

Supplementary Materials

Learning from Divided Parties? Legislator Dissent as a Cue for Opinion Formation

Table S1 Comparison of 2015 CES respondents and the UBC student subject pool

	Student		CES 2015	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Gender	0.94	0.18	0.98	0.14
Religiosity	1.10	0.10	1.06	0.07
Ideology	0.97	0.07	0.96	0.03
Conservative PID	0.23***	0.08	0.32***	0.09
Liberal PID	7.37***	1.95	9.27***	1.85
NDP PID	0.40***	0.11	0.54**	0.16
Constant	0.80	0.36	0.18***	0.06
R ²	0.30		0.29	
N	713		1575	

* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01, two-tailed

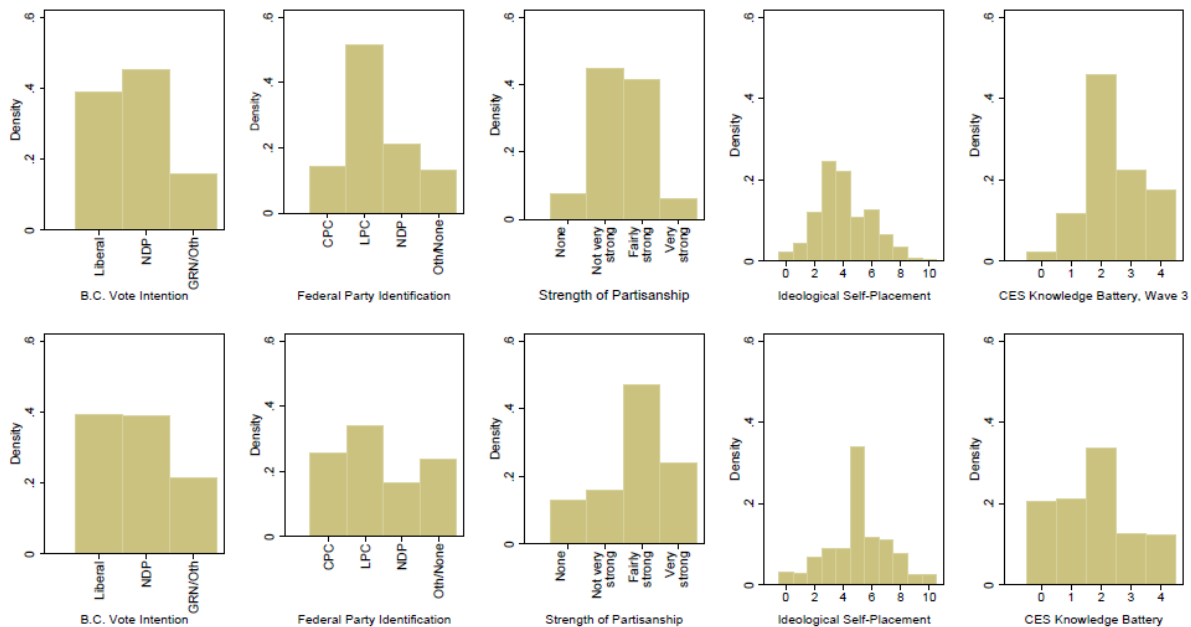


Figure S1 Distributions of common measures for student subject pool (top row) and 2015 Canadian Election Study (bottom row)

Table S2 Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Max	Min
Policy support	4.03	1.40	7	1
Political knowledge	2.12	1.30	4	0
PID strength – Government	0.67	0.87	3	0
PID strength – Opposition	0.58	0.84	3	0
Recall	0.78	0.13	1	0.32
Ideological Extremity	1.78	1.16	5	0
Ideology (0-10)	4.04	1.90	10	0
Religiosity	2.11	1.06	4	1

Note: Ideological extremity is measured with a standard zero-to-ten ideological self-placement scale that is folded on its mid-point (five). Religiosity is based on a question that asks respondents how important religion is in their life (4-point).

