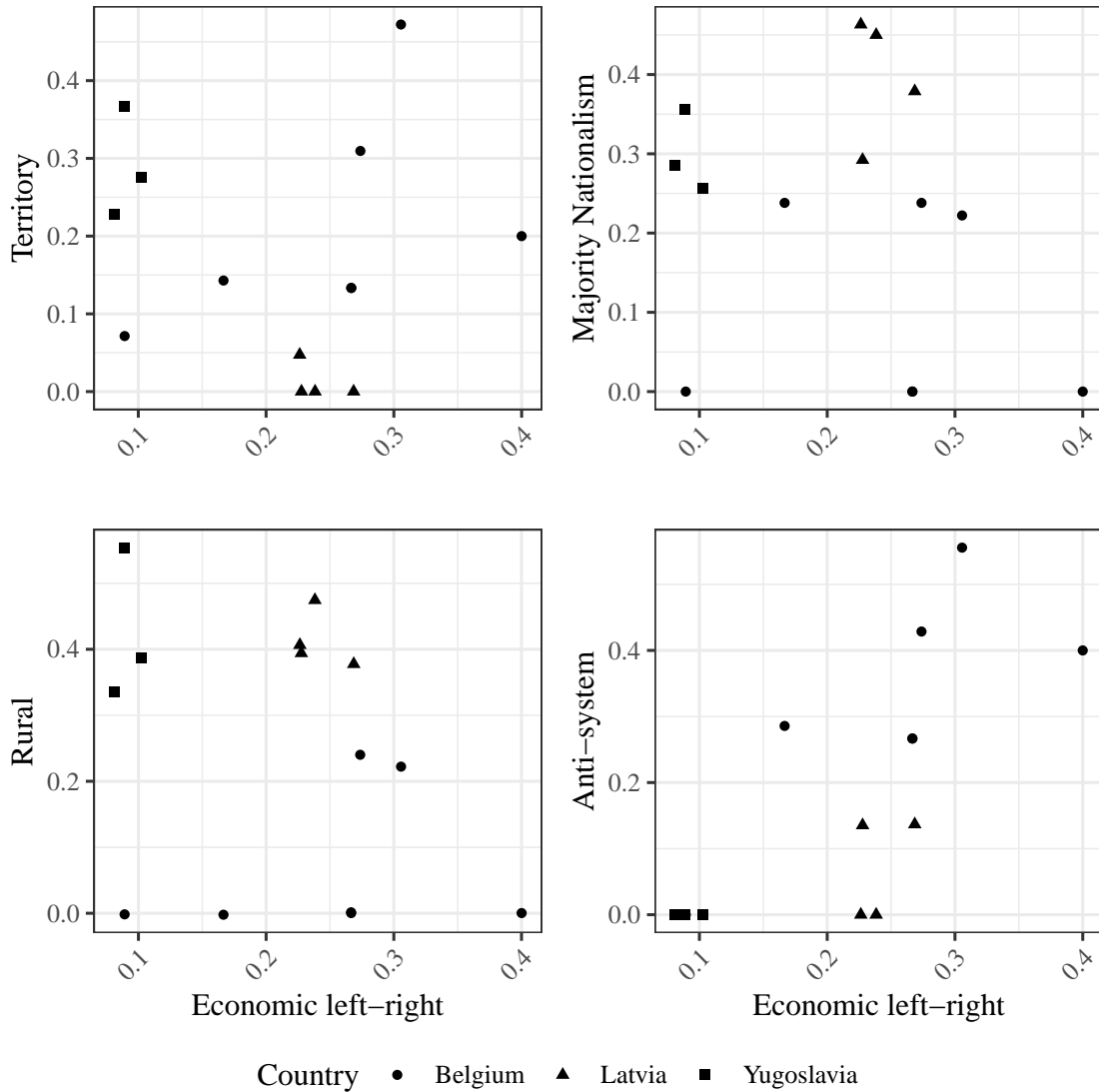
## Measurement & Research Design

To test our hypotheses, we compare variation in polarization, fragmentation, and democracy levels at each of our 129 democratic interwar elections. Our main outcome variable is the Polyarchy index from the V-DEM data (Coppedge et al., 2022). Relating back to Dahl's (1971) foundational work on democracy, the index captures the quality of electoral democracy on a continuous scale between 0 and 1 on five fundamental dimensions: (1) the degree over which citizens elect the legislature and executive, (2) the extent of suffrage, (3) the scope of election interference, (4) the range of freedom association, and (5) expression. The index explicitly ignores components of liberal democracy such as the protection of minority rights (Coppedge et al., 2022, p. 43-4). To ensure that our results are not subject to a specific choice of measuring the outcome, we additionally employ V-Dem's liberal component index (`v2x_liberal`) and the Polity V score (`polity2`) in Online Appendix D. We capture each of the different outcome measures in the year following the election, as we expect that the effects of polarization and fragmentation require time to unfold.

Our main explanatory variables are measures of party polarization and fragmentation. In our theoretical discussion above, we argued for separating the effects of ideological distance and the relative size and number of parties, and for conceptualizing polarization along multiple dimensions. Figure 1 plots ideological polarization along different dimensions for the elections of three interwar democracies. The horizontal axis always displays the traditional economic left-right dimension. In contrast, the horizontal axes vary other important policy dimensions. The plots clearly reveal that uni-dimensional measures of polarization would fail to capture crucial ideological divisions. First, conflict between the economic left and right hardly mattered in interwar Yugoslavia (squares), where parties representing ethnic groups competed over autonomy and majority status. Second, Latvia (triangles) experienced left-right, urban-rural, and ethnic divisions but not along territorial lines. Instead, Latvia's minorities were predominantly urban and did not seek autonomy or secession. Finally, the case of Belgium (black circles) demonstrates the importance of all policy dimensions while showing substantial temporal variation including the rise of the anti-system Rex



Figure 1: Different dimensions of ideological polarization in select interwar democracies, 1919-1939.



movement in the 1930s.

In line with our theoretical argument, we introduce a multi-dimensional measure of polarization that focuses exclusively on ideological differences: the Euclidean distance between parliamentary parties.<sup>11</sup> To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that introduces a multi-dimensional measure of polarization to the literature on democratic backsliding. Using our

<sup>11</sup>Other, more commonly used measurements of polarization such as Dalton (2008) and Esteban and Ray (1994) conflate seat distribution and distance between parties. We nevertheless investigate these indices and discuss deviating results in Section .

newly collected data, we compute the difference in policy positions  $p$  between each pair of parties  $i$  and  $j$  at each election. We capture the labor-capital conflict with policy differences on the economic left-right dimension (between 1 for left-wing and 5 for right-wing, re-scaled to 0-1), center-periphery divisions with territorial claims (0 if none, 0.5 for demands to decentralize and 1 for secessionist claims), and urban-rural conflicts with rural claims (dichotomous indicator that takes the value of 1 if a party advocates agrarian interests or interests of the rural population). We add two other relevant dimensions: anti-system claims (dichotomous indicator) and majority nationalism (dichotomous indicator).<sup>12</sup> Adding a regime cleavage and a non-territorial measure of ethno-nationalist conflict is important, both in historical and contemporary cases that undergo democratic deconsolidation.

$$EuclDist_{i,j} = \frac{1}{K} \sqrt{\sum_{k=1}^K (p_{i,k} - p_{j,k})^2} \quad (1)$$

We then measure multi-dimensional polarization as the square root of the sum of squared differences between positions  $p$  of parties  $i$  and  $j$  for all dimensions  $k$  (see Equation 1). By dividing the sum of squared distance measures with the number of dimensions  $K$ , we scale the Euclidean distance for each party pair  $i, j$  to lie between 0 and 1.<sup>13</sup> We expect the most extreme polarization value to affect democratic deconsolidation. Thus, we choose the maximum Euclidean distance observed in a given election as our main explanatory variable, what [Sartori \(2005, 111\)](#) calls the “overall spread of the ideological spectrum of any given polity” (also see [Matakos, Troumpounis and Xeferis, 2016](#)).<sup>14</sup> Finally, we capture the second theoretical dimension of interest, fragmentation, by computing the effective number of parties (ENP), the inverse of the sum of squared seat shares  $s$  for all parties  $n$  represented in a given parliament (see Equation 2 and [Laakso and Taagepera, 1979](#)):

$$ENP = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n s_i^2} \quad (2)$$

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<sup>12</sup>Variable definitions, measurement scale, and coding instructions are available in our Online Appendix B.

