



*Political polarization and the environment:
a study into the factors contributing to the growing political divide over
environmental issues*

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environmental issues*

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Abstract

There is a growing political divide between Democrats and Republicans over environmental issues, which poses serious challenges for politicians trying to find common ground in debates and trying to create and implement effective environmental policies. Despite the large body of research that exists on political polarization, there is a need for future research in this study area, for it remains unclear what lies behind political polarization. This study attempted to fill this research gap by examining based on which ideological predispositions and political communications political actors position themselves around environmental issues, in order to determine which factors contribute to the widening of the political divide over environmental issues. This study has been carried out using discourse theory, and employed mixed methods, namely interviews and content analysis. This study found three separate discourses, each with its own distinguishing features, and concludes that a combination of internal elements and external factors continue to drive the two main opposing groups in society further apart, thereby further widening the political divide. This study has furthered scientific understanding of political polarization over environmental issues; yet, not over other dividing partisan issues. Here, as well as on the role of physical objects in political polarization, lies a task for future research.

Keywords: political divide, polarization, environmental issues, discourse, ideological predispositions, political communications

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1. Problem statement

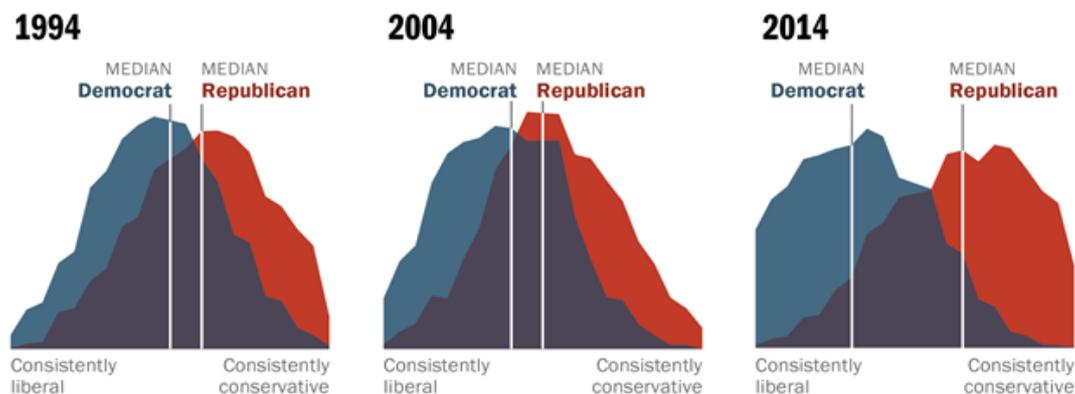
American attitudes are deeply divided along partisan lines; Democrats and Republicans are more politically divided than at any point in the last two decades, in particular on environmental issues. This is an ongoing trend, marked by ideological consistency and partisan antipathy, which manifests itself in a myriad of ways, as discussed in the following sections (Pew Research, 2014).

Social relevance and research gap

Due to the growing partisan polarization on environmental issues (among both the general public and the government) and the rightward shift of the Republicans in Congress, environmental protection measures and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are under increasing attack by Republicans (Dunlap et al., 2016). Furthermore, the partisan divide poses serious challenges to politicians trying to find common ground in the various debates over environmental laws (Pew Research, 2014) and trying to create and implement effective environmental policies. The increasingly polarized public is expected to only further inhibit this process of creating and implementing effective environmental policies, given the fact that public opinion can exert a significant influence on policy-making (McCright & Dunlap, 2011). As long as the underlying sources of disagreement among Democrats and Republicans on environmental issues are not brought to light, no effective environmental policies can be enacted. Thus, future research should focus on unmasking what lies behind the political polarization and what are the focal points of disagreement in the social debate about environmental issues (Fisher et al., 2013).

Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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Figure 1. Change in ideological consistency between Democrats and Republicans over time (Pew Research, 2014)

Ideological consistency

Ideologically consistent thinking (i.e. thinking strictly along the lines of one set of ideological viewpoints) and partisanship have become almost inextricably intertwined, as a result of which Democrats are moving more to the left, and

Republicans to the right, with little overlap between parties (Pew Research, 2014). More than ever before are individuals' ideological views largely consistent with that of the party they are affiliated to. This is particularly true for the politically attentive, among whom 70% take positions that are almost entirely in line with the ideological predispositions of their respective parties (Pew Research, 2014). The number of Americans whose opinion is consistently liberal or conservative has more than doubled over the last two decades, from 10 to 21 percent (Pew Research, 2014). This ideological shift (figure 1) is most evident in Democrats, with 56% of Democrats being consistently liberal, compared to only 20% of consistently conservative Republicans (Pew Research, 2014).

Partisan antipathy

Partisan antipathy (i.e. a strong dislike of the opposite party), like ideologically consistent thinking, is reaching new heights, albeit the former is more evident in Republicans than in Democrats (Pew Research, 2014). Partisans' views of the opposite party are becoming increasingly negative, with 58% of Republicans and 55% of Democrats viewing the opposite party in negative terms. Especially ideologically consistent partisans (hereby referring to consistently liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans) hold extremely negative views of the opposite party (Pew Research, 2016). Partisans not only hold negative views of the opposite party, but also consider the opposite party to be more and their own party to be less ideologically extreme than its counterpart (Pew Research, 2016). Furthermore, 70% of Democrats and 62% of Republicans indicate they are afraid of the opposite party, and more than half of the Democrats (70%) and Republicans (52%) regard the opposite party as close-minded. Partisans even go as far as to say that the opposite party threatens the nation's well being. This holds true for 45% of Republicans and 37% of Democrats (Pew Research, 2016).

The negative views both parties hold of each other are reflected in the reasons for identifying with one's own party. Majorities in both parties (68 and 64 percent of Democrats and Republicans, respectively) indicate the reason for identifying with their own party is the negative impact of the opposite party's policies. Only slightly more indicate the reason is the positive impact of their own party's policies. The negative views are also reflected in the ratings both parties give each other. On a scale from 0 to 100, Democrats give Republicans a rating of 31, and Republicans give Democrats one of 29 (Pew Research, 2016). Ratings of the opposite party are lowest among the politically attentive, with this relationship being especially apparent in Democrats (Pew Research, 2016).

Different views are held as to which factors contribute to the growing partisan and ideological divide between Democrats and Republicans. Two increasingly popular viewpoints are those centered on the concepts ideological realignment and party sorting, both of which touch on aspects discussed in the above-mentioned sections on ideological consistency and partisan antipathy.

Ideological realignment

Ideological realignment is a concept built on three basic assumptions, the first one of which is that the electorate has grown increasingly polarized along ideological lines. The second assumption is that the electorate is structured along the same liberal-conservative dimensions that drive party conflict at the elite level. The reason for this

is because the electorate operates using one-dimensional indicators of mass ideology, such as liberalism and conservatism, the supporters of which each have their own attitudes towards policy issues. The third assumption is that individuals' party affiliations are increasingly based on their ideological views (Layman et al., 2006). These assumptions are in line with former research that showed that partisanship determines individuals' attitudes towards policy issues, and that individuals often change their positions in response to changes in positions of elites with whom they share their political predispositions. Former research also showed that, as a result of individuals shifting their attitudes towards the ideological extremes of either party, party polarization increases (Guber, 2013).

Party sorting

Related to the concept of ideological alignment is the concept of party sorting. Party sorting is concerned with the idea that public attitudes towards policy issues are in part determined by political communications or cues provided by elites. Those concurring with this idea argue that when elites are in agreement along partisan or ideological lines, the public's response is non-ideological; however, when elites are in disagreement, the public's response is ideological (Layman et al., 2006). It is also argued that, as parties grow increasingly polarized, elites become better at sorting individuals along ideological lines (McCright et al., 2014). Political communications or cues are also referred to as identity markers by other authors who, similar to those concurring with the idea behind the party sorting concept, argue that the adoption of an individual's position is driven through a process whereby elites provide identity markers that determine what being associated with the Democratic or Republican party entails. Identity markers can be described as characteristics with which individuals present themselves or characterize others, and are used to distinguish oneself from others (Sol Hart & Nisbet, 2011).

Environmental concern

Widest Partisan Gaps Over Environment, Gun Control, Health Care

	Rep	Dem	Ind	R-D diff
<i>% considering each as a "top priority"</i>	%	%	%	
Protecting the environment	32	69	49	-37
Strengthening gun control laws	22	56	32	-34
Reducing health care costs	46	79	63	-33
Dealing with problems of the poor	46	71	53	-25
Dealing with global warming	13	38	31	-25
Reducing crime	44	63	55	-19
Improving educational system	64	80	68	-16
Improving roads, bridges, transportation	24	36	29	-12
Making Medicare financially sound	62	73	61	-11
Reducing the influence of lobbyists	39	49	43	-10
Reforming nation's tax system	48	57	51	-9
Improving job situation	77	84	75	-7
Dealing with global trade	30	33	30	-3
Strengthening nation's economy	89	89	84	0
Dealing with nation's energy problem	45	45	46	0
Making Social Security financially sound	74	72	67	+2
Defending against terrorism	80	72	64	+8
Dealing with illegal immigration	44	35	40	+9
Dealing with moral breakdown	50	34	40	+16
Reducing budget deficit	84	67	71	+17
Strengthening the military	58	31	38	+27

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Jan. 9-13, 2013. Q30. Significant differences in bold.

There is a sharp partisan and ideological divide on environmental issues; especially those at the extreme ends of the political spectrum, liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans, have vastly different views on all matters concerning the environment. Although the majority of U.S. citizens (52%) consider environmental protection a top priority, a wide partisan gap (-37) exists over the environment (and the protection thereof) (figure 2) (Pew Research, 2013).

Figure 2. Partisan gap over the environment (Pew Research, 2013)

In fact, the partisan gap over the environment is wider than over any other (polarizing) issue, with 69% of Democrats, compared to only 32% of Republicans considering environmental protection a top priority (Pew Research, 2013). Also in the elections of 2016 was there no issue that divided more along partisan lines than the environment. Only on the issue of treatment of racial, ethnic minorities were Democrats and Republicans equally divided (Pew Research, 2016). When it comes to the implementation of environmental laws and regulations, while approximately one-third of U.S. citizens (34%) say stricter environmental laws are too costly and bad for the economy, the majority (59%) say such laws are necessary and worth every cost (Pew Research, 2016).

Scientific relevance and contribution

Despite the large body of scientific research that has been conducted to expand our collective knowledge of party polarization, the need for future research in this study area remains. The current state of research leaves room for future investigation of, among other things; the way in which moral suasion (i.e. a method adopted to influence and/or elicit behavior change) by authority figures contributes to environmental polarization (Feinberg & Willer, 2012), the way in which different types of actors (parties' affiliates and activists, [political] elites and regular citizens) can be positioned in relation to this problem (Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006), and the way in which social identity cues (e.g. location, pictures, names, headlines) are embedded in (political) messages (Sol Hart & Nisbet, 2011). This study attempts to fill this research gap by examining ideological predispositions and political communications in the context of political polarization over environmental issues. Hereby, this study contributes to the field of (political) discourse by examining political discourse theories, including Laclau's theory of populism and Hajer's theory of policy discourse (see chapter 3. Theoretical framework), in the light of current trends in political polarization, and to the understanding of the factors contributing to the growing partisan divide over environmental issues.

2. Research objective and research questions

2.1 Research objective

This study examines based on which ideological predispositions and political communications political actors position themselves around environmental issues, in order to determine which factors contribute to the widening of the political divide over environmental issues.

Concepts:

In this study, the concepts below (derived from the research objective) have the following meaning:

Ideological predispositions: self-reported political identity of (politically homogeneous) groups of people, which is made up of ideological and partisan views and beliefs and is consistent with and determines one's political leanings and/or affiliations

Political communications: cues provided by external parties (politicians and media outlets) that determine the political identity of (politically homogeneous) groups of people and are used to distinguish oneself from opposing groups

Political actors: active participants in the political process (members of the general public who are politically aware and have a strong political identity)

2.2 Research questions

Central question: based on which ideological predispositions and political communications do political actors position themselves around environmental issues?

Sub-questions:

1. Which discourses can be identified?

The purpose of this sub-question is to help identify a number of (dominant) discourses (on both sides of the political spectrum), consisting of groups of people with a similar political identity, and to determine of which elements these discourses consist. The answer to this sub-question provides insight into which opposing/conflicting characteristics of the identified discourses contribute to political polarization over environmental issues.

2. How are discourses structured internally?

The purpose of this sub-question is to help determine of which different types of elements (ideological predispositions, political communications and linguistic utterances) the various identified discourses consist and how these elements interact with each other. The answer to this sub-question provides insight into the way in which the interplay between the various elements contributes to political polarization over environmental issues.

3. How are discourses structured externally?

The purpose of this sub-question is to help determine which external factors (in the form of a barrier marking the differences between the discourses and trends and 'instruments' strengthening the discourses) shape the various identified discourses and how these factors interact with each other. The answer to this sub-question provides insight into the way in which the external factors affect the different discourses, and the way in which the interplay between the various

factors and with the internal elements contributes to political polarization over environmental issues.

3. Theoretical framework

This study has been carried out using discourse theory. The type of discourse theory that has been used is political discourse analysis (PDA). Most narrowly defined, political discourse is the discourse of politicians (van Dijk, n.d.). There is, however, no single definition of political discourse. Depending on the author, it could either encompass all participants in the political process, or political actors only (van Dijk, 1998). The definition that has been used for the purpose of this study is the former, whereby focus has been placed on those members of the general public who form part of the popular discourse. Within the field of political discourse, the two theories that have been employed are: populism theory and policy discourse theory, developed by Laclau and Hajer, respectively. The following sections will briefly introduce the concepts discourse and political discourse, and describe the above-mentioned theories in more detail.