Table S3 Differences between dissent treatment conditions

	Coef.	SE
Divided – No frame	-0.27**	0.13
Divided – Leadership frame	-0.19	0.14
Constant	4.17***	0.10
Difference (Frame-No Frame)	-0.08	0.14
R ²		0.01
N		647

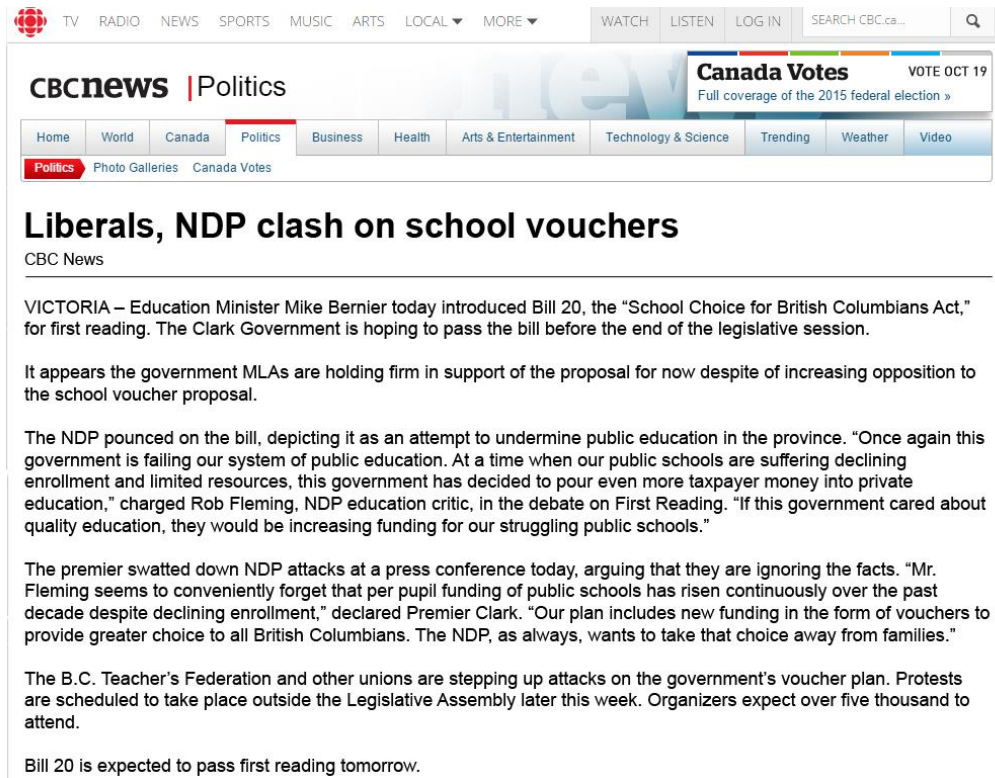


Figure S2 Example Article, United Condition

Merkley – Learning from Divided Parties: Supplementary Materials

Thank you for answering these questions so far.

In the next few minutes you will read a handful of newspaper articles describing a political issue that has recently come up in British Columbia. You will be asked questions about the articles at the end. Please read the articles the way you would when you are following political issues that interest you.

You only need a little background to proceed. Education policy in British Columbia is very different than other provinces such as Ontario. K-12 schools are given operating grants per pupil as a means of rewarding schools for attracting students. Between 2000 and 2013 per pupil funding has increased 37.4 percent. Grants to public schools are thus increasing despite declining enrollment.

British Columbia also has a large network of independent schools. Unlike in many other provinces, many of these schools are publicly funded. There are 5 categories of independent schools and the level of public funding varies accordingly. The two largest are the following:

Group 1 – receive 50 percent of their local board of education's per student operating grant. They are required to employ B.C. certified teachers, have programs consistent with ministerial directives, provide a program that meets the learning outcomes of the B.C. curriculum among other requirements. The vast majority of students enrolled in independent schools fall into this category (56,062)

Group 2 – receive 35 percent of their local board of education's per student operating grant. They must have all the requirements of Group 1 schools, but have operating costs that exceed ministry grants paid to local boards of education. There are approximately 14,352 students in Group 2 schools.