<sup>13</sup>Empirically, we observe polarization values far below the maximum possible value of 1, as party pairs in our sample never exhibit a maximum difference across all policy positions at once. In this sense, our multi-dimensional measure of polarization incorporates cross-cutting cleavages.

<sup>14</sup>We evaluate alternative measures of ideological distance, including the mean distance between all parties in our robustness section, and find substantively similar results.

We model the relationship between polarization, fragmentation, and Polyarchy with beta regressions. The Polyarchy index takes values between 0 and 1, though in our cases neither 0 nor 1. Common linear regression models might neither show unbiased nor efficient estimates, and fit values far beyond the actual natural bounds of our measurements (Cribari-Neto and Zeileis, 2010; Ferrari and Cribari-Neto, 2004). The Beta function only predicts values between 0 and 1 (excluding 0 and 1) and simultaneously estimates mean and dispersion parameters, thus effectively addressing heteroskedasticity in the data.<sup>15</sup> To ensure that our results do not depend on the choice of statistical model, we provide linear regression results in our Online Appendix D.1.

We employ conservative country and year-fixed effects to control for any country-specific and period trends that drive changes in the level of Polyarchy. We further assess whether our results are robust to adding control variables. The extant literature identifies economic development (Przeworski et al., 2000), small country size (Lijphart, 1977), democratic legacies (Cornell, Møller and Skaaning, 2017), and party institutionalization as key correlates of democratic stability (Ziblatt, 2017). Thus, we control for the following confounders: a country’s level of economic development as well as its population size (both logged and lagged by one Bolt and van Zanden, 2020), its democratic experience (logarithm of years since democratic transition Boix, Miller and Rosato, 2013), its history as an independent state (logarithm of years since independence Gleditsch and Ward, 1999), its level of party institutionalization (logarithm of oldest party age, coded by authors), and the prevalence of violence in a given country (number of parties with violent wings, authors’ data).<sup>16</sup> section C in the Online Appendix displays descriptive statistics of all variables included in our analysis.

Most of the control variables clearly constitute pre-treatment confounders rather than post-treatment mediators or colliders that would bias our results (Cinelli, Forney and Pearl, Online First).<sup>17</sup> The exceptions are our indicators of economic development and violence. If polarization

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<sup>15</sup>The dispersion parameter is modeled as a function of the mean and a constant  $\phi$  that allows the dispersion to vary for different  $X$ .

<sup>16</sup>We fill in missing values for GDP per capita and population size for the Baltic countries, Luxembourg, Iceland, and Poland from country-specific sources.

<sup>17</sup>Collider variables are common effects of the main explanatory and outcome variables. Mediator variables are caused by the explanatory variable and effect the outcome variable in turn. Introducing them in a statistical model

causes violence and leads to democratic deconsolidation, violence would be a mediator and capture some of polarization's direct effect, thus weakening the association we find between polarization and violence. If, however, violence is the result of both polarization and deconsolidation, then the bias on our main effect would be unknown. The same considerations apply for economic development. Unfortunately, we cannot simply drop either variable as it is conceivable that violence and economic development cause both polarization and deconsolidation. Although we cannot completely escape the dilemma of either risking omitted variable or collider bias, we display models with and without these controls as a first indication that our results are robust in both cases.

## Empirical Analysis

In the following section, we put our hypotheses regarding the non-linear and conditional effect of polarization to the test. We begin by describing the unconditional, bivariate relationships between two polarization and democracy indices each in Figure 2.<sup>18</sup> All combinations of measurements demonstrate non-linear relationships. The relationship between democracy and our preferred measure of polarization, the maximum euclidean distance, shows a consistent inverse U-shape. At low and high values of polarization, the two democracy indices indicate lower levels of democracy than in the intermediate range of polarization. The [Esteban and Ray \(1994\)](#) index of polarization also indicates an inverted U-curve for the two V-Dem indices, albeit with greater uncertainty at higher levels of polarization. Esteban & Ray's index depends on policy positions and party size, and their conflation may contribute to the greater observed uncertainty.

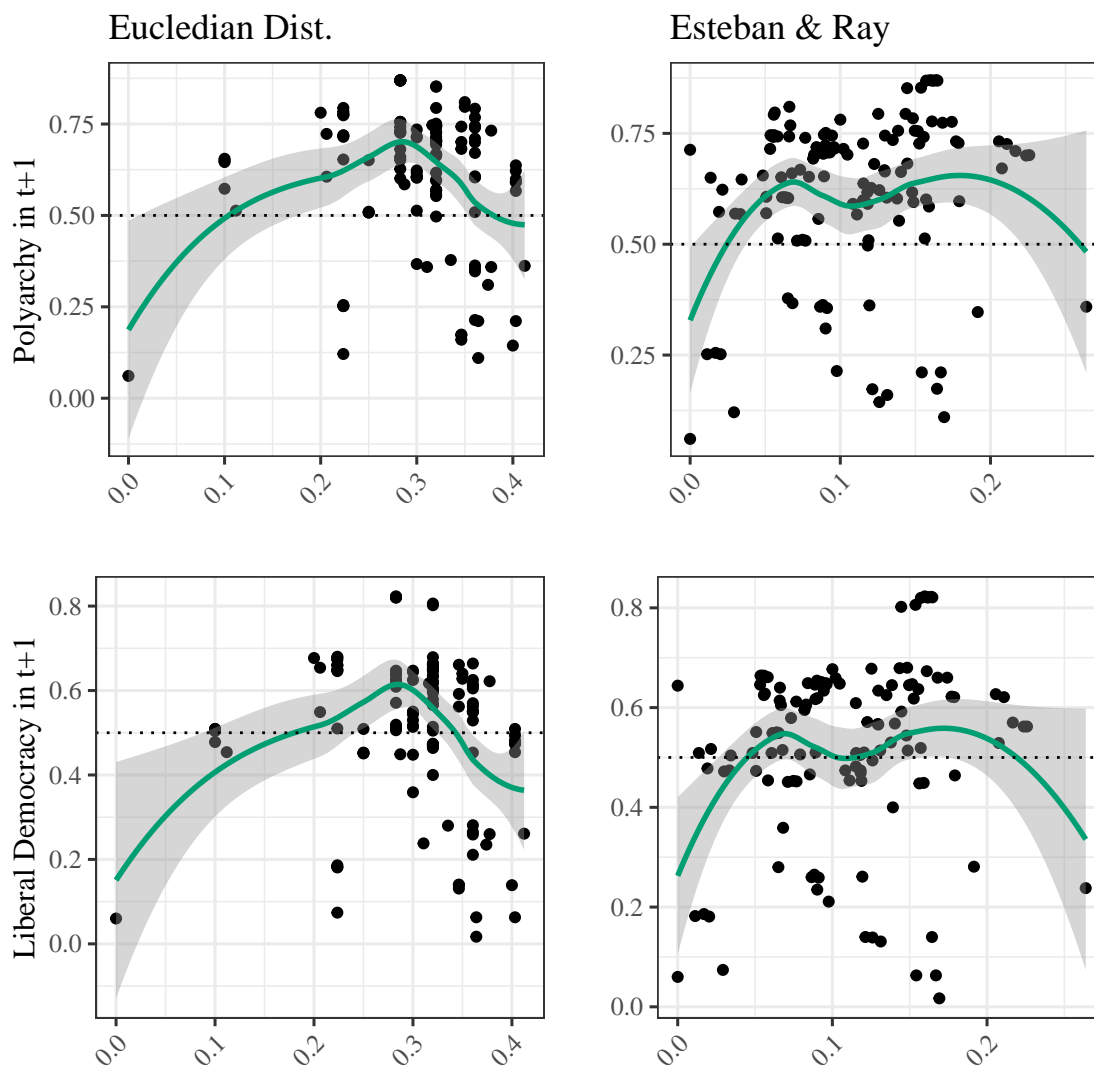
Next, we turn to multi-variate analysis that support our inverted U-curve hypothesis. [Table 1](#) shows results from different beta regressions of levels of Polyarchy in the following year on polarization and fragmentation using a logit link function. All models include country and year-fixed effects. Model 1 only contains a linear specification of the maximum Euclidean distance measure

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introduces bias if we are interested in the direct effect of an explanatory on an outcome variable.