Discourse theory

Discourse

Discourse theory is built on the assumption that all objects and actions are meaningful, and that their meaning is constructed from historically specific systems of rules. It is thus concerned with '*the way in which social practices construct and contest the discourse that constitute social reality*' (Howarth, 2000). Discourse theory can be explained by elaborating on three basic categories: discursive, discourse and discourse analysis. Firstly, with discursive is meant that all objects are essentially objects of discourse, as the ascription of meaning to objects is depended on a socially constructed system of rules and significant differences. Discourse, secondly, refers to historically specific systems of meaning through which identities of subjects and objects are formed. Discourses, at this level of abstraction, can be seen as (intrinsically political) concrete systems of social relations and practices, and contingent and historical constructions, vulnerable to external political forces and dislocatory effects of uncontrollable events. The construction of discourses involves exercising power and structuring relations between different social agents (through the drawing of political frontiers). Thirdly, discourse analysis refers to the process of analyzing both linguistic and non-linguistic materials for discursive forms of signifying practices (Howarth, 2000).

Political discourse

Political discourse is concerned with the text and/or talk of (professional) politicians or political institutions and their activities or practices (e.g. governing, ruling, legislating). Politicians, however, are not the only objects of study in PDA, for they are not the only participants in the domain of politics. Other objects of study in PDA include the various recipients of political communications (characterized as the general public or citizens), and people involved in political activities and/or processes, such as voting and protesting. Only throughout the duration of such activities though are the objects of study participants of political discourse. The text and/or talk under study in PDA encompasses a broad range of communicative events and encounters (e.g. cabinet meetings, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, media interviews), through which specific political aims and goals are met, such as making or influencing political decisions (van Dijk, 1998).

3.1 Laclau: populism

Laclau defines the term discourse as *“the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity”*, hereby referring to *“any complex of elements in which relations play the constitutive role”* (Laclau, 2005), and conceptualizes populism through the identification of a set of five theoretical variables: popular demands, difference and equivalence, representation, popular identity and naming. The first defining feature of populism is concerned with the establishment of an equivalential relation between unfulfilled/satisfied demands (that cannot be absorbed in a differential way by the institutional system). These (unsatisfied) demands, through the emergence of an equivalential chain, form an internal antagonistic frontier, whereby a popular identity is constructed. As the equivalential chain becomes larger, the components entering into it generally become more mixed in nature, though some are assigned a role of anchorage (distinguishing them from the others). Laclau, in his description of equivalential articulation, makes a distinction between two types of demands; democratic and popular demands, the latter of which are those that are formed through equivalential articulation, and thereby make the emergence of the people possible. The former are demands (either satisfied or not) that remain isolated and do not unify in an equivalential chain (Laclau, 2005).

The second defining feature of populism is concerned with the construction of the social. The social can be constructed through one of two modes: the logic of difference (assertion of a particularity: the differential nature of demands) or the logic of equivalence (partial surrender of particularity: the commonalities between demands), the latter of which is concerned with the formation of an equivalential chain and, subsequently, the antagonistic frontier. This formation process involves democratic demands transitioning into popular demands through the process of crystallization around a common denominator. The third defining feature of populism is concerned with the construction of new popular demands. The construction of new popular demands takes place when the (old) popular demands (that transitioned from individual/isolated into popular demands through the establishment of an equivalential bond) are not met and, consequently, can no longer be sustained by their pre-existing differential framework (Laclau, 2005).

The fourth defining feature of populism connects back to the crystallization of demands around a common denominator (an individual demand, embodying the equivalential chain). This process of crystallization constitutes the people (or popular identity); a discursive identity, which represents the equivalential links between individual demands. Throughout this process, demands, on the one hand, remain particular and, on the other hand, come to signify the total chain of equivalential demands. The popular identity is condensed around signifiers (attached to the equivalential demands). The larger the equivalential chain becomes, the smaller the amount of signifiers attached to the original particularistic demands gets, or, in other words, the more particularistic demands are disposed of. Throughout this process, the popular identity starts functioning as an empty signifier (of [heterogeneous] social demands). The fifth defining feature of populism is concerned with the ‘naming’ and subsequent identity formation of the empty signifier. Through the process of naming, the heterogeneous elements become articulated and crystalized in a unified whole (Laclau, 2005).

3.2 Hajer: policy discourse

Hajer defines the term discourse as “*an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices*” (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005), and in his discursive analysis distinguishes three separate elements. Firstly, the construction of vocabularies, storylines and metaphors, referred to as terms of policy discourse; secondly, the formation of discourse coalitions formed around these terms; and, thirdly, the determination of institutional practices in which discourses get produced. He further distinguishes the terms of policy discourse, the first element of his discourse theory, into three separate layers (table 1) (Hajer, 2003).

Table 1. Three layers of policy discourse (Hajer, 2003)

Terms of policy discourse	
1. Storylines, myths and metaphors	Statements that bring together preciously unrelated elements of reality and thus facilitate coalition formation
2. Policy vocabularies	Sets of concepts structuring a particular policy, consciously developed by policymakers
3. Epistemic figures	Certain rules of formation that underpin theories/policies but that are ‘not formulated on their own right’

The first layer consists of storylines, myths and metaphors. A storyline is defined as “*a statement summarizing complex narratives*” (Howarth & Torfing, 2005), and its primary function is to help structure one’s knowledge, experience and/or expertise into the larger context of a policy debate. The construction of storylines allows for the development of shared (political) orientations and the formation of discourse coalitions. Storylines often carry metaphors, used to reduce their discursive complexity and to facilitate communication over complex policy issues, and are brought into coherence through myths. The second layer is comprised of policy vocabularies, the function of which is to structure government reports and to determine the legitimacy of policy actions. The third layer is composed of epistemic figures and/or notions. Hajer’s definition hereof is based on that of Foucault, who refers to it as positive unconscious of knowledge and describes it as “*a regularity in the thinking of a particular period, structuring the understanding of reality without actors necessarily being aware of it*” (Hajer, 2003).

A discourse coalition, the second element of Hajer’s discourse theory, is defined as “*a group of actors that, in the context of an identifiable set of practices, shares the usage of a particular set of storylines over a particular period of time*” (Howarth & Torfing, 2005). Through the discursive construction of language, actors engage in political debate and create and transform political conflicts. This process is referred to as positioning (Hajer, 2003), and involves imposing one’s own view of reality on others, advocating certain social positions and practices, and criticizing alternative forms of social arrangement. The way in which actors position themselves in relation to each other determines a discourse’s power and/or dominance. Hajer distinguishes two distinct forms of discursive power; discourse structuration and discourse institutionalization. One speaks of discourse structuration when a discourse starts to dominate the way in which a certain social unit is conceptualized, and one speaks of

discourse institutionalization when a discourse becomes solidified in certain institutional arrangements (Howarth & Torfing, 2005).

Institutional practices, the third element of Hajer's discourse theory, are defined as *"embedded routines mutually understood rules and norms that provide coherence to social life"* (Howarth & Torfing, 2005), or, in other words, situations in which storylines are uttered, discourses get produced and conflicts are played out. Actors who have been socialized according to the rules and norms belonging to a certain (institutionalized) discourse will often try to persuade others to act according to the same rule set, thereby facilitating the reproduction of the given discourse. According to Hajer, linguistic utterances in the form of storylines cannot fully be understood outside the institutional practices in which they get produced. Thus, institutional practices are essential elements of a discourse, for they give meaning to discursive language (Howarth & Torfing, 2005).

3.3 Conceptual framework

This section illustrates the way in which the various components of the above-mentioned theories have been linked to the concepts (ideological realignment and party sorting) introduced in the first chapter, the way in which they have been used for the purpose of this study, the way in which they relate to the research questions, and the way in which a discourse is structured.

Laclau: populism

The use of this theory has been limited to the first and fourth defining feature of populism; popular demands and popular identity, and has been used to answer all three sub-questions. This theory has been linked to the concept of ideological realignment, which revolves around people's ideological predispositions being based on and in line with those of political elites. Ideological predispositions, in this study, in part form the discourses' internal structure, which consists of (shared sets of) attitudes and demands (generated by the attitudes). This theory has been used as a framework to distinguish between different types of elements, to identify the core element for each discourse and to identify where the barrier between the different discourses lies and is strongest.

In order to, firstly, provide an answer to sub-question one (discourses) and two (discourses' internal structure), various types of content (in the form of interview transcripts and media publications) have been collected and analyzed in search of attitudes and demands that structure a discourse (internally) and determine one's position on environmental issues. In order to, secondly, provide an answer to sub-question three (discourses' external structure), the (previously analyzed) content has been (re)examined, from the perspective of external factors, in search of distinguishing features making up the antagonistic frontier between the different discourses. The two defining features have hereby been dealt with simultaneously, for they are inextricably linked to each other, and data on the defining features has been collected using different types of data collection methods: interview transcripts and media publications (see sub-chapter 4.2. Data collection).

Hajer: policy discourse

The use of this theory has been limited to the first element of Hajer's discourse theory; terms of policy discourse (consisting of three separate layers: storylines,

myths and metaphors, policy vocabularies and epistemic figures), and has been used to answer all three sub-questions. This theory has been linked to the concept of party sorting, which revolves around people's positions being determined by cues provided by political elites. Political communications, in this study, in part form the discourses' internal structure, which consists of (a coherent set of) identity markers and (multiple) storylines (which the identity markers assimilate into). This theory has been used as a framework to extract discursive elements from the raw data, and to identify underlying trends.

In order to, firstly, provide an answer to sub-question one (discourses) and two (discourses' internal structure), various types of content (in the form of interview transcripts and media publications) have been collected and analyzed in search of identity markers, storylines and policy vocabularies that structure a discourse (internally) and determine one's position on environmental issues. In order to, secondly, provide an answer to sub-question three (discourses' external structure), the (previously analyzed) content has been (re)examined, from the perspective of external factors, in search of epistemic figures structuring the different discourses. Each layer of the terms of policy discourse has hereby been dealt with separately, and data on each layer has been collected using different types of data collection methods. Data on the first (storylines, myths and metaphors) and third (epistemic figures) layer have been extracted from content derived from both interview transcripts and media publications, and data on the second layer has primarily been extracted from content derived from media publications (see sub-chapter. 4.2 Data collection).

Discourse structure

A discourse is structured by both internal elements and external factors. A discourse's internal structure consists of a number of ideological predispositions and political communications, consisting of attitudes and identity markers, respectively. Each attitude generates its own set of demands, and each identity marker assimilates in (multiple) storylines. There are, however, individual attitudes and identity markers that assemble independently of any other element; the same applies to the demands and storylines. A discourses' internal structure also consists of a number of policy vocabularies. Policy vocabularies are words and/or phrases used by people belonging to the various discourses to express their opinions (on partisan issues) and exemplify their points of view.

A discourse's external structure consists of a total of three factors: (1) epistemic figures, (2) the antagonistic frontier and (3) physical objects. Epistemic figures, firstly, are the (two main) underlying trends that structure the different discourses: (1) the upsurge in political rhetoric and (2) the increase in straight-(party)ticket voting. The antagonistic frontier, secondly, is the barrier that exists between the different discourses, which marks the distinguishing features of the people belonging thereto; these can be organized around three main themes: (1) geography, (2) education and (3) media, messaging and information provision. Physical objects, thirdly, are the things people have latched onto in an attempt to take a stance in the debate over environmental issues. Of the three above-mentioned external factors, the former two (epistemic figures and the antagonistic frontier) play the largest role in structuring the various discourses, for the physical objects only start playing an active role as the epistemic figures and the antagonistic frontier increase in strength/grow stronger. The interaction process (in brief) looks as follows: the epistemic figures (re)shape the

discourses' internal elements, after which the (main opposing) discourses drift further apart and the antagonistic frontier grows stronger. The epistemic figures then further increase in strength; this is where the physical objects come into play. As a result, the political divide widens further. The figure below illustrates the way in which a discourse (in this study) is structured.

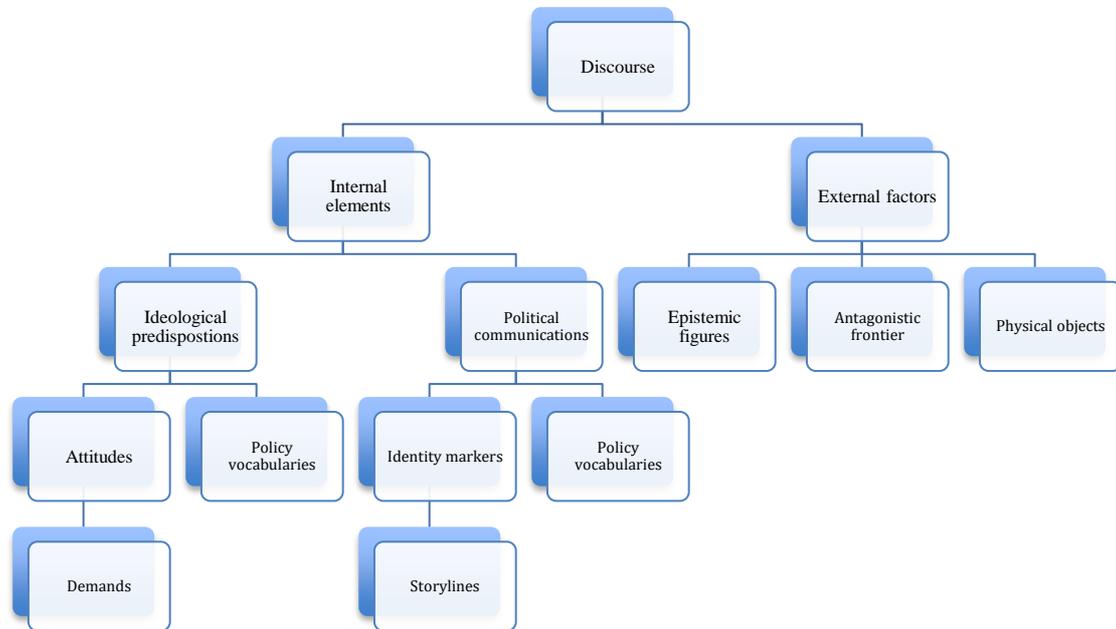


Figure 3. Discourse structure

4. Methodology

4.1 study design

This study is classified as a descriptive case study, as its purpose is to attempt to describe the attitudes held by people towards the problem under study, and to gain a deeper understanding of the problem. The people whose attitudes this study attempts to describe are political actors, and the problem under study is the growing divide between Democrats and Republicans over environmental issues (Kumar, 2014). The six cases are the following: designation of national monuments, water management, renewable energy (2), coal, solar power and climate change. The selection of cases was left to the interviewees' choice. The cases had a supporting function, as they were introduced during interviews to discuss topics that, owing to their controversial and complex nature, could not be addressed directly.

