

Understanding the gridlock: Measuring and responding to polarization

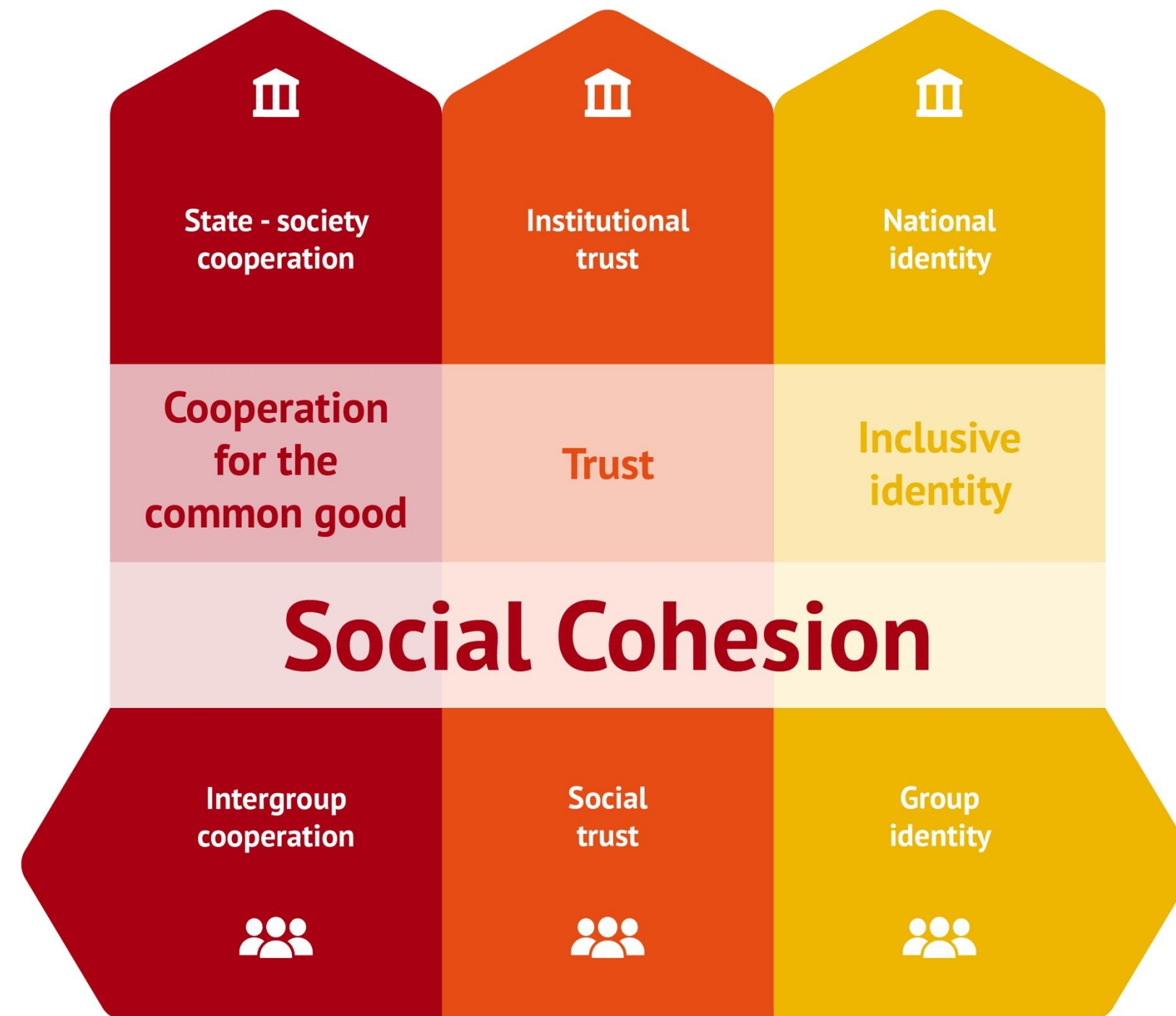
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1. **Disentangle social cohesion and polarization.** They hang together but are not the same. Cross-check policies and programs for links between them.
2. **Identify the type/driver of polarization in the context you work in:** On what does polarization pivot? At which level is polarization strongest?
3. **Program accordingly:** If polarization is hardwired, find a way to work around; if it is possible to change, work on it. Reflect on your programming's potential side effects on polarization.
4. **Do not buy all measures of polarization at their face value.** Not all measure what they claim to measure, and with varying degrees of quality. As data consumers and producers, ask the right questions to assess the quality, accuracy, and reliability of data.