<sup>18</sup>Appendix D.3 lists the functions used to measure polarization according to [Esteban and Ray \(1994\)](#).

Figure 2: Polarization indices ( $t$ ) and democracy measures ( $t + 1$ ) in interwar Europe.



*Notes:* The solid line depicts the non-parametric estimate of a loess function. The dashed line indicates the common cut-off point between democracies and autocracies for each measure.

of polarization to test the established claim that high levels of polarization are damaging to democracy. Model 2 adds our measure of fragmentation, the effective number of parties (ENP). Finally, Model 3 constitutes the first test of hypothesis 1, that the effect of polarization on democracy is curvilinear, by adding a squared term of the Euclidean distance. Model 4 also includes control variables. To test hypothesis 2, Models 5 and 6 interact the squared polarization measure with our fragmentation measure.

Although Models 1 and 2 exhibit weak signals of linear or unconditional effect of polarization on changes in democracy scores, the direction of the effect runs counter to existing theories that associate high polarization levels with decreasing democracy scores. At least in the interwar period, there is no simple negative relationship between ideological polarization and democracy. In contrast, the quadratic specifications in Models 3-4 indicate better model fit and an inverted-U relationship between polarization and democracy. Finally, Models 5 and 6 that capture both the non-linear and conditional logic of our theoretical argument (H2). Both models reveal increasing effect sizes and substantial improvements in model fit.

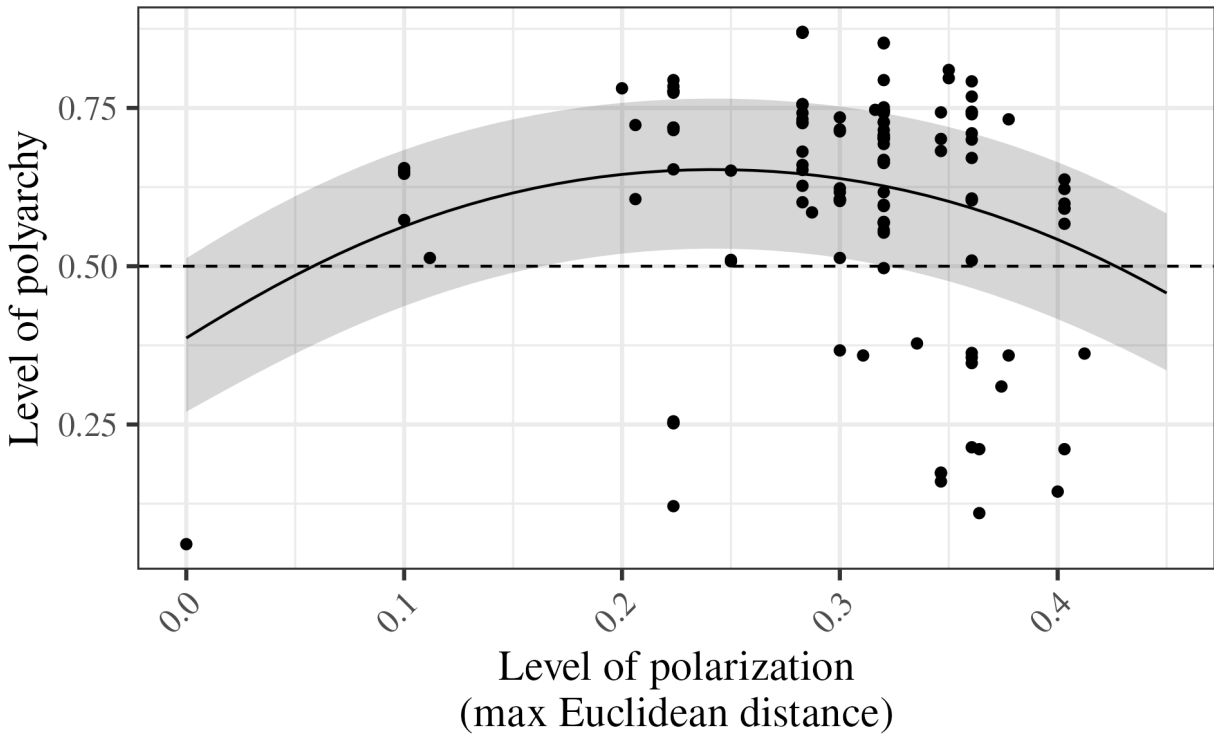
Table 1: Beta regression models of V-Dem polyarchy on multi-dimensional polarization, 1919-1939.

	<b>M1</b>	<b>M2</b>	<b>M3</b>	<b>M4</b>	<b>M5</b>	<b>M6</b>
Euclidean dist (max)	1.66*	1.03	8.87**	13.42***	29.51***	30.01***
	(0.72)	(0.75)	(3.40)	(3.78)	(5.80)	(6.06)
Euclidean dist (max) <sup>2</sup>			-18.28*	-25.11**	-63.52***	-60.05***
			(7.62)	(8.24)	(12.85)	(13.19)
ENP		0.12*	0.17***	0.16**	0.72***	0.72***
		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Eucl. dist (max):ENP					-6.67***	-5.64***
					(1.56)	(1.57)
Eucl. dist (max) <sup>2</sup> :ENP					14.04***	11.19***
					(3.12)	(3.10)
Constant	-0.15	-0.18	-0.77*	20.51	-2.30***	14.47
	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.38)	(15.06)	(0.68)	(14.45)
Country-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	129	128	128	121	128	121
Log Likelihood	158.37	160.14	163.13	166.62	173.30	173.28

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05

To illustrate the complex relationships between polarization and democracy, we turn to graphical interpretation. Figure 3 showcases predicted levels of Polyarchy as a function of changes in polarization, thus testing the unconditional effect of polarization specified by H1. The solid black line displays the median predicted Polyarchy value for hypothetical levels of polarization assuming the non-linear relationship described by Model 4.<sup>19</sup> The grey area around the black line shows the 90% confidence interval. The points in Figure 3 indicate the observed Polyarchy and polarization values (maximum Euclidean distance) in our data.

Figure 3: Predicted values of Polyarchy as a function of multi-dimensional polarization (Euclidean maximum) based on Model 3.



At very low levels of polarization, a country’s democratic score as measured through the Polyarchy index is low and tends towards authoritarian forms of government (below 0.5 of the Polyarchy scale). As polarization values increase, so does the predicted Polyarchy value up to approximately the middle of our polarization scale. There, the relationship between polarization

<sup>19</sup>For this simulation, we fix the ENP at the observed median.

and the Polyarchy index reverts: increasing polarization is negatively associated with a country's democratic stability. While lending some support to Hypothesis 1 that extremely low and high levels of party polarization are associated with democratic deconsolidation, the results in Figure 3 are surrounded by uncertainty. Only the most extreme median predictions fall outside the 95% confidence bounds of the median prediction.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the estimated relationship on the left side of the scale is driven by few data points. After discussing our tests of H2, we will discuss the role of outliers and other robustness tests.

