

What Causes Affective Polarization?

- Conflicting theories: **Partisanship/Social Identity Theory** vs. **policy (dis)agreement**
- Orr and Huber (2020): **polarization may be caused by (dis)agreement on policy**
- Dias and Lelkes (2022): Orr and Huber’s policies **cue for partisanship**, cannot conclude that policy drives polarization

The Problem: Researcher-Selected Policies and Party Branding

- Current debate: perceived “partisan branding” of the policies selected by researchers
- We lack a systematic manner to choose policies. My solution: topic sampling
- I argue: issue is **not party branding**, respondents’ use of party/policy cues varies with the **individual importance of policies**

Research Design

- **Topic Sampling** of 50 policies drawn from population n = 261 (ISideWith; Tappin 2022)
- 2,822 respondents saw six vignettes, each corresponding to one of 50 policies
- Registered: partisanship, policy preference, policy importance, evaluation of hypothetical partisan (101-point feeling thermometer)

Statistical Methods

- Combine topic sampling method with a hierarchical linear regression model
- Estimate predicted means for hypothetical partisans across party congruence, policy congruence, and policy importance

$$\begin{aligned}
 FT_{ijv} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Party}_{ijv} + \beta_2 \text{Policy}_{ijv} + \beta_3 \text{Importance}_{ijv} \\
 & + \beta_4(\text{Party}_{ijv} \times \text{Policy}_{ijv}) + \beta_5(\text{Party}_{ijv} \times \text{Importance}_{ijv}) + \beta_6(\text{Policy}_{ijv} \times \text{Importance}_{ijv}) \\
 & + \beta_7(\text{Party}_{ijv} \times \text{Policy}_{ijv} \times \text{Importance}_{ijv}) \\
 & + \mathbf{u}_v + \mathbf{r}_i + \varepsilon_{ijv}
 \end{aligned}$$

