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STUDYING THE RELATIONSHIP OF NATIONALITY, IDEOLOGY AND AFFECTIVE  
POLARIZATION: THE CASE OF ESTONIA

MA thesis

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## Authorship Declaration

I have written this Master thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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..... / position /

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*15.05.2023*

## Abstract

Estonia is a strongly divided country on an ethnic basis, in which approximately 24% of the population is Russian-speaking. Competition between ethnic groups for different values, like public resources and political representatives, increases polarization and creates conflicts. In recent centuries, partisan-ideological sorting has taken place, which has increased the strength of political identities and polarized mass political behavior. Such splitting and partisan-ideological sorting lead to affective polarization, which is one of the main concerns that threaten the well-being of democracy. This Master's thesis examines how ethnicity and ideology affect affective polarization in Estonia. In the case of the years selected for analysis, it can be seen that while ethnicity played an important role and was a more important indicator in the study of affective polarization, in 2022 ideological self-placement was the more important factor in affective polarization. In addition, it turned out that the level of affective polarization is higher for people who ideologically place themselves at the extremes than those who place themselves more moderately on one or the other side of the left-right scale. However, from the linear regressions carried out in the work was seen that ideological self-placement, ethnicity and age, and gender used as control variables describe a small variation of affective polarization, therefore, it is important to investigate what other factors are influencing this phenomenon in the future.

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## 1. Introduction

Estonia is a strongly divided country on an ethnic basis. In 2022, 315 242 people of Russian nationality lived in Estonia, approximately 24% of our population (Population Figure, 2022). Bradley and Chauchard (2022, p. 3) bring out that: “Ultimately, the more individuals within a society that identify with an ethnic group which has access to political power, the less incentive there will be for those individuals (and groups) to mobilize based on the logic of political exclusion.” In Estonia, however, the problem is that minorities, mainly Russian-speaking Estonians, do not have a direct political party that would stand up for the values and wishes of this particular group. As there is no direct access to politics through a political party representing minorities, escalating the conflict is also potential. Since we have such a large number of people who are not Estonians by ethnicity, this distribution at the national level also impacts affective polarization. However, the ethnic divide threatens the implementation of the political process because the values of people and ethnic groups are different (Bazzi & Gudgeon, 2021). Competition between ethnic groups for different values - public resources and political representatives - increases polarization and creates new conflicts (Bazzi & Gudgeon, 2021). As a result of the ethnic divide, political mobilization can occur - a situation where interest groups favoring specific political groups emerge, which can influence political actions and reshape public opinion (Snyder, 2000). Such political mobilization also leads to a new phenomenon in which ethnic minorities create their own political parties, although yes, in the case of Estonia, they do not exist. As a result, groups arise that are charged and produce negative impulses, and because of this, enmity also arises between different groups (Horowitz, 2001). More serious ethnic divisions can lead to deeper problems than political polarization. Horowitz (2001) points out that ethnic division is also a threat to the survival of democracy, as it can lead to one-party central politics and incite those left out to protests and riots.

Affective polarization can be defined as a situation where, in addition to expressing their support for the party they like, voters also feel intense negativity and opposition to the parties they do not support (Iyengar et al., 2019). Affective polarization can lead to different problems. Affective polarization is one of the main concerns that threaten the well-being of democracy (Hernández et al., 2021). One of the negative aspects of affective polarization is that it affects people's satisfaction with democracy. This is associated with the fact that when there are negative feelings toward other political parties, their coming to power is more

repulsive for people (Wagner, 2021). In addition, a situation may arise where there is no consensus between political parties due to negative attitudes toward each other (Reiljan, 2021. p. 16). This means the decision-making process can become almost impossible because the parties have negative feelings toward each other, which could bring a standstill in politics. Reiljan (2021) Points out that in the case of affective polarization, social groups arise between which distance exists, which is a determining aspect in terms of the strength of polarization. This means that the greater the (emotional) distance between groups, the greater the strength of polarization and affective polarization.

The connection between affective polarization and the ethnic divide has been pointed out before. Reiljan (2021) points out that although it is not yet known and widely studied whether the level of affective polarization is higher in more ethnically divided countries, the nature of the ethnic divide is still one of the causes of affective polarization. Although there are other sources of conflict in society, ethnic differences can be the basis for new dimensions of conflict. Reiljan (2021) also proves in his doctoral thesis that a higher level of affective polarization is correlated with the ethnic gap, regardless of the strength of party identity. Bradley & Chauchard (2022) also describe the same thing and point out that behind the degree of affective polarization is not only ideological polarization but also ethnic differences whereby the addition of ethnic variables affects levels of affective polarization. This means that levels of affective polarization may indicate ethnic divisions and the two phenomena are interrelated. Therefore, the relationship between affective polarization and ethnic division must also be studied in the context of this thesis.

Affective polarization has been studied primarily in the USA, and more should be discussed about this topic in Europe. Therefore, it would be essential to reflect on this topic also in the European context and to find out what the level of affective polarization is in Europe and especially in Estonia. Reiljan (2019) has pointed out that this phenomenon also exists in the European context and that affective polarization among parties also exists in Estonia. This study looked into the state of affective polarization in Estonia after the 2019 elections. As expected, the results show that the most negative feelings are primarily related to the right-populist EKRE party (Reiljan, 2019). Speaking about the influence of nationality in this study, Reiljan has pointed out that in the case of the Center Party, we can talk about both Estonian and Russian voters, whose results show that the attitude of Estonian voters towards Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) was moderately negative. Still, the attitude of Russian voters was significantly more negative (Reiljan, 2019). In Estonia, however,

affective polarization has been studied very little, and its nature and factors affecting it have not been studied. In doing so, it is important to examine how affective polarization in Estonia has changed over time, how ideology has influenced this phenomenon, and what the role of nationality has been since there is a large ethnic minority in Estonia that can influence the situation of affective polarization. The importance of this topic also lies in the fact that the results of this study can help us better understand the foundations of affective polarization in a society that is strongly divided on an ethnic basis and potentially be transferred to other countries in which the ethnic gap is at a similar level compared to Estonia.