Figure 4 plots the relationship between polarization and levels of Polyarchy conditioning on the level of fragmentation. We chose to fix the ENP at 2.5 and 6 respectively, following Sartori's (2005, 110) seminal differentiation between two and extremely pluralized party systems. The points depict actual observations, whereas the black and green lines show predicted democracy values from Model 5 in Table 1. The shaded regions span the 90% confidence intervals around the estimated median level of Polyarchy.

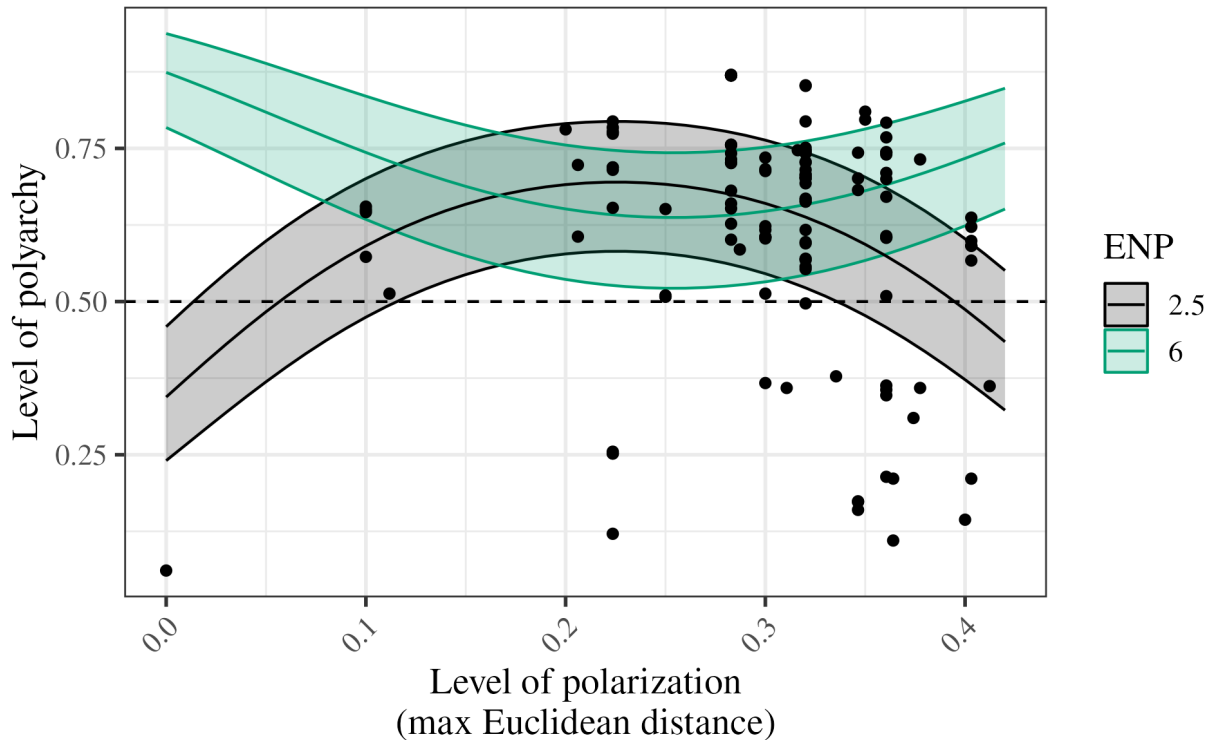
Figure 4 provides two key insights. First, the effect of polarization on democracy critically depends on the degree of party fragmentation. Contra Sartori, party systems that approach two-party competition and that are either highly polarized ideologically or not polarized at all decrease democratic scores in line with H2. In contrast, at high levels of fragmentation polarization has a negligible effect on Polyarchy scores. The shape of the curve inverts to a very flat U, though the changes in predicted democracy levels along different polarization scores are hardly substantial. High fragmentation diffuses polarization. Second, the predicted effect of polarization becomes substantively and statistically stronger at both the high and the low ends of our measurement. Statistically significant differences to the median value are now recognizable in the intervals  $[0, 0.09]$  and  $[\.36, 1]$ . Despite these stronger results we remain hesitant to confidently embrace the relationship between low polarization and Polyarchy at high levels of fragmentation due to lacking support in our data.

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<sup>20</sup>The exact location of the curve on the vertical axis varies strongly with the choice of country-fixed effect. We chose Finland as a country that faced several challenges to democracy but survived (Capoccia, 2005, 138-176).



Figure 4: Predicted values of Polyarchy as a function of multi-dimensional polarization (Euclidean maximum) interacted with the effective number of parties based on Model 5.



## Robustness tests

Given the limited sample size and concerns about the confidence in our results, we subject our thesis to several robustness tests. We probe the sensitivity of our findings to the choice of statistical models, measurement choices, and omitted variable bias. Due to space limitations, we only summarize the main results here and refer the reader for detailed discussions to the relevant appendix sessions.

To guard against model-dependence, we re-estimate all models in [Table 1](#) using ordinary least squares regressions ([Online Appendix D.1](#)). To ensure that our findings are not driven by measurement choices, we use two additional outcome variables (V-Dem’s liberal component index and the Polity V score in [Section D.2](#)), as well as three alternative operationalizations of our explanatory variables: the mean Euclidean distance which considers policy positions by all parties, and multi-dimensional implementations of Dalton’s (2008) and Esteban & Ray’s (1994) indices.

As the latter two measurements capture elements of both party polarization and fragmentation, we just test the curvilinear relationship between polarization and deconsolidation (Section D.3). When only testing H1 in Models 3 and 4, we fully replicate the results in the majority but not in all models. In contrast, we find substantively similar and statistically significant results in all replications of Models 5 and 6, which jointly tests the curvilinear (H1) and conditional (H2) effects of polarization on deconsolidation. Finally, we probe whether our multi-dimensional measure of polarization is driven by any single underlying dimension. In line with our argument that multi-dimensional polarization matters for deconsolidation, we find substantively weaker and frequently statistically insignificant results when testing individual policy areas (Section D.4). Overall, we uphold that our results remain robust to alternative modeling and measurement strategies.

Finally, we probe the sensitivity of our results to omitted variable bias. We do so by simulating the effect of hypothetical confounding variables at different levels of partial correlation with our outcome and explanatory variables (Cinelli and Hazlett, 2020). Higher levels of correlation with both the outcome and the explanatory variables indicate more severe confounding. The simulation indicates how strong an unobserved confounder would have to be relative to included control variables to undermine the key relationship found. Cinelli & Hazlett’s simulation approach is designed for linear relationships, so we run simulations for both the linear and squared estimates of polarization in Model 4.<sup>21</sup> We add the log of GDP per capita, one of the strongest predictors in the literature on democratic survival (Przeworski et al., 2000), as the relative comparison. The simulation results reported in Online Appendix D.5 indicate that even a predictor three times the strength of the GDP per capita estimate in our regression models would not undermine our findings. Notably, the substantive effects of polarization are more robust to omitted confounders than their statistical significance. While the linear effect of the Euclidean distance measure of polarization continues to be statistically significant, even if we failed to include a confounder three times as strong as GDP, the estimate coefficient of the squared Euclidean distance would dip barely below conventional thresholds of significance (t-value=-1.994).

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<sup>21</sup>We chose Model 4 with weaker results as the more conservative test.