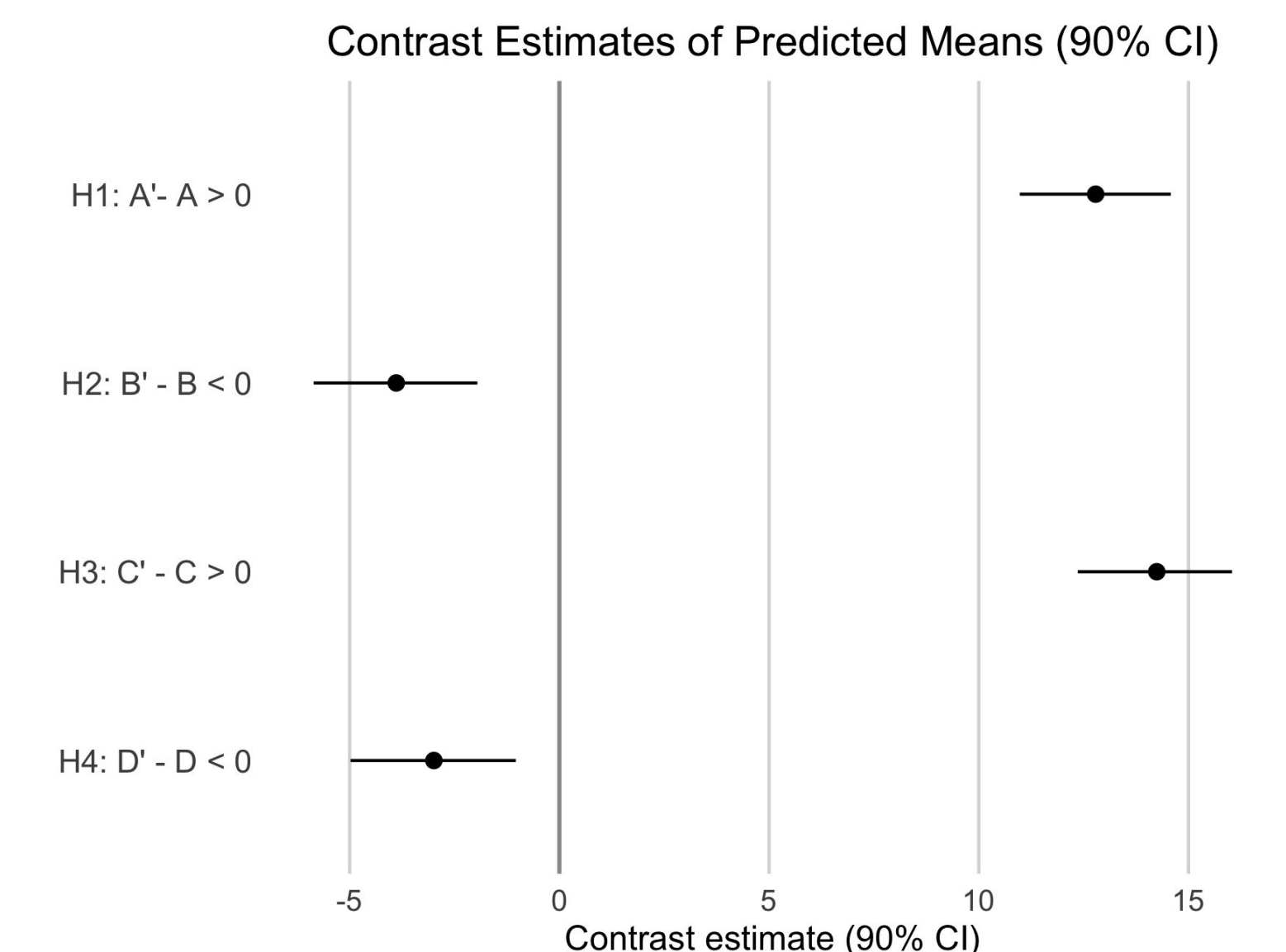
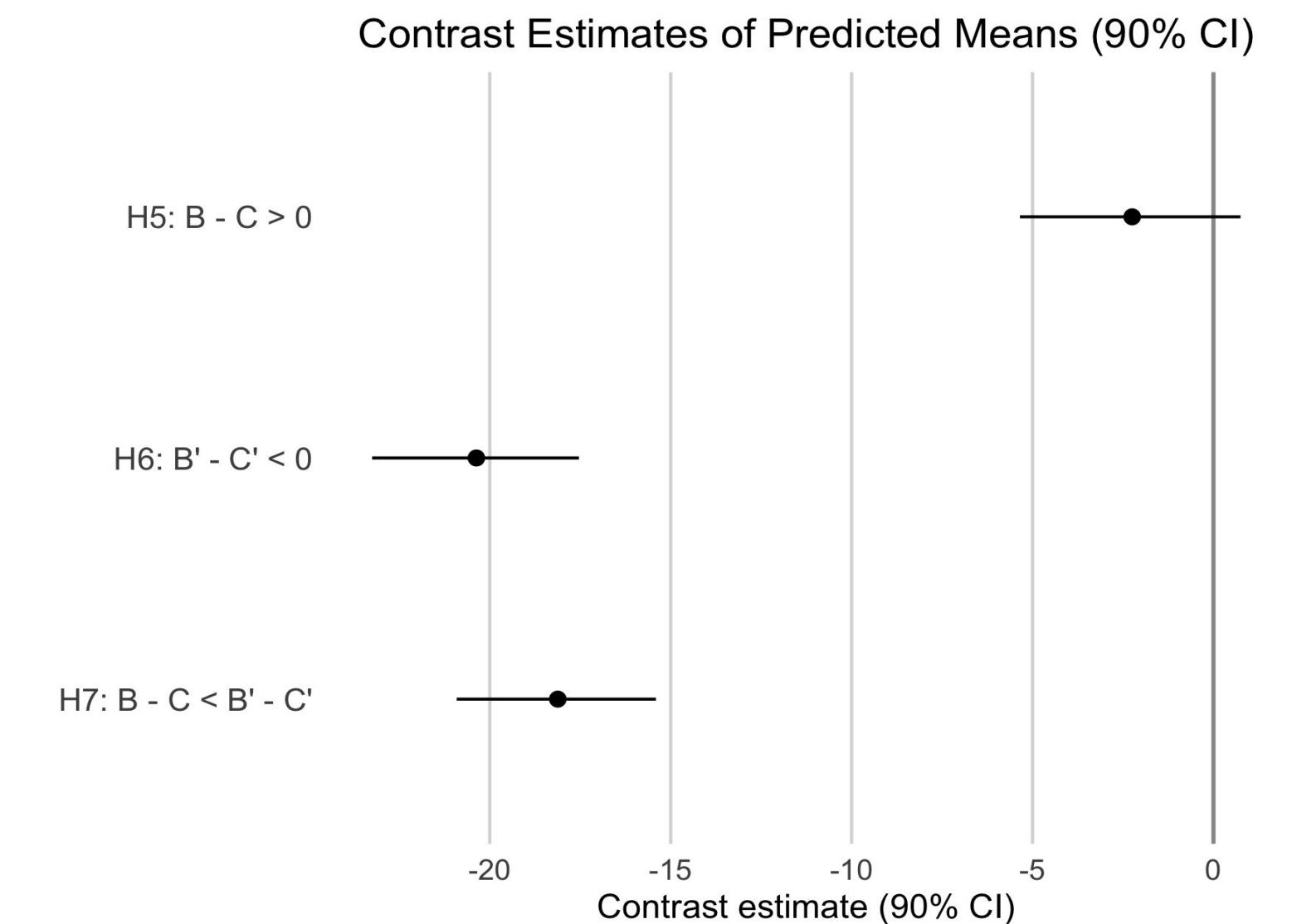
Estimated Means and Confidence Intervals

	estimate	conf.low	conf.high	party	policy	importance
A	65.79	63.47	68.06	congruent	congruent	1 (low)
A-prime	78.83	76.68	80.97	congruent	congruent	5 (high)
B	50.23	47.71	52.90	congruent	incongruent	1 (low)
B-prime	45.43	43.05	47.87	congruent	incongruent	5 (high)
C	52.00	49.58	54.39	incongruent	congruent	1 (low)
C-prime	66.38	64.25	68.50	incongruent	congruent	5 (high)
D	38.00	35.55	40.39	incongruent	incongruent	1 (low)
D-prime	35.46	33.39	37.74	incongruent	incongruent	5 (high)

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Contrast Estimates and Hypothesis Tests



Conclusion and Discussion

- Policy importance moderates role of party/policy cues in affective polarization
- Party was never more important than policy in producing affective polarization
- Supports theories that put policy preferences at the center of affective polarization (Orr and Huber 2020) and casts doubt on Social Identity theories (Dias and Lelkes 2022)