**Social
Cohesion
Hub**





1. Polarization about what?

- affective polarization
- ideological polarization
- perceived or false polarization

2. Polarization among whom?

- Elites
- General Public
- Media

Demographic polarization

- Urban-rural divide
- Generational polarization

Economic polarization

Social/cultural polarization:

- Ethnic/racial
- Religious/sectarian
- Educational

Political polarization

- Left/right polarization
- Policy disagreement

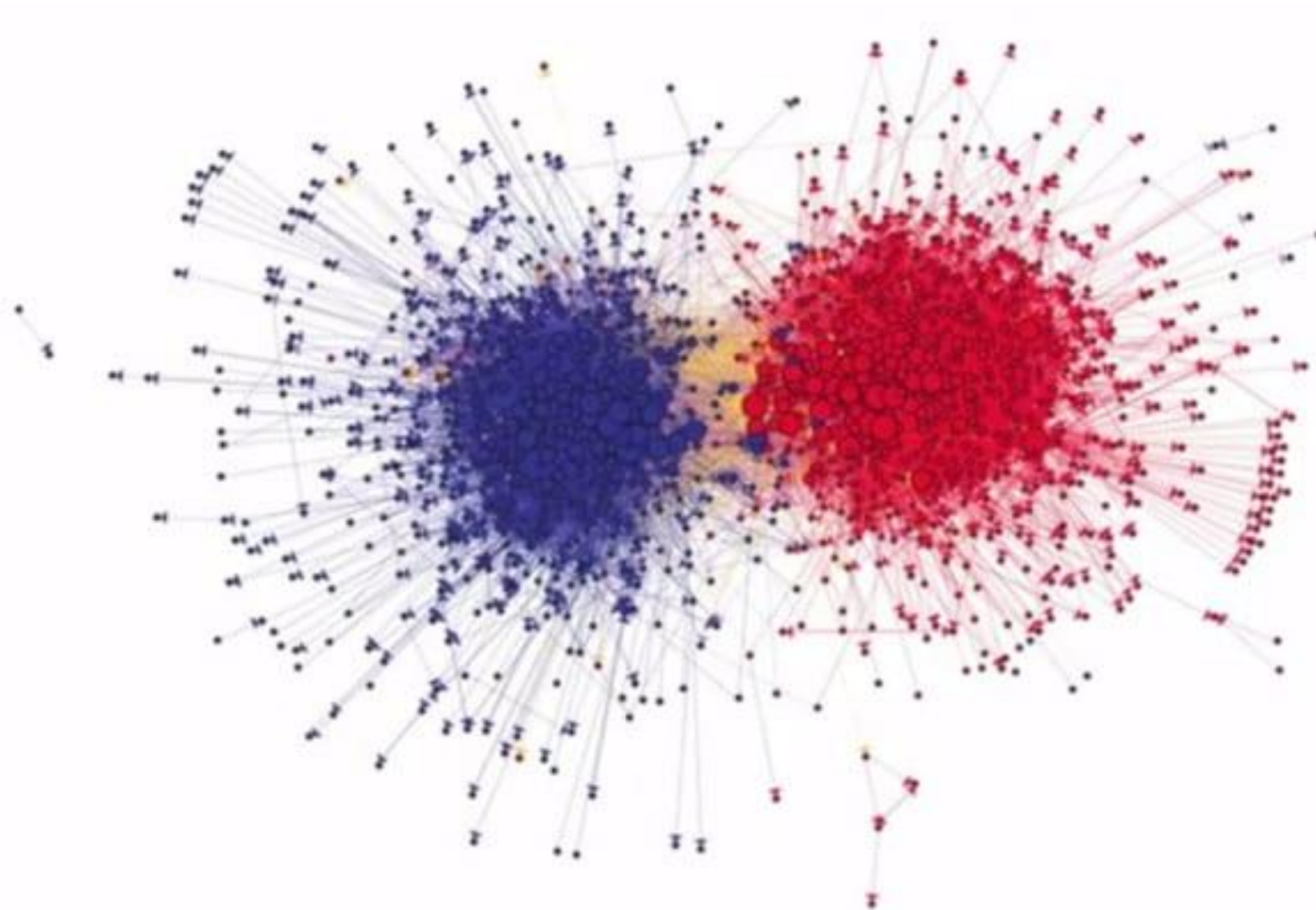
Affective/pernicious polarization

Elite-led political strategy

Media landscape

Echo chambers, algorithmic bias, disinformation

Other structural shocks



Is it a contextual variable to work on or work around?



identify the relevant policy priorities



establish a theory of change



determine the most appropriate entry points for programming based on available mechanisms and partners.



Polling



Overview of existing data landscape

Survey data

Expert-coded data

Text data

Administrative data



Practical advice on assessing data quality, accuracy, and reliability.

1

Left-Right Scale

Respondents place themselves on a 0-10 scale.

(SHOW CARD 25)

Q240. In political matters, people talk of "the left" and "the right." How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking? (Code one number):

Left										Right
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

2

Issue Positions

Questions on key issues

.

(SHOW CARD 12)

From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [this country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please, tell me whether you agree or disagree with it: (Interviewer, for every items code "agree" or "disagree". Don't read "hard to say", code only if mentioned by the respondent)

		Agree	Hard to say	Disagree
Q122	Fills important jobs vacancies	2	1	0
Q123	Strengthens cultural diversity	2	1	0
Q124	Increases the crime rate	2	1	0
Q125	Gives asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere	2	1	0
Q126	Increases the risks of terrorism	2	1	0
Q127	Offers people from poor countries a better living	2	1	0
Q128	Increases unemployment	2	1	0
Q129	Leads to social conflict	2	1	0

World Values Survey, Wave 7

! Potential issues

Different meanings of 'left' and 'right.'

Some policy issues are more salient.

Issue-specific.