## Outlier analysis

Above, we identify outlier observations as a threat to the validity of our findings. Figures 3 and 4 hint towards singular influential cases that might drive our results. Most importantly, there is only one observation with extremely low levels of polarization and fragmentation, and a low democracy score: the Greek election on June 9, 1935. At the high end of the polarization scale, our results are buttressed by far more data points. Nevertheless other borderline cases of democratic rule might undermine our findings. The German election on March 5, 1933, held shortly after the Reichstag's fire, is the most notable case. Using an executive decree, Adolf Hitler used the fire as an excuse to restrict important civil liberties before the elections took place. Especially members of the German Communist Party (KPD) were arrested prior to the election, although the KPD was only officially banned after the election (Berman, 2019, 250-1). Despite these restrictions on civil liberties and the prosecution of political opponents, the NSDAP did not manage to win an absolute majority of seats in the Reichstag. German democracy eventually broke down when parliament passed the Enabling Act on March 23, 1933.

We investigate the influence of these potential outliers using Cook's distance. Based on a threshold of 3 times the mean Cook's distance, we identify only one influential case: the 1919 election in Italy. Table 2 displays results for Models 3 and 5 while dropping each of following sets of elections: the Greek parliamentary election in 1935 ("w/o GR '35"), the 1919 Italian election identified with Cook's distance ("w/o IT '19"), and all elections in years that do not occur during democratic country-years as classified by Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013) but were held before democracy broke down or after democratic rule was established ("only BMR")<sup>22</sup>. The "only BMR" sample thus accounts for potentially arbitrary decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of "quasi-democratic" elections. Our results are robust to excluding the 1919 Italian election and the election considered undemocratic by BMR. Dropping the 1935 Greek election leads to statistically insignificant results in Model 3 but returns substantively weaker but statistically significant

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<sup>22</sup>This excludes the March 1933 election in Germany, the 1926 election in Lithuania, the 1919 Austrian election and the only election from San Marino (1920).

results in our replication of Model 5. Thus, once we consider the conditional effect of polarization on democracy, we continue to find statistically significant result even after dropping the most egregious outlier.

Table 2: Beta regression models of V-Dem polyarchy on multi-dimensional polarization without outliers, 1919-1939.

	w/o Greece, 1935		w/o Italy, 1919		only BMR	
Euclidean dist (max)	2.21 (3.78)	19.55* (9.45)	8.55* (3.43)	30.14*** (5.81)	8.55* (3.43)	30.14*** (5.81)
Euclidean dist (max) sq.	-7.40 (7.95)	-47.71** (17.46)	-17.49* (7.71)	-64.99*** (12.86)	-17.49* (7.71)	-64.99*** (12.86)
ENP	0.14** (0.05)	0.35 (0.34)	0.17*** (0.05)	0.74*** (0.21)	0.17*** (0.05)	0.74*** (0.21)
Eucl. dist (max):ENP		-4.21 <sup>+</sup> (2.41)		-6.99*** (1.57)		-6.99*** (1.57)
Eucl. dist (max) sq.:ENP		10.08* (4.30)		14.80*** (3.15)		14.80*** (3.15)
Constant	0.20 (0.46)	-0.78 (1.33)	-0.78* (0.39)	-2.36*** (0.68)	-0.78* (0.39)	-2.36*** (0.68)
Country-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	127	127	126	126	126	126
Log Likelihood	166.32	171.70	160.17	171.18	160.17	171.18

\*\*\* p < .01; \*\* p < .05; \* p < .1

Although the 1935 Greek election seems to drive parts of our results, we do believe that it should be included in the analysis since it exemplifies our theoretical considerations for low polarization and low fragmentation outlined above. In cases where governments manage to quasi-monopolize parliamentary power, party polarization decreases automatically due to the absence of a parliamentary opposition. In turn, the risks of violent extra-parliamentary opposition, executive aggrandizement, self-coups or coups by opposing actors all increase, and democratic deconsolidation becomes far more likely. This is exactly what happened in 1935 Greece: as a response to an attempted coup in March of the year, the Tsaldaris government substantially increased the hurdles for opposition parties to compete in the upcoming election. As a result, pro-government actors won all but 13 out of 300 seats in Parliament. Under the leadership of Kondylis, factions within the government coalition who opposed parliamentary democracy used these power grabs to stage

a coup against Tsaldaris himself, thereby ending democratic rule in Greece in 1936 (Zink, 2000).

## Conclusion

In this study, we advance the literature on polarization and democratic deconsolidation. Specifically, we argue that high and low levels of party ideological polarization contribute to democratic deconsolidation, specifically at low levels of party fragmentation. We also propose a critical conceptual innovation by measuring party polarization along multiple policy dimensions. We test our theoretical argument with novel data on party positions and election outcomes for Europe's interwar period, when about half of all democracies actually failed. Our findings indicate robust support for the democracy-damaging effects of high levels of ideological polarization at low levels of party fragmentation. While surrounded by greater uncertainty due to fewer cases, we similarly uncover suggestive evidence in line with the deleterious effects of low levels of ideological polarization and fragmentation, even after removing the largest outlier. Although our observational research design does not allow us to make strong causal claims, we show it is unlikely that omitted variable bias drives the observed correlations. Moreover, our results are robust to the choice of statistical model as well as various operationalizations of the outcome and explanatory variables.

In light of recent skepticism about the negative consequences of mass affective polarization for democracy (cf. Broockman, Kalla and Westwood, 2023), our focus on ideological party polarization returns the spotlight to conflicts between political elites and their role in the stability of democratic regimes (Bermeo, 2003; Bartels, 2023). If affective polarization is endogenous to elite cues (McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018; Hahm, Hilpert and König, 2024; Wagner and Praprotnik, 2024), it is essential to arrive at a better understanding of ideological elite divisions. Our study of democratic survival and breakdown in Europe's interwar period echoes two important findings from in-depth qualitative comparisons of deconsolidating democracies. First, the superior empirical fit of our multi-dimensional measure of polarization relative to uni-dimensional operationalizations underlines the insight that elites may activate any one of a multitude of cleav-

ages to polarize society (McCoy and Somer, 2019, 237-40). Second, a society divided into two polarized camps is most vulnerable to democratic deconsolidation (McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018, 23-4). While the second insight might seem unsurprising, it contrasts with Sartori's famous model of polarized pluralism that locates the highest risk to democracies in high-fragmentation, high-polarization party constellations.

Our theoretical argument can also explain why large-N studies investigating the relationship between ideological polarization and democratic stability uncover contradictory or null findings. First, the relationship between polarization and democracy is neither linear nor unconditional. Existing work predominantly specifies linear functional forms and employs aggregate indices that conflate ideological distance with the size and number of political actors (Wang, 2014; Arbatli and Rosenberg, 2021; Orhan, 2022). Second, polarization measured exclusively along the economic left-right dimension hides important political conflicts, such as ethnic or urban-rural divisions (cf. Boone, 2014; Reiljan, 2020; Mason, Wronski and Kane, 2021). Particularly, broad cross-country comparisons need to take into account the varying sources of political differentiation to capture the true extent of polarization. Third, existing work focuses on polarization and deconsolidation dynamics in recent decades, when the extent of deconsolidation, especially in high-income democracies, is disputed (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019; Little and Meng, Online First; Treisman, 2023). Our new data on polarization in interwar democracies thus provides an important reference point for studies investigating the threat of polarization in established democracies. Future research should investigate both our non-linear and conditional argument on multi-dimensional measures of polarization in contemporary democracies, and probe its differential impact in young and more established democratic regimes (Cornell, Møller and Skaaning, 2017).

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# Online Appendix to

## Polarization, Fragmentation, and Democratic Deconsolidation in Interwar Europe

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## A Sample

Table A1 lists the elections that satisfy the democracy definition by [Boix, Miller and Rosato \(2013\)](#) and four additional elections: San Marino is too small in size to be included in [Boix, Miller and Rosato's \(2013\)](#) data. We include it in ours. We furthermore include the 1919 election in Austria, the March 1933 election in Germany and the 1926 election in Lithuania since they took place under democratic rules. [Boix, Miller and Rosato](#) classify these country-years as because democracy broke down after these elections.

