



# Partisanship and Participation: The Political Activity Divide

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## Introduction

Many say that the United States is as divided as it was since the Civil War. Countless polls have shown that Democrats and Republicans agree on less and less. With rising tensions comes an increased chance of people getting into a political argument. Whether it is fighting about politics at the Thanksgiving table or refusing to talk to a coworker whose political views differ from your own, arguing about politics has certainly become a more common facet in American life.

But who exactly are the people getting into political arguments? That question is what sparked my interest in this topic. I know that I've gotten into an argument before, but am I the norm or the outlier? My goal through this research was to attempt to single out the most important factor in determining what types of people get into political arguments.

## Literature Review

There has been a lot of research conducted into the impacts of political discussions in recent years. In their 2022 article, Eriksson, Vartanova, and Strimling found that, when liberal leaning individuals have more frequent political discussions, those individuals become more ideologically liberal. They explained this by using the moral argument theory which states that public opinion on moral issues becomes more liberal over time. The more someone has political discussions, the more likely they are to be open and accepting of other views (Eriksson, et al.).

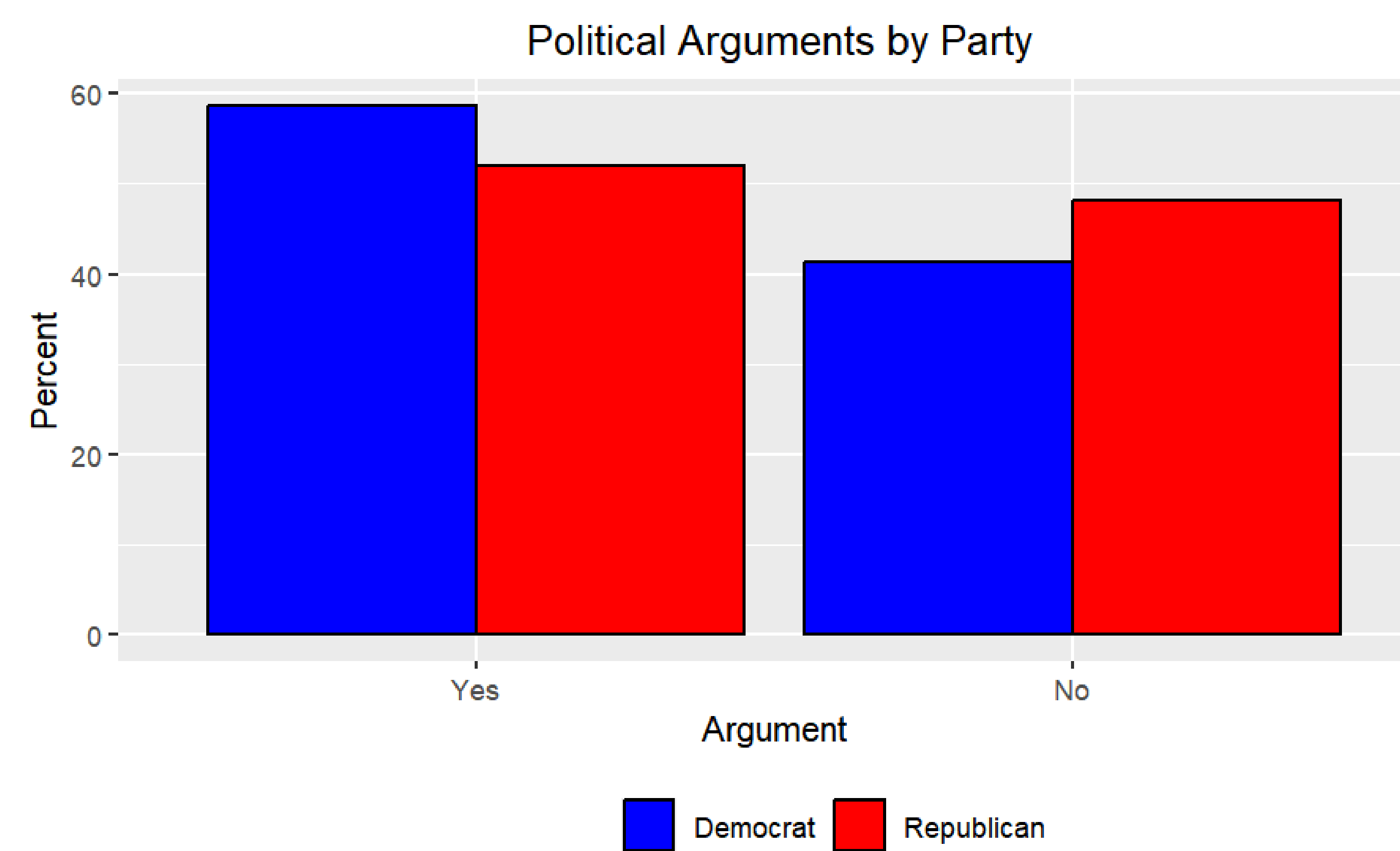
In their 2019 article, Ward and Tavits conducted research into how being strongly connected to a political party will increase one's dislike of other parties. They found that once parties have affectively polarized voters, those voters are more likely to believe that there is more division between parties than there really is, and that people are more likely to view politics as a high-stakes competition against the opposing party. This article proves that partisanship plays a key role in how people view the world (Ward and Tavits).

## Hypothesis

People who identify as **Democrats** are **more likely** to get into political **arguments** than people who identify as **Republicans**.

## Variables

- **Independent Variable:** Whether or not someone has gotten into a political argument
- **Dependent Variable:** Political Party
- **Control Variables:** Education, Class, Location, Attention to Politics, Gender, Race



## Methods

For this project, I used the 2020 American National Election Study. At the time of my research, the updated 2024 survey had not been released. To analyze and interpret this data, I used R Studio, an open-source data analytics software.

## Data Analysis and Findings

To test my hypothesis, I ran several cross tabulations to see if one's political party truly does impact whether someone gets into a political argument. To begin, only 53% of total respondents reported getting into a political argument. When accounting for one's political party, 58.6% of Democrats reported getting into an argument compared to just 51.9% of Republicans.

To ensure that political party was the driving factor for getting into arguments, I also ran three-way cross tabulations on demographics such as education, socioeconomic class, one's interest in politics, location, race, and age.

After controlling for the other demographic factors listed above, I still stand by my original hypothesis that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to get into a political argument. Very few groups of Republicans were more likely to get into an argument than their Democratic counterparts. These groups were: Suburban Republicans, Black and Asian Republicans and Republicans aged 50 to 69.

While I was not able to determine the exact reasons for these exceptions, I do have some theories as to why they exist. Black and Asian Republicans are the minority within their racial groups, which may make it more likely for them to get into an argument. Republicans who live in the suburbs and those aged 50 to 69 are stereotypically more confrontational than Republicans in other demographics.

While the scope of my research could not conclude the reasons why these differences exist, I believe there are some likely reasons. Republicans seem to have become a party coalesced around Donald Trump, while Democrats don't have a clear party leader. Even after the 2020 election, Joe Biden was not representative of how many Democrats viewed politics which could lead them to fight more.

## References

Eriksson, K., Vartanova, I., & Strimling, P. (2022). How does political discussion frequency impact political moral opinions? The moral argument theory of opinion dynamics. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 915252. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.915252>.

Iyengar, S. (2021). The polarization of American politics. In *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology*. Routledge.

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## Conclusions

While my research is a great start, I would like to see more studies conducted in this realm to answer some of my lingering questions. First, why do Democrats get into more political fights than Republicans? Second, who are these people fighting? In such a polarizing time in America, answering these questions may allow us as a nation better understand each other and heal.