4.2 data collection

Data has been extracted from both primary and secondary sources. The data extracted from primary sources is in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews. The reason why this data collection method has been employed is because it allows for a certain amount of freedom in determining the interviews' content and question formulation, yet ensures a certain level of structure, and because it is useful in obtaining a broad base of information and in helping to understand the interviewees' perspective (Kumar, 2014). The data extracted from secondary sources is in the form of content derived from media publications. The media sources from which data has been extracted are the following: Breitbart, Fox News, Mother Jones, MSNBC, National Review, New York Post, Politico, Real Clear Politics, The Huffington Post and The Nation. A full list of media publications from which data was extracted can be found in Appendix III. List of interviewees and news articles. The selection of media sources has been based on the media sources' place on the liberal-conservative spectrum, as depicted in the figure below.

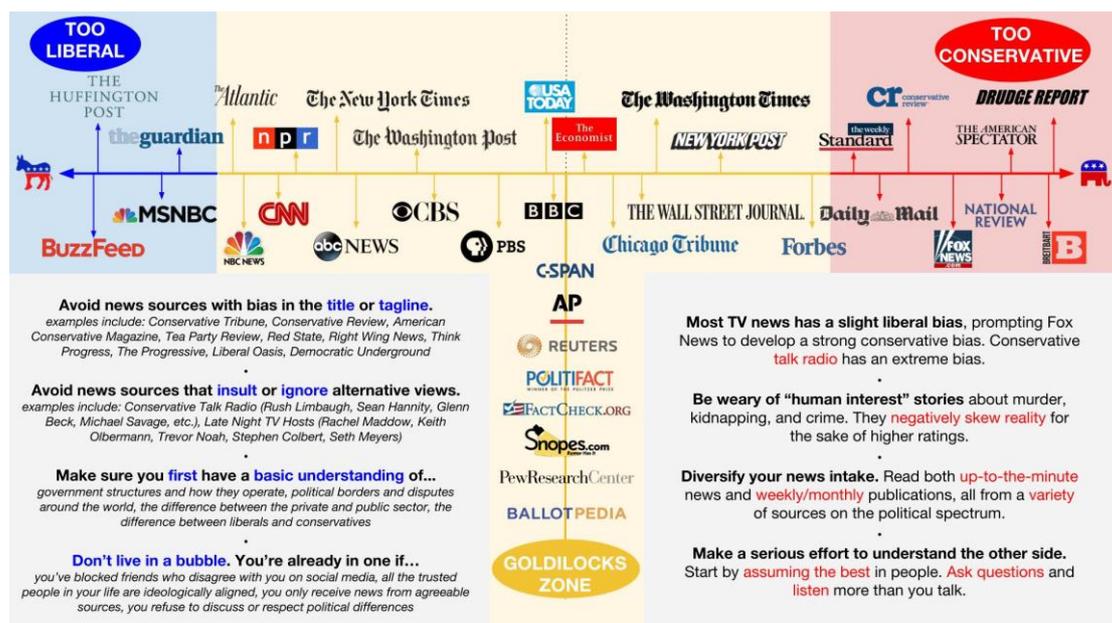


Figure 4. Place media sources on liberal-conservative spectrum * (LibGuides, 2019)

** The selection of media sources has been based on three figures in total outlining the media sources' place on the liberal-conservative spectrum. The two figures that have not been included in this sub-chapter can be found in Appendix IV. Media sources.*

The number of liberal media sources is proportional to the number of conservative ones. The media publications that were selected from the above-mentioned media sources have been published no earlier than 2012 (the start of President Barack Obama's second term). The search terms that were used in the extraction of data from media sources are 'environment' AND 'political polarization' OR 'divide OR 'partisanship' OR 'ideology'. All three sub-questions have been answered through the use of both the former and latter data collection method.

Research instrument(s)

An interview guide (consisting of a list of pre-determined questions) was developed to give direction to the interviews and to ensure sufficient coverage of the areas of interest. The questions that were formulated, though, only served as a starting point for conversation. Questions were added to the initial list of questions and conversation was diverted from the initial starting point, based on the interviewees' input. The interview guide can be found in Appendix I. Interview guide. All interviews were recorded (with the interviewees' consent) with the iPhone's built-in voice recorder, and were transcribed no later than two days after they took place.

Research population

The research population consists of government officials (employed at governmental organizations, federal executive departments, bureaus of the U.S. Department of the Interior, municipalities and NGOs) based in Washington D.C. The following departments, bureaus, municipalities and NGOs were contacted with and agreed to an interview (request): U.S. Department of Energy, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, D.C. Council and the Environmental Network. A list of interviewees can be found in Appendix III. List of interviewees and news articles. The research population was sampled according to two non-probability sampling techniques: judgmental and snowball sampling. Firstly, potential interviewees were selected based on the researcher's judgment as to whom could provide the best information to answer the research questions, and, secondly, additional interviewees were selected based on the former interviewees' recommendations. A total of 7 interviews have been conducted over a two-week time period. A more detailed time schedule can be found in Appendix II. Working & financial plan.

Triangulation

The (internal) validity of this study has been determined through the use of triangulation. Two types of triangulation are used in this study, namely triangulation of sources and triangulation of methods, as different types of sources (primary and secondary) and different methods of data collection (interviews and content analysis) have been employed.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues in this study have been considered in relation to various stakeholders, including the research participants (i.e. the respondents or interviewees) and the researcher itself. With regard to the research participants, (informed) consent was requested (and received) prior to collecting data from the respondents, incentives (in

the form of edible gifts) were provided to respondents in exchange for their cooperation, sensitive or confidential information has (upon request) been kept off the record, and the research report will be sent to all participating bodies upon completion; requests for corrections received thereafter will be honored. With regard to the researcher, bias has been avoided (as much as possible), all the information provided by respondents has been obtained in an appropriate manner and all the research findings have been reported correctly.

4.3 data analysis

There is no single method of conducting discourse analysis; thus, the data obtained has been analyzed using a four-step coding process, designed especially for the purpose of this study. This process has been based on one of the three coding procedures for data processing in qualitative studies, as outlined in Kumar, 2014, which revolves around the identification of main themes emerging from the collected data. The first step involved identifying (and color coding) main themes emerging from the raw data (the transcribed interviews and the content derived from the media publications). The second step involved classifying relevant information under the (previously identified) main themes. The third step involved once more classifying relevant information under the main themes; yet this time keeping the theoretical framework in mind. The last step involved integrating the research findings (i.e. the coded data) into the research report, using verbatim quotations where appropriate.

5. Results

In total, three discourses have been identified, each with its own structure and identity: (1) heartland, (2) knowledge and (3) loyalty discourse. Each discourse received its name from the element that, for the largest part, structures the discourse and shapes the other elements belonging thereto. The heartland discourse's name, firstly, is based on its peoples' geographical location, for (I3, L116) '*geography is the biggest determination of political identity*'. The knowledge discourse's name, secondly, is based on its people's (higher) educational attainment level, the gap in which is one of the primary causes of the differences of opinion (on environmental issues) held between people belonging to the various discourses. The loyalty discourse's name, thirdly, is based on its peoples' patriotic beliefs, which stem from a collective effort and shared desire for bipartisan support (on environmental issues).

“Geography is the biggest determination of political identity”

5.1 Heartland: “Home Is Where The Heart Is”

Ideological predispositions

Attitudes

People belonging to the heartland discourse hold a predominantly positive attitude towards the fossil fuel industry; their attitude is that they are supportive of and welcome new developments in this industry. This attitude is inextricably linked to their geographical location, and can be explained by looking at their place of origin and employment history. The majority of people belonging to the heartland discourse originate from fossil fuel depended and oil, gas and coal producing states, on which they heavily depend for their livelihood. Albeit they are on some level aware of the fact that the fossil fuel industry is a ‘dirty’ and, not to mention, dying industry, and that the life expectancy of people employed in that industry is lower than the average U.S. life expectancy, they are supportive of the fossil fuel industry because (I4, L44-55) '*their family has always worked in the coal mines*' and '*it's their only livelihood, the only thing they've ever known*'. Thus, their attitude is grounded in the fact that their roots lie in the fossil fuel industry, and their vested interest in and continued support of this industry stem from a desire for job and income security. People belonging to the heartland discourse are fiercely opposed to people of the opposite discourse, whom they refer to as ‘global warming/climate change alarmists’, ‘environmental crusaders’ and ‘greenies’, for they are believed to threaten the existence of the fossil fuel industry with their ‘green ideology’, ‘green energy boondoggles’ and ‘eco-fascism’, and thereby weaken the foundations of the livelihood of the people belonging to the heartland discourse.

Another attitude held by people belonging to the heartland discourse is that they feel as though they have a socially and intellectually disadvantaged position compared to people belonging to the competing discourses. There is a lack of education among people belonging to the heartland discourse, causing them to feel this way, which may in part be the result of their line of work not leaving any room for academic development. Another explanation for them being in this position is the commonly

held belief that (A44, P4) *“Christians and conservatives in the Academy right now are frequently undercut by intolerant liberal colleagues who try to marginalize them”*. This belief strengthens their attitude greatly, and increases their feeling that ‘radical leftists’, ‘leftist Americans’, ‘left’s antichrists’, ‘power-grabbing leftists’, ‘Nazi’s’ and ‘zealots’ are intent to keep them out of their ‘bureaucratic-academic hothouse’ in an attempt to further their own academic careers, whilst ensuring people belonging to the heartland discourse become stagnant in theirs.

“Christians and conservatives in the Academy right now are frequently undercut by intolerant liberal colleagues who try to marginalize them”

Furthermore, belonging to the heartland discourse fear they are underrepresented in the mass media and that the range of conservative-leaning news sources is too small. There is a liberal media bias, driving the conversation about environmental issues, which causes people belonging to the heartland discourse, who primarily hold conservative viewpoints, to believe that the left-wing media (A44, P21) *“is in control of the rapidly growing mainstream online news and social-media properties”*, (A3, P3) and that *“Facebook, Twitter, and Google have become ideological battlefields that their geopolitical rivals have learned to exploit”*. This also causes there to be a prevailing feeling among people belonging to the heartland discourse that, although conservative-leaning news sources are now readily available, they can only be found on the far-right alternative media spectrum, while there is a much broader range of liberal-leaning news sources. People belonging to the heartland discourse argue that this gives their liberal counterparts an unfair advantage over them in the obtaining of adequate information, and that they end up bearing the brunt of the ‘politicized media’ environment, in which ‘leftist politics’, which in their opinion is ‘drenched in ideology’, prevails.

In addition to the above-mentioned, people belonging to the heartland discourse fear the United States’ interests are not adequately protected and that the United States as a nation used to be ‘greater’ than it is today. The former, rather xenophobic attitude, is born out of a distrust of other governments and a fear that other governments do not have the United States’ interests at heart, and will consequently weaken the state of the United States’ economy. People belonging to the heartland discourse are of the opinion that (I4, L211) *“it’s the United States first, heck with anybody else”*, and believe that their liberal counterparts are guilty of ‘zealotry’ and the spreading of ‘conspiracy theories’ and ‘fake news’, and will wind up being responsible for bringing down the nation. The latter attitude comes from a place of dissatisfaction with their current social standing (in terms of their limited academic opportunities and underrepresentation of their viewpoints in the mass media), and rests on a certain ‘romanticized’ idea of what the United States used to be like.

“It’s the United States first, heck with anybody else”

Demands

People belonging to the heartland discourse, in an attempt to protect their own interests and try to sustain their livelihood, demand the fossil fuel industry be kept alive. Specifically, the demands made are that the fossil fuel industry must be advocated for and endorsed and that the mines must not close down. These demands stem from a fear of losing their jobs and a desire to maintain a steady income, rather than an innate desire to save the industry from extinction. Another set of demands made by people belonging to the heartland discourse is that Christians and conservatives must not be marginalized and that they must be provided with equal opportunities for academic success. These demands stem from a desire to no longer be socially and intellectually inferior to their liberal counterparts.

Another set of demands made by people belonging to the heartland discourse is that they must be equally represented in the media, that there must be a broader range of conservative-leaning news sources and that the United States' interests must be adequately protected. These demands stem from a desire for their liberal counterparts to no longer have an unfair advantage over them (in the acquiring and accessing of information) and for other governments to not be able to take advantage of the weakened United States' economy, and ultimately serve as a means to break down the liberal media bias and to rebuild the United States' nation to its original 'great' state.

Political communications

Identity markers

People belonging to the heartland discourse cast themselves as being supportive of economic development and job creation; the identity marker that defines them is that they support economic development and job creation. This identity marker is of utmost importance to them, and takes precedence over all other (partisan) matters. Albeit some, hereby referring to non-Trump supporting conservatives, (I6, L50) '*find liberals' efforts to conserve the environment idealistic, they all agree they are unpractical*', and should never outweigh efforts to create economic prosperity and generate job opportunities. Hence, any initiatives for environmental protection put forward by people belonging to the competing discourses are immediately shut down, and any scientific evidence of global warming presented is cast off as 'a hoax created by the Chinese (to make U.S. manufacturing noncompetitive)'. Furthermore, people belonging to the heartland discourse believe that their liberal counterparts are out to destroy the United States' culture and weaken the economy, and hold strong to the idea that '*the leftist infiltration into Wall Street is intentionally impacting employees' values, creating spillovers to society and ultimately undermining the cultural and economic principles that have made the United States a success*'.