Table A1: Interwar Democratic Elections

Country name	Elections
Austria	1919 - 1920, 1923, 1927, 1930
Belgium	1919, 1921, 1925, 1929, 1932, 1936, 1939
Czechoslovakia	1920, 1925, 1929, 1935
Denmark	1920, 1924, 1926, 1929, 1932, 1935, 1939
Estonia	1920, 1923, 1926, 1929, 1932
Finland	1919, 1922, 1924, 1927, 1929 - 1930, 1933, 1936, 1939
France	1919, 1924, 1928, 1932, 1936
Germany	1919 - 1920, 1924, 1928, 1930, 1932 - 1933
Greece	1926, 1928, 1932 - 1933, 1935
Iceland	1919, 1923, 1927, 1931, 1933 - 1934, 1937
Ireland	1922 - 1923, 1927, 1932 - 1933, 1937 - 1938
Italy	1919, 1921
Latvia	1922, 1925, 1928, 1931
Lithuania	1922 - 1923, 1926
Luxembourg	1919, 1922, 1925, 1928, 1931, 1934, 1937
Netherlands	1922, 1925, 1929, 1933, 1937
Norway	1921, 1924, 1927, 1930, 1933, 1936
Poland	1919, 1922
Portugal	1919, 1921 - 1922, 1925
San Marino	1920
Spain	1933, 1936
Sweden	1920 - 1921, 1924, 1928, 1932, 1936
Switzerland	1919, 1922, 1925, 1928, 1931, 1935
United Kingdom	1922 - 1924, 1929, 1931, 1935
Yugoslavia	1923, 1925, 1927

Existing work by [Cornell, Møller and Skaaning \(2017, 17\)](#) identifies a slightly different set of elections as democratic. Compared to them, we exclude spells in Bulgaria and Romania. We believe the exclusion of the two former states from the list of democracies is justified. In Romanian, a non-elected monarch was able to and actually dismissed multiple governments to

end those spells Cornell, Møller and Skaaning (2017, 24-5). In Bulgaria, two out of three initial elections were manipulated by the incumbent (ibid., 25), which is why Boix, Miller and Rosato (2013) do not include the country in their list of democracies. We add two additional countries: Iceland and San Marino. San Marino is probably missing from Cornell et al.'s list for a similar reasons as why Boix et al. do not consider it, its size. Iceland was still part of a union with Denmark, though its democratically elected government held complete domestic autonomy.

Disregarding the arguments for or against the inclusion of these states, we argue that adding Romania and Bulgaria to our sample would strengthen our results. Romania and Bulgaria constituted two polarized democracies that ultimately failed as fragmentation decreased. While the 1919 Romanian election led to a fragmented parliament, the electoral victory by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod's Romanian National Union pursued radical land reform, an indicator of polarization, that led to the king's dismissal of Vaida-Voevod's government. The 1928 electoral election better fits our argument as high polarization between the National Liberal Party and National Peasant's Party led to a dominant victory by the latter, and a parliament with only 1.23 effective parties. While Bulgaria's first democratic election still featured more than five effective parties, the number dropped to 3.3 in the second election in 1920, after which democracy failed according to Cornell et al. The only election in the second democratic spell (1931-34) featured 2.5 effective parties in parliament, squarely hitting the dangerous range identified by our argument.

## B Definitions

Table A2: Definition of key concepts.

Policy Dimension	Definition
Economic Left-Right	<p>Economic left-right ordering of political parties (1=extreme left, 2=moderate left, 3=center, 4=moderate right, 5=extreme right).</p> <p>We follow the CHES expert survey’s classification: “Parties can be classified in terms of their stance on economic issues such as privatization, taxes, regulation, government spending, and the welfare state. Parties on the economic left want government to play an active role in the economy. Parties on the economic right want a reduced role for Government” (Bakker et al. 2020, 22).</p> <p>We provided the following additional coding instructions for the five categories: 1) total control of the state over the economy, planned economy, no property rights (ex: Stalinist USSR) 2) semi-total control of the state over the economy, partial property rights (ex: nowadays China) 3) intervention of the state in the economy, property rights recognized by the authority (ex: nowadays Sweden) 4) minor intervention of the state in the economy, property rights recognized by the authority (ex: ’80 UK and USA) 5) no intervention of the state in the economy (ex: anarchist or radical liberal parties)</p>
Territory	<p>Categorical variable whether party demands more autonomy for a specific region within the current nation state (1), demands secession of a specific region from the nation state (2) or makes no such claims (0).</p>
Maj. Nationalism	<p>Binary flag whether the party persistently, publicly and explicitly claims to represent the interests of the ethnic majority in the country or speaks out against proposed or existing rights of ethnic minorities.</p>
Rural-Urban	<p>Binary flag whether party claims to act on behalf of or attracts disproportional electoral support from rural constituencies, i.e. farmers.</p>
Anti-System	<p>Binary flag whether party aims to implement a non-representative democratic system of government such as monarchy, fascist dictatorship, communist dictatorship, Soviet democracy, or other forms of political systems that are not representative democracies.</p>



## C Descriptive Statistics

Table A3: Summary statistics of variables used in empirical analysis.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Polyarchy (t+1)	129	0.612	0.189	0.061	0.870
Liberal Component Index (t+1)	129	0.792	0.175	0.035	0.962
Polity V (t+1)	120	7.425	4.117	-9	10
Euclidean Distance (max)	130	0.302	0.069	0.000	0.412
Euclidean Distance Sq. (max)	130	0.096	0.036	0.000	0.170
Euclidean Distance (mean)	130	0.151	0.058	0.000	0.289
Euclidean Distance Sq. (mean)	130	0.026	0.018	0.000	0.084
ENP	129	4.187	1.843	1.092	11.211
Dalton Polarization	130	0.062	0.032	0.000	0.156
Dalton Polarization Sq.	130	0.005	0.005	0.000	0.024
ER Polarization	130	0.109	0.054	0.000	0.264
ER Polarization Sq.	130	0.015	0.013	0.000	0.070
Log(GDP p.c.)	122	8.482	0.425	7.383	9.216
Log (Population Size)	129	8.495	1.592	4.522	11.098
Log(Democracy Age)	130	2.600	1.156	0.000	4.796
Log(State Age)	130	3.514	1.433	0.000	5.193
Log (Oldest Party Age)	130	3.514	0.656	1.099	4.615
No. of Violent Wings	130	0.176	0.168	0.000	0.750

## D Robustness checks

### D.1 Alternative modeling strategy: OLS

To ensure that our results are not model-dependent, we re-estimate all models in [Table 1](#) using ordinary least squares regressions ([Online Appendix D.1](#)). The estimates of the polarization, fragmentation, and their interaction continue to point in the right direction, and remain statistically significant in Models 4-6. Only the OLS results of Model 3 drop to the 90% level of statistical significance. Given the small sample size and our theoretical argument that suggests polarization to matter only at lower levels of fragmentation, we uphold that our results remain robust to using an alternative estimation technique.

Table A4: Regressing polyarchy on multi-dimensional polarization and ENP with linear models.

