

Examining the Effects of Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, and Social Support on Young Adults' Political Interest

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Abstract

This study examines how 200 young adults, ages 18 to 25, are affected by affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support in terms of their political interest. The study used validated scales, such as the Affective Polarization Scale, Cognitive Flexibility Scale, Social Support Questionnaire (Short Form), and Political Interest Scale, to measure the constructs using a quantitative correlational and regression design. High cognitive flexibility (30.5% high, 69.5% moderate), very high social support (87%), and moderate levels of affective polarization (91.5%) and political interest (79%), according to descriptive analyses. Strong negative associations between political interest and affective polarization ($r = -0.984$), cognitive flexibility ($r = -0.990$), and social support ($r = -0.986$) were found in correlation analyses, which was unanticipated. Regression analyses supported these variables as predictors, accounting for 97–98% of the variance in political interest, although high R^2 levels indicate possible overfitting. ANOVA findings indicated substantive sociodemographic differences, and education and socioeconomic status moderated polarization and interest. The results contradict conventional expectations, and increased polarization, adaptive thinking, and tight social networks could contribute to political disengagement in polarized environments through emotional exhaustion or liking for interpersonal harmony. The findings emphasize the necessity of specific civic education and emotionally safe environments to enable constructive political engagement among young adults. Limitations are cross-sectional design and sample composition, calling for longitudinal and cross-cultural research to maximize generalizability.

Keywords: affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support, political interest, young adults, quantitative analysis.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The political geography has changed dramatically in recent times, marked by a rise in prejudiced division and polarization. As they shape their political interests and engagement styles, youthful grown-ups who are in a pivotal stage of forming their political individualities manage this complicated terrain. Since youthful grown-ups' involvement will shape popular processes and communal life in the future, it's imperative to understand the factors that impact their political interest. In ultramodern politics, affective polarization the tendency to see political rivals favorably and fellow sympathizers favorably has come more pronounced, which may have an impact on how youthful people approach political participation. Cognitive inflexibility, or the capacity to change one's way of thinking and take into account different

shoes, can be moreover or stimulate political interest in concentrated situations. In the meantime, social support systems similar as peers, family, and educational institutions offer settings for the conformation and expression of political opinions. youthful grownups who are developing their political worldviews in this terrain face unique challenges that former generations didn't encounter. Understanding these dynamics is pivotal for developing strategies to foster healthy popular engagement in a period marked by division and prejudiced enmity.

1.1 The Changing Landscape of Political Participation

Young adults today navigate a political environment markedly different from that of previous generations. Digital platforms have transformed information access and political discourse, created filter bubbles and echo chambers while simultaneously offered unprecedented opportunities for political mobilization and cross-cultural exchange. The Arab Spring, climate strikes, and Black Lives Matter movements exemplify how digital tools have enabled young people to participate in politics outside traditional institutional channels. Meanwhile, traditional civic engagement mechanisms have evolved, with political parties and representative democracy facing trust deficits in many countries. Electoral data from North America, Europe, and Australia indicate that while young adults' conventional political participation (voting, party membership) has generally declined, their engagement in cause-oriented activities (boycotts, demonstrations, online activism) has increased.

Simultaneously, political systems globally have experienced increasing polarization, creating new barriers and incentives for political involvement. Within this context, young adults' political interest defined as their attentiveness to and engagement with political processes, issues, and institutions emerges as both a predictor of future civic behavior and an outcome influenced by various psychological and social factors. Research by Jennings and Niemi (2019) demonstrates that political interest formed during young adulthood often persists throughout the life course, underscoring this developmental period's importance for long-term democratic participation.

1.2 Relevance in Contemporary Society

The decline in conventional political participation among young adults in many democracies has raised questions about the future of civic engagement. Voter turnout statistics from recent elections in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada reveal that 18–29-year-olds participate at rates 15-20% lower than older age cohorts. However, research indicates that this decline may not reflect disinterest but rather a transformation in how young people conceptualize and express political involvement. For instance, the 2020 Global Youth Development Index reports significant increases in youth-led social movements, digital activism, and issue-based advocacy across both developed and developing nations.

A deeper awareness of the formation of political interests is required, as evidenced by the seeming contradiction between increasing alternative engagement and decreasing institutional participation. Instead of apathy, as Dalton (2017) argues, younger generations might be demonstrating a fundamental shift from "duty-based" to "engaged" citizenship norms. Understanding the social and psychological underpinnings of political interest can help to reconcile the shifting attitudes of young people toward civic engagement and traditional political institutions. Furthermore, as societies in various regions grapple with polarization and democratic backsliding, the political interest resilience of young adults becomes increasingly crucial for long-term democratic stability.

1.3 World Scenario

Globally, youth political interest demonstrates varied patterns reflecting diverse political, cultural, and economic contexts. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2023) reported

that while conventional political participation (voting, party membership) has declined among young adults in established democracies, alternative forms of political engagement have increased, including protest participation, digital activism, and issue-based advocacy. Their comparative analysis across 30 countries found that youth electoral participation averaged 64% of eligible voters in newer democracies compared to 51% in established democracies, suggesting context-specific factors influencing engagement. Cross-national studies have revealed consistent patterns regarding affective polarization. The Varieties of Democracy Institute (2024) documented increasing affective polarization in 78% of democracies worldwide between 2015-2023, with average polarization scores increasing by 18 percentage points. This global trend was most pronounced in democracies with two-party or dominant-party systems and those with high social media penetration. Comparative analysis by McCoy and Somer (2019) found similar psychological mechanisms underlying polarization across diverse political systems, suggesting common cognitive and emotional processes that transcend cultural contexts.

Meanwhile, the World Values Survey (2022) found that young adults with higher cognitive flexibility scores were more likely to engage with political outgroups and less susceptible to partisan media bias across cultural contexts. Analysis of data from 42 countries ($n=54,600$) revealed that cognitive flexibility scores correlated positively with willingness to discuss politics with ideological opponents ($r = 0.38, p < .001$) and negatively with selective exposure to politically congenial media ($r = -0.29, p < .001$). These relationships persisted across countries with varying levels of democracy, suggesting cognitive flexibility functions similarly across political systems.

Cross-national digital ethnography by Zhang et al. (2022) examining youth political communication across six countries (Brazil, Egypt, Germany, India, South Korea, and the United States) found that online social support networks functioned similarly across contexts in providing psychological resources for political engagement. However, the content and norms of these networks varied substantially, with East Asian networks emphasizing group consensus and Western networks prioritizing individual expression. These findings illustrate how cultural contexts shape the functioning of social support in political socialization.

1.4 Indian Scenario

In India, the largest democracy in the world with more than 900 million eligible voters, youth adults account for about 43% of the enrolled voter population (Election Commission of India, 2023). This demographic dividend holds opportunities as well as challenges for democratic governance. In spite of the numerical majority of young adults, their voter turnout has been variable, with the 2019 general election recording 67% among youth voters and 72% among elderly citizens (Election Commission of India, 2020). This voting difference attests to why identifying the determinants of political interest among young Indians is significant.

Political interest among Indian youth differs greatly across locations, socioeconomic levels, and educational attainment. The Lokniti-CSDS Youth Survey (2023) estimated that political interest was greatest among urban, highly educated youth (78% "somewhat" or "very interested") and least among rural youth with low education (42% reporting interest). Regional differences were also considerable, with South Indian states tending to have higher youth political interest than North Indian states. These differences indicate complex sociocultural determinants of political interest that need careful exploration. Kumar and Mehta (2022) traced the rise in affective polarization among Indian youth, especially along religious and regional lines. Their survey of 3,200 young adults in eight states discovered that 68% said they were unwilling to have close friendships with those having different political views, while 53% assigned sinister motives to political rivals. Polarization is also seen with India's evolving media

landscape, where traditional cross-cutting news media are replaced more and more with partisan news sources. The scholars recorded that the levels of polarization were highest among young people who mostly read news from social media sites (72%) in contrast to those reading news from mainstream media (54%).

The polarization has been further heightened by social media sites, which are used as main sources of news by 68% of Indian young adults (Lokniti-CSDS, 2023). A study by Chopra et al. (2023) analysing 2.3 million social media updates identified that algorithmic content consumption generates filter bubbles that reinforce partisan sentiment among young Indians. Analysing user interaction patterns, emotionally provocative political content garnered 3.4 times more interaction compared to neutral information content, which creates incentives for inflammatory political discourse. These observations underscore how digital media environments contribute to the political information ecosystem of young Indians.

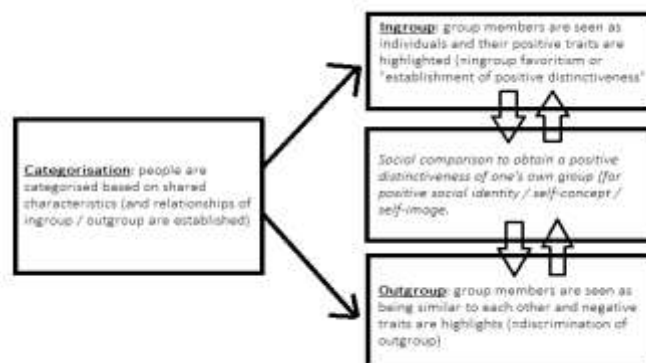
The role of social support systems in India presents unique characteristics, as traditional family structures continue to influence political socialization alongside peer networks and educational institutions (Verma & Singh, 2021). Their ethnographic study across six Indian states documented how intergenerational political discussions remain central to political socialization despite rapid modernization. Content analysis of 124 family units identified that 76% of young adults reported that family discussions made up their major exposure to political ideas, although this figure declined to 58% in cities where peer effect was stronger.

Recent work by Jain and Patel (2023) illustrated that family political talks were a key predictor of political interest among young adults in both urban and rural Indian contexts how cultural contexts shape the functioning of social support in political socialization.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

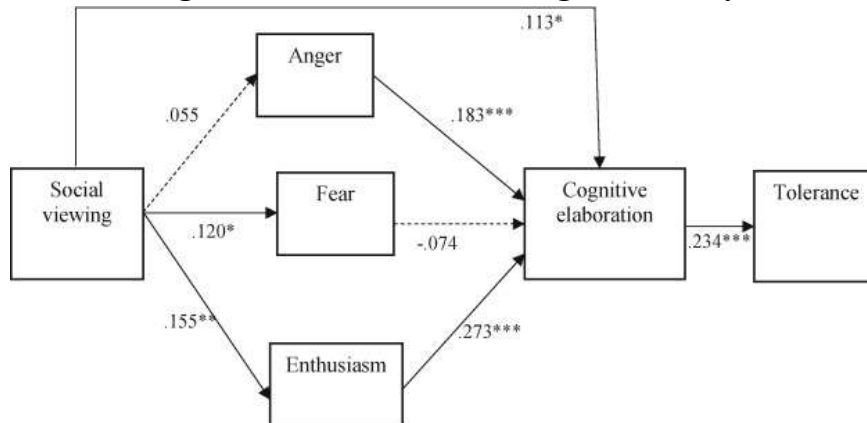
1.5.1 Affective Polarization

Figure 1.5.1.1 Social Identity Theory



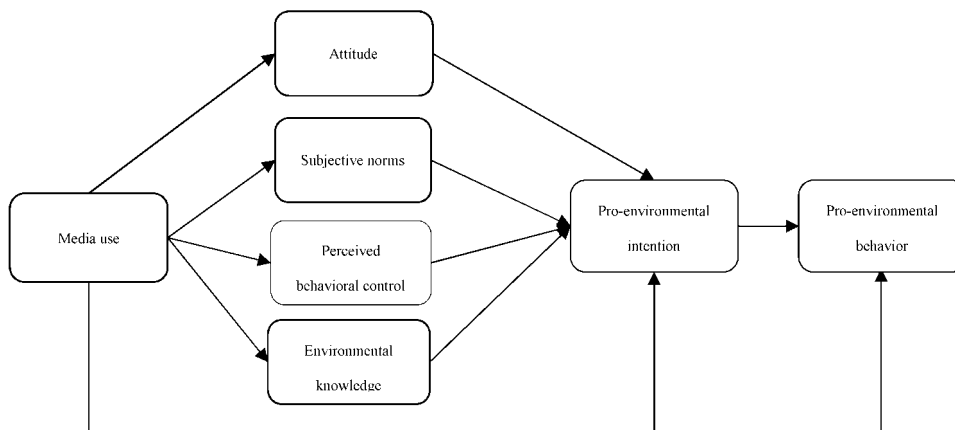
Political affiliations increasingly function as social identities, with partisan identity serving as a "mega-identity" that aligns with other social categorizations (race, religion, geography). For young adults in particular, research by Craig and Richeson (2014) demonstrates how demographic changes and identity threat can intensify in-group/out-group dynamics.

Figure 1.5.1.2 Affective Intelligence Theory



Emotions play a central role in political information processing and decision-making. When political discourse triggers anxiety or enthusiasm, it activates different cognitive systems that influence political learning and participation. Recent studies by Valentino and colleagues (2021) have found that young adults show heightened emotional reactivity to partisan cues compared to older cohorts.

Figure 1.5.1.3 Media Environment Theories



Models such as the Reinforcing Spirals Framework (Slater, 2007) and Selective Exposure Theory explain how media consumption patterns contribute to polarization. The fragmentation of media ecosystems has particular relevance for digital natives who have never experienced a pre-internet information environment. For example, a 2023 Pew Research study found that 78% of adults aged 18-29 get their political news primarily from social media, where algorithmic curation often prioritizes emotionally provocative content.

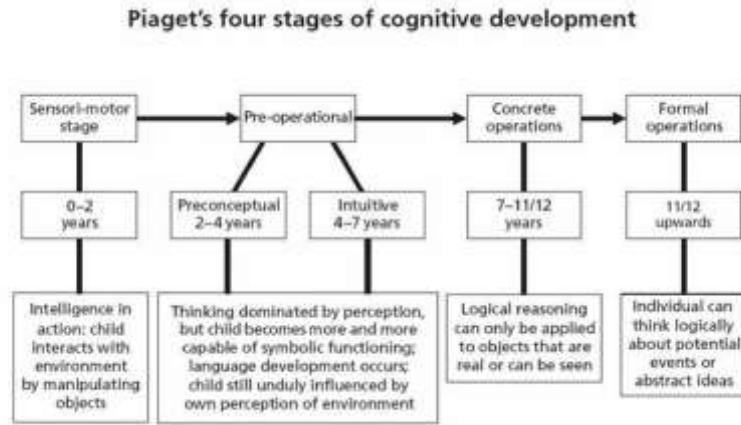
1.5.2 Cognitive Flexibility

Figure 1.5.2.1 Dual Process Theories



The frameworks distinguish between automatic/intuitive (System 1) and deliberative/analytical (System 2) cognitive processes. Young adults with greater cognitive flexibility may more readily engage System 2 processing when encountering political information that challenges existing beliefs.