Tips

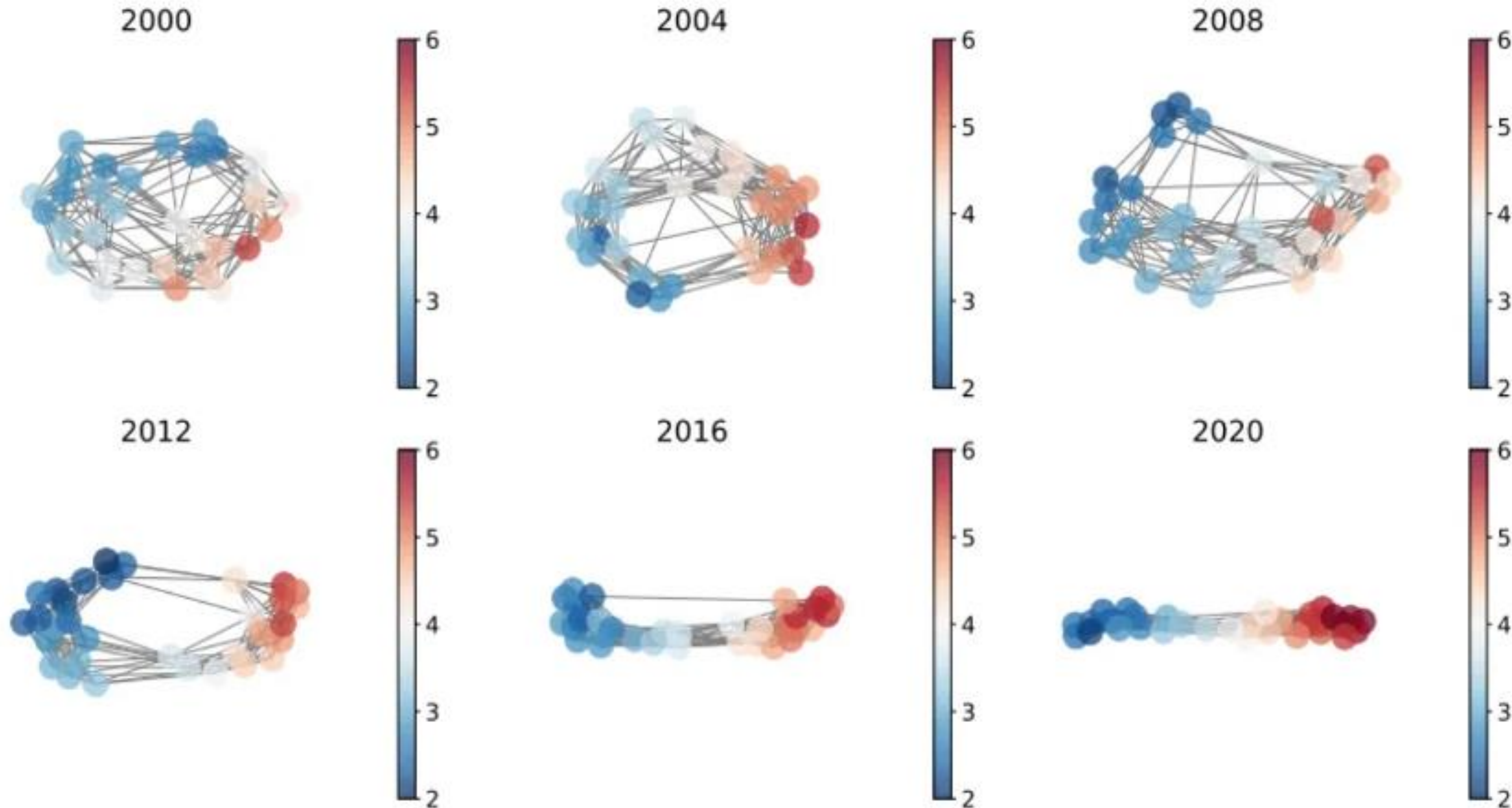
Open-ended questions.

Ranking/rating questions for policies.

Tools like network analysis.

Survey data: Partisan polarization

ResIN snapshots for ANES (2000-2020)



1 — Perception measures
How divided you believe your country is today?

2 — Feeling thermometer
On a scale from 0 to 100, rate a political party.

3 — Social distance
Marriage, business, friendships...

4 — Personal traits
Patriotic, honorable, selfish, traitor...

B25 How close do you feel to this party? Do you feel that you are... **READ OUT...**

very close,	1
quite close,	2
not close,	3
or, not at all close?	4
(Refusal)	7
(Don't know)	8

! Potential issues

Survey mode.

Multiple in-/out-parties.

Party elite or average Joe?

People just don't like
talking about politics...

Perceptions are distorted.

Calculating country-scores is not
that straightforward.

Tips

Be careful with question wording.

Ask different questions.

Be clear with in-party and out-party
identification.

Probe how country scores
are calculated.



V-DEM Data

Expert-coded worldwide data from 1900-2023 on partisan, online media, and elite polarization.



Chapel Hill Survey

Focuses on European countries, measuring party positions on divisive issues from 1999-2019.



Manifesto Project

Analyzes policy preferences of over 1000 parties since 1945 in 50+ countries.

! Potential issues

Reproducibility and bias.

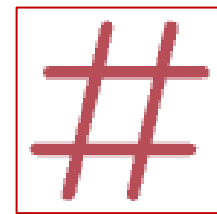
Party polarization may not capture elite or voter polarization.

Tips

Benchmarking.

Transparency in expert pool qualifications.

Degree of uncertainty.



Social Media

Twitter, Reddit, Facebook, and Telegram data.



Legislative Speeches



News Coverage

How polarization is measured: scaling or classification.

! Potential issues

Selection bias and accounting for change over time.

Influential or bot accounts.

Platform design effect.

Differences in language $\neq$ ideological difference.

Tips

Ask about how they model time,
and deal with influential or bot accounts.

Do not rely on one platform.



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