	<b>M1</b>	<b>M2</b>	<b>M3</b>	<b>M4</b>	<b>M5</b>	<b>M6</b>
Euclidean dist (max)	0.29 (0.18)	0.16 (0.20)	1.64 (0.90)	2.52* (1.06)	5.34*** (1.43)	5.56*** (1.60)
Euclidean dist (max) <sup>2</sup>			-3.45 (2.04)	-4.77* (2.36)	-11.84*** (3.38)	-11.47** (3.73)
ENP		0.02 (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)	0.13* (0.05)	0.13* (0.06)
Eucl. dist (max):ENP					-1.22** (0.40)	-1.08* (0.44)
Eucl. dist (max) <sup>2</sup> :ENP					2.64** (0.82)	2.20* (0.89)
Constant	0.51*** (0.08)	0.50*** (0.08)	0.39*** (0.10)	3.64 (4.24)	0.15 (0.15)	2.53 (4.16)
Country-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	129	128	128	121	128	121
R-squared	0.85	0.86	0.86	0.89	0.88	0.90
Adj. R-squared	0.77	0.78	0.79	0.80	0.81	0.81

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05

## D.2 Alternative Outcome Measures

Next, we probe whether the specific operationalization of our outcome variables challenges our findings. With respect to outcome measures, we employ the Polity V score and V-Dem's liberal component index as alternative democracy scales.<sup>23</sup> Across Models 3-6, we replicate our substantive results and reach similar levels of statistical significance for both outcome variables. Thus, our results are overall robust to different modeling strategies and outcome measures.

Table A5: OLS regression models of Polity V on multi-dimensional polarization, 1919-1939.

	<b>M1</b>	<b>M2</b>	<b>M3</b>	<b>M4</b>	<b>M5</b>	<b>M6</b>
Euclidean dist (max)	26.86*** (5.40)	22.02*** (5.54)	60.28* (25.44)	78.54* (31.52)	215.64*** (38.17)	219.35*** (43.62)
Euclidean dist (max) <sup>2</sup>			-89.83 (58.33)	-120.03 (70.18)	-442.13*** (91.15)	-458.82*** (103.30)
ENP		0.96** (0.35)	1.19** (0.37)	1.21** (0.42)	5.15*** (1.32)	4.39** (1.58)
Eucl. dist (max):ENP				-3.44 (3.55)		-3.33 (3.53)
Eucl. dist (max) <sup>2</sup> :ENP					-50.77*** (10.36)	-45.77*** (11.72)
eucl.maxSquare:enp					108.68*** (21.59)	101.86*** (24.10)
Constant	-0.28 (2.26)	-0.65 (2.17)	-3.41 (2.80)	188.75 (143.66)	-13.47*** (3.85)	154.74 (129.23)
Country-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	120	119	119	112	119	112

\*\*\*p < .001; \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05

<sup>23</sup>V-Dem's liberal component index contributes 50% of the high-level liberal democracy index. We examine the liberal component index, because the Polyarchy index used in Table 1 informs the other half of the liberal democracy index. Rather than recovering an empirical relationship we already tested, we aim to use as much different information as possible.

Table A6: Regressing V-Dem liberal component index on the ENP and multi-dimensional polarization using a beta function

	<b>M1</b>	<b>M2</b>	<b>M3</b>	<b>M4</b>	<b>M5</b>	<b>M6</b>
Euclidean dist (max)	3.03*** (0.89)	1.82* (0.92)	5.73 (4.41)	13.10** (4.74)	38.75*** (6.51)	38.68*** (6.44)
Euclidean dist (max) <sup>2</sup>			-9.28 (10.21)	-20.86* (10.40)	-90.70*** (15.38)	-87.44*** (14.92)
ENP		0.22*** (0.06)	0.25*** (0.06)	0.20** (0.06)	0.65** (0.24)	0.48* (0.23)
Eucl. dist (max):ENP					-9.58*** (1.82)	-8.12*** (1.80)
Eucl. dist (max) <sup>2</sup> :ENP					23.16*** (3.77)	20.11*** (3.74)
Constant	0.08 (0.37)	0.07 (0.36)	-0.19 (0.46)	-10.26 (18.57)	-1.32 (0.68)	-24.21 (17.07)
Country-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	129	128	128	121	128	121
Log Likelihood	171.46	176.56	176.99	185.14	195.53	199.89

\*\*\*p < .001; \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05

### D.3 Alternative Multi-Dimensional Polarization Measurements

Alternative and widely used polarization measurements have been proposed by [Esteban and Ray \(1994, see Equation 3\)](#) and [Dalton \(2008, see Equation 5\)](#). Since they are both functions of a party's parliamentary seat share ( $s$ ), they are conflating fragmentation and polarization. For our multi-dimensional measurement, we use the Euclidean distance for the distance measurement proposed by [Esteban and Ray's \(1994, see Equation 4\)](#), and the distance of each party from the mean position for each issue in our dimension for the measurement proposed by [Dalton \(2008, see Equation 6\)](#).

$$ERI = \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^n s_i^2 s_j (|p_i - p_j|) \quad (3)$$

$$ERI_{multi} = \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^n s_i^2 s_j \left( \frac{EUCL_{multi} - \min(EUCL_{multi})}{\max(EUCL_{multi}) - \min(EUCL_{multi})} \right) \quad (4)$$

$$DALT = \sqrt{\sum_i s_i \left( \frac{p_i - \bar{p}}{0.5} \right)^2} \quad (5)$$

$$DALT_{multi} = \sqrt{\sum_i s_i \left( \frac{p_{i,k} - \bar{p}_k}{0.5} \right)^2} \quad (6)$$

Turning to alternative operationalizations of our explanatory variables, we compare our results to the mean rather than maximum multi-dimensional Euclidean distance measure of polarization, multi-dimensional operationalizations of Dalton’s (2008) and Esteban & Ray’s (1994) indices, and finally uni-dimensional measures of the Euclidean distance. We continue to recover our key results for Models 5 and 6 when using the mean distance but encounter greater uncertainty in the estimates in Models 3 and 4. This is unsurprising. The mean effect of polarization downplays the presence of extreme positions represented in parliament, and Models 3 and 4 only assess the non-linear part of our theoretical argument but overlook the unconditional effect. Both the polarization indices of Esteban & Ray and Dalton already include measures of fragmentation. Thus, adding a fragmentation variable, let alone interacting it with polarization, to a model estimates the effect of these two indices makes little sense. Instead, we simply test linear and non-linear effects of polarization. In line with H1, we continue to find evidence for an inverted U-shape. While we cannot separate the conditional effects of fragmentation, we are reassured that we uncover the theoretically predicted effects. Overall, we uphold the robustness of our results when using alternative measures of polarization.

Table A7: Beta regression models of V-Dem polyarchy on multi-dimensional polarization (Euclidean mean), 1919-1939.

	<b>M1</b>	<b>M2</b>	<b>M3</b>	<b>M4</b>	<b>M5</b>	<b>M6</b>
Euclidean dist (mean)	1.99 (1.13)	1.31 (1.12)	-0.29 (3.26)	2.91 (3.44)	24.87*** (7.11)	31.91*** (7.60)
Euclidean dist (mean) <sup>2</sup>			6.73 (12.59)	-0.13 (13.08)	-81.20** (24.92)	-99.22*** (26.20)
ENP		0.13** (0.04)	0.14** (0.04)	0.12** (0.04)	0.63*** (0.15)	0.72*** (0.16)
Eucl. dist (mean):ENP					-8.64*** (2.11)	-9.73*** (2.22)
Eucl. dist (mean) <sup>2</sup> :ENP					29.79*** (7.17)	32.44*** (7.45)
Constant	-0.08 (0.32)	-0.20 (0.31)	-0.22 (0.31)	35.70* (15.82)	-1.54** (0.57)	33.60* (14.64)
Country-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	129	128	128	121	128	121
Log Likelihood	156.92	159.80	159.94	160.91	168.98	170.47

\*\*\*p < .001; \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05

Table A8: Beta regression models of V-Dem polyarchy on multi-dimensional polarization (Esteban & Ray and Dalton indices), 1919-1939.