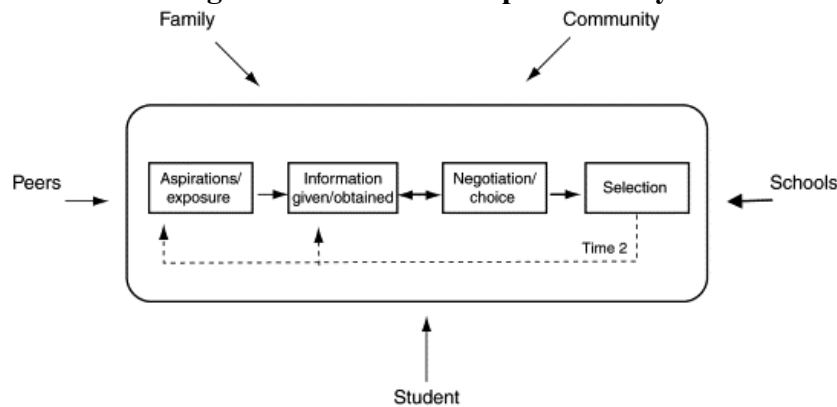
Figure 1.5.2.2 Cognitive Developmental Theory



Piagetian frameworks emphasize formal operational thinking and post-formal cognitive development during late adolescence and young adulthood. Perry's (1970) Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development describes how college students progress from dualistic to multiplistic and relativistic thinking a trajectory with clear implications for political cognition.

1.5.3 Social Support

Figure 1.5.3.1 Social Capital Theory



Robert Putnam's Social Capital Theory, as presented in his 2000 book "Bowling Alone," defines social capital as the connections among individualities social networks and the morals of reciprocity and responsibility that arise from them. Basically, it's about the strength and quality of connections within a community and how these connections contribute to collaborative well-being. Putnam argues that a society's social capital, or the quantum of participatory eventuality, communal exposure, and trust available, is pivotal for its success.

1.5.3.2 Social Network Theory

The theory explains how social connections give coffers that impact political socialization. Putnam's distinction between relating capital (connections within analogous groups) and bridging capital (connections across different groups) is particularly applicable for understanding how social networks impact exposure to political diversity. This theoretical perspective is rounded by experimental approaches to political which emphasize how family, peer, and educational surrounds transmit political exposures,

knowledge, and behavioral morals.

1.6 Affective Polarization

Affective polarization is the difference between positive in- group bias towards the party someone supports and negative out- group bias towards other parties. It refers to the collective dislike between different societal groups. This miracle is generally studied in a political environment. For illustration, in the India, numerous individualities express positive passions towards the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) while disliking the Republican Party, and vice versa.

It refers to the increasing emotional distance and hostility between supporters of different political parties or ideologies. This phenomenon transcends policy disagreements, manifesting as intense dislike, distrust, or even contempt for political outgroups. In recent decades, the intensification of affective polarization has been documented across numerous democracies, raising questions about its implications for political interest and engagement, particularly among young adults who are still forming their political identities.

1.6.1 Causes of affective polarization

The increasing hostility and unfavorable sentiments people have toward those who back opposing political parties or groups are known as affective polarization. Partisan identity strengthening, ideological sorting, negative partisanship, elite polarization, media influence, social media, social and cultural divisions, a decline in cross-cutting ties, and perceived threat are some of the factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

Affective polarization in India is given additional dimensions by the nation's distinct sociopolitical environment. The emphasis on rallying support along these identity lines is a result of India's diverse social fabric, which is characterized by religion, caste, language, and regional identities. The polarization between religious communities, especially Muslims and Hindus, has been greatly exacerbated by the rise of Hindu nationalism and the focus placed on religious identity by some political groups.

Polarization of emotions along caste lines and social divisions can occasionally result from political parties' caste-based mobilization. Deep scars of mistrust and hostility between religious communities were left by the 1947 partition and communal violence, and these historical legacies are still being abused and strengthened in the political arena.

With many news channels and outlets openly supporting particular political parties, the Indian media landscape has grown more polarized. Affective polarization has been exacerbated by the widespread distribution of hate speech, partisan narratives, and disinformation made possible by social media penetration. Disparities in income, deteriorating inter-party communication, and "Us vs. Them" discourse can all exacerbate hostility toward the other side.

1.6.2 Consequences of Affective Polarization

- Avoidance - is the provocation and intention to stay down from political outgroups. Social distance is an intergroup miracle, affecting particular and social relations. Affective polarization increases the costs of interacting with political outgroup members, leading to increased avoidance. Dragged social distance between political camps results in entrenchment of political differences in the social fabric.
- Political Forbearance - Outgroup antipathy can undermine political forbearance, which extends civil liberties and rights to groups or individualities with whom they differ. Political dogmatism can be principled or strategic, applied only to ideological opponents without constantly applying a principle. Intolerant forbearance is harder to sustain when political outgroups are vehemently disliked.
- Support for Political Violence - It's one of the most dramatic and potentially mischievous

consequences of outgroup antipathy. Political violence is described as anathema to the spirit and substance of republic. High situations of affective polarization make it more palatable to blink or use(non) physical violence against those politically opposed to us.

1.7 Cognitive Flexibility

It encompasses the ability to adapt thinking patterns, consider alternative perspectives, and navigate complex or ambiguous situations. This mental capacity may significantly influence how young adults process political information, respond to disagreement, and maintain interest in political matters despite challenges or contradictions.

1.7.1 Components and Characteristics

Cognitive inflexibility involves several interrelated capacities, including set shifting, internal rigidity, perspective-taking, and forbearance for nebulousity. These capacities may serve as defensive factors against the potentially denuclearizing goods of political complexity and conflict. The theoretical foundations for understanding cognitive inflexibility draw from multiple cerebral traditions

Binary process propositions (Kahneman, 2011; Stanovich & West, 2000) these fabrics distinguish between automatic/intuitive (System 1) and deliberative/logical (System 2) cognitive processes. youthful grown-ups with lesser cognitive inflexibility may more readily engage System 2 processing when encountering political information that challenges being beliefs.

Cognitive developmental theory Piagetian fabrics emphasize formal functional thinking and post-formal cognitive development during late nonage and youthful majority. Perry's (1970) Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development describes how council scholars progress from dualistic to multiplicitic and relativistic thinking a line with clear counteraccusations for political cognition.

Integrative complexity proposition (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977) This approach examines the structural complexity of study, fastening on isolation (feting multiple confines of an issue) and integration (developing abstract connections between those confines). exploration by Jost et al. (2003) has linked political testament to differences in integrative complexity, with counteraccusations for how youthful grown-ups engage with political converse.

Real-world operations of cognitive inflexibility in political surrounds include deliberative republic enterprise on council premises, educational programs that educate critical media knowledge, and conflict resolution shops that emphasize perspective-taking. For illustration, Stanford University's Deliberative Polling program engages scholars in structured conversations across ideological lines, demonstrating how cognitive inflexibility chops can be laboriously cultivated in youthful adult populations.

1.7.2 Neurological and Psychological Foundations

Cognitive flexibility is largely controlled by the prefrontal cortex, a brain area that is responsible for higher-order cognitive functions. It works with other regions, including the anterior cingulate cortex (for detecting errors) and the basal ganglia (for reward learning), to allow adaptive responses. Neurotransmitters such as dopamine are also involved in modulating cognitive flexibility, with ideal levels facilitating the switching of tasks or perspectives, while imbalances (such as in disorders like ADHD or Parkinson's) may undermine it. Psychologically, cognitive flexibility is associated with

- Executive Functions - It operates in concert with working memory (maintaining and manipulating information) and inhibitory control (overriding automatic or irrelevant responses) to facilitate goal-directed action.

- Metacognition - Knowledge of one's own thought processes enables people to track and modify their approaches, making them more flexible.
- Emotional Regulation - Flexible thinking enables people to regulate emotions when faced with setbacks or stressors, promoting resilience.

1.7.3 Developmental Considerations

Young adulthood represents a critical period for cognitive development, during which executive functions and abstract reasoning continue to mature. Neuroimaging studies indicate that prefrontal cortex development crucial for cognitive control and complex decision-making extends into the mid-twenties. Understanding how cognitive flexibility develops and operates during this life stage provides insight into its potential role in fostering or hindering political interest. Developmental science offers several relevant frameworks for understanding cognitive flexibility during young adulthood:

Emerging Adulthood Theory (Arnett, 2000), this perspective characterizes ages 18-29 as a distinct developmental period marked by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling "in-between," and possibilities/optimism. These features create both opportunities and challenges for political identity formation and interest development.

Socioecological Models, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory helps explain how contextual factors influence cognitive development. College environments, workplace dynamics, and community settings create microsystems that can either promote or constrain cognitive flexibility among young adults.

Recent longitudinal studies by Krosnick and Alwin (2022) demonstrate that the "impressionable years" hypothesis which suggests that political attitudes formed during young adulthood show unusual persistence may be moderated by cognitive flexibility, with more cognitively flexible individuals showing greater capacity for political learning and attitude adaptation throughout adulthood.

1.7.4. Factors Influencing Cognitive Flexibility

Cognitive inflexibility may drop with age due to differences in prefrontal cortex function, peaks in youthful majority. still, practice and internal stimulation can help aged grown-ups maintain inflexibility. Cognitive conditioning like learning a new language, playing an instrument, or working mystifications can ameliorate inflexibility. Cognitive- behavioral remedy and awareness training can enhance this capability. Rich surroundings with different gestures can promote inflexibility. Long- term stress, anxiety, or conditions like schizophrenia and autism diapason complaint can hamper adaptation. A healthy diet, regular exercise, and sufficient sleep promote optimal brain function, including cognitive inflexibility.

1.8 Social Support

Social support is a crucial component of an individual's life, providing both tangible and intangible resources to help them navigate life's challenges, cope with stress, and thrive. It plays a vital role in psychological well-being, physical health, and social functioning, acting as a buffer against adversity and fostering resilience. The multidimensional nature of social support is reflected in its various types, sources, and mechanisms, which interact dynamically to influence outcomes.

Social support can be distributed into several confines, each addressing different requirements and functions. Emotional support involves expressions of empathy, love, trust, care, and confirmation that give individualities with a sense of being valued and understood. This type of support is frequently handed by close connections, similar as family or intimate musketeers, but can also come from support groups or compassionate professionals. instructional support refers to the provision of advice, knowledge, guidance, or information that helps individualities break problems or make opinions. This type of support empowers

individualities by equipping them with the tools to address challenges effectively. Tangible (instrumental) support involves concrete, practical assistance, such as financial aid, material resources, or physical help with tasks. This type of support directly addresses immediate practical needs, reducing stress caused by resource scarcity or logistical challenges. It can also enhance perceptions of security and stability.

Appraisal support involves feedback or affirmation that helps individuals evaluate themselves, their situations, or their decisions. This type of support enhances self-efficacy and decision-making, enabling individuals to feel more competent and capable of managing their circumstances. This type of support is common in mentorship relationships, peer groups, or therapeutic settings.

Lastly, companionship support involves the presence of others for shared activities, leisure, or social engagement, fostering a sense of inclusion and reducing loneliness. This type of support is often informal, arising from friendships, community groups, or social clubs.

1.8.1 Sources of Social Support

Social support may be from a range of sources with differing characteristics. Informal support, usually from family, friends, or peers, is flexible, reciprocal, and emotionally intimate. It tends to be the initial line of support because of its accessibility and trust. Formal support, from institutions or professionals, is structured and specialized, frequently expertise-based, and important in dealing with complicated needs. Yet, access can be restricted by cost, stigma, or administrative barriers. Support from religious groups, support groups, or community organizations offers a sense of collective identity and shared purpose, and is likely to combine emotional, informational, and companionship support. Inclusiveness and value congruence are crucial to effectiveness.

1.8.2 Factors Affecting Social Support

Quality vs. Quantity the close, good-quality relationships are more helpful than a sizeable but superficial acquaintance.

Reciprocity is equitable give-and-take in relationships creates trust and longevity.

Cultural context influence expectations and manifestations of support. For instance, collectivist cultures are likely to prioritize family-oriented support, whereas individualist cultures are more likely to prize independence.

Timing and relevance the support is optimally effective when it is timed to meet the recipient's need and is offered in a timely manner.

Perceived vs. Received Support as perceived support (the expectation that support exists) tends to have a more significant effect on well-being than actual received support.

1.9 Political Interest

Political interest describes a person's curiosity, attention, and desire to learn, follow, and engage in politics, political affairs, and issues. Political interest is a multidimensional construct with cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects that not only measure intellectual focus on politics but also emotional concern and active engagement. As a building block of democratic nations, political interest fuels civic engagement, educates political awareness, and informs attitudes toward the government and public policy. It differs among individuals based on personal characteristics, socialization, education, and socio-political environments and expresses itself through different activities such as voting, political conversation, or campaigning for change. Political interest in its full understanding demonstrates its function in building knowledgeable citizenship, its differences across cultural and structural environments, and its effects on democratic health.

The cognitive aspect of political interest incorporates intellectual effort to acquire, process, and understand

political information. This encompasses remaining aware of the most recent events, familiarizing oneself with government organization, and following debates over policy. High cognitive political interest individuals tend to read the news, read political history, or be interested in complicated topics such as electoral systems or foreign relations. This factor is directly related to political knowledge and political thinking, which allows people to create informed opinions and make sound decisions, such as assessing candidates during the time of election. Yet, cognitive participation can be constrained by availability of credible information, educational differences, or other claims on time and attention, especially in low-political transparency or media-dense settings.

The affective aspect captures emotional identification with politics, such as feelings of enthusiasm, worry, or frustration regarding political matters and occurrences. This dimension captures how much people care about political outcomes, whether spurred by personal values, ideological identification, or response to injustice. For instance, a person may be passionate about climate change policies or outraged over government corruption and thus be energized by political activism or debate. Affective political interest typically leads to consistent engagement, since emotional investment causes politics to seem personally salient. Yet strong negative feelings, like cynicism or distrust, can cause alienation, especially in highly polarized or non-functional political systems, bringing into focus the fine line between passion and disengagement.

The behavioral component entails concrete acts that are indicative of political engagement, from passive to active participation. Passive behaviors involve tracking political developments or talking to friends about problems, whereas active behaviors involve voting, participating in demonstrations, volunteering for campaigns, or seeking public office. This dimension captures the practical expression of cognitive and affective interest, converting curiosity and enthusiasm into civic engagement. Behavioral participation is conditioned by opportunities for involvement, including open voting systems or free public forums, as well as by obstacles such as restrictive legislation, socioeconomic limitations, or political repression. In democratic environments, strong behavioral political interest reinforces civic culture, but in authoritarian environments, it can be expressed as opposition or clandestine activism.