Another identity marker that defines people belonging to the heartland discourse is that they avoid talking about climate-related matters. This identity marker follows logically from the previous one; as economic development and job creation are their top priority, climate concern has no place in their minds. People belonging to the heartland discourse regard people belonging to the opposing discourses as 'silly', particularly when it comes to their counterparts' views on climate change and environmental degradation. Although they generally try to (I5, 390) '*avoid talking about climate-related matters*', when presented with the opportunity, they point to studies that found no clear evidence of the fact that climate change is caused by

human activity, or studies, dating back to the 60s or 70s, that estimated that climate change would be much more severe by the year 2000, or that report that the average global temperature has not increased in line with the projections. They also tend to be in agreement with Trump when he posts messages on Twitter, saying that the recent drops in temperature are proof of global warming being a myth, and cast everything reported to the contrary off as ‘global warming scams’, ‘pseudo-scientific claims’ and ‘made-up leftist nonsense’.

Storylines

The main storylines constructed by people belonging to the heartland discourse, in an attempt to invalidate their counterparts’ viewpoints and highlight their own, are that (I3, L134) *“climate change isn’t real”* and that *“they’re losing jobs because people are anti-fossil fuels”*. They even go as far as saying that the United States’ economy suffers as a result of their non-economically minded counterparts (A54, P2, 7) *“undermining business objectives and foundational American principles”*; this is another storyline. These storylines are constructed to ensure that the economy does not suffer from their counterparts’ efforts to protect the environment.

Another set of storylines constructed by people belonging to the heartland discourse is that liberals are (I5, L41) *“overestimating the challenges posed by climate change”* and that they themselves think of (I4, L150) *“solar energy and energy efficient cars as things that, back in the 60s, hippies and people with long hair used to believe in”*. These storylines are constructed to downplay the arguments put forward by their counterparts and to promote the United States’ economic vitality.

They themselves think of ‘solar energy and energy efficient cars as things that, back in the 60s, hippies and people with long hair used to believe in’

Interplay elements

The most noteworthy relationship between the various elements of the heartland discourse is that a large number of demands, identity markers and storylines can to some extent be traced back to the first attitude; that involves people belonging to the heartland discourse being supportive of and welcoming new developments in the fossil fuel industry. This works as follows; being that people belonging to the heartland discourse originate from fossil fuel depended states and are depended on the fossil fuel industry for their livelihood, they demand the fossil fuel industry must be advocated for and endorsed, the mines must not close down, and the United States’ (economic) interests must be adequately protected. Furthermore, to ensure job and income security (further), they support economic development (in the United States as a whole) and job creation (in the fossil fuel industry specifically), and avoid talking about climate-related matters, in an attempt to steer the conversation away from all climate-related topics and make the United States’ economy the top priority.

Table 2. Elements heartland discourse

Elements heartland discourse	
Attitudes	(1) Supportive of and welcome new developments in the fossil fuel industry

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (2) Feel as though they have a socially and intellectually disadvantaged position compared to people belonging to the competing discourses (3) Fear they are underrepresented in the mass media (4) The range of conservative-leaning news sources is too small (5) Fear the United States' interests are not adequately protected (6) The United States as a nation used to be 'greater' than it is today
Demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The fossil fuel industry must be advocated for and endorsed (2) The mines must not close down (3) Christians and conservatives must not be marginalized (4) They must be provided with equal opportunities for academic success (5) They must be equally represented in the media (6) There must be a broader range of conservative-leaning news sources
Identity markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (7) The United States' interests must be adequately protected (1) Support economic development and job creation (2) Avoid talking about climate-related matters
Storylines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Climate change isn't real (2) They're losing jobs because people are anti-fossil fuels (3) Their non-economically minded counterparts are undermining business objectives and foundational American principles (4) Liberals are overestimating the challenges posed by climate change (5) Think of solar energy and energy efficient cars as things that, back in the 60s, hippies and people with long hair used to believe in

5.2 Knowledge: 'Knowledge Is Power'

Ideological predispositions

Attitudes

People belonging to the knowledge discourse are more highly educated than people belonging to the heartland discourse. Albeit they are oftentimes no more clear on issues of current importance than their counterparts, they believe to have a greater wealth of information at their disposal and to be off higher social standing. This causes their attitude to be that they regard themselves as morally superior to their conservative counterparts, whom they view as short-sided economically minded individuals, who solely (I3, L30) '*focus on short-term gains, as a trade-off for long-term devastation*'. Owing to the fact that people belonging to the knowledge discourse are more highly educated than their conservative counterparts (which may or may not be due to them having a different origin and/or position in the academic world), they have developed viewpoints that are in direct contrast with those of their counterparts. While they themselves primarily hold liberal viewpoints, their counterparts' viewpoints, in their opinion, are those at the 'alt-right' political spectrum, born out of 'far-right' and 'conservative ideology', to which they refer as 'ultraconservatism', 'Trumpism' and 'economic populism'.

“After all, if even the parts of American life that unite us are politicized, how do we hold the country together? What do we share when our most innocent pastimes are reduced to partisanship?”

Another attitude held by people belonging to the knowledge discourse is that they are indifferent to any kind of political messaging; that is to say they have no specific attitude to speak of. The reason for this is because they have become saturated with political messaging (spread by liberal and conservative media outlets alike and played right into the hands of the ‘lame-duck Congress’), and, in response, turn to, for example, late night television shows that deliver news in a (I4, L359, 363) ‘*funny format; it’s escapism*’, in an attempt to temporarily escape the real world. Their reasoning behind this is that (A79, P4) ‘*after all, if even the parts of American life that unite us are politicized, how do we hold the country together? What do we share when our most innocent pastimes are reduced to partisanship?*’ Furthermore, people belonging to the knowledge discourse completely dismiss their conservative counterparts’ attitude towards political messaging; they believe their counterparts’ idea of what the United States used to be like to be nonexistent. Their attitude is that their counterparts’ idea is merely (I4, L367) ‘*how Hollywood portrays America*’, and that it is a non-existent idea that, for some reason, ‘*Americans bought into in the 50s and 60s*’.

Demands

People belonging to the knowledge discourse, in an attempt to gain more ground on their ideological opponents, demand their conservative counterparts take note of their, in their opinion, morally superior viewpoints. Specifically, the demands made are that their counterparts step away from their one-sided economic viewpoints, and instead open themselves up to competing viewpoints. These demands stem from a desire to reduce the impact the alt-right movement has on the United States as a whole, and the environment in particular, and increase that of their (left) own side of the political spectrum.

Another demand made by people belonging to the knowledge discourse is that they not be confronted with political messaging (to such a great extent). This demand comes from a place of dissatisfaction with the way in which their lives have become polluted with partisan views, and stems from a desire to live their lives free of polarization. Another set of demands is that they urge their conservative counterparts to adjust their idea of what the United States used to be like, and encourage them to focus on a more realistic goal for its future. These demands stem from a (somewhat false) hope that if their counterparts were to stop focusing on the past, they might start to realize that it in fact are their viewpoints that stand in the way of progress.

Political communications

Identity markers

People belonging to the knowledge discourse view themselves as being (I6, L231, 61) ‘*idealism driven*’; the identity markers that define them are that they are idealism driven and ‘*ambitious and aggressive with environmental policies*’. They are hard at

work to carry out the message that the United States needs to join the rest of the world in their efforts to mitigate climate change and prevent further environmental degradation. They, however, are under the impression that their conservative counterparts are doing the exact opposite. They (I4, L72) *‘look at conservatives as representing fossil fuel interests’*, and fear for the environmental ramifications associated with that. Furthermore, while they view themselves in a rather positive light, they view their conservative counterparts as nationalistic, jingoistic, xenophobic and money-crazed ‘Republican energy/climate hawks’, ‘climate deniers’, ‘denialists’ and ‘demagogues’, who by means of a ‘conveyor belt of financial support ‘gave rise to the ‘Trump/Breitbart phenomenon’, and through ‘(corporate) influence-peddling’ are responsible for bringing about the ‘oil curse’.

Another identity marker that defines people belonging to the knowledge discourse is that they are accepting of science-based evidence. While they view themselves as being accepting of science-based evidence, they view people belonging to the opposite discourse as climate-skeptics; as rejecting or unwilling to accept the science behind global warming. They believe their counterparts’ unwillingness to accept the science behind global warming finds its roots in egocentricity; their ‘climate-skepticism’, and ‘anti-environment’ and ‘anti-climate rhetoric’ attitude are purely self-serving in their opinion. Furthermore, people belonging to the knowledge discourse cast themselves as being more (I4, L260) *‘understanding of what they call reality’* than their conservative counterparts; this is another identity marker. They believe their counterparts’ single focus on the economy (in combination with their lack of education) clouds their judgment, and causes them to ‘attack science’, be ‘at war with science’, engage in ‘scaremongering’ and spread their ‘Republican gospel’ and ‘anti-regulatory zeal of the extreme right’.

Storylines

The main storyline constructed by people belonging to the knowledge discourse is a (triple layered) argument as to how their counterparts’ interest in the fossil fuel industry can be explained: (1) by recognizing the importance of oil, gas, and mining operations in regions where people belonging to the heartland discourse are situated, (2) by identifying their largest campaign contributors; (giant) energy firms, and (3) by acknowledging that they are trying to increase national security by turning the United States into a (A117, P12) *‘bastion of fossil fuel abundance’* in an attempt to ensure the United States’ continued dominance over other (key) regions of the world. Another storyline, constructed with their counterparts’ position on all environment-related matters in mind, is that (A23, P5, 6) *‘a global, harmonized carbon tax is about as likely as a unicorn stampede’*, as their counterparts’ *‘anti-government dogma just is ill-suited to climate change’*. These storylines are constructed to demonstrate they understand their counterparts’ reasons behind their actions, yet still feel strongly that their counterparts have no choice but to loosen their grip on oil, gas, and mining operations, and instead focus their attention on protecting the environment.

‘A global, harmonized carbon tax is about as likely as a unicorn stampede’

Interplay elements

The most noteworthy relationship between the various elements of the knowledge discourse is that the level of education of people belonging to the knowledge discourse (in particular the difference in education levels between them and their counterparts) shapes a large number of attitudes, demands and identity markers. This can be explained as follows; their (higher) educational attainment has made them develop viewpoints that in their eyes are morally superior to those of their counterparts, and has made them see themselves in a rather positive way (in terms of them being idealism driven and accepting of science-based evidence) compared to their counterparts. This, in turn, has caused them to believe their counterparts are short-sided economically minded individuals whose actions reflect their intention to merely protect their own interests.

Table 3. Elements knowledge discourse

Elements knowledge discourse	
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Regard themselves as morally superior to counterparts (2) Believe their conservative counterparts are short-sided economically minded individuals, who solely focus on short-term gains, as a trade-off for long-term devastation (3) Are indifferent to any kind of political messaging; have no specific attitude to speak of (4) Their counterparts' idea of what the United States used to be like is merely how Hollywood portrays America, and is a non-existent idea that, for some reason, Americans bought into in the 50s and 60s
Demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Their counterparts must step away from their one-sided economic viewpoints, and instead open themselves up to competing viewpoints (2) They must not be confronted with political messaging (to such a great extent) (3) Urge their conservative counterparts to adjust their idea what the United States used to be like, and encourage them to focus on a more realistic goal for its future
Identity markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Idealism driven (2) Ambitious and aggressive with environmental policies (3) Accepting of science-based evidence (4) More understanding of what they call reality than their conservative counterparts
Storylines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) (Triple layered) argument as to how their counterparts' interest in the fossil fuel industry can be explained: (1) by recognizing the importance of oil, gas, and mining operations in regions where people belonging to the heartland discourse are situated, (2) by identifying their largest campaign contributors; (giant) energy firms, and (3) by acknowledging that they are trying to increase national security by turning the United States into a 'bastion of fossil fuel abundance' in an attempt to ensure the United States' continued dominance over other (key) regions of the world (2) A global, harmonized carbon tax is about as likely as a

unicorn stampede’’, as their counterparts’ ‘‘anti-government dogma just is ill-suited to climate change’’

5.3 Loyalty: ‘Patriotism Above Partisanship’

Ideological predispositions

Attitudes

People belonging to the loyalty discourse hold similar views as people belonging to the knowledge discourse when it comes to their position on environmental and science-related matters (the reason for which may be because they are of similar origin and hold a similar position in the academic world as their liberal counterparts). They, however, as opposed to their counterparts, do not hold exclusively liberal or conservative viewpoints, but instead prefer to seek bipartisan support in the tackling of (partisan) issues; their attitude is that they have a more moderate, middle-of-the-road perspective on (partisan) issues. They have the, some would say, unpopular opinion that things ought to be managed somewhere in the middle, taking into account the opinions of both sides.

Another attitude held by people belonging to the loyalty discourse, which stems directly from the previous one, is that they feel as though neither party represents them very well. They believe that people from both sides of the political spectrum are going the wrong way about propagating their partisan views and that, in order for people from all discourses to move past the current ‘political gridlock’, both sides have to step away from ‘(party) identity politics’ and find a way to start working together; at the local state level at first. Furthermore, they believe that people, in particular those belonging to the heartland discourse, need to discard of their nationalistic beliefs, and instead adopt more patriarchic ones, for (A104, P3) ‘*nationalism focuses on the State while patriotism focuses on the people*’.

Demands

A demand made by people belonging to the loyalty discourse, in an attempt to bring people from both sides of the political spectrum closer together, is that their counterparts follow their lead in adopting more moderate perspectives on partisan issues, and adjust their positions accordingly. Another set of demands is that political reforms be instated that leave room for bipartisan support, and that (new) policies be implemented in coordination with local legislations, for they observed that (I7, L2) ‘*most policy reforms have in the past been achieved at the local state level (through local efforts)*’. These demands stem from a desire for the group of moderately opinionated politicians in Congress (who share their viewpoints) to grow larger, and for them to, subsequently, find more support for the implementation of environmental measures.

People belonging to the loyalty discourse not only demand politicians alter their (extreme) viewpoints, but also the type of (political) messages that they spread to their constituents. A specific demand made is that the nature of political messages be altered, as it, according to them, has gotten to the point where (I1, L228) ‘*a lot of the traditional rules that guided the political discourse are falling by the wayside*’. Another set of demands is that (environmental) messages be unified and that (race-neutral economic) messages be spread, for they believe (A11, P3) ‘*unified messages*

that acknowledge both racial and economic disparities win over white voters more effectively than economic messages alone”. These demands stem from a desire to help people get back to the roots of the issues and help them realize that they have more in common than first anticipated, and are made in an attempt to call a halt to (political) polarization and instill in people the idea that in unity there is strength.