11 percent of B.C. students are enrolled in independent schools. Total enrollment has grown 8.7 percent in the past five years.

Supporters of the independent school system argue that it allows parents maximum flexibility on where they send their kids to school, and allows students to potentially acquire specialized education that isn't facilitated in the public school system. Additionally, many people believe competition among education providers, both public and independent, will generate lower costs and better outcomes. Supporters want to extend choice in education further by making it easier for lower-income families to afford education at independent schools, which have a tuition averaging over \$16,000 per year.

Opponents of the independent school system argue that these schools are diverting important tax dollars away from public school education. They further argue that independent schools generate serious inequities because of their high tuition. High income families are able to send their kids to expensive independent schools, while others are not as fortunate. They also voice concerns that the specialization of independent schools facilitate religious, class, and ethnic segregation, and believe all students should be able to learn together in public schools. Opponents want B.C. to claw back grants to private schools and increase grants to public schools to reduce class sizes.

Premier Christy Clark is in the process of passing legislation that facilitates greater access of independent schools for lower income families. It is being touted as a potential signature accomplishment for her tenure as Premier.

Figure S3 Text for policy primer

Premier launches ambitious plan for education reform

By Carol Saunders

VANCOUVER – Premier Clark stood at a podium in front of York House in Vancouver to announce a sweeping new policy designed to expand school choice in the province.

"I stand here today in front of the top-ranked school in our province to announce our government's intention to make choice in education more affordable for ordinary British Columbians," announced Premier Clark. "All students, regardless of their wealth or status, should be able to access the quality of education found at schools like York House."

The premier's proposal would institute a voucher system. Parents will be given a voucher, worth up to \$5,000, which they can utilize at any public school or independent schools from Groups 1 or 2 that fulfill B.C. program and teacher certification requirements. The value of the voucher declines with total family income. It disappears entirely for families that earn over two hundred thousand dollars per year.

"This new program will ensure the wealthy pay their fair share to allow the children of less fortunate British Columbians the opportunity to access alternative forms of high quality education," explained Premier Clark. "Education providers should have to compete for all students regardless of the financial means of their parents."

The Independent Schools Association of British Columbia (ISABC) cheered the development. "We believe that parents should have the ability to shop around for education that suits the needs of their child," explained Elizabeth Moore, Executive Director of the IASBC. "Public dollars do not cover the cost of providing high quality education, so tuition remains too high for too many British Columbians. This proposal is starting an important conversation."

Critics are concerned that essential money will be diverted from public school funding. "It is laudable that the government wants to give low income British Columbians access to quality education. But the best way to achieve this is to make sure our public schools have adequate funding to reduce class sizes," argues Jim Iker, President of the B.C. Teacher's Federation. "The government has failed at this task, and their latest proposal is a large step backward."

A bill is expected to be introduced in the legislature later this week.

Figure S4 Text for the first news article on school voucher proposal. Text does not vary by treatment condition

Divided Liberals, N.D.P. clash on school vouchers

Victoria – Education Minister Mike Bernier today introduced Bill 20, the “School Choice for British Columbians Act,” for first reading. The Clark Government is hoping to pass the bill before the end of the legislative session.

Premier Clark seems to have lost some grip over her legislative caucus. Liberal MLAs appear to be somewhat divided on the issue. One MLA, who refused to be identified, (expressed concern the government was pushing too far too fast in expanding the reach of independent schools in the province)[argued that the proposed voucher was not going far enough to expand access to private schools]. Such caucus unrest would represent an unusual challenge to the Premier’s leadership on a signature piece of the government’s agenda.