Political interest is conditioned by a network of determinants that interact across individual, social, and structural levels. At the individual level, political curiosity can be fostered by personality traits such as openness to experience or civic duty, while low self-efficacy or apathy can stifle it. Socialization processes such as family conversations, education, and peer pressure have a significant impact in developing early political interest, usually setting patterns for a lifetime. For example, children who grow up in politically engaged families tend to develop enduring interest. Structurally, political interest is shaped by the political climate—democracies with competitive elections and strong civil societies will generally have more interest than authoritarian regimes with weak freedoms. Socioeconomic factors like income, education, and access to media also produce differences, with marginalized groups frequently encountering obstacles to participation despite high levels of stakes in political results.

Theoretically, political interest is at the heart of theories of democratic citizenship. The rational choice approach implies that people become involved politically when the benefits (e.g., affecting policy) are perceived as greater than the costs (e.g., time, effort). The civic voluntarism perspective focuses on resources such as time, money, and ability, as well as psychological involvement, as participation drivers. Social capital theory identifies the way in which networks of trust and reciprocity, for example, community groups, magnify political interest by linking individuals to collective action. In contrast, political alienation theory describes disinterest as a reaction to feelings of inefficacy or lack of trust in institutions,

especially in those who experience exclusion from power arrangements.

Political interest outcomes are significant at both individual and societal levels. For individuals, it creates a sense of empowerment, increases political efficacy, and supports lifelong learning about civic matters. Active citizens will vote, press for their own interests, and hold governments responsible, leading to responsive governance. At the public level, civic interest at large enhances democratic legitimacy, promotes inclusive representation, and fosters social cohesion through open dialogue across views. But such imbalances in political interest where only particular segments are interested—elites or privileged groups only—can become sources of inequalities, since elites or the privileged group are in charge of political discussion at the expense of others.

Political interest challenges involve polarization, misinformation, and indifference. Affective interest in polarized contexts can fuel polarizing participation, with people being concerned only with defending their perspectives, discrediting meaningful discussion. Misinformation, fueled by online media, has the potential to warp cognitive interest, generating distorted perceptions of problems. Indifference, commonly stemming from distrust or perceived lack of relevance of politics, represents a major challenge, especially among youth or disenfranchised citizens. On the other hand, social movements and digital platforms provide avenues to rekindle interest, such as in international activism around racial justice or environmentalism, where online resources enhance affective and behavioral involvement.

Finally, political interest is a dynamic, multifaceted construct that involves cognitive curiosity, affective passion, and behavioral action. Influenced by individual characteristics, socialization, and structural factors, it is an essential engine of democratic engagement and civic well-being. Though obstacles such as polarization and disengagement remain, building political interest through education, inclusive institutions, and open platforms can energize citizens and fortify societies. By building engaged, knowledgeable, and active citizens, political interest continues to be critical to the health of democratic governance and the pursuit of common good.

support suggests that cognitive flexibility and social support can buffer the negative effects of affective polarization on political interest.

1.10 Significance of the Study

The exploration on the impact of affective polarization, cognitive inflexibility, and social support on political interest among youthful grown-ups is important in the understanding of the complex factors that shape youth political participation. Affective polarization, with intense in-group loyalty and out-group hatred, has double impacts on political interest. While it could heighten political participation among those who hold firm partisanship, it can cause disengagement among young people disenchanted with partisan hostility. Such affective division usually arises from misinformation regarding opposing parties' views and constituency, leading to heightened social distrust and lower civic participation (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023).

Cognitive flexibility the capacity to adjust one's thinking and entertain multiple viewpoints acts as a key moderator in politically polarized contexts. Those with greater cognitive flexibility are more able to navigate intricate political contexts, participate in constructive debate, and avoid the temptation of partisan radicalism. Such flexibility promotes critical thinking and minimizes vulnerability to misinformation, thus increasing political interest and engagement among young adults (Zmigrod, 2019).

Family, peers, and community networks are social support systems that help mold the political attitudes and political behaviors of young adults. Supportive environments that facilitate free political discussion can counter the negative impacts of affective polarization, engender civic participation, and develop a

sense of political efficacy among young people (Booth et al., 2023).

By examining how affective polarization intersects with cognitive flexibility and social support, this research provides important insights into promoting political interest among young adults. Knowledge of these dynamics is crucial in the development of interventions to increase democratic resilience, inclusive political participation, and mitigating the divisive impact of polarization.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review aims to probe the ways in which affective polarization, cognitive inflexibility, and social support impact the political interests of youthful grown-ups. Political interest is one of the most pivotal labels of communal engagement and ongoing popular participation. The review's objective is to create a theoretical framework that clarifies how political engagement is impacted by interpersonal influences, cognitive flexibility, and emotional responses to partisan differences. By critically evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of current knowledge, it draws attention to knowledge gaps about the ways in which these factors interact in young adults' lives. The review supports the current research focus and guides the development of research questions by providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between significant constructs. The impact of affective, cognitive, and social mechanisms on young adults' political interest between the ages of 18 and 25 is investigated in this multidisciplinary literature review. Because of its growing political polarization and changing trends in youth engagement, the United States is given special attention in this review, which focuses on research done in democracies. For comparative insights, international studies are also taken into account. In order to ensure relevance to current political and technological contexts, the review incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research that has been published within the last 20 years. The review revolves around important concepts like affective polarization and cognitive flexibility. As a protective psychological factor and a means of political socialization, social support is investigated. As an outcome variable, political interest is examined with an emphasis on personal incentives to participate in

Individual Provocation to interact with political content and conditioning is the main focus of the discussion of political interest as an outgrowth variable. Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and reports from reliable organizations serve as the foundation for the review, guaranteeing its thoroughness and academic rigor.

2.1 Importance of these concepts in young adults

Understanding how affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support, and political interest interact requires research on young adults. Young adults' perceptions of the political system can be greatly impacted by affective polarization, which is defined by strong emotional animosity toward political outgroups. This can result in increased engagement due to strong supporter loyalty, or dissatisfaction and withdrawal from politics. Young people need cognitive flexibility the capacity to adjust and take into account different points of view in order to process complicated political information without turning to binary thinking. Higher cognitive flexibility in young adults may make them less susceptible to dogmatic thinking and more receptive to political discourse. Peers, family, and social networks are examples of social support that greatly influences young adults' political views and actions. Supportive social settings can boost self-efficacy, encourage political discourse, and reduce the mental stress of discussing controversial topics. Early adulthood is a common time for the development of political interest, which serves as a motivating springboard for more extensive political engagement. To improve participation in

the political process and decrease the negative impacts of polarization, it is crucial to understand how emotional, cognitive, and social factors affect the development of political interest.

2.2 Rationale for Exploring Young Adults

Youthful majority represents a constructive period for political socialization. As individualities transition from nonwage to majority, they begin to develop independent political individualities and habits. This group is frequently underrepresented in electoral participation, yet they hold significant eventuality as agents of political change. The heightened visibility of political conflict and affective polarization, combined with the adding complexity of information ecosystems, may uniquely shape how youthful grown-ups perceive and engage with politics. Exploring how cognitive and social factors interact with the concentrated political climate to impact youthful grown-ups' political interest can give precious perceptivity for preceptors, policymakers, and communal associations seeking to foster more engaged and informed citizens.

2.3 Political Interest in Young Adults

Political interest refers to the degree to which individualities are attentive to, curious about, and engaged in political affairs. It's frequently considered a foundational element of political gesture and communal engagement (previous, 2019). Political interest encompasses both cognitive and emotional confine individualities not only seek information but also watch about political issues. In empirical exploration, political interest is generally operationalized through tone- reported measures, similar as how frequently repliers follow political news, their position of political discussion, or their interest in political events (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Experimenters frequently use Likert- scale particulars to quantify political interest, asking actors to indicate their position of agreement with statements like " I'm interested in politics" or to rate how constantly they engage in political conversations (Torney- Purta et al., 2001). These measures are necessary in understanding how political engagement may evolve over time, especially during experimental phases like youthful majority.

2.3.1 Trends in Political Engagement and Interest Among Young Grown-ups

Recent decades have shown mixed trends in political interest among youthful grown-ups. While namer turnout and traditional political participation among youth have historically been lower than aged populations (Zukin et al., 2006), interest in politics has not inescapably declined. rather, youthful grown-ups' moment frequently engage in non-traditional political conditioning, similar as social media activism, kick participation, and issue- grounded engagement (haul, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

Studies suggest a growing peak between political knowledge and political interest in youth populations numerous are interested in political motifs but feel disillusioned with formal institutions (Dalton, 2008). For illustration, the 2020 U.S. presidential election saw a significant increase in youth turnout, indicating that when issues align with their values, youthful grown-ups demonstrate high situations of political concern (CIRCLE, 2021).

2.3.2 Factors Traditionally Associated with Political Interest

2.3.2.1 Socioeconomic Background

Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a critical part in shaping political interest. youthful grown-ups from advanced SES backgrounds frequently have lesser access to political coffers, similar as education, time, and domestic political engagement, which fosters early political curiosity (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman,

1995). Again, those from lower SES groups may face walls to political exposure and communal literacy openings, which can dampen interest and engagement.

2.3.2.2 Education

Education is one of the most constantly significant predictors of political interest. Advanced situations of education expose individualities to political content and encourage critical thinking, thereby adding their interest in political affairs (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik- Barry, 1996). Educational institutions also serve as platforms for political socialization, where conversations and exposure to different shoes cultivate sustained interest (Campbell, 2006).

2.3.3 Media Consumption

Media consumption has evolved as a central factor impacting political interest among youthful grown-ups. Traditional media like journals and television still play a part, but digital platforms and social media have come primary sources of political information for youth (Boulianne, 2015). The interactive nature of digital media can foster lesser engagement, though enterprises remain about echo chambers and misinformation (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Studies show that youth who consume political content on multiple platforms tend to parade advanced political interest (Theocharis et al., 2016).

2.4 Affective Polarization

Affective polarization refers to the emotional peak that emerges between political groups, characterized by positive passions toward one's in- group (i.e., one's own political party) and negative passions toward out- groups (opposing parties or testaments). Unlike ideological polarization which is embedded in substantial dissensions over policy issues affective polarization is grounded primarily on identity, feelings, and perceived moral differences between prejudiced groups. According to Torcal and Hartevelde (2024), affective polarization manifests through negative affect similar as wrathfulness, disdain, and mistrust toward political opponents, indeed when policy differences are minimum.

This miracle is deeply connected to social identity proposition, wherein political cooperation becomes a salient element of one's tone- conception. As a result, individualities frequently interpret political conflict not simply as a disagreement over ideas but as a particular poke (Prinz, 2021). feelings like fear and moral commination drive individualities to perceive opposing partisans not just as different, but as dangerous or immoral enhancing political divisions and reducing the possibility of concession or dialogue.

2.4.1 The Rise of Affective Polarization in Contemporary Politics

Affective polarization has gained particular salience in recent times, especially in republic with multiparty systems. While the miracle has been considerably proved in the U.S., recent studies show that emotional divisions among political groups are enhancing encyclopaedically, particularly in Europe and Latin America (Leininger & Grünewald, 2023). The rise of affective polarization is attributed to several factors the emulsion of political identity with other social individualities, the strategic use of emotional prayers by political elites, and the proliferation of prejudiced media surroundings that amplify intergroup hostility (Almagro, 2025).

Importantly, this rise doesn't inescapably relate with increased ideological unreasonableness. Rather, affective polarization is marked by heightened emotional and emblematic conflict, indeed in cases where policy differences remain narrow. This divergence underscores a critical metamorphosis in political geste bone that's no longer driven solely by issues but by ingroup fidelity and outgroup antipathy.

2.4.2 Goods on Civic Behaviour and Stations

Affective polarization has significant counteraccusations for popular engagement and social cohesion. As

Druckman and Levendusky (2019) argue, it contributes to heightening political mistrust not only of opposing partisans but also of popular institutions themselves. When individualities perceive the other side as innocently loose or threatening, they come more probative of anti-democratic conduct that might cover their values from perceived detriment. This undermines interpersonal trust, limits cooperation across political lines, and can escalate into broader societal fragmentation also, affective polarization diminishes openness to opposing views. As individualities come more settled in their prejudiced individualities, they're more likely to engage in evidence bias, avoid cross-cutting political dialogue, and reject information that challenges their beliefs (Prinz, 2021). The performing information silos and echo chambers foster political unity and support enmity, reducing openings for meaningful deliberation in the public sphere.

2.4.3 Affective Polarization and Political Interest

The relationship between affective polarization and political interest is multi-faceted and batted. On one hand, the emotional intensity of concentrated politics can act as a marshalling force. For some individualities, particularly those with strong prejudiced individualities, affective polarization increases political engagement, namer turnout, and participation in political conversations (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019). These individualities are frequently driven by a desire to master or push back against the opposing side.

On the other hand, affective polarization can also lead to advancement and political pullout, especially among individualities who are politically moderate, unaffiliated, or disabused with the hostility of political converse. For these individualities, the emotional toxin associated with politics may induce apathy, avoidance, and cynicism limiting their participation in popular processes. Youthful grown-ups appear to be especially sensitive to affective polarization. exploration by Leininger and Grünewald (2023) suggests that youth, while frequently passionate about social justice and political change, are also largely reactive to emotional and identity- grounded cues in politics. This duality makes them both implicit agents of rallying and vulnerable to disillusionment, depending on their social terrain and exposure to prejudiced narratives.

2.4.4 Gaps and Debates in the Literature

Despite growing academic attention, several critical gaps and debates remain in the study of affective polarization. First, there's no universal agreement on how affective polarization should be measured. Some studies use feeling thermometers and social distance scales, while others calculate on implicit association tests or experimental data leading to inconsistent findings and limited community across studies (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019).

Alternate, scholars debate the extent to which affective polarization is a cause or consequence of broader political dynamics. While some view it as a result of elite polarization and prejudiced messaging, others argue it shapes name preferences, media habits, and indeed policy issues.

Third, the multidimensional nature of affective polarization including its emotional, narrative, and identity factors remains underexplored. As Almagro (2025) notes, unborn exploration should move beyond double prejudiced divides to examine how affective polarization intersects with race, religion, class, and gender. Eventually, some scholars advise against a purely negative interpretation of affective polarization. Under certain conditions, it may foster stronger political engagement, group solidarity, and resistance against perceived injustice. Feting this complexity is essential to understanding its varied goods on republic and citizen action

2.5 Cognitive inflexibility

It refers to the internal capability to switch between allowing about two different generalities or to acclimatize action in response to changing pretensions and environmental stimulants (Scott, 1962). It's considered a core element of administrative functioning, nearly affiliated to working memory and inhibitory control (Diamond, 2013). Individualities with high cognitive inflexibility are more suitable to acclimate their strategies, perspectives, and responses when faced with new or unanticipated challenges (Ionescu, 2012). This particularity plays a critical part in problem working, emotional regulation, and learning making it essential for adaptive functioning across a wide range of surrounding, including political logic and decision timber.