“A lot of the traditional rules that guided the political discourse are falling by the wayside”

Political communications

Identity markers

People belonging to the loyalty discourse view themselves as being the only ones who are not blinded by ‘negative partisanship’, and want to do away with the traditional division between the ‘Red and Blue states’, in order to break the ‘gridlock at the national level’, and to ultimately be able to successfully tackle environmental issues. The identity marker that defines them is, thus, that they try to find solutions (to environmental problems) beyond political boundaries. They believe a paradigm shift in politics (that will shake up the current political system) is already underway; they believe the traditional ‘partisan coalitions and/or platforms’ are breaking down, whilst new ones are reassembling. They believe this reassembling to be accompanied by ‘policy realignment’, causing a (A74, P1) ‘*broad center-left majority*’ to come into existence that will break the ‘*paralyzing grip of polarization and get America moving forward again*’. Furthermore, to truly achieve environmental justice, they believe a transformative (climate-justice) movement needs to take place, forcing ruling elites (hereby referring to major players in the oil, gas and coal industries) to relinquish still profitable practices such as fossil fuel extraction, in exchange for a new set of political and economic interests.

Storylines

The main storyline constructed by people belonging to the loyalty discourse revolves around the climate-justice movement that they believe needs to take place; in particular, the underlying force that will allow it to happen and the ingredients for success. Climate change, according to them, is the force that will set this movement into motion; (A108, P13) ‘*the grand push— that will bring together all of these still-living movements: a rushing river fed by countless streams, gathering collective force to finally reach the sea*’. In order for this movement to be successful, the movements’ leaders need to look back to and learn from previous movements that; (A108, P14, 17, 19) ‘*(1) major shifts in economic balance of power result from extraordinary levels of social mobilization, (2) fundamental change comes in spasms of rapid-fire lawmaking, and (3) the process of shifting cultural values is a central element to success*’.

“The grand push— that will bring together all of these still-living movements: a rushing river fed by countless streams, gathering collective force to finally reach the sea”

Interplay elements

The most noteworthy relationship between the various elements of the loyalty discourse is that almost all (other) elements stem directly from the first attitude; that involves people belonging to the loyalty discourse having a more moderate, middle-of-the-road perspective on (partisan) issues. This works as follows; owing to the fact that their viewpoints are neither entirely liberal nor conservative, they have come to feel as though neither one party in Congress represents their interests very well. They, in turn, have expressed interest in reforming the political system and finding ways to close the gap between the two sides of the political spectrum, in order to form a larger group of (independent) people (in Congress) working together towards a common goal; to fight global warming.

Table 4. Elements loyalty discourse

Elements loyalty discourse	
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Have a more moderate, middle-of-the-road perspective on (partisan) issues (2) Feel as though neither party represents them very well
Demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Their counterparts must follow their lead in adopting more moderate perspectives on partisan issues, and must adjust their positions accordingly (2) Political reforms must be instated that leave room for bipartisan support (3) (New) policies must be implemented in coordination with local legislations (4) The nature of political messages must be altered (5) (Environmental) messages must be unified (6) (Race-neutral economic) must messages be spread
Identity markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Try to find solutions (to environmental problems) beyond political boundaries
Storylines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The (underlying) force that will set the climate-justice movement into motion: climate change; the grand push—that will bring together all of these still-living movements: a rushing river fed by countless streams, gathering collective force to finally reach the sea (2) The ingredients for success (of the climate-justice movement): the movements' leaders need to look back to and learn from previous movements that; (1) major shifts in economic balance of power result from extraordinary levels of social mobilization, (2) fundamental change comes in spasms of rapid-fire lawmaking, and (3) the process of shifting cultural values is a central element to success

5.4 Epistemic figures

Epistemic figures are the underlying trends that structure the different discourses and establish the regularity in thinking of the people belonging to the different discourses. There are two main trends (underpinning the collective ideological predispositions and political communications): (1) the upsurge in political rhetoric (emanating from political actors and media outlets) and (2) the increase in straight-(party)ticket (along party lines) voting (as a result of the rise in [negative] partisanship). As these trends continue to grow, people (belonging to the two main competing discourses) are

becoming increasingly entrenched in (I1, L388) *“an awful lot of rhetoric that doesn’t stand up to very much scrutiny”*. This, as a result, has given rise to a (A53, P5) *“balkanized and instantaneous media environment”*, where political actors and media outlets alike are *“compelled to make facts serve a larger tale in every utterance”*, and where the groundwork is being laid for the political divide to further increase. Trump is believed to be a by-product, rather than a cause, of the political-media complex, whereby Trump (A82, P12) *“represents a dramatic change from the way politics has been practiced in the TV era”*. Only people belonging to the loyalty discourse do not, to such a great extent, let themselves be entangled in this political-media complex.

Political rhetoric

At the core of the upsurge in political rhetoric lie increased levels of polarization, manifestations of which are (A87, P3) *“gerrymandered congressional districts that produce politicians more extreme than the general population, our shout-fest 24-hour cable news cycle that thrives on conflict, lawmakers who care more about re-election than governing, and a stranglehold of special interest groups on each party”*. Political actors and media outlets are, for a large part, to blame for the upsurge in political rhetoric, for they carry partisan beliefs into public discussions, thereby adding a layer of complexity to issues, which makes it harder for people to independently form opinions. To help form their opinions, people look to political leaders and tune into news stations that (I7, L37) *“tell them what they are already predisposed to believe”*. Political leaders and news stations, in turn, look to the general public for ways to (I7, L42) *“tap into and confirm their predisposed beliefs”* that enable them to *“cater to the perspectives of the people they represent”*.

As people increasingly look to political leaders and news stations to tell them which opinions to adopt, their opinions have become more entrenched by political rhetoric. People themselves have also become (I6, L106) *“more entrenched in their own positions”*, since they only turn to political leaders and news stations that operate on the same side of the political spectrum that they place themselves on. As a result, people have come to be of the opinion that they already know everything there is to know about the various partisan issues, and therefore do not feel the need anymore to converse with people belonging to the opposite discourse, or to generate a (I4, L105) *“more middle of the road moderate neutral discourse and exchange of ideas”*. When they do converse with their counterparts, it is only to share with them their pre-held beliefs and provide them with generic predetermined answers, but even then do they not talk directly at them, but past them.

People do not feel the need anymore to generate a *“more middle of the road moderate neutral discourse and exchange of ideas”*

As a result of this, in turn, there is (I2, L123) *“no longer any middle ground between the various discourses”*, which has caused American politics to have become like a (A67, P1) *“bitter sports rivalry, in which the parties hang together mainly out of sheer hatred of the other team, rather than a shared sense of purpose”*. Furthermore, people have started to resort to name-calling and labeling. This, consequently, causes the various discourses to grow even further apart because (I4, L321) *“when the*

political discourse resorts to name calling, and people are sticking their tongues out at each other and calling each other names, the social discourse follows soon after”, and “when you start to label people, all discourse closes down”.

“When the political discourse resorts to name calling, and people are sticking their tongues out at each other and calling each other names, the social discourse follows soon after” and “when you start to label people, all discourse closes down”

Straight-(party)ticket voting

With the rise in partisanship, people (A67, P2) *“have come to see each other not just as political adversaries, but as enemies who want to harm the nation”*. They have grown to distrust each other to such an extent that they dislike the opposite party and its elected leaders more than they like their own. This is a phenomenon referred to as ‘negative partisanship’, and this is believed to be a (A67, P2) *“by-product of the growth in negative partisanship within the American electorate”*. While (negative) partisanship used to influence decision-making mainly at the national level, it now increasingly influences decision-making at the local level, which is starting to become visible in (A69, P3) *“congressional races”*, where *“party identity and national politics now trump local politics”*.

It is also clearly reflected in people’s voting behavior. In (local) elections, people are now voting strictly along party lines, with this trend being at the highest rate in 100 years, and are increasingly voting against the opposite political party, rather than for their own. The rise in (negative) partisanship, however, is not the only reason for the observed changes in voting patterns. There are a multitude of (additional) reasons why voting patterns are changing, including: (A69, P4) *“(1) the ideological sorting of the parties; (2) residential sorting, where people tend to live in enclaves of like-minded people; (3) political gerrymandering of districts; (4) better targeting of vulnerable districts by both national parties and interest groups; and (5) increased mobility of voters and workers, resulting in less community identification”*.

5.5 Antagonistic frontier

The antagonistic frontier is the barrier that exists between the different discourses, marking the differences of opinion (on environmental issues) between and the distinguishing features of the people belonging to the various discourses. The distinguishing features can be organized around three main themes (emerging from the collective ideological predispositions and political communications): (1) geography, (2) education and (3) media, messaging and information provision. These themes signify where the barrier and, in turn, political divide between the different discourses and its people is strongest. There is believed to be a ‘dam effect’ when it comes to breaching the barrier and overcoming political polarization over environmental issues. What this entails is that (A27, P5) *“once the dam is breached, there could be rapid change”*. This belief is based on the observation that (A39, P2) *“the climate change debate is moving; it’s sort of like the gun control debate, but further behind”*. The people belonging to the loyalty discourse hold strong to this belief and are intent on breaching the dam. The people belonging to the other two

discourses, however, (still) dominate the climate change debate and only continue to widen the political divide with their fundamentally different opinions.

“The climate change debate is moving; it’s sort of like the gun control debate, but further behind.”

A major distinguishing feature (themed ‘geography’) between the two main competing (heartland and knowledge) discourses is the strong rural-urban divide, with the heartland discourse having the former characteristic and the knowledge discourse the latter. The place of origin of each group shapes their respective attitudes (on environmental issues); conservative and liberal, respectively, for people belonging to the heartland and knowledge discourse. The difference in attitudes between both groups can be attributed to the fact that the majority of people belonging to the heartland discourse originate from rural areas that heavily rely on the fossil fuel industry for a steady income, whereas people belonging to the knowledge discourse originate from urban areas where the educational attainment is higher and the impact of climate change is deeply felt. The heartland discourse’s reliance on the fossil fuel industry enables the industry to (A27, P3) *‘fund a load of anti-science rhetoric and propelled climate change into the nation’s most divisive political issue’*. This causes people belonging to the heartland discourse to move further to the political right, and, in turn, causes the political divide to widen further.

Another distinguishing feature (themed ‘education’) between the different discourses is the gap in education. People belonging to the heartland discourse are the most poorly educated, albeit a lack of education can be identified on both sides of the political spectrum. The level of educational attainment (together with the place of origin) shapes the different groups’ attitudes. What this means in terms of attitudes held (towards environmental issues), for those with a lower education level, is that they are often unclear on and have very little understanding about the issues that are affecting them. Their attitudes are not (I1, L319, 320) *‘grounded in any understanding of what is going on’*; *they are purely ‘based on emotion, or on what their friends are saying, or on what they’re hearing in the media’*, and are laden with emotion and ideological beliefs, which, rather than the issues themselves, form the foundation of their arguments. With the current gap in education between people belonging to the different discourses, the differences of opinion that exist between them are likely to only increase, along with the political divide.

An additional distinguishing feature (themed ‘media, messaging and information provision’) between the different discourses is the polarized media environment. The media, similar to the general public, is divided along partisan lines, whereby each outlet comes from a specific place in ideology, causing issues to be spun in either liberal or conservative direction. The tone of the media coverage (re)shapes the different groups’ attitudes; the attitudes of the people belonging to the heartland and other two discourses are in line with, respectively, the conservative and liberal ones presented in the media. There, to the heartland discourse’s disadvantage, is a liberal media bias, driving the conversation about environmental issues, which causes them to feel as though their views are underreported in the media. They are further disadvantaged because the way in which environmental issues are framed (in the

media) does not resonate with them, for they do not identify with the values represented in environmental messages. Furthermore, they do not like the solutions on the table, causing them to be reluctant to act on climate change. As a result of the liberal media bias and the inability of people belonging to the heartland discourse to identify with the values represented in environmental messages, they oftentimes end up being the victim of the polarized media environment. This causes them to remain poorly informed, and, in turn, causes the political divide to persist.

5.6 Physical objects

With the political divide being at an all-time high, people (in particular those belonging to the two main competing discourses) have become increasingly convinced of their own opinions. In an attempt to express their opinions and exemplify their points of view, they, instead of going into an in-depth discussion about environmental issues, latched onto physical objects. The reason for this is because physical objects have come to serve as a platform for people to take a stance in the debate over environmental issues, and express their feelings of victimization towards the federal government. Physical objects are used for the latter purpose, specifically, when there is a lot of local resentment about something the federal government is involved in. As a result, (I3, L15) *‘it’s not about the issues themselves anymore, but about whether or not your team is winning, and the environment has unfortunately taken a backseat in that’*. Furthermore, physical objects have (A72, P3) *‘gained an overinflated role in the political discourse’* and have *‘become what the conversation is about’*; to such an extent that it no longer bears any resemblance to (I1, L490) *‘what people are actually experiencing on the ground’*.

‘It’s not about the issues themselves anymore, but about whether or not your team is winning, and the environment has unfortunately taken a backseat in that’

There are three examples of cases in which physical objects have become symbols of the larger debate over environmental issues: Keystone XL Pipeline, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and Bears Ears National Monument. The first case revolves around the energy infrastructure company TransCanada’s intention to extend the original Keystone pipeline and expand its transport capacity. People belonging to the heartland discourse support the project for its economic benefits (such as job creation and increased energy security), whereas people belonging to the knowledge discourse oppose the project on the grounds that it has negative environmental consequences (among which are disturbance to the fragile ecosystem of the surrounding area and increased greenhouse gas emissions). The two groups, however, no longer discuss the case in terms of being in favor or against the project, but rather use it as a way to indicate on which side of the political spectrum they place themselves. The Keystone XL Pipeline has, consequently, (A40, P2) *‘become a totem of sorts’*; *‘a proxy for the broader battle over energy vs. environment’* and has (A89, P2) *‘taken on a life of its own’*, despite the fact that it turned out to (A72, P4) *‘neither be a silver bullet for the economy, as was promised by some, nor the express lane to climate disaster proclaimed by others’*, and that *‘its actual value has been rendered meaningless’*.