The NDP pounced on the bill, depicting it as an attempt to undermine public education in the province. “Once again this government is failing our system of public education. At a time when our public schools are suffering declining enrollment and limited resources, this government has decided to pour even more taxpayer money into private education,” charged Rob Fleming, NDP education critic, in the debate on First Reading. “If this government cared about quality education, they would be increasing funding for our struggling public schools.”

Premier Clark swatted down NDP attacks at a press conference, arguing that they are ignoring the facts. “Mr. Fleming seems to conveniently forget that per pupil funding of public schools has risen continuously over the past decade in spite of declining enrollment,” declared Premier Clark. “Our plan includes new funding in the form of vouchers to provide greater choice to all British Columbians. The NDP, as always, wants to take that choice away from families.”

The B.C. Teacher’s Federation and other unions are stepping up attacks on the government’s voucher plan. Protests are scheduled to take place outside the Legislative Assembly later this week. Organizers expect over five thousand to attend.

Bill 20 is expected to pass first reading tomorrow.

Figure S5 Text for second news article on school voucher proposal. Text in italics was included in united treatment. Text in bold was included in the dissent condition. Underlined text was featured in framed dissent condition. Text in square brackets is in the extreme dissent condition (wave 3), text in parentheses was in the centrist dissent conditions (waves 1 and 2)

School choice bill passes amid labour opposition, Liberal disarray

VICTORIA – Bill 20, the “School Choice for British Columbians Act,” passed third reading with 45 MLAs in favour and 36 opposed. **Three Liberals MLAs broke ranks from the government to vote with the NDP against the bill – an unusual rejection of Premier Clark’s agenda.** The effect of the law will be to give parents a five thousand dollar school voucher which they can use at a public or a group one or two independent school of their choice.

The adoption of the school voucher proved divisive. Teachers’ unions decried the result. “Christy Clark and the Liberals have once again abandoned our public schools. We should be investing in our schools to develop the skills and values needed for the 21st century. Instead we are moving backwards,” argued Jim Iker, President of the B.C. Teacher’s Federation.

Amid labour push back on the bill, **Liberal MLAs were deeply split in their support of Premier Clark’s initiative. As a sign of growing turmoil in Liberal ranks, three Liberal MLAs voted against the initiative, and another two abstained. (Some expressed their reservation with the adjustment of the voucher’s value to family income, while others preferred to put the funding towards public schools)[Some expressed dismay at the modest scale of the proposal, while others opposed the claw backs of voucher support for higher income British Columbians]. The dissent marks a notable challenge to the Premier’s leadership. It is unclear how this disorder will affect her agenda moving forward.**

“There will always be spirited disagreement on important policy decisions facing the province. But make no mistake. This is a huge win for parents. It’s a huge win for students, and it’s a huge win for this province. It will go down as a signature accomplishment of this government,” argued Education Minister Mike Bernier.

Others cheered the development. “The reality is we have a strong and vibrant independent school system in B.C., we should be finding ways to make it accessible to everyone, and this new law does exactly that, explained Elizabeth Moore, Executive Director of the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia.

The NDP have vowed to repeal the legislation if they win government in the upcoming provincial election in 2017.

Figure S6 Text for third news article on school voucher proposal. Text in italics was included in united treatment. Text in bold was included in the dissent condition. Underlined text was featured in framed dissent condition. Text in square brackets is in the extreme dissent condition (wave 3), text in parentheses was in the centrist dissent conditions (waves 1 and 2)

Table S4 Predicting Attitudes toward School Voucher Policy

	Coef.	1 SE	Beta
Partisanship Scale (Very strong NDP to Very strong Liberal)	0.30***	0.04	0.32
Ideology	0.07**	0.03	0.10
Religiosity	0.18***	0.06	0.13
Political Knowledge	-0.04	0.04	-0.04
Attention to the News	-0.08	0.05	-0.06
Income	-0.02	0.04	-0.02
Gender	0.10	0.12	0.04
Constant	3.55***	0.29	
R ²		0.19	
N		532	

Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table S5 Alternative Specifications

	1		2		3	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Divided	0.89	0.44	-0.67**	0.30	-0.97**	0.38
Opposition PID	-0.21	0.46				
Knowledge	0.02	0.13				
Divided * Opposition PID	-0.78	0.59				
Divided * Knowledge	-0.42**	0.19				
Opposition PID * Knowledge	-0.03	0.18				
Divided * Opposition PID * Knowledge	0.17	0.24				
Gov't PID	0.21	0.40				
Divided * Gov't PID	-0.68	0.53				
Gov't PID Strength * Knowledge	0.22	0.17				
Divided * Gov't PID * Knowledge	0.23	0.23				
Ideology			0.14***	0.05	0.14**	0.06
Divided * Ideology			0.02	0.05	0.02	0.07
Extreme Dissent					-0.63	0.53
Divided * Extreme Dissent					0.92	0.66
Ideology * Extreme Dissent					0.03	0.10
Divided* Ideology * Extreme Dissent					-0.05	0.12
Religiosity			0.12	0.08	0.06	0.11
Divided * Religiosity			0.18*	0.10	0.28**	0.13
Religiosity * Extreme Dissent					0.12	0.17
Divided* Religiosity * Extreme Dissent					-0.24	0.21
Constant	3.96***	0.32	3.35***	0.25	3.58***	0.32
R ²	0.17		0.10		0.10	
N	647		713		713	

Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

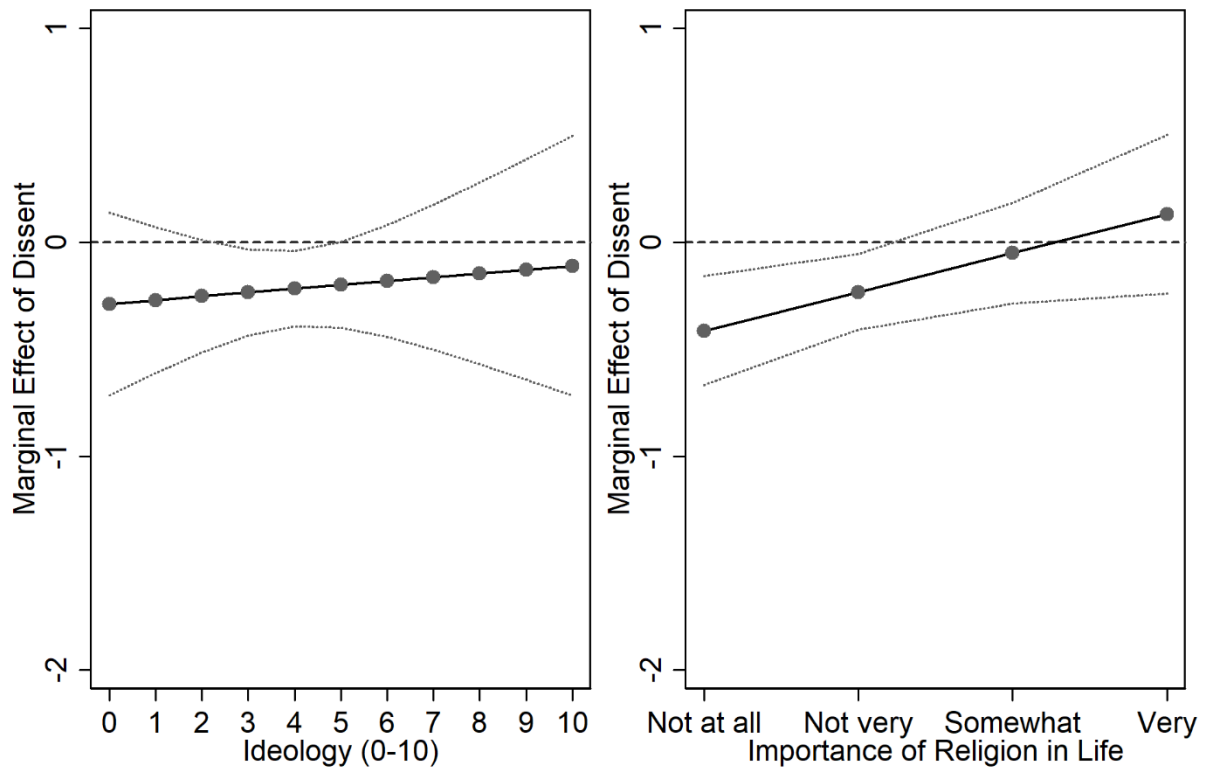


Figure S7 Marginal effect of dissent across left-right ideology (left panel) and religiosity (right panel)