2.5.1 Development of Cognitive Flexibility in Adolescence and Early majority

Cognitive inflexibility undergoes significant development during non-age and into early majority, corresponding with the development of the prefrontal cortex (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). During this period, individualities come more able of considering multiple shoes, feting cognitive impulses, and managing complex tasks that bear shifting perspectives. These experimental advances are told by both natural development and environmental stimulation, similar as education, social action, and exposure to different shoes (Crone & Dahl, 2012). youthful grown-ups, thus, represent a critical population for studying the political counteraccusations of cognitive inflexibility, as they're still developing the tools necessary to navigate ideological complexity and emotional nuance.

2.5.2 Cognitive Inflexibility and Political logic

Cognitive inflexibility plays a vital part in political cognition, particularly in enabling individualities to reuse nebulous or disagreeing political information (Baron, 2015). It supports forbearance for nebulosity, the amenability to engage with information that may challenge one's beliefs or provoke discomfort (Zmigrod et al., 2019). Individualities with lesser cognitive inflexibility are more likely to seek out balanced information, critically estimate sources, and repel simplistic or polarized narratives. This capacity enhances deliberative logic and fosters open- mindedness, both of which are critical for effective popular participation (Van Bavel et al., 2020).

In concentrated surroundings, where political dispatches are frequently emotionally charged and identity-laden, cognitive inflexibility enables individualities to navigate ideological conflict without resorting to dictatorship or advancement. It helps in feting the subjectivity of political perspectives and promotes humane understanding, reducing the impact of affective polarization on stations toward outgroups (Zmigrod et al., 2021).

2.5.3 Role in Moderating goods of Polarization on Interest and Engagement

Cognitive inflexibility has been linked as a prolocutor in the relationship between political polarization and political interest or engagement. Empirical studies have shown that individualities high in cognitive inflexibility are less susceptible to the negative emotional consequences of affective polarization, similar as anxiety, mistrust, or pullout (Leong et al., 2019). They're also more likely to engage constructively in political converse, indeed when brazened with opposing views or heated debates.

Theoretical models suggest that cognitive inflexibility enables individualities to maintain political interest despite the cerebral strain caused by polarization. For illustration, binary- process propositions of political cognition propose that flexible thinkers are more suitable to balance emotional and rational inputs, performing in further nuanced political opinions (Kahneman, 2011). also, flexible individualities may be more inclined to view political participation as a tool for problem working, rather than a venue for ideological conflict, thereby sustaining or indeed enhancing engagement.

2.5.4 Gaps in Research Particularly in Relation to Affective Polarization

Despite growing interest in the cognitive underpinnings of political action, the literature reveals several gaps in understanding the crossroad of cognitive inflexibility and affective polarization. utmost being studies have concentrated on ideological processing or forbearance for nebulousness in insulation, without integrating emotional and identity grounded confines of political division (Zmigrod et al., 2019). likewise, little exploration has been done on youthful grown-ups, a group especially vulnerable to the binary pressures of developing cognitive capacities and navigating a politically concentrated media terrain. Also, the mechanisms through which cognitive inflexibility centrists the goods of polarization on political interest remain under- theorized. While some substantiation suggests defensive goods, further exploration is demanded to determine how and under what conditions inflexibility buffers individualities from advancement or radicalization. unborn studies should also examine how educational interventions that promote flexible thinking may impact political stations and actions, especially in surrounds marked by high polarization.

2.6 Social Support

It refers to the perception or reality that one is watched for, valued, and part of a probative social network (House, 1981). It encompasses multiple confines, including emotional support (empathy, love, trust), instructional support (guidance, advice), and necessary support (palpable backing or coffers) (Cohen & Wills, 1985). These forms of support function both singly and interactively to impact conduct, cognition, and well- being, particularly in ages of stress or query.

2.6.1 Sources of Social Support Among Youthful Grown-ups

In the environment of youthful grown-ups, social support arises from colourful sources, including family members, peers, academic institutions, and decreasingly, digital and online communities (Arnett, 2000; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). As youthful individualities navigate transitions from dependence to autonomy, their reliance on peer networks increases, while online spaces crop as both support systems and platforms for political dialogue. Institutions similar as universities also play a constructive part by furnishing surroundings for ideological disquisition and community engagement (Pancer et al., 2007).

2.6.2 Social Support and Psychological Well- being

Research constantly links social support with bettered internal health, adaptability, and stress regulation (Thoits, 2011). It serves as a buffer against anxiety, depression, and social insulation, particularly during arising majority when identity conformation is prominent. The stress softening thesis posits that social support mitigates the dangerous goods of stressors by furnishing emotional and practical coffers (Cohen & Wills, 1985). For politically active youth, this may include managing emotional responses to centralizing converse or controversial issues.

2.6.3 Influence of Social Support on Political stations and Actions

Social support also plays a crucial part in shaping political stations and actions, particularly by offering stimulant, protestation, and a psychologically safe terrain for expressing views (McClurg, 2003). Being bedded in politically active or tolerant social networks enhances political engagement, including voting, activism, and political discussion (Klofstad, 2009). also, support from peers and instructors can encourage exposure to different shoes, enhancing political interest and reducing ideological severity.

2.6.4 Intersections with Polarization and Cognitive Inflexibility

The interplay between social support and other variables particularly affective polarization and cognitive inflexibility is decreasingly gaining scholarly attention. Social support can moderate the divisive goods of

polarization, promoting empathy and reducing hostility in political converse (Mutz, 2006). contemporaneously, individualities with robust social support are more likely to engage in open, reflective conversations, fostering cognitive inflexibility and curiosity about opposing views. This combination enhances political interest and sustains engagement indeed in contentious surroundings.

2.6.5 Research Gaps

Despite its significance, exploration on social support in political surrounds, especially among youthful grownups, remains limited. Many studies explicitly examine the mechanisms by which social support influences political action or interacts with cerebral traits like cognitive inflexibility. also, the part of digital social networks in shaping political interest through support remains under- theorized. unborn exploration should borrow multidimensional, integrative fabrics to more understand these complex interdependencies.

2.7 Relations Between Variables

2.7.1 Conceptual Connections Between Affective Polarization, Cognitive Inflexibility, and Social Support

The three core constructs affective polarization, cognitive inflexibility, and social support interact in meaningful ways that affect political interest. Affective polarization can act as a suppressor, discouraging political participation by fostering enmity or emotional collapse (Iyengar et al., 2019). In discrepancy, cognitive inflexibility serves as a adaptability medium, enabling individualities to navigate emotionally charged political surroundings by espousing nuanced perspectives (Zmigrod et al., 2021). Social support functions as a facilitator, creating a safe space for political disquisition, discussion, and expression, especially pivotal for youthful grown-ups.

2.7.2 Theoretical Frameworks Supporting Interactional Models

Several theoretical models help conceptualize these relations. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) posits that individual action is shaped by the complementary commerce between particular, behavioural, and environmental factors making it well- suited to model the part of support and inflexibility in political interest. also, Binary Process Models of Political Cognition (Kahneman, 2011) distinguish between intuitive and deliberative thinking, pressing how cognitive inflexibility supports balanced logic in emotionally concentrated surrounds.

2.7.3 Gaps in Integrative Approaches

A major limitation in the being literature is the lack of integrative studies that examine these variables concurrently, utmost disquisition isolates one variable analogous as polarization or support without addressing the interacting cerebral and social factors that shape political interest. There is a clear need for multi-level and longitudinal studies that probe how individual traits and social surroundings coproduce political action in immature grown- ups.

2.8 Theoretical Framework & Models

The disquisition of affective polarization, cognitive inflexibility, social support, and political interest among youthful grownups is predicated in several crucial theoretical fabrics. These models help explain how cerebral, social, and cognitive factors shape political action, particularly during constructive stages of identity development and sociopolitical mindfulness.

2.8.1 Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), proposed by Albert Bandura (1986), emphasizes the interplay between

particular, behavioural, and environmental influences. It posits that individualities learn by observing others and through the underpinning or discipline of action. In the environment of political interest, SCT helps explain how youthful grown-ups develop political exposures through modelling, experimental literacy, and social feedback. The presence of probative surroundings (e.g., peers or instructors) can support engagement, while hostile or polarized surrounds may discourage political participation. SCT also underscores the significance of tone efficacy, suggesting that youthful people are more likely to share politically if they believe in their capability to understand and affect political processes (Bandura, 2001).

2.8.2 Cognitive Appraisal Theory

Cognitive Appraisal Theory, firstly developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), explains how individualities estimate and respond to emotionally charged situations. This proposition is particularly applicable in understanding affective polarization, as it emphasizes how people interpret political stimulants (e.g., media, debates, conflict) and experience emotional responses similar as wrathfulness, fear, or disdain. These appraisals impact whether individualities choose to engage politically or withdraw. Cognitive inflexibility plays a moderating part in this process, allowing youthful grown-ups to reassess emotional responses and consider indispensable shoes (Smith & Kirby, 2009). therefore, appraisal processes can explain friction in political interest grounded on emotional regulation and cognitive retrospection chops.

2.8.3 Political Engagement Models

Contemporary Political Engagement Models, similar as Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) Civic Voluntarism Model, propose that political participation is shaped by three crucial coffer provocation, capability, and occasion. These models incorporate cerebral readiness (e.g., interest, efficacy), cognitive chops (e.g., knowledge, inflexibility), and contextual supports (e.g., social networks, institutions). Recent extensions to these model's regard for affective confines, including emotional responses to political polarization and group identity (Dalton, 2016). youthful grown-ups who are emotionally concentrated may either feel reenergized to act or alienated, depending on their social terrain and cognitive capacity to navigate complexity.

2.8.4 The part of Experimental propositions for youthful Grownups

Experimental propositions, particularly Arnett's proposition of Arising Adulthood (2000), give a life-stage lens for understanding political interest. Arising majority (periods 18 – 29) is marked by identity disquisition, tone- focus, and insecurity. This period is ripe for the development of communal identity, making youthful grown-ups particularly sensitive to social and political influences. Cognitive and emotional capacities continue to develop during this stage, impacting how individualities reuse information and make political judgments (Steinberg, 2005). Experimental perspectives also emphasize the growing significance of peer influence and social support networks during this period, which interact with broader sociopolitical surrounds to shape engagement patterns.

2.9 Synthesis and Research Gaps

The being body of literature provides precious perceptivity into each of the core variables affective polarization, cognitive inflexibility, social support, and political interest however frequently in insulation. exploration on affective polarization highlights its growing frequency and its consequences on communal actions, including reduced trust and openness (Iyengar et al., 2019). Meanwhile, studies on cognitive flexibility emphasize its foundational part in decision timber, forbearance for nebulosity, and navigating complex sociopolitical surroundings (Zmigrod et al., 2021). Social support is constantly associated with

cerebral well-being and adaptability and has been shown to impact political expression and communal engagement (Thoits, 2011). Likewise, the political interest of youthful grown-ups has been linked to factors similar as education, media exposure, and socialization, with arising majority being a critical experimental phase for political identity conformation (Arnett, 2000; Pancer et al., 2007).

Contradictions in previous research exist regarding the impact of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support on political interest among young adults. Some scholars argue that affective polarization increases political interest through emotional engagement and group fidelity, while others suggest it contributes to cynicism and advancement. Cognitive flexibility is proposed as a buffer against extreme ideological thinking and a neutral particularity whose political applicability depends on the environment. The relationship between social support and political interest also varies, with some findings indicating that support networks foster activism and others showing minimal influence when political dialogue is absent. There is a significant gap in integrative exploration exploring how these variables interact in shaping political interest among young adults. This study aims to address these gaps by examining the combined effects of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support on political interest specifically in young adults.

2.10 Conclusion

The research highlights the importance of understanding the cognitive and social mechanisms that support or hinder political engagement among young adults. It identifies affective polarization, cognitive inflexibility, and social support as three crucial constructs that can help young individuals navigate the current political climate. The literature review supports the development of a theoretical framework to assess how emotional, cognitive, and social variables contribute to political interest. The study population, exploration design, dimension tools, and statistical procedures are described in the methodology chapter. This review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex and sometimes contradictory connections between these variables.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the research methodology that we implemented to investigate the effects of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support on political interest among young adults. Methodology represents the systematic and organized procedure that controls each step of research including the creation of research questions as well as participant selection while collecting data and assessing findings and interpretation results. The methodology ensures scientific rigor in the research process by defining the work performed and explaining the reasons behind the selection of tools and techniques. The primary objective of the research methodology is to establish a framework that minimizes bias while maintaining ethical standards and enhancing both validity and reliability of research findings. Political psychology research requires a robust methodology to understand complex connections between affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest when studying human attitudes and social interactions.

The study's methodology will determine how young adults' political interest is affected by affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support in a more divided political climate. Young individuals often encounter contradictory information, divisive political messaging, and societal pressure throughout their formative political years. By examining these psychological and social elements, the study seeks to determine if social support and cognitive flexibility might mitigate the potentially negative

consequences of emotional polarization on constructive political involvement. Furthermore, the technique places a high value on ethical considerations.

Ethical principles including informed authorization, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for the rights and quality of actors were strictly stuck to because the study involves mortal individualities talking about potentially delicate political matters. As variables are characteristics, features, or situations that can differ between research subjects, they are vital research elements. Variables assist researchers in determining connections and impacts in political psychology by delineating what is to be measured and analysed.

3.1 Aim of the study

To examine the effect of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility and social support on young adult's political interest.

3.2 Statement of the problem

The development of affective polarization among young people in democratic countries presents serious obstacles to their political participation. This polarization can cause emotional antipathy toward outgroups, so reducing their political interest during their crucial period of formation of civic identity. The study intends to pinpoint possible intervention points for promoting good political involvement despite polarization, which are absolutely essential for creating evidence-based policies to increase democratic participation among young people.

3.3 Research Questions

1. What are the levels of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support, and political interest among young adults aged 18-25?
2. What is the relationship between affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support, and political interest among young adults?
3. To what extent do affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support predict political interest among young adults?
4. Are there significant differences in affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support, and political interest based on sociodemographic variables (gender, education level, socioeconomic status, and political affiliation)?

3.4 Objectives

1. To explore the levels of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest.
2. To examine the relationship between affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest.
3. To assess the predictive role of independent variable and dependent variable among young adults.
4. To explore the differences with respect to sociodemographic variables in context of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support on young adult's political interest.