The second and third case revolve around the Trump administration's plans to open up public lands, removed from its monument status, to industrial developments. People belonging to the heartland discourse, again, support the plans in the hopes of deriving economic benefits from it, whereas people belonging to the knowledge discourse oppose the plans in order to protect the national monuments' natural values. As to the objects' role in discussions about environmental issues, the same applies as to the previous case. Despite the fact that the initial conversation about the plans has meanwhile died down, as the plans turned out not to be economically viable, people still use it to express their partisan opinions. Except people belonging to the loyalty discourse; they do not, to such a great extent, position themselves around physical objects.

6. Discussion

This study set out to examine based on which ideological predispositions and political communications political actors position themselves around environmental issues. The following sections will go into detail about the outcome(s) of the examination, thereby drawing on the findings presented in the previous chapter, by answering the (sub- and central) research questions and engaging in a discussion on the links that can be drawn between the research findings and previous research on the concepts introduced in the first chapter and (other) trends in political polarization. Furthermore, the following sections will elaborate on the reasons for in- and excluding certain elements of the employed theories, problems encountered throughout the research process and suggestions put forward for future research.

6.1 Answers to research questions

Sub-questions:

1. Which discourses can be identified?

Three separate discourses have been identified, each with its own distinctive features: structure and identity: (1) heartland, (2) knowledge and (3) loyalty discourse. Each discourse is characterized by a number of ideological predispositions and political communications (i.e. elements), making up the discourses' internal structure. One element in each discourse serves as the foundation upon which the (entire) discourse structure rests. The heartland discourse's structure, firstly, rests on the first attitude (and, with that, the element directly linked to it; its people's geographical location): being supportive of and welcoming new developments in the fossil fuel industry. The knowledge discourse's structure, secondly, rests on its people's higher level of educational attainment (and, with that, the attitude directly born out of it; regarding themselves as morally superior to their counterparts). The loyalty discourse's structure, thirdly, rests on the first attitude: having a more moderate, middle-of-the-road perspective on (partisan) issues.

The foundational element upon which the discourses' structure rests is referred to as the 'common denominator', and, for a large part, structures and shapes the various discourses' identities. All other remaining elements become crystalized around the common denominator, thereby forming the popular identity. Hereby, two types of elements can be distinguished; ones that have a (in)direct relationship to other elements (popular demands) and ones that stand on their own (democratic demands). Elements of the latter type remain isolated and/or particular and do not unify into a whole, whilst elements of the former type form an equivalential chain of demands (with signifiers attached to it) that continues to grow larger as more particularistic demands are disposed of. Throughout this process, the popular identity starts functioning as an empty signifier of demands, which, throughout the process of crystallization around the common denominator, have become heterogeneous (Laclau, 2005).

2. How are discourses structured internally?

A discourse's internal structure consists of a number of ideological predispositions and political communications, consisting of attitudes and demands, and identity

markers and storylines, respectively. Ideological predispositions, firstly, are formed through a process whereby various sets of formerly unrelated positions cluster together into shared sets of attitudes, which, in turn, generate its own set of demands. Political communications, secondly, are formed through a process whereby formerly unstructured narratives transform into a coherent set of identity markers, which, in turn, assimilate into multiple storylines. There are, however, individual demands and identity markers that assemble independently of other elements/remain unattached; these are referred to as democratic demands.

Each discourse has its own unique set of ideological predispositions and political communications that forms its internal structure. The core elements (i.e. popular demands) structuring the heartland discourse, firstly, include its people holding a positive attitude towards the fossil fuel industry, being supportive of economic development and job creation, feeling underrepresented in both the academic world and the mass media and denying the existence of climate change. The core elements structuring the knowledge discourse, secondly, include its people regarding themselves as morally superior to their counterparts, adopting an ambitious and aggressive approach in carrying out environmental policies and being accepting of science-based evidence. The core elements structuring the loyalty discourse, thirdly, include its people having an outspoken preference for bipartisan support and approaching things from a neither entirely liberal nor conservative perspective, wanting to instate political reforms and break the national gridlock and attempting to find solutions to environmental problems beyond political boundaries.

A discourses' internal structure also consists of a number of policy vocabularies, which strengthen the various elements making up the discourses' internal structure. The policy vocabularies that strengthen the heartland discourse, firstly, are centered on their counterparts' ideological and environmental viewpoints and partisan beliefs. The policy vocabularies that strengthen the knowledge discourse, secondly, are centered on their counterparts' ideological and economic viewpoints and partisan beliefs. The policy vocabularies that strengthen the loyalty discourse, thirdly, are centered on the political divide and partisan gap and (reforms of) the political system.

3. How are discourses structured externally?

A discourse's external structure consists of three factors: (1) epistemic figures, (2) the antagonistic frontier and (3) physical objects. The external factors, whilst structuring the various discourses, constantly interact with each other, with the epistemic figures being the instigator of the interaction. The factors behave (in relation to each other) as follows: the epistemic figures, firstly, determine each discourse's (separate) direction, thereby widening the gap between the different discourses and, in turn, strengthening the antagonistic frontier. Secondly, whilst the epistemic figures strengthen the antagonistic frontier, the antagonistic frontier itself, in turn, also strengthens the epistemic figures. To put it differently; the two underlying trends structuring the different discourses, in part, strengthen the barrier that exists between the different discourses and, in part, gain strength themselves as the barrier grows stronger. Thirdly, physical objects do not interact with the former two factors on the same level; they only start serving as a discussion platform in response to the rise in and emergence of epistemic figures and the antagonistic frontier.

The two external factors that play the largest role in the widening of the political divide (in order: epistemic figures, antagonistic frontier) structure the various discourses as follows: people look to political leaders and news stations to help form/(re)shape their opinions (here the internal discourses' elements) and, in turn, position on environmental issues. With time and with the simultaneous rise in negative partisanship (and, with that, changing voting patterns), people's opinions/positions grow stronger and become more (ideologically) consistent and extreme; either exclusively liberal or conservative. As people are becoming more entrenched in their own positions, the barrier between the different discourses grows stronger and the distinguishing features separating them from each other become more apparent. Consequently, people's tendency to (exclusively) look to political leaders and news stations operating on their own side of the political spectrum and to strictly vote along party lines becomes stronger, thus causing the trends to grow further.

The discourses' (internal) elements that are structured by external factors (here not including the physical objects) can be divided into separate categories. A distinction can hereby be made between ideological predispositions and political communications. For the heartland discourse, these include (categorized under ideological predispositions and political communications, respectively): (1) geographical location, (2) educational level and (3) position on the media, and (1) economy and (2) climate change denial. For the knowledge discourse, these include: (1) educational level and (2) position on the media, and (1) environment and (2) science-based evidence. The internal elements of the loyalty discourse are not, to such a great extent, structured by external factors, for they are not affected by (growth in) trends, and help breach the barrier, rather than strengthen it.

Central question: based on which ideological predispositions and political communications do political actors position themselves around environmental issues?

Political actors from the three identified discourses position themselves around environmental issues based on a number of ideological predispositions and political communications (consisting of attitudes and demands, and identity markers and storylines, respectively), unique to each discourse. The ideological predispositions and political communications form the discourses' internal elements/make up the discourses' internal structure. The internal elements in combination with the external factors determine the discourses' position on environmental issues and, through constant interplay, (continue to) drive the (two main) opposing discourses further apart, thereby (further) contributing to political polarization over environmental issues.

The heartland discourse people's position, firstly, is that they value economic growth and job and income generation above all else, and want to avoid environmental interests starting to weight more heavily than economic ones at all costs. Furthermore, they do not share their counterparts' concern for the environment, and will continue to do everything in their power to downplay and direct attention away from environmental issues. The knowledge discourse people's position, secondly, is that they want to face environmental issues head on, but fear their counterparts' sole focus on the economy will continue to interfere with their efforts to achieve climate justice. Furthermore, they want to convince their counterparts of the scientific evidence

behind global warming, but fear their ties to the fossil fuel industry are too deeply rooted for them to ever admit to the industry's activities being harmful. The loyalty discourse people's position, thirdly, is that they support their liberal counterparts in their fight for climate solutions, but believe that, in order to truly achieve results, the political divide must first be bridged, and solutions (to environmental problems) must ultimately be sought beyond political boundaries.

The interplay (and causal relationship) between the internal elements and external factors works as follows: the epistemic figures determine the various discourses' people's points of view (in a way consistent with their ideological viewpoints) and (re)shape their position on environmental issues (to be in line with those of their own political party). Over time (with the epistemic figures continuing to steer people to either side of the political spectrum), people become more convinced of their own opinions, as a result of which the antagonistic frontier grows stronger and the differences of opinion between the people belonging to the various discourses increases further. As a result of that, in turn, the epistemic figures (continue to) increase in strength, thereby strengthening people's convictions further. With people increasingly clinging to their own (partisan) beliefs, they latch onto physical objects and start using them as a platform to share with their counterparts their environmental views.

6.2 Reflection on literature

Internal elements

Previous research on the concepts of ideological consistency and ideological realignment suggests that people's ideological viewpoints and partisan beliefs have become inextricably intertwined (Pew Research, 2014) and that people's ideological viewpoints increasingly determine peoples' political affiliations (Layman et al., 2006) and, in turn, attitudes towards policy issues (Guber, 2013). It could be argued that the foundational element upon which the discourses' structure rests is such an important determinant for the discourses' place in ideology (and, with that, position on the political spectrum) that it dictates people's political leanings and, in turn, position on environmental issues. Assuming this assertion proves correct, it would be in line with the above-mentioned concepts. In addition, previous research on the concepts of partisan antipathy and party sorting suggests that partisans view the opposite party in (increasingly) negative terms (Pew Research, 2016) and that the 'identity markers' used to describe themselves and others with are cues provided by elites (Sol Hart & Nisbet, 2011). It could be argued that the use of policy vocabularies is a manifestation of partisan antipathy, for the majority of policy vocabularies are negative words and/or phrases directed at the opposite party, and that policy vocabularies are direct examples of cues provided by elites. Again assuming these assertions prove correct, they would be in line with the above-mentioned concepts.

Evidence to support the research findings as presented above only applies to the two main competing discourses; people belonging to the loyalty discourses form and adopt their own attitudes and positions, irrespective of their political affiliations and/or provided cues. As for the loyalty discourse, numerous previous studies found that Americans prefer public officials to cooperate in the solving of widely accepted issues (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). This is consistent with the research findings, which indicate that the loyalty discourses' people favor bipartisan support in the tackling of

environmental issues, and are of the opinion that, in order for people to move past the current political gridlock, both sides have to step away from identity politics and start working together. Previous studies also found that moderate voters, in particular, are expected to increasingly start objecting to ‘partisan welfare and political gridlock’ (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). People belonging to the loyalty discourse, in this case, can be considered ‘moderate’, as they feel neither party represents them very well; thus, with this group becoming increasingly vocal, bipartisan cooperation might be a future occurrence.

Caution needs to be exercised though when making (such) predictions about the future direction of (one of) the identified discourses, because, as of yet, the two main competing discourses still dominate the political playing field. Thus, for the majority of American (ideological) viewpoints and (partisan) beliefs goes that they are becoming stronger and continue to drift further apart (to the extreme ends of the political spectrum). However, with the loyalty discourse (whose positions are not, to such a great extent, influenced by ideological and/or partisan beliefs) seemingly becoming stronger, the possibility exists that people from other discourses will someday share the positions currently (only) held by the people belonging to the loyalty discourse. While the increase in political polarization is currently still the dominant trend, a turning point might thus be reached at some point in the future, where it becomes more common practice to take a bipartisan approach to practicing politics.

External factors

Manifestations of trends

Previous research on ideological realignment suggest that people adopt and change their positions in response to changes in positions of elites with whom they share their political predispositions, thereby becoming more entrenched in their own positions, and further widening the political divide (Guber, 2013). Previous research also suggests that people change their positions (on partisan issues) to make them consistent with or correspond with their political views (here referred to as party identification: party ID) (Prior, 2013). These studies’ results are consistent with the research findings, which indicate that people increasingly look to political leaders and news stations (operating on the same side of the political spectrum as them) to help form their opinions, which has led to an upsurge in political rhetoric; the first of two underlying trends structuring the different discourses.

Furthermore, previous research on partisan antipathy suggest that partisans consider the opposite party to be more and their own party to be less ideologically extreme than its counterpart, and that the reason for the majority of people to identify with their own party is the negative impact of the opposite party (and its policies) on society (Pew Research, 2016). Previous research also suggest that people view the opposite party in increasingly negative terms, whereas their view of their own party remains the same, and that people’s voting choices are determined for a large part by their party ID, for party ID is an increasingly accurate predictor for voting choices (Prior, 2013). These studies’ results are consistent with the research findings, which indicate that people have come to dislike the opposite and its elected leaders more than they like their own (i.e. negative partisanship), as a result of which people are increasingly voting straight-(party)tickets; the second underlying trend.

Distinguishing features of the barrier

Previous research on geographic polarization produces mixed results. It, on the one hand, suggests that the majority of Americans live in politically homogeneous communities where there are few opposing views, and that the grouping of politically like-minded people increases political polarization. It, on the other hand, suggests caution in accepting the following statements: “(1) *the United States is divided into two homogeneous political sections, (2) the two parties have become more geographically segregated, (3) geographical divisions are more stable than in earlier eras, (4) religio-cultural differences are growing, and (5) political divisions in general are growing*” (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). The former result is consistent with the research findings, which indicate that the strong rural-urban divide (the first distinguishing feature making up the antagonistic frontier) is one of the major contributors to political polarization over environmental issues. Previous research also shows that there is evidence of spatial and/or geographical polarization of party identification and (liberal-conservative) ideology; however, not of voting behavior (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). This is contradiction with the research findings (which indicate that geographical segmentation in fact influences voting behavior).

