

Introduction

- Political polarization increasing in recent years
- Internet/social media use dramatically increasing in the past decade
- Plethora of research on polarization's effect on political reasoning, but not on the internet's effect on political thought

Research Question

- How does online socialization exacerbate the effects of political polarization on the quality of political reasoning?

Definitions

- **"Political Reasoning"** – how and why individuals form political opinions
- **"Polarization"** – when a group or individual's political opinion is more likely to be in line with that of a specific political party
- **"Online Socialization"** - process of being socialized by the internet/social media

Prior Research

Polarization

- Finds polarization leads to less effortful thinking and political opinion formation (Druckman 2012)

Internet and Thought

- Finds those with a lower need for cognition use social media more often (Zhong et.al 2012)



Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis #1:** Respondents socialized online will find weaker arguments more effective than non-online socialized individuals.
- **Hypothesis #2:** Online socialized individuals' support for a policy will increase in the direction of their identified party's position more so than the non-online socialized.

Methods

Design

- Online survey with participants from M-Turk
- 4x3 experimental design plus control (13 conditions)
- 2 manipulations
 - Arguments (pro-pro, pro-con, con-pro, con-con)
 - Party Cue (none, party, party with polarization)
- 4 larger groupings
 - Group 1: Control (Issue info)
 - 4 Combinations of weak/strong arguments
 - Group 2: Issue info, Pro/Con Arguments
 - 4 Combinations of weak/strong arguments
 - Group 3: Issue info, Arguments & Party Info
 - 4 Combinations of weak/strong arguments
 - Provide which party sides for/against
 - Group 4: Issue info, Arguments, Party Info & Polarization
 - 4 Combinations of weak/strong arguments
 - Provide which party side for/against
 - Suggest parties issue position difference

Questions

- Policy Support (DV1)
 - "To what extent do you oppose or support the DREAM Act?"
 - 1 (strongly oppose) to 7 (strongly support)
- Strength of Arguments (DV2)
 - "How effective or ineffective did you find the main argument opposed to/in support of the DREAM Act?"
 - 1 (very ineffective) to 7 (very effective)

Sample Composition

- N = 2160
- Randomization successful

Analysis

- Difference of means T-tests
- Multiple regressions (balance checks)

Implications/Takeaways

- Non-online socialized people more in line with our expectations than their online counterparts.
- Online socialization/internet or social media usage may have little to no effect on political reasoning
- Topic deserves more attention and research, this study is inconclusive
- Experimental design issues – issues selection
- Making changes to experiment could drastically effect results
 - Choosing arguments differently
 - Choosing issues differently
 - Administer survey differently

Challenges

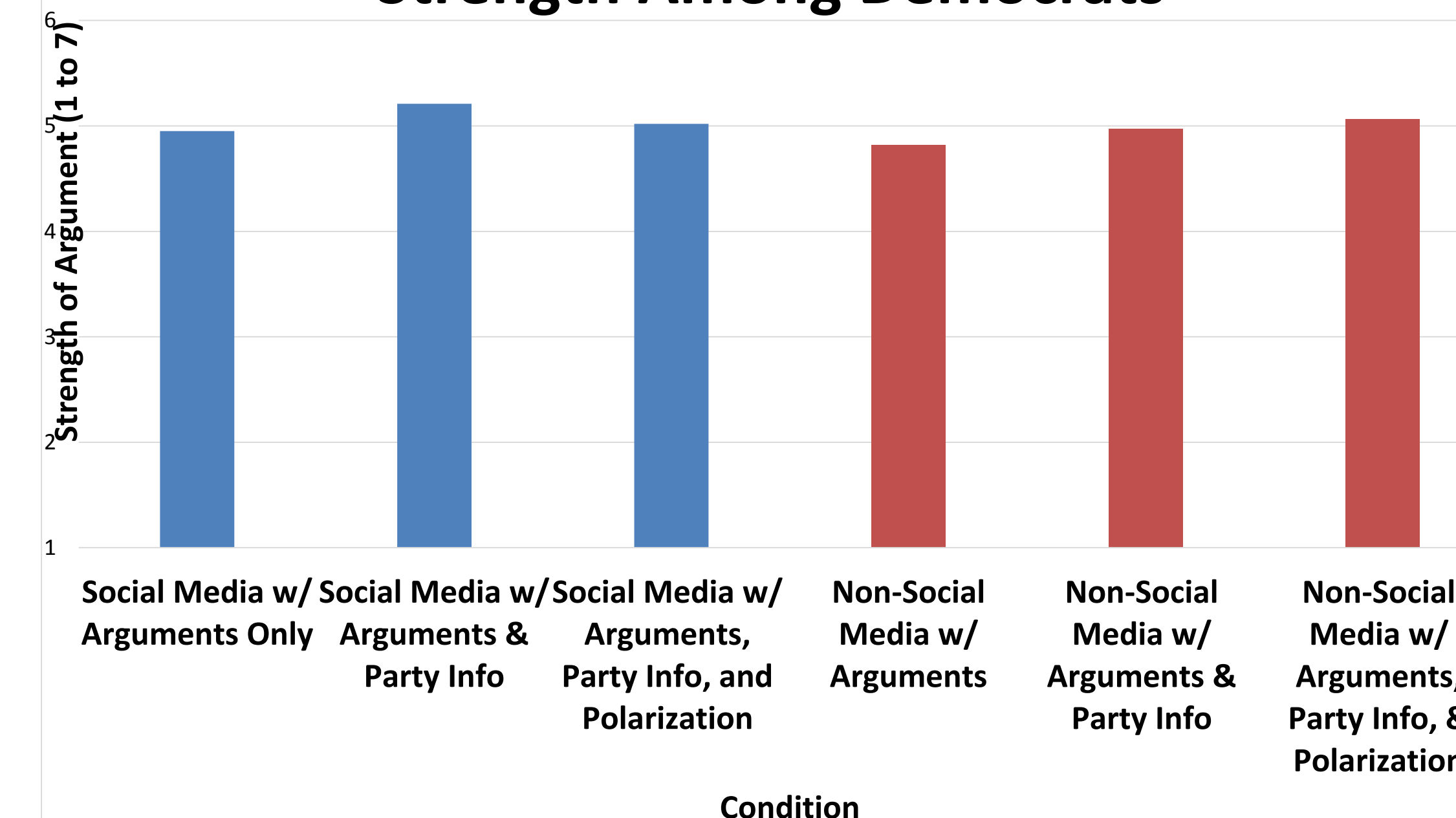
- Operationalizing online socialization was challenging due to its complexity/abstractness
- Learning SPSS & statistical analysis from scratch
- Online design drew a sample limited by insufficient numbers of Republicans, minorities, conservatives, people who don't use social media/internet