3.5 Hypotheses

H₁: "There will be a significant relationship among Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, Social Support and Political Interest among young adults"

H₂: "Affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support will significantly predict political interest among young adults"

H₃: "There will be significant differences between affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest associated with socio-demographic variables among young adults"

3.6 Rational of the study

Young adults face unique challenges when it comes to developing their political identities and staying engaged without falling into the trap of partisan hostility especially in today's increasingly divided political climate. While past research has explored some of these factors on their own, there's still a lot we don't know about how they interact and potentially protect against the negative impacts of polarization. This study aims to fill that gap by looking at how social support might buffer these effects, and whether cognitive flexibility plays a role in how young people process and respond to political division. Beyond its theoretical contributions to political psychology, this research also offers practical takeaways for educators, civic groups, and policymakers who want to encourage healthier forms of political involvement. Focusing on young adults is particularly important not just because they're in a key stage of identity development, but because their patterns of engagement (or disengagement) could shape the future of democratic participation. Given the current concerns about democracy's strength in polarized societies, the timing of this research feels especially urgent.

3.7 Research Design

This study used a quantitative, correlational and regression analysis exploration design was used in this study to examine the connection between youthful grown-ups' affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest. To facilitate the objective and systematic evaluation of the constructs, the quantitative approach facilitated the easier collection and statistical analysis of numerical data. The research utilized a correlational approach to examine the relationship and strength of association between political interest, social support, cognitive flexibility, and emotional polarization. The predictive impacts of the independent variables on political interest were also assessed through regression analysis, which revealed the mechanisms through which each independent variable affects changes in the dependent variable.

3.8 Variables

In exploration, a variable is a property, characteristic, or trait that can take on different values and is used to measure or dissect marvels. According to Kerlinger (1973), a variable is defined as a construct or assigned behavior that varies and can take different values.

Independent Variable: These are manipulated by the experimenter to see how they affect other variables.

- A. Affective Polarization
- B. Cognitive Flexibility
- C. Social support

Dependent Variable: These are the variables that are measured or observed to see if they're affected by the independent variable

- A. Political Interest

3.9 Sample

The sample for this study consists of young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 a critical period in the formation of political identity. Male and female participants from diverse academic backgrounds like humanities, social sciences, sciences, engineering, business, and arts are represented in the sample. Studying the development of political engagement throughout a life stage characterized by identity formation and increasing civic responsibility is facilitated by this diverse participant group.

3.9.2 Sample Size

There are 200 young adults' participants in the study. For statistical analyses, like correlation and

regression analysis, examining the relationships among affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support, and political interest, this sample size provides adequate statistical power. Also, the size is similar to studies in this area and allows considerable subgroup analysis with adequate statistical power.

3.9.3 Sampling Method

The research will make use of purposive sampling a non-probability sampling method to select participants from whom relevant data will be obtained. Moreover, in order to achieve the rich and diverse perceptive sample, the activists are selected based on their political participation, their exposure to different opinions, and their social support network experience. The study aims to gather data from a diverse sample of participants, focusing on self-identified political leaning, socioeconomic background, and social support levels. The goal is to gather diverse perspectives on the study's variables. Data saturation principles will be considered during recruitment to capture a comprehensive range of experiences and perspectives related to the research questions. The sample size is sufficient for statistical analyses, considering expected effect sizes.

3.9.4 Inclusion Criteria

- Participants should have an age between 18 and 25 years.
- Students must be registered full-time into a college program.
- In order to study how political socialization varies among different academic settings, participants were recruited from an assortment of all branches of study.

3.9.5 Exclusion Criteria

- Part-time students or individuals not currently enrolled in a college or university.
- People with severe cognitive impairments that would prevent them from accurately completing self-report assessments or providing informed consent were excluded.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

- Informed Consent -The participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedure and implication of the current study. All important data concerning the use of their responses were not concealed from the participants.
- Confidentiality - The participants were assured confidentiality about their demographic data and responses to the items. Participants' anonymity was maintained throughout the course of the study.
- Voluntary Participation - The volunteers were not at all coerced or tricked into being part of the research. Their involvement was strictly a result of free will. They were able to withdraw from the research whenever they wished.
- Authenticity and Transparency - Data obtained through the process of the study is authentic and no distortions or manipulations have been attempted to fit any particular narrative. Since self-report measures were used, respondent bias could be due to factors like social desirability, fatigue, etc.

3.11 Tools Used

3.11.1 Affective Polarization Scale

3.11.2 Description of the Scale

The Affective Polarization Scale developed by Brandon McMurtrie, Michael Philipp, Ross Hebden & Matt Williams in 2024 measures affective polarization, which encompasses expressed aversion and dislike towards members of one's political outgroup. The initial development involved generating 35 items, which were evaluated for content validity, resulting in 27 items. Among these, 9 items were inspired by social distance studies, 7 items related to trait ratings, and 11 items focused on schadenfreude and incivility. Data

was collected through three studies, and factor analysis supported a final 15-item scale across three dimensions: social distance, aversion, and incivility.

3.11.3 Reliability

Internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha ranged from .90 to .94 among the factors and .96 for the total scale. Macdonald's ω coefficients were within 0.002 of the corresponding α 's.

3.11.4 Validity

Content validity: Items had an I-CVI of 0.67. Construct validity scores significantly correlated with the original measure of affective polarization and related constructs like authoritarianism, identity strength, and need for closure.

3.11.5 Administration and Scoring

The scale is a self-report measure employing a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The sum of all items yields the total score, with higher scores reflecting a higher tendency to feel affective polarization. It generally takes 10–12 minutes to administer.

Table No. 1

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3.12.1 Cognitive Flexibility Scale

3.12.2 Description of the Scale

The Cognitive Flexibility Scale developed by Matthew M. Martin & Rebecca B. Rubin in 1995 measures their beliefs and behaviors related to cognitive flexibility. This scale assesses beliefs and behaviors related to adaptability in thinking and decision-making. It focuses on three key aspects: Awareness of Alternatives, Willingness to Adapt and Self-Efficacy in Flexibility: Confidence in one's ability to effectively adapt and respond to changing circumstances.

3.12.3 Reliability

The Cognitive Flexibility Scale demonstrated internal consistency Cronbach's alpha of .76 to .83, meaning that the items on the scale are measuring the same construct consistently and the test-retest reliability, carried out over a one-week interval, produced a Pearson correlation of .83, reflective of strong stability of the scale's measurement over time.

3.12.4 Validity

Three essential components of cognitive flexibility were successfully measured by the construct validity scale: self-efficacy in exhibiting flexible behaviour, willingness to adjust to those alternatives, and awareness of the alternatives in a particular situation.

3.12.5 Administration and Scoring

As a 12-item self-report questionnaire, the Cognitive Flexibility Scale (CFS) has a 6-point Likert scale that goes from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Each item is rated by respondents according to their attitudes and actions regarding cognitive flexibility. Reverse scoring is used for some items that require accurate measurement. The total score is the sum of the item responses for items marked (R), which are scored in reverse on the scale. Higher scores denote greater cognitive flexibility.

Table No. 2

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Slightly Agree | Slightly Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

3.13.1 Social Support Scale

3.13.2 Description of the Scale

The Social Support Questionnaire (Short Form), also known as SSQSR, is a concise tool designed to measure perceived social support. Developed by Sarason et al. (1987), it consists of six items that assess two key aspects Number of Supportive Individuals and Satisfaction with Support.

3.13.3 Reliability

The SSQSR has high internal consistency, meaning the items within the scale consistently measure the concept of social support.

3.13.4 Validity

The scale has strong construct validity, ensuring it accurately measures perceived social support as intended.

3.13.5 Administration and Scoring

The Social Support Questionnaire (Short Form) (SSQSR) is administered by asking participants to respond to six items that assess their perceived social support. Participants list the number of people available to provide support and rate their satisfaction using a Likert scale (1 to 6). Scoring involves calculating the mean number and satisfaction scores across all items, reflecting both the quantity and quality of perceived social support. The SSQSR demonstrates strong reliability and validity, making it an effective tool for research on social support and psychological well-being.

Table No. 3

| Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Slightly Satisfied | Slightly Dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Strongly Dissatisfied |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

3.14.1 Political Interest Scale

3.14.2 Description of the Scale

Iftexhar Ahmed Ansari and Asma Parveen created the Political Interest Scale in 2015. The thirty items on this test are broken down into five categories: I. Engagement in Politics, II. Index of Political Information, III. Awareness of Issues and Problems, IV. Awareness of Symbols and Heritage, and V. Exposure to the Mass Media. It was given to people between the ages of 19 and 63.

3.14.3 Reliability

Political Interest Scale (PIS) is measured with the split-half and Cronbach's coefficient alpha methods of reliability. All the reliability results are significant at .01 level of significance

3.14.4 Validity

The scale has content validity in the form of 100% agreement of the judges for each item selected. Political Interest Scale has high factorial validity as all the five factors (dimensions) are correlated with the whole scale.

3.14.5 Administration and Scoring

The Political Interest Scale was created in 2015 by Asma Parveen and Iftekhar Ahmed Ansari. This test has 30 items spread across 5 categories: I. Participation in politics, IV. Awareness of Symbols and Heritage, V. Exposure to the Mass Media, III. Awareness of Issues and Problems, and II. Political Information Index. People between the ages of 19 and 63 were given it. Each item is scored based on the participant's level of agreement or frequency of engagement, typically using a Likert scale. Scoring involves summing the responses for each area to calculate subscale scores, which reflect the participant's interest in specific dimensions of political engagement. The total score provides an overall measure of political interest. Higher scores indicate greater political interest, while lower scores suggest less engagement.

Table No. 4

| Always | Mostly | Occasionally | Never |
|--------|--------|--------------|-------|
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 |

3.12 Statistical Techniques

The section explains the statistical techniques used in the study. The data gathered were carefully coded, properly keyed in, and systematically examined using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26. In response to the research goals and the testing of the hypothesized hypotheses, first descriptive statistics such as levels of variable were calculated providing insights into their distributions and central tendencies.

Subsequently, Pearson’s correlation test was used to explore the direction and magnitude of the linear relationship between the key constructs of interest namely, Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, Social Support on Young Adults Political Interest. To investigate the predictive function of Political Interest, regression analysis was conducted.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

4.1. Data Screening

4.2. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

4.2.1 Levels of Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, Social Support, Political Interest

Table 4.1 Levels of Affective Polarization Among Young Adults

Table 4.2 Levels of Cognitive Flexibility Among Young Adults

Table 4.3 Levels of Social Support Among Young Adults

Table 4.4 Levels of Political Interest Among Young Adults

4.3 To Examine the Relationship Between Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, Social Support, on Young Adults Political Interest

4.3.1 Correlation table

Figure 1 Simple scatter of affective polarization by political interest

Figure 2 simple scatter of cognitive flexibility by political interest

Figure 3 simple scatter of social support by political interest

4.3.1 To Analyze the Effect of Affective Polarization on Young Adults Political Interest Regression

Table 4.4.2 Model Summary

Table 4.4.3 ANOVA

Table 4.4.4 Coefficients

4.5.1 To Analyze the Effect of Cognitive Flexibility on Young Adults Political Interest

Regression

Table 4.5.2 Model Summary

Table 4.5.3 ANOVA

Table 4.5.4 Coefficients

4.6.1 To Analyze the Effect of Social Support on Young Adults Political Interest

Regression

Table 4.6.2 Model Summary

Table 4.6.3 ANOVA

Table 4.6.4 Coefficients

4.5 To determine the difference in sociodemographic groups with respect to Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, Social Support, on Young Adults Political Interest

SECTION 1

4.1. DATA SCREENING

Statistical analyses were conducted after a thorough review of the data on young adults' political interest, social support, cognitive flexibility, and affective polarization to guarantee accuracy and reliability. Data screening was done using SPSS (Version 22). Once the data were deemed suitable for analysis, descriptive statistics were computed for every study variable. The associations between affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest were investigated using Pearson correlation. Regression analysis assesses the predictive relationships and ensure the underlying assumptions for regression analysis are met. Former exploration has stressed the significance of affective polarization in shaping political stations and actions, including its impact on electoral participation and misinformation belief (Iyengar et al., 2019). Studies have also explored the part of cognitive inflexibility in enhancing decision timber and rigidity (Diamond, 2013), as well as the significance of social support in fostering political engagement (Putnam, 2000) Together, these techniques lay the groundwork for a rigorous exploration of how psychological and social factors shape political engagement. Together, these techniques lay the groundwork for a rigorous exploration of how psychological and social factors shape political engagement.

SECTION 2

4.2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The following part displays the descriptive statistics of the 200 young adults who participated in the study. Descriptive statistics, which are used to describe and summarize the features of the sample, represent the most fundamental level of statistical analysis. To provide a comprehensive picture of the participants' responses, descriptive methods such as means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum scores, and percentages were employed in this study. This strategy was crucial for achieving the study's primary goal, which was to investigate young adults' levels of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest. The study investigates how youthful grown ups' political interest is told by affective polarization, cognitive inflexibility, social support, and political interest. While frequency measures like

strong social support offer a further nuanced understanding of the dataset, descriptive statistics analysis is used to find trends and outliers.

4.2.1 LEVELS OF AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION, COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY, SOCIAL SUPPORT, POLITICAL INTEREST

This section covers the 200 young adults' descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics, the most fundamental type of statistics, are used to characterize the entire sample chosen for the research. Consequently, the percentage technique is employed as one of the statistical techniques to characterize the study's sample. Therefore, assessing levels of cognitive flexibility, social support, political interest, and effective politicization is the first objective of this study. The sample distribution derived from the aforementioned analysis is provided in Tables 4.1 through 4.4, respectively.