Previous research on educational polarization suggests that higher levels of educational attainment and (self-reported) understanding positively reflect the degree of environmental concern for liberals and Democrats, yet not for conservatives and Republicans (McCright & Dunlap, 2011). This is consistent with the research findings, which indicate that the (perceived) gap in education (the second distinguishing feature) between the various discourses contributes to political polarization in the same way that the rural-urban divide does; namely by shaping the different groups’ attitudes (towards environmental issues). Previous research also shows that the differences between both groups can be explained by looking at (content) differences between both sides’ preferred news outlets and political elites (McCright & Dunlap, 2011). This, as well, is consistent with the research findings, which indicate that politicians and media outlets structure the different discourses and continue to drive them further apart.

Previous research on attitude polarization produces mixed results. Evidence of a relationship between the increasing number of partisan messages and changing attitudes or behavior remains sparse. Previous research, on the one hand, suggests that, as media outlets became more (ideologically) diverse and started catering to smaller audience segments, strong partisans in particular began consulting more ideologically extreme content. It, on the other hand, shows there is no concrete evidence that increasing levels of polarization within the media have led to increased partisan attitudes or voting behavior (Prior, 2013). The former result is consistent with the research findings, which indicate that polarized media coverage (the third distinguishing feature) contributes to political polarization by shaping the different groups’ attitudes, only in a less coincidental way than the former two distinguishing features. Media outlets, namely, specifically target people (from both sides of the political spectrum) with the intention of reinforcing their pre-held beliefs, and people, in turn, actively search for the information put out by the media. The latter result, however, is in contradiction with the research findings (which indicate that the polarized media environment has in fact driven people’s attitudes further apart).

As can be deduced from the research findings and confirmed by findings from previous research (as presented in the above-mentioned sections), it is a combination of internal elements and external factors that determines the discourses' position on environmental issues (through a constant interplay, whereby the two opposing groups continue to drift further apart). It can hereby be assumed that external factors (the epistemic figures in particular) are the largest contributor to the increase in political polarization, for they (re)shape people's positions (and thus, in a way, prompt the interplay with the internal elements) and instigate the (initial) interaction between the various external factors. The antagonistic frontier is presumed to also play an important role in structuring the various discourses and widening the political divide further. However, the research findings and the findings from previous research produce conflicting results in the judgment as to which distinguishing features make up the barrier. The antagonistic frontier might thus not be such an important determinant for the increase in political polarization as the research findings imply. It can, nevertheless, be said with certainty that both the epistemic figures and the antagonistic frontier deserve ample attention when looking at the factors contributing to the growing political divide (over environmental issues).

6.3 Reflection on theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study consists of two theories within the domain of political discourse: Laclau's theory on populism and Hajer's theory on policy discourse. The use of the former theory was limited to the first (popular demands) and fourth (popular identity) element, and the use of the latter theory was limited to (all three layers of) the first (terms of policy discourse) element. The first element of Laclau's theory (popular demands) was used as a framework for two purposes. Firstly, to distinguish between the different types of elements; those that have a (in)direct relationship to other elements and those that stand on their own. These (two) different types of elements (in each discourse) have been identified using Laclau's distinction between democratic and popular demands, the former being those that remain isolated and the latter those that cluster together into a unified whole. Making such a distinction between different types of elements was essential in determining which elements are ultimately responsible for forming the popular identity, and has contributed to the understanding of the inner workings of a discourse (the elements it consists of and their interplay).

Secondly, to determine which elements make the various discourses distinguishable from each other and establish where the barrier between the different discourses lies and is strongest. Determining the points on which the barrier is strongest was essential in determining how the antagonistic frontier affects the discourses' structure and in uncovering the underlying reasons for (some of) the internal elements' formation, and has contributed to the understanding of the antagonistic frontier's interaction with a discourses' internal elements. The fourth element of Laclau's theory (popular identity) was used as a framework to identify the element (in each discourse) that serves as the foundation upon which the discourse structure rest (common denominator). Identifying the foundational element was essential in determining which elements set the discourses' course and determine their place in ideology and position on the political spectrum, and has contributed to the understanding of a discourses' identity formation process.

The first layer of (the first element of) Hajer's theory (consisting of storylines, myths and metaphors) was used as a framework to extract the (four different types of) elements from the raw data. Extracting and distinguishing between different types of elements was essential in determining of which elements a discourse consists and where the differences between the various discourses lie, and has contributed to the understanding of the inner workings of a discourse. The second and third layer of Hajer's theory were used as a framework to extract policy vocabularies from the raw data and identify the epistemic figures. Identifying policy vocabularies and the epistemic figures were essential in, respectively, determining which words/phrases are used to strengthen (some of) the internal elements and how epistemic figures affect the discourses' structure, and has contributed to the understanding of the inner workings of a discourse and the epistemic figures' interaction with a discourses' internal elements.

The remaining elements of the employed theories (introduced in the theoretical framework) were left out of this study due to time constraints. It could, however, be argued that if time had allowed for more elements to be studied (in detail), it would have resulted in a more complete picture of the factors contributing to political polarization over environmental issues. Firstly, it could have been beneficial to include the second element of Hajer's theory (discourse coalitions), in order to gain a(n) (better) insight into the different types of (political) actors positioning themselves around environmental issues, and to discover the way in which one actor's position on environmental issues (inadvertently) affects that of another actor.

A distinction could hereby have been made between, on the one hand, (politically attentive and non-attentive) general citizens and, on the other hand, politicians and media outlets. Even though this study employed multiple data collection methods in an attempt to determine the difference in positions between different types of political actors, the results across data collection methods were virtually the same. The reason for this, presumably, is that the underlying trends structuring the different discourses in part bring the positions of the two groups closer together, making it difficult to distinguish between positions. This is where it could have been beneficial for the element 'discourse coalitions' to be included.

Secondly, it could have been beneficial to include the third element of Hajer's theory (institutional practices), in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the way in which underlying structures shape the different discourses, and to discover the way in which certain (predisposed) ideological and partisan beliefs affect people's positions on environmental issues and their response to external stimuli. Although this study set out to find underlying trends (in the form of epistemic figures), it did not take account of the societal/cultural rules and norms (for example, whether or not it is culturally acceptable to openly discuss politics and/or directly state one's political affiliations) that determine how discourses get produced in response to trends. Thus, whether the epistemic figures alone provide sufficient evidence from which to draw conclusions on the discourses' structure is a contentious issue, for it could be argued that it is the interplay between societal trends and rules and norms that determines the discourses' structure.

Thirdly, it could have been beneficial to include the second element of Laclau's theory (difference and equivalence), in order to gain insight into the underlying

processes causing certain elements to remain isolated/particular, whilst other elements unify into a whole and become crystalized around the common denominator, and to discover the way in which people's positions on environmental issues are formed. Albeit a clear distinction (in each discourse) can be made between popular and democratic demands, the question remains which demands clustered together and which were disposed of for people's positions to be formed. An answer to this question might have been found had the element 'difference and equivalence' been included.

6.4 Reflection on methodology

The methodological approach was, in most respects, well suited to investigate the problem under study. The mixed method approach, in particular, was of high value, as it allowed for the subject area to be studied from different perspectives (of government officials and media outlets). However, there are a number of complications that have limited the study and potentially influenced the research findings to some extent, all of which are related to the collection of primary data; in particular, the selection of cases and the research population. Firstly, if the selection of cases had not been left to the interviewees' choice, there would not have been such a mixture of energy and environmental related interview topics. Admittedly, having based the selection of cases on the interviewees' choice slightly diverted the study away from its aim (to determine which factors contribute to the widening of the political divide over environmental issues specifically). This was a carefully thought-out choice though, which, considering that the selection of media publications was limited to articles that exclusively deal with environmental issues, does not invalidate the research findings.

Secondly, the goal to conduct a minimum of ten interviews has not been reached; only seven interviews have been conducted in total. The main reason for this is because the government officials that had been selected for an interview were extremely hard to reach (both outside of the United States, through email correspondence, and over the phone and/or in person). Most were unreachable altogether. Arguably, the research findings would have been richer had more interviews been conducted. Nonetheless, the data extracted from the interviews and media publications support each other; thus, the research findings can be deemed valid.

Thirdly, the majority of government buildings are accessible to U.S. residents only; the ones that foreigners are allowed to enter are difficult to obtain clearance for. This made not only requesting interviews on-site, but also finding an appropriate location to conduct interviews challenging. Fourthly, the interviewees were predominantly liberal, which may have caused the research findings to be slightly bias and/or lean in liberal direction. Lastly, the interviewees were rather reserved when it comes to the (accurate) provision of information. The reason for this, presumably, is that American citizens in general, and government officials, in particular, are hesitant to talk about dividing partisan issues out of fear of, for example, stirring things up with the 'other side', being misquoted or losing their jobs.

6.5 Implications for future research

This study has contributed to the field of political discourse by uncovering the different factors and underlying mechanisms contributing to the growing political divide over environmental issues, and by demonstrating the interplay thereof.

Furthermore, this study has furthered the (overall) scientific understanding of political polarization (over environmental issues), and has proposed innovation(s) to studying political polarization; specifically, to the role of physical objects. Physical objects, in this study, are one of three external factors structuring the various discourses. (Elements of) the other two factors (epistemic figures and antagonistic frontier) have been discussed (in depth) in sub-chapter 6.2 (Reflection on literature) in terms of their connection to previous research on political polarization. No previous studies have, however, been encountered where physical objects were studied in the context of political polarization. Having established this, this research field could benefit from additional research on the role physical objects play in the growing political divide (over a multitude of partisan issues).

Besides the role of physical objects, there is more room left for future research in this study area. With the current knowledge of which factors contribute to political polarization over environmental issues, future research could expand on this study's findings by looking into the following topics: (1) future research could look into the factors contributing to political polarization over other dividing partisan issues, in order to determine if similar results would be generated across different policy terrains. Likewise, (2) future research could set out to determine if similar results would be generated across different presidential eras. Furthermore, (3) future research could look into the different types of polarization (elite, media, attitude, geographical etc.) that either underlie and/or (directly) contribute to the widening of the political divide, in order to determine to what extent and in which way each type of polarization is (on its own and in combination with the others) responsible for the widening of the political divide (over environmental issues).

7. Conclusion

Large differences of opinion (between different political groupings) evidently exist on environmental issues, making the environment one of the most dividing partisan issues. This greatly disadvantages politicians trying to overcome partisan barriers in the hope of enforcing (stricter) environmental laws and regulations. While there was a general awareness (among researchers in the field of political science) of the growing political divide over environmental issues, it remained unclear what lay behind it. This critical knowledge gap prompted the idea for a study into the factors contributing to the widening of the political divide over environmental issues. As revealed in the previous chapters, this study found three separate discourses, each with its own unique set of distinctive features, and found that a combination of internal elements (attitudes, demands, identity markers and storylines) and external factors (epistemic figures, the antagonistic frontier and physical objects) shape the various discourses and, in turn, determine the position on environmental issues of the people belonging thereto.

It is inferred in the discussion that the combination of internal elements and external factors continue to drive the two main opposing groups in society further apart, thereby (further) contributing to political polarization over environmental issues, as follows: through a constant interplay between the epistemic figures and the antagonistic frontier (and the physical objects on a different level) with the discourses' internal elements, whereby a growth in/of trends and the barrier continuously (re)shapes and strengthens people's positions (on environmental issues) in a way that causes them to (continue to) drift further apart. This is the case with many dividing partisan issues, the environment included. It is believed, however, that the partisan gap over environmental issues can be bridged, when people intent on overcoming partisan barriers start to dominate the debate over environmental issues. People involved in the gun control debate (and many other debates over dividing partisan issues), held the same belief, making the debate over environmental issues comparable to the gun control debate, which is said to be 'similar, only further ahead' (A39, P2).

Only in the debate over environmental issues have physical objects taken the environmental issues' place, causing the debate to no longer revolve around the environment itself, and thereby making it unique compared to other debates. Bearing in mind the similarities between the various debates over dividing partisan issues though, it remains a contentious issue whether or not the factors contributing to the widening of the political divide over environmental issues are the same as those responsible for the divide over other partisan issues. An argument to support this notion, on the one hand, is that many external factors (the epistemic figures and antagonistic frontier in particular) are 'overarching' factors that presumably shape people's positions on many partisan issues in the same way as they do people's positions on environmental issues. An argument to oppose this notion, on the other hand, is that many internal elements (mainly the identity markers and storylines, for these are centered most exclusively on environment-related matters) are specific to people's positions on environmental issues.

The question also remains whether the political divide will persist/continue to widen, or whether there will be a 'paradigm shift in politics', as the people belonging to the

loyalty discourse expect to happen, causing the political gridlock to loosen and the ‘center-left majority’ to gain ground. In order for the latter scenario to be realized, the loyalty discourse would need to merge with the knowledge discourse (whose people hold a similar position on environmental issues) and together form a front against and gain the upper hand over the heartland discourse. In practice, this would mean that, in order for ‘moderate voters’ to join the liberals’ ranks, the democrats in Congress would need to step away from identity politics and start to place focus on/(re)direct their attention towards the things that unite liberals and moderates. There is also a role to play for policy makers and media outlets, if they are so inclined to help the loyalty discourse grow (substantially). It would be recommendable for them to tend to the loyalty discourse’s demands, the most important ones among which are: adopting more moderate perspectives on partisan issues, instating political reforms that leave room for bipartisan support and local involvement, and altering (the nature) of political messages.

In order to fulfill these demands, policy makers could start by taking into account/giving equal attention to both sides’ arguments in debates and focusing on both sides’ commonalities (rather than differences) whilst doing so, incorporating both sides’ perspectives into policy documents, and involving local legislators in the decision-making process. Media outlets, in their turn, could start by reporting on issues from a neither entirely liberal nor conservative (middle-of-the-road) perspective and by doing so acknowledging that there is more than one side to the story, and reporting on the issues themselves, in a fact-based manner (rather than in a way that is colored by partisanship). A different way to shake up partisan strongholds would be for policy makers and media outlets alike to try and keep the trends (upsurge in political rhetoric and increase in straight-(party)ticket voting) from growing further and breach the barrier by, respectively, reducing the use of political rhetoric in public discussions and keeping partisanship out of local elections, and stimulating relocation to and from rural and urban areas, encouraging people belonging to the heartland discourse to obtain/increasing access to higher education and raising the amount and number of conservative media coverage and outlets to an equal level (the same level as that of liberal media coverage/outlets).