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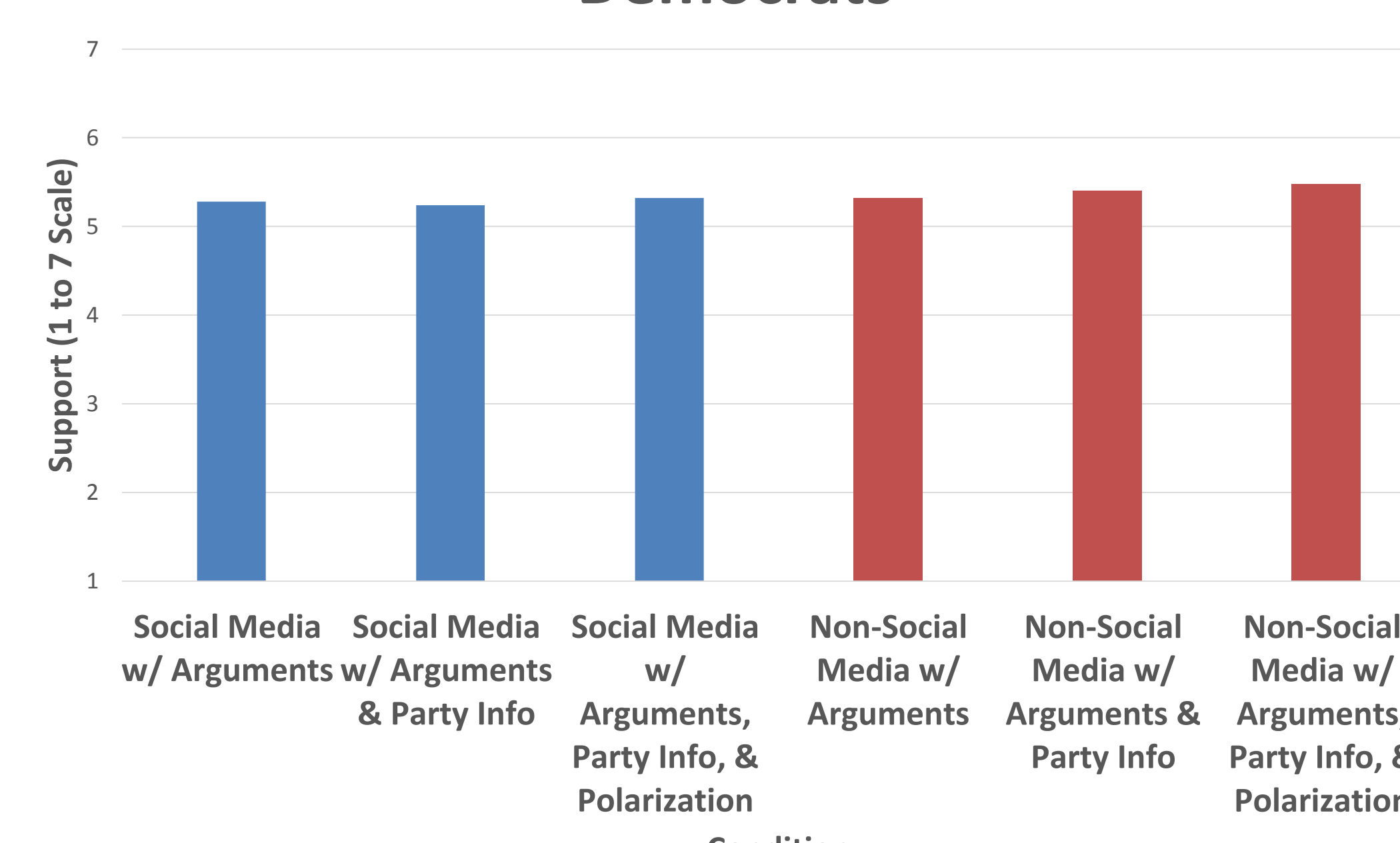
Results & Findings

Figure 1 - DREAM Act Pro Argument Strength Among Democrats



- Online socialization did not effect the effectiveness of any arguments (H1 not supported)

Figure 2 - DREAM Act Support Among Democrats



- Online socialization did not effect the support for any policies (H2 not supported)