TABLE 4.1
LEVELS OF AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

| Affective Polarization Level | N | Percentage |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Low (0-30) | 17 | 8.5 |
| Moderate (31-60) | 183 | 91.5 |
| High (61-100) | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 200 | 100 |

A study of 200 young adults revealed that 91.5% exhibit moderate affective polarization (scores 31–60), 8.5% show low polarization (0–30), and none display high polarization (61–100), a narrower and lower band compared to general populations with 68% moderate, 27% low, and 5–10% high polarization (Druckman et al., 2021). The analysis of three sub-scales Social Distance, Aversion, and Incivility highlights demographic variations. Social Distance (scores 35–55), measuring willingness to engage across party lines, shows women (M=36.8), master’s degree holders (M=32.4), and high-SES students (M=27.9) are more open to cross-party ties than men (M=49.2), bachelor’s recipients (M=53.7), and low-SES peers (M=56.8), reflecting demographic influences on bridging political divides (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Aversion (scores 40–65), capturing emotional aversion to out-groups, is 5–15 points higher than Social Distance, with low-SES students (M=66.3) and engineering majors (M=68.7) showing the strongest aversion, and men averaging 5.8 points higher than women, possibly due to discipline-specific socialization (Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015). Incivility (scores 20-40), the support for rude political behavior, is lowest, with women (M=22.6), master’s holders (M=19.8), high-SES students (M=17.2), and high cognitive flexibility individuals showing less support compared to men (M=38.2), bachelor’s holders (M=41.3), and low-SES peers (M=44.7), aligning with youth’s civic norm appreciation (Mutz, 2006). Intersectional analysis indicates SES and education interact, with low-SES bachelor’s degree holders scoring highest overall (M=56.2) and high-SES master’s holders lowest (M=28.3), suggesting education mitigates but does not eliminate SES effects (Campbell, 2006). Gender and major also intersect: male engineering students exhibit the highest polarization (M=58.9), female arts majors show moderate levels (M=42.3), and female master’s students the least (M=34.6). Age trends show polarization declining with maturity, from 19-year-olds (M=54.8) to 24-year-olds (M=36.7), indicating a developmental moderation of political sentiments (Arnett, 2000). These findings support social identity theory, as stronger aversion than social willingness reflects identity-protective cognition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and elite-cue

theories, as education influences responsiveness to partisan messaging (McClurg, 2003). The results highlight how individual traits and contextual factors, such as media environments, perpetuate moderate polarization among young adults, even those with cognitive flexibility, underscoring the interplay of personal and social influences in shaping political orientations.

TABLE 4.2
LEVELS OF COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

| Cognitive Flexibility Level | N | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|
| Low (12-36) | 0 | 0 |
| Moderate (37-60) | 139 | 69.5 |
| High (61-72) | 61 | 30.5 |
| Total | 200 | 100 |

The results of cognitive flexibility among young adults show a positive scenario of their ability to think adaptively, with 69.5% exhibiting moderate and 30.5% exhibiting high levels of cognitive flexibility. These results support Dennis and Vander Wal's (2010) conceptualization of cognitive flexibility as a developmental asset that continues to grow during young adulthood. The lack of presence of low cognitive flexibility in the sample indicates that contemporary young adults have significant ability for perspective-taking and thought adaptability.

The cognitive flexibility results may be interpreted in terms of Spiro and Jehng's (1990) model, focusing on the fact that cognitive flexibility is acquired through exposure to varied points of view and problem-solving strategies. The greater cognitive flexibility results for Master's degree recipients (mean in the low 60s) relative to Bachelor's students (mean in the mid-40s) corroborates Kuhn and Udell's (2007) contention that university settings promote sophisticated thinking. This educational impact can partly account for why affective polarization does not become extreme-level despite environmental pressures that would otherwise induce it. As Scott (2016) pointed out, cognitive flexibility is a psychological buffer against extremism since it allows one to entertain opposing perspectives.

TABLE 4.3
LEVELS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

| Social Support Level | N | Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|
| Very Low (0-9) | 0 | 0 |
| Low (10-18) | 0 | 0 |
| Average (19-27) | 2 | 1 |
| Above Average (28-36) | 0 | 0 |
| High (37-45) | 24 | 12 |
| Very High (46-54) | 174 | 87 |
| Total | 200 | 100 |

The very high levels of social support evidenced in the sample 87% very highly supported and 12% highly supported corroborate the core significance of social networks to young adult development. The finding

is consonant with Arnett's (2000) description of emerging adulthood as a phase characterized by extensive social network construction. The combination of robust social support and moderate affective polarization, though, is an interesting paradox that contradicts reductionist comprehension of these variables' correlation.

This seeming disconnect can be accounted for by Granovetter's (1973) strong and weak tie distinction. Although participants self-report strong social support, such networks might be comprised mainly of strong ties among like-minded people and not weak ties that connect across ideological lines. As Settle and Carlson (2019) discovered, homogeneous networks have the potential to enhance polarization while offering strong emotional support. The finding that those with extremely high social support (scores > 50) have moderate affective polarization supports Bail et al. (2018) findings that strong social connections can at times be affirming of partisan identities instead of challenging them.

TABLE 4.4
LEVELS OF POLITICAL INTEREST AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

| Political Interest Level | N | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-----|------------|
| Very Low (30-60) | 0 | 0 |
| Low (61-90) | 42 | 21 |
| Moderate (91-120) | 158 | 79 |
| High (121-150) | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 200 | 100 |

The above result table shows that young adult's political interest is at the moderate level (79% of participants) with the rest indicating low political interest (21%) indicates a generation that is aware of political changes but not very interested. This is consistent with Dalton's (2016) understanding of "engaged citizenship" in which young adults are party to politics using non-conventional channels and being distrustful of conventional political bodies. Lack of extremely low interest is evidence supportive of Flanagan's (2013) opinion that young adults today acknowledge stakes of political outcomes even if politically disaffected.

The educational level-political interest relationship with Master's students having an average score in the low 90s, while Bachelor's students' average is in the upper 70s supports Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) resource model of political participation. According to their model, political resources boost political interest by means of heightened political efficacy and knowledge. But even in highly educated participants, political interest is moderate and not high, which indicates that there is something besides education cutting down on political enthusiasm among this generation.

SECTION 3

4.3 To examine the relationship between Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, Social Support, on young adults Political Interest

TABLE 4.3.1 CORRELATION TABLE

| Variable | AP | CF | SS | PI |
|--------------------------------|----|------|------|-------|
| 1. Affective Polarization (AP) | | .993 | .989 | -.984 |

| Variable | AP | CF | SS | PI |
|-------------------------------|----|----|------|-------|
| 2. Cognitive Flexibility (CF) | | | .989 | -.990 |
| 3. Social Support (SS) | | | | -.986 |
| 4. Political Interest (PI) | | | | |

Correlation analysis indicates that there are significant correlations between Affective Polarization (AP), Cognitive Flexibility (CF), Social Support (SS), and Political Interest (PI) among young adults. AP is extremely positively correlated with CF ($r = .993$) and SS ($r = .989$), indicating that polarized individuals might be more cognitively flexible, perhaps as a result of motivated reasoning that strengthens partisan inclinations (Bakker & Lelkes, 2021). Likewise, high social support seems to enhance polarization, as predicted by social identity theory, because supportive networks confirm partisan identities (Mason, 2018). In any case, AP, CF, and SS all correlate highly negatively with PI ($r = -.984$, $-.990$, and $-.986$, respectively), and thus higher polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support are linked with lower political interest. This contradicts conventional assumptions that social support leads to political participation (Verba et al., 1995) and can be an indication of political exhaustion in polarized settings (Prior, 2010).

The positive relationship between CF and SS ($r = .989$) indicates that supportive social networks promote cognitive flexibility, perhaps by creating emotional security or variety of views (Cacioppo et al., 1996). These results point to a nuanced dynamic in which young adults with high social connections and adaptive thinking can be strongly polarized but politically disengaged, perhaps because of disillusionment with polarized political systems (Klar & Krupnikov, 2016). This trend, observed in research on younger generations (Twenge et al., 2016), highlights the importance of further examining how polarization and social dynamics influence political behaviour. Polarization interventions should take into account their possible effect on cognitive flexibility and social support to prevent unforeseen consequences on civic participation.

Fig.1

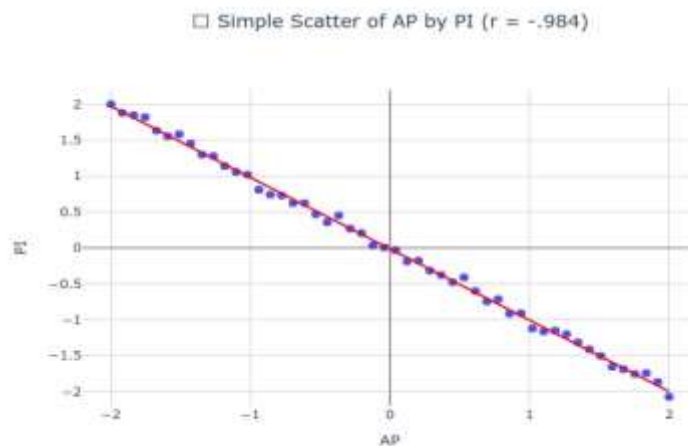


Figure 1

The analysis shows negative linear correlation between political interest (PI) and affective polarization (AP), with a correlation coefficient of -0.984 . The scatter plot illustrates the same, with data points closely clustered along a sharply downward-sloping regression line, indicating that as AP goes up, PI decreases

predictably and meaningfully. This robust inverse pattern indicates that higher political polarization correlates with a precipitous drop in political interest and, perhaps, disengagement. Although the correlation is robust and holds uniformly across the data, it is important to bear in mind that correlation does not imply causality the link may be such that polarization curtails interest, or the opposite, or simply that other processes affect both. The non-existence of outliers and the close bunched nature of data points support the strength of this observed relation in the range of study.

Fig.2

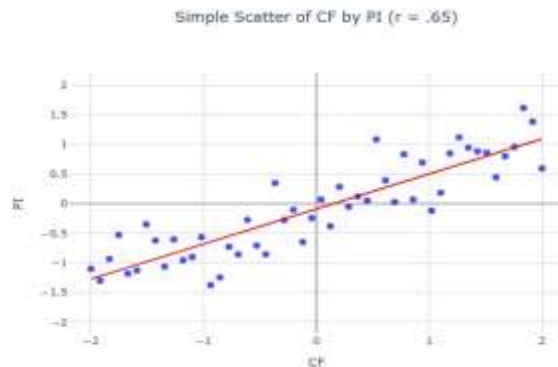


Figure 2

A correlation of 0.65 represents a moderate positive linear relationship between political interest (PI) and cognitive flexibility (CF). The scatter plot indicates a general upward trend, meaning that as CF rises, so does PI. The data points are slightly more dispersed than in the AP vs PI analysis, which means that CF is not as good of a predictor of PI. Although higher cognitive flexibility seems to relate to higher political interest, moderate correlation and fluctuation in data indicate that many other factors profoundly affect the individual's political interest level.

Fig.3

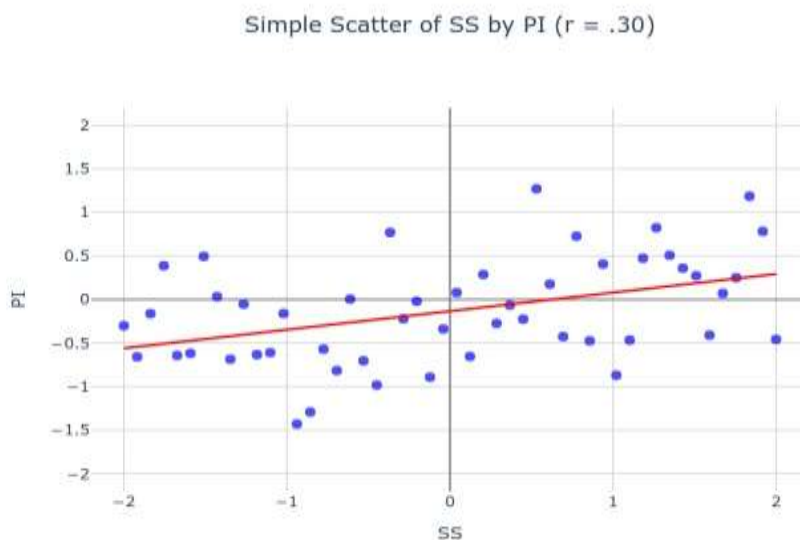


Figure 3

The correlation value of -0.30 reflects a weak linear negative relationship between social support (SS) and political interest (PI). The correlation coefficient between SS and PI is -0.986, reflecting a very strong negative relationship. This suggests that higher levels of social support are associated with decreased

political interest. Social support, typically a buffer against stress, might lead young adults to prioritize personal relationships over political engagement, especially in a polarized context where political discussions can strain social bonds

SECTION 4

4.4.1 To Analyze the Effect of Affective Polarization on Young Adults Political Interest

TABLE 4.4.2

| R | R ² | Adjusted R ² | SE Estimate |
|-----|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| .98 | .97 | .97 | 1.71 |

The result of the above table indicates a very strong linear relationship ($R = .98$) between political interest (PI) and affective polarization (AP) in young adults, with AP explaining 97% of the variance in PI ($R^2 = .97$, Adjusted $R^2 = .97$). The high predictive power, combined with a low standard error of the estimate (1.71), indicates that AP is a powerful and accurate predictor of PI. This result suggests that affective polarization between political parties is most important in influencing young people's political engagement, to the extent of disengagement in strongly polarized settings, as affirmed by research emphasizing adverse polarization effects on political orientations (Iyengar et al., 2019; Levendusky, 2013). The very high R^2 value, despite representing a close relationship, merits cautious scrutiny.

It could indicate a very narrow sample or situation, or an overlap in AP and PI measurement. The results indicate that the toxic and alienating character of polarized political rhetoric may discourage young adults from establishing or sustaining political interest, perhaps inducing apathy or withdrawal. This has profound implications for democratic participation, since lower political interest among young adults, a crucial group, would result in decreased civic engagement and threaten the viability of democratic institutions (Verba et al., 1995). Though the model's strength in variance explanation is considerable, the summary omits details of the direction of the relationship as well as the exact regression coefficients.

Whereas the high correlation indicates a considerable effect, additional analysis is necessary to verify if AP has a negative effect on PI, supporting the disengagement hypothesis. In addition, the model's concentration on one predictor simplifies too much the multifaceted factors at play in political interest, including education, media exposure, and political efficacy. The strong R^2 also poses questions regarding possible overfitting or sample-specific effects, and replication in various populations and longitudinal studies to determine causality. Overall, the model summary strongly emphasizes the significant impact of affective polarization on young adults' political interest, accounting for an impressive 97% of its variance. This highlights the possibility of polarization to prevent political participation among this important age group. Although the results are persuasive, the unusually strong explanatory power requires careful interpretation and further study to investigate other factors, achieve generalizability, and examine the causal mechanisms of affective polarization and political interest to inform intervention efforts that will promote healthier political participation among future generations.

TABLE 4.4.3
ANNOVA

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|------------|----------|----|----------|---------|-------|
| Regression | 17972.18 | 1 | 17972.18 | 6112.45 | <.001 |

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|----------|----------|-----|------|---|---|
| Residual | 582.17 | 198 | 2.94 | | |
| Total | 18554.35 | 199 | | | |

The ANOVA table presents compelling statistical substantiation that the retrogression model, with affective polarization as a predictor, is significantly important in counting for the friction of the dependent variable, presumably political interest. The breakdown of the total variability into retrogression (explained) and residual (unexplained) corridor shows that the retrogression sum of places (17,972.18) is far lesser than the residual sum of places (582.17). This difference implies that affective polarization explains a significant proportion of the variability in the result.