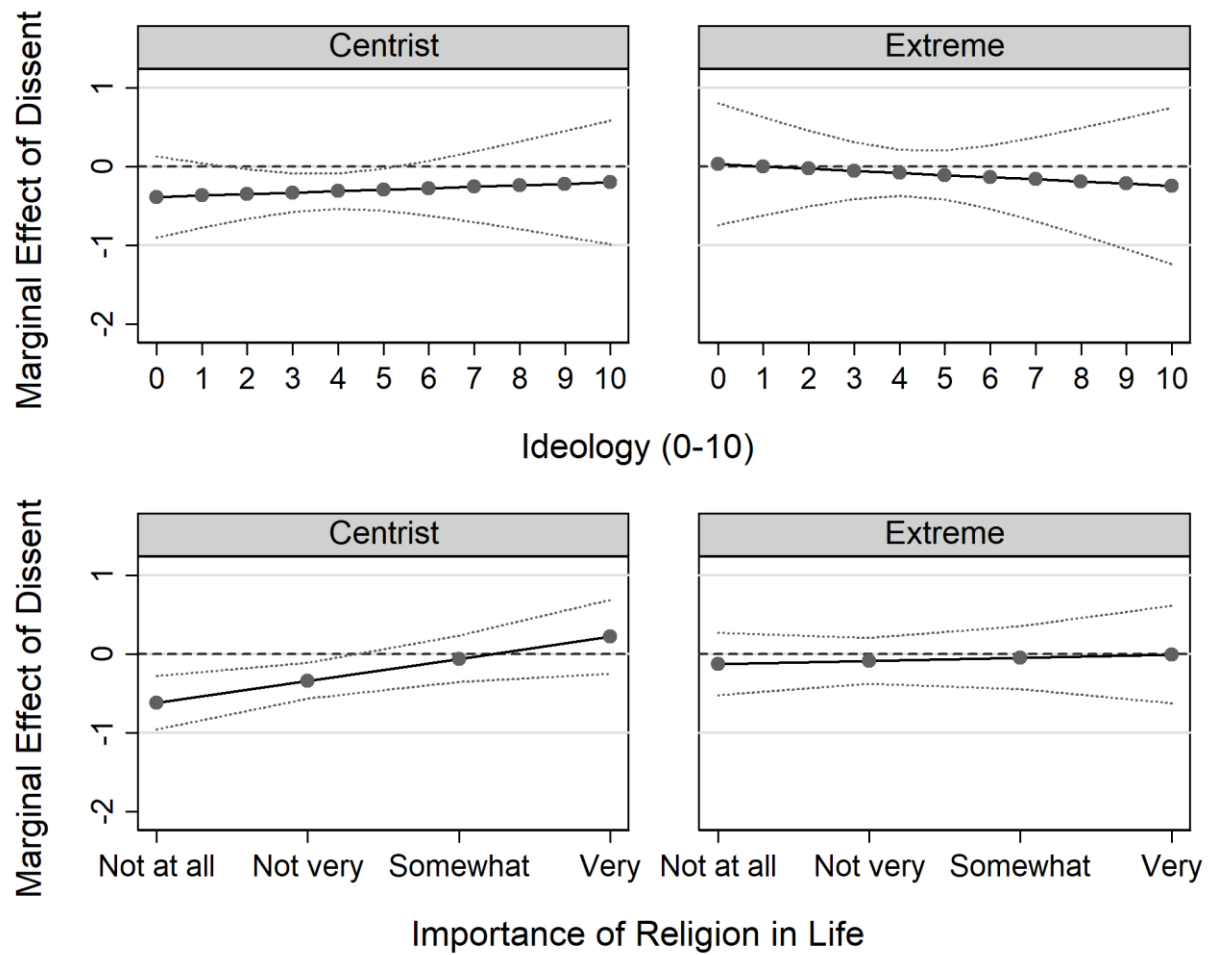


Figure S8 Marginal effect of centrist and extreme dissent across left-right ideology (top panels) and religiosity (bottom panel)

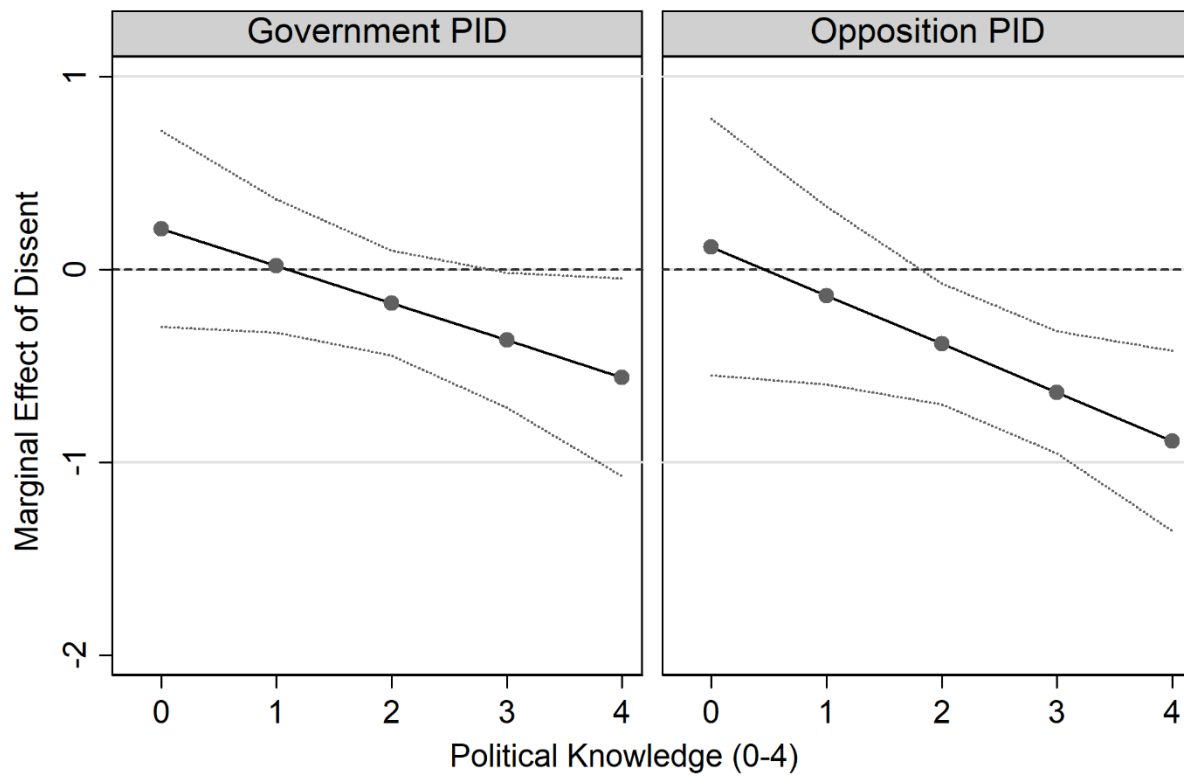


Figure S9 Marginal effect of dissent across levels of political knowledge for government and opposition partisans.