Coming back to the scenario where there is a ‘paradigm shift in politics’ and where the loyalty discourse, as a result, increases in strength, for the epistemic figures this would mean that the trends might stagnate and/or decline over time. The first trend (upsurge in political rhetoric), firstly, would be likely to start showing signs of stagnation/decline, as people belonging to the loyalty discourse look to political leaders and news stations with a different intent than people from the two main competing discourses; namely with the intent to find commonalities between the different groups of people, rather than to focus in on the things that divide them. The second trend (increase in straight-(party)ticket voting), secondly, would also be likely to start showing such signs, as the loyalty discourse’s people suggest counteracting negative partisanship by entering into cooperation with their counterparts and working towards common goals, from the local level up.

For the antagonistic frontier a ‘paradigm shift in politics’ would mean that the barrier might be breached, or at least weakened, being that people belonging to the loyalty discourse have a general desire to break the political gridlock and to bring people from both sides of the political spectrum closer together. The polarized media

environment, in particular, would likely no longer be marked as a distinguishing feature making up the barrier, as the loyalty discourse's people demand (environmental) messages be unified, in order for them to resonate better with a larger proportion of the population. For the physical objects this would mean that the attention in the debate over environmental issues might be diverted away from physical objects and back onto the issues themselves. The reasoning behind this assumption is that people belonging to the loyalty discourse wish to get back to the core of the issues to, from there on, try to get past partisan blockades and find solutions to common problems facing the world today.

For the environment as a whole this would mean that the government would no longer be able to overlook environmental issues. In the event that the environment would indeed become an 'inescapable' item on the government's agenda, there could be 'rapid change', as the people belonging to the loyalty discourse foresee. Consequently, the debate over environmental issues might start to develop along the same lines as the gun control debate, resulting in stricter environmental laws and regulations. However, looking at the history of the United States' government, with its two-party system, a strong 'center-left majority' (consisting of liberals and moderates) is highly unlikely to start dominating the political landscape any time soon. Nonetheless, the loyalty discourse's advance might instigate a shift in the political landscape in the upcoming elections, and if it does, the loyalty and knowledge discourses' people might find that by focusing on their common position on all environment-related matters, they could procure a majority to push through new legislation on environmental protection measures.

A 'paradigm shift in politics', however, is not a likely scenario for the foreseeable future, as the two main competing discourses currently still dominate the political playing field and the political divide still continues to grow; which, considering that this development has been ongoing for the past few decades is not all that surprising. The (continued) growth in political polarization is reflected in the ongoing trends (of upsurge in political rhetoric and increase in straight-(party)ticket voting) and the barrier's increase in strength. Even if the Democratic Party manages to receive sufficient (electoral) votes to win the upcoming election/presidency and, thereby, instigate a shift in the political landscape, a turning point will not be reached as a result of that; all that would mean is that the political landscape will be flipped, from one (extreme) end of the political spectrum to the other. What is likely to change though in the event of a win for the Democratic Party is that the physical objects will start to play a less important role in the (widening) of the political divide, for it is the Democrats' intention to resolve the (ongoing) debate over this matter. This might, in turn, set in motion a change in the discourses' composition. As of yet, though, no (accurate) future predictions can be made.

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Appendix I. Interview guide

1. What do you think are the causes and consequences of (case)?
2. What is your position on (case)?
3. Would you say individuals' positions on (case) are (largely) consistent with that of the political party they are affiliated to?
4. How would you say each party perceives the opposite party's position on (case)?
5. Would you say individuals' attitudes towards (case) are (in part) influenced by the attitude(s) held by the political party to which they are affiliated?
6. Would you say public opinion on (case) has changed as a result of changes in positions of politicians with whom the general public shares their political views?
7. Would you say public attitudes towards (case) have changed as a result of political messaging?
8. What would you say are the main attitudes held towards (case) by members of both political parties?
 - a. How would you say politicians' political views shape those attitudes?
9. What would you say are the main characteristics with which members of both political parties position themselves around (case)?
 - a. How would you say political messaging shapes those characteristics?
10. Through the use of which (main) arguments would you say do members of both political parties position themselves around (case)?
11. What would you say are the main concepts used by members of both political parties to structure their arguments around (case)?
12. Would you say members of both political parties each have certain (standard) ways of thinking about (case)?
13. What would you say are the main sets of attitudes towards (case) that shape both political camps?
 - a. Would you say these sets of attitudes have changed as a result of changing conditions of (case)?
14. What would you say is the common denominator of both political camps around which attitudes towards (case) are formed?

** The word 'case' has been substituted by one of the six cases selected by the interviewees.*

Appendix II. Working & financial plan

Working plan

Thesis	Start date	End date
First draft research proposal	28/08/2017	08/10/2017
Final research proposal	09/10/2017	03/12/2017
Holiday	24/12/2017	07/01/2018
Fieldwork	08/01/2018	21/01/2018
Internship	01/03/2018	31/07/2018
First draft thesis	02/09/2018	31/07/2019
Second draft thesis	20/08/2019	01/09/2019
Final thesis	10/09/2019	19/09/2019
Meetings		
Meetings with supervisor	6 times	
Examinations		
Start colloquium (in thesis rings)	22/11/2017	
Final colloquium	29/08/2019	
Final examination talk	10/10/2019	

Financial plan

Fieldwork	
Transportation (flight/local transportation) costs	550 EUR
Accommodation costs	500 EUR
Living costs	650 EUR
Thesis	
Printing and binding costs	15 EUR

Appendix III. List of interviewees and news articles

Interviewees:

1. Focus group interview, Bureau of Land Management
2. Patricia Aaron, Bureau of Reclamation
3. Phillip Han, U.S. Department of Energy
4. Scott Minos, U.S. Department of Energy
5. Joe Patrician, ex-campaign manager
6. Nicole Rentz, D.C. Council
7. Chris Weiss, Environmental Network

News articles:

Breitbart:

1. 'Climate Change Obsessed' Smith 'should resign' says official
2. Alarmist/ Climate Change Is About 'Immigration Reform, LGBTQIA+ Rights' Not Just Planet
3. Blue State Blues/ Media, Politicians Gave Russia a Map of America's Divisions
4. Delingpole/ The Great Global Warming Scam Began with the Nazis...
5. Delingpole/ Trump Is Western Democracy's Last Man Standing Against the Green Terror
6. Energy Expert/ Even Obama Admin Admitted Keystone XL Pipeline Was Safe for Environment
7. EXCLUSIVE--Talgo/ EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt Should Be Applauded, Not Attacked
8. Jay H. Lehr/ The Beginning of the End of EPA
9. Pew/ Majority of US Catholics Believe in Global Warming, but Less Than Half Attribute It to Human Activity
10. Report/ Save the Oceans - Stop Recycling Plastic!
11. Shock Study/ Climate Skeptics More 'Eco-Friendly' than Climate Alarmists
12. The Democrats' Death Wish/ The Disappearing Destiny of the Donkey Party
13. The Numbers Have It/ Questioning Climate Change Is The Smart Thing To Do
14. Too hot to handle/ Politics of warming part of culture wars
15. Vatican Issues Far-Left Declaration on Climate Change, 'Very Fabric of Life on Earth at Grave Risk'

Fox News:

16. Fox News Power Rankings/ Dem divides emerge
17. Google under fire for listing 'Nazism' as the ideology of the California Republican Party
18. Partisan dysfunction drives demand for new choice
19. Researchers Find the 'Liberal Gene'
20. Weak parties = More partisanship

Mother Jones:

21. A Climate Caucus Has Turned Into a Magnet for House Republicans. Wait, What?
22. Big Oil Can't Wait For the New Republican Majority in Congress
23. Can Climate Science Be Rendered Conservative-Friendly?
24. Care About Climate? Start Talking Like a Conservative
25. How Science Can Predict Where You Stand on Keystone XL

26. Once a Small Group of Lawmakers Agreed on Climate Science. Trump Destroyed That.
27. The Conservative Case for Taxing Carbon Pollution
28. The EPA Is Letting Energy Companies Pollute Our Drinking Water
29. The Paris Climate Agreement Takes Effect Today
30. This Is How the Federal Government Is Going to Force Your State to Prepare for Climate Change
31. When Did Republicans Start Hating the Environment?
32. Why Do Conservatives Like to Waste Energy?

MSNBC:

33. An environmental fight that's poised to transcend partisan politics
34. Analysis/ Donald Trump and the limits of political shaming
35. Climate debate takes a farcical turn in GOP-led Senate
36. Divided, We Stand
37. GOP Senate candidate won't answer on climate change
38. Millennials/ We care more about the environment
39. Obama mentioned climate change, so now what?
40. Obama rejects Keystone XL, left scores major victory
41. Senate approves Keystone XL project, veto awaits
42. The deep dive/ Who supports Donald Trump?
43. The Republican war on parks

National Review:

44. Conservative Academics/ Numbers Are Few in Colleges and Universities
45. Democrats & Donald Trump's State of the Union
46. Dog & Polar Bear Video Showcases Media Lies & Propaganda on Animals
47. Donald Trump & GOP House Majority -- He Endangers It
48. Donald Trump & Media -- Republicans' Hatred for Leftist Media Trumps All Else
49. Donald Trump's Conspiracy Theory Peddling Supporters & Critics Are Wrong
50. Fox News Conservative Media Echo Chamber Hurts Conservatives
51. Obama Emission Standards/ Trump Rolls Back
52. On Climate, Science and Politics Are Diverging
53. Political Narratives Make Facts Serve the Larger Storyline
54. Progressives & Wall Street -- Ideology That Is Bad for Businesses and the Larger Society
55. Putin -- Republicans & Democrats Love & Hate Him, Respectively/ Dangerous Polarization.
56. Republican Party -- Polls Show Unenthusiasm for Establishment Candidates | [site/name]
57. Scorched-Earth Politics is Overdetermined
58. Scott Pruitt/ EPA Pick for Trump Administration Would Restore Proper Role to Agency

New York Post:

59. Here's the infrastructure deal that Trump and Dems should swing
60. Liberals defend a lying smear
61. No labels = no ideas
62. Nonprofits would rather spite Trump than help those in need
63. Partisan prosecutions/ How state attorneys general dove into politics

64. Sorry — liberals aren't stymied because 'the system is rigged'
65. Trump is going to be the breath of fresh air we all need

Politico:

66. 'I Don't Like to Be Called a Nazi.'
67. 'Negative Partisanship' Explains Everything
68. 2016 Elections/ Getting the Politics of Fear Right
69. All Politics Is No Longer Local
70. Climate change skeptics run the Trump administration
71. Environmentalists/ Pruitt's replacement 'should scare anyone who breathes'
72. How Obama's waiting game killed Keystone
73. How the GOP Can Survive Trump
74. How to Save the Democratic Party From Itself
75. Left, right/ Politics's brain science
76. No, America's Not Divided
77. Pew poll/ Polarization levels high
78. Stage set for another big year of energy and environment fights
79. The Politicization of Everything
80. This graphic shows how America's partisan divide grew
81. This Is What the Future of American Politics Looks Like
82. Trump's High-Energy War on American Politics

Real Clear Politics:

83. Do-Nothing Republicans on Climate Change
84. Election Could Reverse Decades-Long Environmental Trend
85. Energy Divides Candidates But Draws Little Attention
86. Global Warming/ Follow the Money
87. How Energy and Conservation Became Partisan Issues
88. Is the U.S. Government Really Broken?
89. Obama Running Out of Reasons to Reject Keystone XL
90. Republican Civil War on Climate Change?
91. The Triumph of Ideology
92. The Trouble With the Latest Global Warming Plan
93. What? Me, Liberal? That's 'Fake News'

The Huffington Post:

94. 6 House Republicans Who Could Get Behind A Carbon Tax
95. A Small Senate Victory Maintains Methane Regulation
96. Democrats Have A Growing Edge Over GOP In Party Affiliation
97. Democrats Lack A Bold National Climate Change Plan In The Trump Era, And It Shows
98. Environmentalists Say They're Averting Climate Disaster. Conservatives Say It's Terrorism.
99. EPA To Gut The Only Major Federal Rule To Cut Climate Pollution From Vehicles
100. Equality Demands Environmental Protection
101. Few Americans Support Donald Trump's Decision To Leave The Paris Agreement
102. Scott Pruitt's Replacement Is Even Worse
103. The Widening Gap Between Our Politics And Our Civil Society

104. There's A World Of Difference Between Patriotism And Nationalism
105. This Is Why I Am A Democrat
106. Trump's Assault On Auto Pollution Rules Is The Latest Salvo In A War On States' Rights

The Nation:

107. Big Oil's Grip on California
108. Climate Change Is a People's Shock
109. Donald Trump's Fixation on Fossil Fuel
110. How to Protect the Environment Where It's Worked by Human Hands
111. New Study/ You Don't Have to Choose Between 'Populism' and 'Identity'
112. Our Addiction to Elections Is Killing American Democracy
113. Patriotism in the Trump Era
114. Should Democrats Try To Win Over Trump's Supporters, or Just Move On?
115. The Debate Democrats Can't Duck
116. The Far-Right Campaign to Destroy Our National Monuments
117. The Most Effective Foreign Policy Tool in the GOP's Pocket Is an American Pipeline
118. The Policy Weapon Climate Activists Need
119. This Is How We Can Tackle Climate Change, Even With a Denier in Chief
120. Trump's Denial of Catastrophic Climate Change Is a Clear Danger
121. Trumpism and the 'Liberal Elite'
122. What Does Big Oil Really Think About Climate Science?
123. What We Talk About When We Don't Talk About Climate Change
124. Why Are So Many Fossil-Fuel Companies Funding the Paris Climate Conference?
125. Will Obama Block the Keystone Pipeline or Just Keep Bending?
126. With the Supreme Court at Stake, This Election Could Determine the Future of Our Environment

Appendix IV. Media sources