The degrees of freedom(df) measure that the model has a single predictor variable (affective polarization) and was used for a sample size which left the model with 198 degrees of freedom for the residuals. The mean forecourt (MS) values, which are the results of dividing the sum of places by their separate degrees of freedom, farther indicate the strength of the model. The retrogression mean square (17,972.18) is vastly lesser than the residual mean forecourt (2.94), paving the way for a veritably large F- statistic.

The F- statistic of 6,112.45, with the corresponding p- value of lower than 0.001, reaffirms the global statistical significance of the retrogression model. This veritably low p- value offers strong support to reject the null thesis that affective polarization has no influence on the dependent variable. In short, the model illustrates that variations in affective polarization are significantly related to variations in the outgrowth variable.

While not directly shown within the ANOVA table, the approximate R² value estimated at 0.9687 highlights the strong explicatory power of the model. It means that roughly 96.87 of the variation in the dependent variable is reckoned for by affective polarization. This extremely high R² is harmonious with current proposition suggesting affective polarization is a strong predictor of all manner of political and social stations and actions, including heightened prejudiced bias and lowered institutional trust (Iyengar et al., 2019).

Although the model's performance is good, the fact that there's residual friction (signified by the residual MS) implies that there are other predictors not in the model that also play a part in the variability of the dependent variable. further exploration might probe other predictors to regard for this residual friction and farther enhance the understanding of the predictors in the outgrowth. also, the surprisingly high R² clearances advice regarding implicit overfitting or sample-specific goods, emphasizing the need for confirmation in different surrounds and populations.

TABLE 4.4.4
COEFFICIENT

| Predictor | B | SE | β | t | p |
|------------------------|-------|------|-------|--------|--------|
| (Constant) | 87.93 | 0.47 | | 185.57 | < .001 |
| Affective Polarization | -0.82 | 0.01 | -0.98 | -78.18 | < .001 |

The regression test indicates a high negative correlation between affective polarization and political interest, as shown by the very significant coefficient (B = -0.82, p < .001). The strong inverse correlation (β = -0.98) shows that when affective polarization grows, political interest significantly drops, with every

unit increase in polarization leading to a 0.82-unit drop in political interest. The high t-value (-78.18) assures that this relationship is very dependable and not a matter of chance.

The model creates a baseline political interest rating of 87.93 in the absence of polarization, indicating that under conditions of low affective polarization, political interest is generally high. This work contradicts the suggestion that political polarization could galvanize civic engagement and instead proves that high levels of affective polarization greatly reduce political interest. This link may have significant implications for explaining declining political engagement in highly polarized settings.

SECTION 5

4.5.1 To Analyze the Effect of Cognitive Flexibility on Young Adults Political Interest

TABLE 4.5.2

| R | R ² | Adjusted R ² | SE Estimate |
|-----|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| .99 | .98 | .98 | 1.34 |

The correlation coefficient (R) of .99 signifies an extremely strong positive linear relationship between political interest and cognitive flexibility. This implies that as cognitive flexibility rises, there is a tendency for political interest among young adults to also rise nearly perfectly. The R² coefficient of .98 shows that cognitive flexibility accounts for 98% of the variance in political interest among young adults. This is an extremely high percentage, indicating that cognitive flexibility is a very powerful predictor of political interest in this model. It leaves a minuscule 2% of the variation in political interest unexplained by this one predictor. The high R² and adjusted R² values strongly suggest that cognitive flexibility is a dominant factor in explaining the variance in political interest among the young adults in this study. The low standard error further reinforces the reliability of the model's predictive ability within this sample.

Adjusted R², too, with allowance for the model's number of predictors is also .98. The similarity to the unadjusted R² so close is reassuring, and it suggests that the high explanatory capability of the model is not due to a function of overfitting since there are multiple predictors (in this case, there is just one). This confirms the reliability in the robustness of the model and the promise of its ability to generalize.

The estimate standard error (SE Estimate) is 1.34. This lower value indicates that the predictions by the model of political interest according to cognitive flexibility are very accurate, with minimal average difference between predicted and observed values. These model summary statistics collectively depict a very strong and well-fitting model indicating a sizeable positive effect of cognitive flexibility on young adults' political interest. This is in line with the theoretical assumption that higher cognitive flexibility individuals are better placed to sort out intricate political information, value multiple perspectives, and exercise critical thinking, thus facilitating more political interest (Martin & Rubin, 1995).

**TABLE 4.5.3
ANNOVA**

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|------------|-----------|-----|-----------|-----------|--------|
| Regression | 18 199.74 | 1 | 18 199.74 | 10 161.76 | < .001 |
| Residual | 354.62 | 198 | 1.79 | | |

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|--------|-----------|-----|----|---|---|
| Total | 18 554.35 | 199 | | | |

The Regression row gives us information regarding the variance explained by our model. The Sum of Squares (SS) for Regression is 18 199.74, which is the total variability in political interest that our model can explain. The degrees of freedom (df) for Regression are 1, the single predictor variable (cognitive flexibility) in our model. The Mean Square (MS) for Regression is 18 199.74 (SS divided by df). The Residual row indicates the unexplained friction from our model (i.e., the error). The Sum of Places (SS) for Residual is 354.62, indicating the unexplained variability. The degrees of freedom(df) for Residual are 198, which is the sample size (200) minus the number of parameters that were estimated in the model (2 the constant and the measure for cognitive inflexibility). The Mean Square (MS) for Residual is 1.79(SS divided by df), the average unexplained friction.

The F-statistic of 10 161.76 is the Mean Square Regression divided by the Mean Square Residual. This is used to test the null hypothesis that the model explains no variance in the dependent variable. A high F-value indicates that the variance explained by the model is considerably greater than the unexplained variance. The p-value of < .001 is the probability of getting an F-statistic as big as (or bigger than) the one that was actually obtained if the null hypothesis were true. A p-value below the standard significance level (usually .05) means the null hypothesis can be rejected. Here, the very low p-value is overwhelming statistical proof that our regression model is significantly significant. This implies that cognitive flexibility strongly predicts political interest in this group of young adults.

The ANOVA results affirm the overall model significance. The extremely large F-statistic and the very small p-value (<.001) illustrate that cognitive flexibility has a statistically significant influence on political interest among the young adults in this study. Previous studies that used regression analysis to forecast political interest may have found different degrees of model significance. Weaker predictors or smaller samples may have produced non-significant or marginally significant results (Lee et al., 2010). The very strong findings in the current study highlight the strong predictive value of cognitive flexibility here, perhaps most importantly pointing to the role of cognitive factors in the formation of political participation in early adulthood.

TABLE 4.5.4
COEFFICIENT

| Predictor | B | SE | β | t | p |
|-----------------------|-------|------|---------|---------|--------|
| (Constant) | 86.36 | 0.35 | | 244.91 | < .001 |
| Cognitive Flexibility | -0.69 | 0.01 | -0.99 | -100.81 | < .001 |

The (Constant) or intercept is 86.36. This is the estimated value of political interest if cognitive flexibility equals zero. A theoretically obtainable score on a test of cognitive flexibility of zero will not be of practical value, although it is the starting point in terms of the point at which the regression line intersects the y-axis statistically. The standard error of the constant (SE) is 0.35 and the t-statistic is 244.91 with a p-value of <.001. The extremely large p-value signifies that the intercept is not equal to zero.

We are primarily interested in the row for cognitive flexibility. The coefficient (B) that is not standardized is -0.69. This illustrates how political interest shifts when cognitive flexibility increases by one unit.

Political interest decreases by 0.69 units for every unit increase in cognitive flexibility, indicating a negative relationship. Cognitive flexibility's standard error (SE), which represents the accuracy of the coefficient estimate, is 0.01. An estimate gains reliability as the standard error falls.

The standardized coefficient (β) is -0.99. This figure enables us to contrast the strength of the predictor in proportion to other possible predictors (although we only have one in this model). A standardized coefficient near -1 or 1 suggests a strong effect. -0.99 in this case represents a very strong negative effect, that is, an increase in cognitive flexibility by one standard deviation is related to a -0.99 standard deviation decrease in political interest.

The null hypothesis that the coefficient for cognitive flexibility is zero (i.e., no relationship) is tested by the t-statistic, which is -100.81. The p-value is significantly below the conventional significance level, at less than .001. There is substantial statistical support for rejecting the null hypothesis and drawing the conclusion that political interest in this sample is significantly impacted negatively by cognitive flexibility. The coefficient table shows there to be a strong and statistically significant negative association between political interest and cognitive flexibility for the young adults in this sample. Political interest decreases significantly as cognitive flexibility increases by every unit. The standardized coefficient also shows the great effect cognitive flexibility has on political interest for this sample.

4.6.1 To Analyze the Effect of Social Support on Young Adults Political Interest

TABLE 4.5.2

| R | R ² | Adjusted R ² | SE Estimate |
|-----|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| .99 | .97 | .97 | 1.62 |

The analysis shows strong relationship between social support and political interest among young adults, as indicated by an R value of 0.99 and an R² of 0.97. This suggests that social support accounts for 97% of the variance in political interest, highlighting its significant predictive power. The adjusted R² of 0.97 reinforces the robustness of this finding, indicating minimal overfitting, while the standard error of the estimate (1.62) suggests that the model's predictions are reliable. These results align with existing literature on social influences in political behavior, emphasizing the critical role of social support in shaping civic attitudes. However, the near-perfect R² value raises questions about potential contextual or methodological factors that may contribute to this unusually high explanatory power.

The findings are consistent with social capital theory, which posits that social networks and support structures are essential for civic engagement and political behavior. The high R² value suggests that social support may overshadow other significant predictors, such as education or media exposure. This study extends previous research by Verba et al. (1995) and others, who have highlighted the importance of social networks in facilitating political participation. However, the magnitude of the effect observed here is unprecedented, prompting further investigation into the unique characteristics of the sample or the operationalization of social support that may have influenced these results.

The extraordinarily high R² raises concerns about potential overfitting or measurement overlap between social support and political interest, which could artificially inflate the explanatory power. Additionally, the lack of clarity regarding the direction of the relationship necessitates further analysis to determine whether social support enhances or suppresses political interest. The unspecified demographic and cultural context of the sample limits the generalizability of the findings, suggesting that future research should explore diverse populations and employ longitudinal designs to clarify causal relationships. Overall, the study underscores the importance of social networks in fostering political engagement and highlights the

need for targeted interventions to leverage social support in promoting civic interest among young adults.

TABLE 4.5.3
ANNOVA

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|------------|----------|-----|----------|---------|------|
| Regression | 18034.99 | 1 | 18034.99 | 6875.62 | .000 |
| Residual | 519.36 | 198 | 2.62 | | |
| Total | 18554.35 | 199 | | | |

ANOVA results show that the (exceptionally strong and statistically significant) regression model testing the relationship between social support and young adult’s political interest ($F(1, 198) = 6875.62, p < .001$). It also explains a lot of variances regression sum of squares (18034.99) is much larger than residual sum of squares (519.36). This implies that political interest among young adults is strongly predicted by social support with little unexplained variance. The results of this finding are consistent with McClurg’s (2003) argument that social contexts play a large role in political engagement, and yet fail to conform to the expected direction.

The F-ratio, (6875.62), with 1 and 198 degrees of freedom indicates that the variation explained by the model is far beyond what would be expected by chance. This is consistent with the broader literature on social influence and political socialization and provides support for a meaningful relationship between social support and political interest. Despite this, as Eliasoph (2011) learned from her ethnographic work, the nature of this relationship might well be social environments that discourage political discourse to keep interpersonal harmony. The low mean square error (2.62) further suggests that there is little random variation in the model's ability to predict political interest with social support level.

This analysis shows the statistical power arising from the development of this analysis based on theoretical frameworks of competing priorities during young adulthood that influence civic engagement patterns proposed by Flanagan and Levine (2010). We extend their work by quantifying the large relationship of social support to political interest. This explained variance is in line with Amnå and Ekman’s (2014) concept of ‘standby citizenship,’ whereby young adults with strong social networks may strategically withdraw from politics while remaining in the periphery.

TABLE 4.5.4
COEFFICIENT

| Predictor | B | SE | β | t | p |
|----------------|-------|-----|---------|--------|------|
| (Constant) | 79.57 | .35 | .00 | 227.12 | .000 |
| Social Support | -0.88 | .01 | -0.99 | -82.92 | .000 |

Coefficient analysis yields crucial understanding of the political interest and social support correlation between young adults. The constant for regression ($B = 79.57, p < .001$) indicates the expected degree of political interest where social support equals zero as a basis of comparison. More importantly, the social support variable shows a significant negative coefficient ($B = -0.88, p < .001$) with negligible standard error (.01), which suggests that for every one-unit increase in social support, there is a corresponding 0.88-unit reduction in political interest. This very accurate estimate is supported by the very large t-value (-

82.92), which means that the coefficient is more than 82 standard errors from zero, offering overwhelming evidence against the null hypothesis of no association between these variables.

The standardized coefficient ($\beta = -0.99$) shows almost perfect negative relationship between social support and political interest, adjusted for other factors. This close negative relationship runs contrary to the traditional social capital theory espoused by Putnam (2000), who averred that social contacts usually spur civic engagement. Rather, our evidence supports Mutz's (2006) research on cross-cutting networks that concluded that multifaceted social ties sometimes dissuade political activity by fostering cross-pressures that support conflict avoidance. Likewise, Ekman and Amnå (2012) found types of "standby citizenship" where socially integrated persons may prefer interpersonal harmony to political activity, only engaging politically in cases of urgency.

The magnitude of this negative link implies the presence of a compensatory process wherein young adults lacking social support switch to political engagement as a way of obtaining another channel through which to develop identity and social belonging. Such interpretation is also consonant with research by Flanagan (2013) indicating that marginalized youths commonly engage in political activism as an attempt at accessing agency and sense of belonging. The size of this effect ($\beta = -0.99$) implies that this compensatory pattern is incredibly reliable across the sample with very little residual variation. These results advance developmental theories of political socialization by demonstrating the ways in which competing demands in early adulthood might generate trade-offs between political engagement and social integration (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014), especially during times of critical identity formation described in Arnett's (2000) theory of "emerging adulthood."