	<b>M1</b>	<b>M3a</b>	<b>M4a</b>	<b>M1</b>	<b>M3b</b>	<b>M4b</b>
ER Index	-0.45 (1.64)	7.60* (3.27)	9.09* (3.62)			
ER Index sq.		-36.13** (12.71)	-40.58** (14.03)			
Dalton Index				3.49 (2.31)	5.09 (6.10)	19.52** (6.89)
Dalton Index sq.					-11.87 (40.71)	-99.98* (43.76)
Constant	0.47 (0.38)	0.40 (0.37)	26.74 (16.58)	0.22 (0.22)	0.18 (0.27)	29.52 (16.28)
Country-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
N	129	129	122	129	129	122
Log Likelihood	155.35	159.44	158.50	156.45	156.50	158.83

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05

## D.4 Alternative Uni-Dimensional Polarization Measurements

Furthermore, we re-estimated the beta regressions with different uni-dimensional measurements of polarization, replicating our results from Models 3 and 5 for each of the components of our multi-dimensional polarization measure separately: parties' economic left-right position, their stances towards the predominant political-economic institutions, their territorial claims, their majority nationalist claims and their rural claims. We find inconsistent results when testing H1 in replications of Model 3, and substantively weaker but mostly statistically significant results when testing H2 in replications of Model 5. These results reassures us that no single dimension solely drives our findings with regards the link between polarization and democracy, and that combining different policy dimensions in one overall measure of polarization yields greater statistical precision.

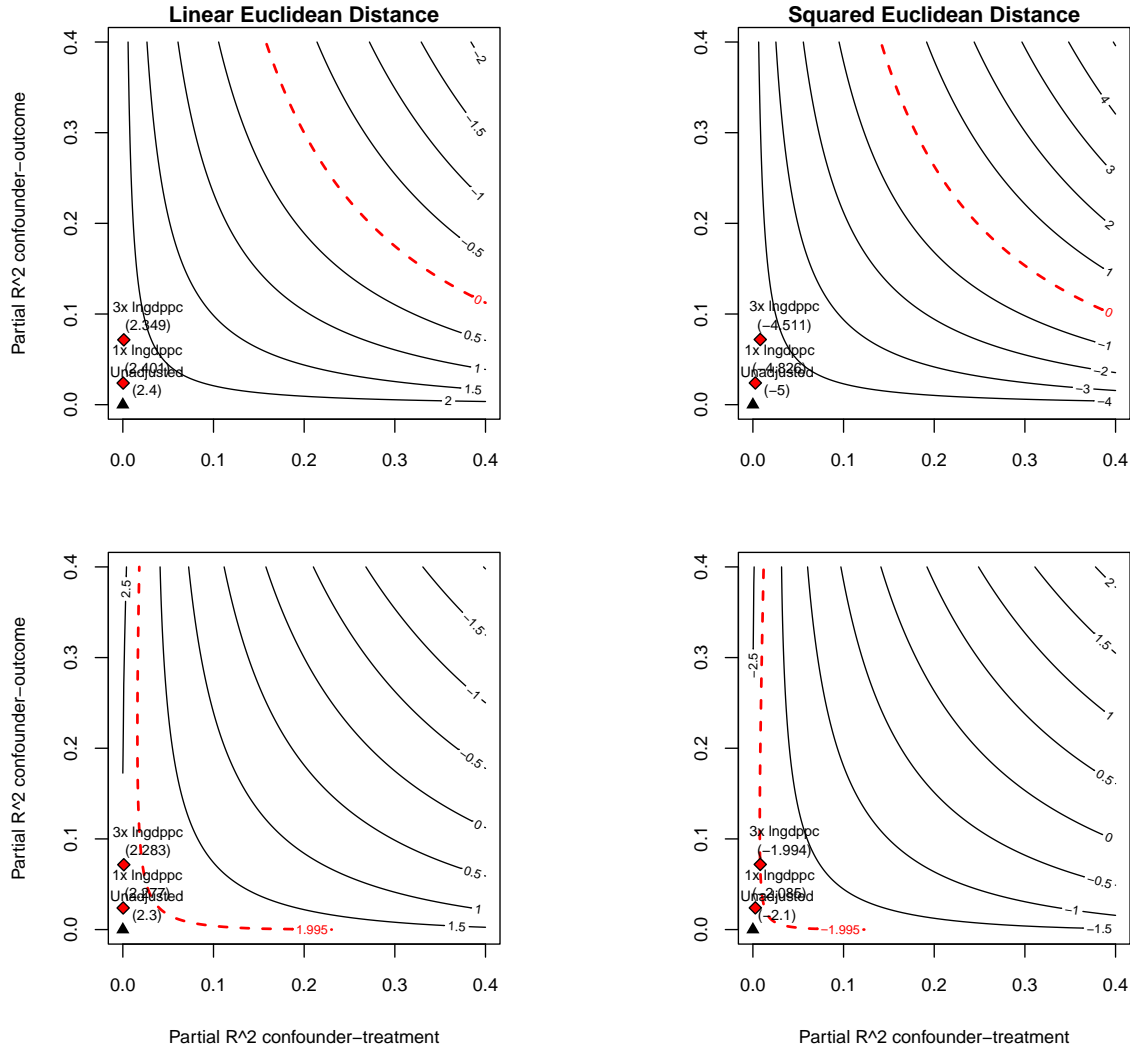
Table A9: Beta regression models of V-Dem polyarchy on uni-dimensional polarization, 1919-1939.

	M3 Eco	M5 Eco	M3 Terr.	M5 Terr.	M3 Rural	M5 Rural	M3 Maj. Nat.	M5 Maj. Nat.	M3 Anti-sys	M5 Anti-sys
Polarization	1.49*	5.57***	-0.80	2.35	-1.41 <sup>+</sup>	5.05**	0.97	1.47	-0.98	2.03
	(0.69)	(1.65)	(0.70)	(1.72)	(0.76)	(1.96)	(0.77)	(1.88)	(0.77)	(2.05)
Polarization Sq.	-1.52**	-4.34**	1.60*	-2.01	3.20**	-9.01**	-4.04*	-5.09	1.63	-4.22
	(0.58)	(1.33)	(0.65)	(1.75)	(1.15)	(3.21)	(1.63)	(3.67)	(1.35)	(3.75)
ENP	0.17***	0.68***	0.05	-0.004	0.15***	0.33***	0.10*	0.11	0.15***	0.23*
	(0.05)	(0.19)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.09)
Polarization * ENP		-1.39**		-0.74 <sup>+</sup>		-2.12***		-0.14		-0.87
		(0.48)		(0.39)		(0.60)		(0.46)		(0.55)
Polarization Sq. * ENP		0.91**		0.87*		3.97***		0.28		1.68 <sup>+</sup>
		(0.33)		(0.41)		(0.99)		(0.90)		(1.00)
Constant	-0.32	-1.75**	-0.48 <sup>+</sup>	-0.24	-0.03	-0.46	0.93**	0.93*	0.08	-0.07
	(0.28)	(0.60)	(0.28)	(0.34)	(0.20)	(0.30)	(0.36)	(0.41)	(0.22)	(0.34)
Country-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128
Log Likelihood	162.66	167.42	167.96	170.71	164.06	172.08	163.29	163.34	159.89	161.32

\*\*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .05; \*p < .1

## D.5 Simulating Omitted Variable Bias

Figure A1: Simulating omitted variable bias to probe robustness of linear (left column) and quadratic effect (right column) of multi-dimensional polarization in Model 4, Table 1.



Top row shows effect of confounder on effect size while bottom row displays effect of confounder on t-values. Crossing the red line indicates reversion of estimated sign or drop of t-value below 1.995 ( $p > .05$ ). Black triangle indicates estimated effect. Red diamonds indicate estimated confounder at same strength and three times the effect size of GDP p.c. (logged).

In this section, we investigate the influence of potential outliers. Based on a threshold of 3 times the mean Cook's distance, we identify only one influential case: the 1919 election in Italy. Additionally, we probe the robustness of our results to dropping the 1935 Greek election, and all cases that are not part of BMR's democracy sample, such as the 1933 German election.