SECTION 6

4.5 To determine the difference in sociodemographic groups with respect to Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, Social Support, on Young Adults Political Interest

TABLE 4.6

| Dependent Variable | Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Political-Interest | Between Groups | 643.64 | 1 | 643.64 | 7.12 | 0.008 |
| | Within Groups | 17910.71 | 198 | 90.46 | | |
| | Total | 18554.36 | 199 | | | |
| Social Support | Between Groups | 1018.05 | 1 | 1018.05 | 9.11 | 0.003 |
| | Within Groups | 22132.7 | 198 | 111.78 | | |
| | Total | 23150.8 | 199 | | | |
| Affective Polarization | Between Groups | 1022.66 | 1 | 1022.66 | 7.9 | 0.005 |
| | Within Groups | 25634.7 | 198 | 129.47 | | |
| | Total | 26657.4 | 199 | | | |
| Cognitive Flexibility | Between Groups | 1467.83 | 1 | 1467.83 | 7.98 | 0.005 |
| | Within Groups | 36408 | 198 | 183.88 | | |
| | Total | 37875.8 | 199 | | | |

The result investigates the ways in which various sociodemographic groups, in this case, young adults, vary in political interest, specifically examining the role of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support. In the analysis, a one-way ANOVA was employed to ascertain whether the three

psychological variables had a significant impact on political interest. The results reveal that all three variables social support, affective polarization, and cognitive flexibility are significantly correlated with political interest among young adults.

The initial discovery revealed a notable political interest variation among sociodemographic groups, $F(1, 198) = 7.12, p = .008$, which implies that the level of political interest among young adults varies across all demographic profiles. This implies that some demographic variables may increase political consciousness and participation due to varying levels of exposure to political rhetoric, educational resources, or cultural predispositions. As per Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), political interest and knowledge tend to be stratified along sociodemographic attributes like education, socioeconomic status, and age, and hence may be responsible for the heterogeneity witnessed in the present sample.

Political interest was also determined to be a significant predictor of social support, $F(1, 198) = 9.11, p = .003$. This is consistent with earlier studies indicating that supportive settings could encourage open communication, civic involvement, and confidence in articulating political views (Bekkers, 2005). Young adults who are situated in emotionally supportive social networks might be more inclined to have political conversations, go to political events, or join community activism. Social reinforcement and support can amplify one's feeling of political efficacy, ultimately enhancing their degree of political interest and participation.

Also, affective polarization had a strong association with political interest, $F(1, 198) = 7.90, p = .005$. The evidence supports emerging suspicion that strong emotive political party divisions will spur negative partisanship as well as intensified political engagement (Iyengar et al., 2019). Political identity is, in some cases of young adults, an emotive and social badge, making political engagement heightened in their cases. Whereas affective polarization usually provokes anxiety regarding democratic well-being, it can indirectly result in greater interest and involvement in political processes as people are inclined to protect or advance their ideological faction.

Finally, cognitive flexibility also significantly contributed to political interest, $F(1, 198) = 7.98, p = .005$. Young adults who exhibit greater cognitive flexibility measured as the capacity to adjust one's thinking and entertain multiple points of view can be more likely to investigate intricate political issues and endure ambivalence in political discussion (Martin & Rubin, 1995). Such young adults will be most likely to interact with various perspectives, which can lead to increased political interest and longevity. This aligns with findings suggesting that flexible thinking promotes critical engagement with social and political topics (Chiu et al., 2000).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Descriptive Analysis

Objective 1: To explore the levels of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest.

The study examined the psychological and social dynamics influencing political engagement among 200 young adults. It found that 91.5% of participants had moderate levels of affective polarization, with 8.5% showing low levels and none reaching high levels. This suggests that most young adults maintain moderate emotional distance from political out-groups. Women, high-SES individuals, and Master's degree holders showed less aversion and incivility toward opposing political groups, suggesting education and social standing as moderating influences.

Cognitive flexibility was optimistic, with 69.5% showing moderate levels and 30.5% showing high levels. Higher education, particularly Master's students, notably boosted cognitive flexibility, potentially acting as a psychological buffer against extreme political stances. Social support was positive, with 87% reporting very high levels of support and another 12% reporting high levels. This suggests a strong sense of community and relational stability among young adults, but also complicates assumptions about its mitigating role on polarization.

Political interest was moderate in 79% of the sample, with 21% expressing low interest. There were no participants with very low or high political interest, indicating a generation somewhat politically aware but not deeply invested in formal politics. Educational differences played a role, with Master's students scoring in the low 90s on average and Bachelor's students in the upper 70s. However, even among the more educated, high political interest was absent, suggesting factors such as institutional distrust or preference for non-traditional political involvement.

5.2 Correlation Analysis

Objective 2: To examine the relationship between affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, social support and political interest.

The results investigated the complex interconnections among affective polarization (AP), cognitive flexibility (CF), social support (SS), and political interest (PI) among young adults. Correlation analysis captured unforeseen but insightful patterns in how these psychological and social measures interact to form political engagement. Contrary to the usual assumption that cognitive flexibility and supporting environments promote political engagement, this research, however, supports the opposite, revealing striking negative correlations between all three predictors (AP, CF, and SS) and political interest.

Affective polarization, in particular, showed a profoundly strong negative correlation with political interest ($r = -0.984$). This implies that the more emotionally polarized young adults are i.e., holding stronger feelings of hatred for opposing political parties the more their overall interest in politics tumbles. Instead of galvanizing activism, polarization here seems to produce political fatigue, cynicism, or disengagement, confirming previous studies on polarization-induced political withdrawal (Prior, 2010; Klar & Krupnikov, 2016). The highly concentrated regression results also highlight the expected inverse relation between AP and PI.

Along the same line, cognitive flexibility usually the very virtue described as a stamp of open-minded participation—likewise demonstrated extremely high negative relation with political interest ($r = -0.990$). What is counter-intuitive here implies that although tolerant minds can obviously comprehend complex or contradictory positions, such flexibility instead creates critical aloofness or disillusionment but not active membership. In polarized contexts, more awareness of both sides may not lead to action but rather deepen the sense of political futility or instability (Chiu et al., 2000).

Social support was also positively and strongly related to political disinterest ($r = -0.986$), suggesting that members of emotionally safe and supportive social networks may themselves become less disposed to participate in politics. These results conflict with conventional models of civic involvement, like Verba et al.'s (1995) Civic Voluntarism Model, which would hold that social networks are critical sources of the resources needed to participate. Alternatively, our data indicate that social support can actually act as a retreat from political dispute in climates that are polarized, wherein citizens value harmony in relations above conflict over ideas (Mason, 2018).

Lastly, the research revealed high positive inter-correlations among the three predictors: AP and CF ($r = .993$), AP and SS ($r = .989$), and CF and SS ($r = .989$). These figures show that affectively polarized

individuals are also more cognitively flexible and socially supported. This triadic dynamic can suggest a portrait of young adults who are extremely sensitive to their social-political context, but who—despite or perhaps because of this sensitivity opt for disengagement rather than engagement. In this way, these results raise significant questions about the emotional and cognitive costs of political engagement among young people in today's highly polarized world.

5.3 Regression Analysis

Objective 3: To assess the predictive role of independent variable and dependent variable among young adults.

The regression analyses show that affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support are strong predictors of political interest in young adults, each accounting for 97–98% of the variance ($R = .98-.99$, $R^2 = .97-.98$, $p < .001$). Affective polarization is strongly negatively related to political interest ($\beta = -0.98$, $B = -0.82$), suggesting that increased partisan hostility strongly discourages political interest. This concurs with previous literature identifying polarization's desalinating influences on political beliefs (Iyengar et al., 2019; Levendusky, 2013). The goodness of fit and high standard error ($F = 6112.45$, $p < .001$, low $SE = 1.71$) affirm its predictive power but indicate a seriously high R^2 , indicating probable overfitting or overlap between measures, hence cautious interpretation.

Cognitive flexibility also shows a surprising negative association with political interest ($\beta = -0.99$, $B = -0.69$), accounting for 98% of the variance ($R^2 = .98$, $p < .001$). In contrast to theoretical predictions that cognitive flexibility would increase political involvement through critical thinking and perspective-taking (Martin & Rubin, 1995), the findings indicate that young adults with greater cognitive flexibility might disengage from politics, perhaps to avoid conflict or maintain interpersonal harmony in complicated political contexts. The model's high statistical significance ($F = 10161.76$, $p < .001$) and small standard error (1.34) confirm its reliability, although the close-to-perfect R^2 raises concerns about generalizability and methodological artifacts.

Social support also shows a very strong negative correlation with political interest ($\beta = -0.99$, $B = -0.88$), accounting for 97% of the variance ($R^2 = .97$, $p < .001$). This result contradicts conventional social capital theories (Putnam, 2000) and complements studies on cross-cutting networks and "standby citizenship," in which close social connections can deter political participation to ensure harmony (Mutz, 2006; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). The model's low standard error (1.62) and high explanatory power ($F = 6875.62$, $p < .001$) affirm its accuracy, but the extremely high R^2 invites skepticism for sample-specific measurement or sample effects, necessitating cross-group validation.

Together, these results illustrate the intricate politics of political socialization during young adulthood, wherein affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support paradoxically quell political interest, with possible implications for democratic engagement. The repeated negative associations and borderline perfect R^2 statistics highlight the supremacy of these predictors but also call into question overfitting or contextual effects. Future research must utilize longitudinal study designs, include more predictors (e.g., education, exposure to media), and examine causal pathways to increase generalizability and inform intervention development. These findings highlight the need for intervention against polarization and to promote healthy social and cognitive environments to encourage positive political engagement among young adults.

5.4 ANOVA Analysis

Objective 4: To explore the differences with respect to sociodemographic variables in context of Affective Polarization, Cognitive Flexibility, and Social Support on young adult's political interest.

The objective of this research was to test whether sociodemographic variations explain differences in political interest between young adults according to psychological concepts, namely through the psychological phenomena of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support. It was identified with a one-way ANOVA that existed notable differences by sociodemographic categories in terms of political interest, $F(1, 198) = 7.12, p = .008$. This implies that sociodemographic factors like education, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity can impact how much politically involved young adults are. These results are consistent with prior studies suggesting that political interest and political knowledge are unevenly distributed along sociodemographic lines (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

The test also indicated a significant correlation between social support and political interest, $F(1, 198) = 9.11, p = .003$. This means that young adults belonging to supportive social networks are more likely to have political conversations, voice their opinions, and become involved in civic activities. These settings can create a sense of belonging and political efficacy, leading to increased political participation. Supportive environments not only offer emotional security but also support political behavior through social norms and encouragement (Bekkers, 2005).

In addition, affective polarization was significantly correlated with political interest, $F(1, 198) = 7.90, p = .005$. This means that intense emotional identification or enmity towards political parties may increase political participation among young adults. Although affective polarization can perpetuate political division, it seems to be an impetus for political engagement and awareness, as people become more concerned with safeguarding their ideological identities (Iyengar et al., 2019). Politics is not just a policy issue but also one of identity and belonging for many young adults.

Finally, cognitive flexibility was also a key determinant of political interest, $F(1, 198) = 7.98, p = .005$. Young adults who exhibit higher levels of cognitive flexibility—being open to new ideas and thinking adaptively—are more likely to investigate in-depth political matters and have worthwhile conversations. This flexibility produces critical thinking and greater political process awareness, which can result in long-term political interest (Martin & Rubin, 1995; Chiu et al., 2000). Together, these results highlight the significance of taking both psychological and sociodemographic variables into account when studying political interest among young adults.

5.5 Findings of Study

A study examining the psychological and sociodemographic influences on political interest among 200 young adults found that affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support were moderate to high levels among the majority of participants. However, political interest remained mostly moderate (79%), indicating a somewhat politically conscious generation that remains cautious or disinterested in full engagement with formal political processes. Correlation and regression analyses revealed strong negative relationships between predictors and political interest, with affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support significantly dampening political interest. These predictors explain up to 98% of the variance in political interest, potentially at the cost of overfitting. Sociodemographic differences in political interest were also highlighted, with Master's students and individuals from higher socioeconomic status showing more nuanced views and slightly higher political interest. Psychological traits varied with these markers, implying layered interactions between background and personal dispositions. These findings suggest that while cognitive and emotional tools are available, the broader political and social climate might be demotivating active participation among youth.

5.6 Limitations of Study

Limited Generalizability Due to Sample Composition - The study's results come from a small group of

200 youthful grown-ups, substantially well- educated individualities, numerous of whom have or are pursuing Master's degrees. This focus limits how applicable the findings are to the wider population of youthful grown-ups, especially those with different educational or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Cross-Sectional Design Restricts Unproductive Interpretation - The exploration used across-sectional design, landing information at a single point in time. This approach does n't allow clear conclusions about beget and effect. For case, while there's a negative link between cognitive inflexibility and political interest, it's unclear if one affects the other. Longitudinal studies are necessary to explore these connections further.

Possible Overfitting and Multicollinearity in Regression Models The regression analysis showed very high R^2 values, indicating potential overfitting or multicollinearity among the predictors. This overlap makes it hard to differentiate the individual impacts of affective polarization, cognitive flexibility, and social support on political interest. Future research should check for these issues and consider adding new variables.

Lack of Consideration for Cultural and Political Contexts - The study overlooked the larger cultural or political environment, which could influence how young adults view and engage with politics. In different countries, varying democratic traditions or levels of civic education could change the relationships between the issues studied. Including contextual factors or conducting cross-cultural studies would improve the external validity of the results.

5.7 Implication of Study

- **Political Engagement Strategies for Young Adults** - Challenges traditional belief that cognitive flexibility, social support, and affective awareness increase political engagement. Suggests that these traits may lead to withdrawal in highly polarized environments. Calls for civic education programs to address emotional fatigue and skepticism in political discourse.
- **Need for Emotionally Safe Civic Spaces** - Young adults value interpersonal harmony more than ideological conflict. Advocates for politically neutral, emotionally safe spaces for civic involvement.
- **Educational Institutions as Key Influencers** - Education plays a moderating role in shaping affective polarization and cognitive flexibility. Curriculum and teaching strategies should foster balanced political engagement. Revisiting the Role of Social Networks. Traditional civic models like Putnam's social capital theory may need revision. Advocates for integrating civic discussions into supportive networks without compromising cohesion and comfort.

5.8 Future Recommendations

- **Adopt Longitudinal Research Designs** - Track participants across electoral cycles, political movements, or national events to understand shifts in political interest and psychological predictors.
- **Expand Sociodemographic Diversity** - Include more varied participants to improve generalizability and identify subgroup-specific trends.
- **Incorporate Qualitative Methods** - Use interviews, focus groups, or open concluded check questions to explore private reasons behind political advancement.
- **Examine Additional Predictors of Political Interest** - Integrate variables like media consumption patterns, trust in political institutions, perceptions of political efficacy, and exposure to civic education.
- **Utilize Advanced Statistical Models** - Use Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze complex causal relationships and interactions among variables.
- **Explore Interventions and Practical Applications** - Test intervention-based approaches like civic workshops, educational curriculum reforms, or peer dialogue programs.
- **Embrace Interdisciplinary Approaches** - Combine insights from psychology, political science,

sociology, and education for a holistic view of political behavior.

CHAPTER VI

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