The bigger goal of this master's thesis is to investigate the importance of the factors affecting affective polarization in the analyzed years. In this thesis, I will try to answer three research questions:

- I. How strong is the relationship between affective polarization and ethnicity in Estonia?
- II. How has people's ideological self-placement affected their feelings towards different parties?
- III. How has the importance of ethnicity and ideological self-placement changed over time?

To answer my research questions, I use data from 2011, 2019, and 2022 about voters' party preferences and like-dislike ratings for various Estonian political parties, their political self-position, and their ethnicity. During the analysis, I find an indicator of affective polarization at the individual level in Estonia. For this purpose, I prepare like-dislike matrices, which show how people feel about different political parties and what the situation of affective polarization is in different years. I then conduct regression analyses to see the relationship between affective polarization and ethnicity and between affective polarization and ideological self-placement to see how these variables influence affective polarization. In addition, I use the control variables, age, and gender, to see if they affect the affective polarization indicator. I will graphically show how the indicator of affective polarization has changed in different years based on ethnicity and how has the role of ethnicity changed when talking about affective polarization.

## 2. Central Concepts

### 2.1. Affective polarization

Although a lot of attention has been paid to affective polarization in recent years, a single concept has yet to be developed that would allow a complete understanding of the nature of affective polarization and how it looks in different political situations. The purpose of this section is to discuss different definitions of affective polarization and outline the conceptual approach I will take on the phenomenon. In polarization studies, in general, the basis of polarization is a population that is divided into different ideological groups whose degree of homogeneity and distance between groups determine the extent of polarization (Reiljan, 2021). In the context of this work, affective polarization is conceptualized primarily in terms of political parties and different voters - what is the distance and size between these groups?

Affective polarization is a phenomenon in which an emotional opposition exists between different social groups (Wagner, 2021). This means that there is an "us" versus "them" confrontation, where those groups whose political views do not match those of "us" will be pushed away. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) point out the same thing and say that affective polarization is a certain divergence between different social groups. During this divergence, in- and out-party confrontations arise (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015). Reiljan (2021) points out that a person who likes all political parties or has neutral feelings towards these parties is not affectively polarized according to the given explanation, and the same applies to those people who do not like any political party or against whom they are not shown at all support. The concept of affective polarization has usually been studied either on the individual or country level. On the individual level polarization level is a result of simultaneous (positive) in-group and (negative) out-group feelings (Wagner, 2021). On a country level, the affective polarization is based on a composite indicator at the system level, which is the average of in-group and out-group polarization. This approach is the most frequently used indicator in the study of affective polarization, and it essentially describes an average version at the individual level (Wagner, 2021; Reiljan 2020).

Connections are seen between affective polarization and partisanship, but Reiljan (2021) points out that affective polarization involves more than negative partisanship, and those two concepts are often mistakenly put together. Affective polarization is a combination of positive

and negative partisanship. It should be remembered that, while negative partisanship and affective polarization are correlated, negative partisanship means that positive feelings do not exist toward any other political party (Reiljan, 2021; Wagner 2021). Thus, affective polarization is related to partisanship, but the term of affective polarization is sometimes wrongly conceptualized, especially in the US context, and based solely on negative partisanship. The interpretation of affective polarization primarily in terms of negative partisanship has come from the fact that there is a strong opposition between Republicans and Democrats, and this is also expressed in their attitude, and negativity is actively shown towards out-party members (Wagner, 2021). However, it has placed greater emphasis on the study of negative partisanship (see Bankert, 2020; Medeiros & Noël, 2014), which is wrongly associated with affective polarization.

Since this paper deals with a multiparty system, it is important to conceptualize affective polarization primarily from this point of view. Under this concept, Wagner (2021) points out that affective polarization is a phenomenon in which there are two opposing camps with one or more political parties. Reiljan (2021) adds his own approach to Wagner's concept, in which he claims that in a multiparty system, all political parties are rivals and fight for their votes. According to this conceptualization, the indicator of affective polarization remains higher if we take into account that the polarization of the voters of each party is considered separately instead of dividing them into different groups (Reiljan, 2021, 20-21). Thus, affective polarization is a phenomenon in which (political) contradictions arise between different social groups, and social groups are primarily for political self-position, and are not classified into similar camps based on the ideological views of political parties. Important is the contradiction between the voters' attitude towards the party they support and what the attitude towards other parties is. Although a voter may have a definite party preference, they may still show positive feelings towards other similar parties. Thus, affective polarization is not just a difference between two opposing groups, as Wagner (2021) pointed out, but rather it is about the competition of several political parties and how voters behave and what the voters' feelings are in relation to other political parties, as Reiljan (2021) pointed out.

### 2.1.2. Affective polarization in Europe

Although studies of affective polarization have been mainly US-centric, in recent years, more and more studies of this phenomenon have also begun in Europe. To date, it has been found that affective polarization is a phenomenon that exists in Europe, but its extent varies from

country to country. The main goal of this chapter is to point out what has been found so far about affective polarization in Europe and what are the possible differences with the rest of the world.

Reiljan (2020) has pointed out during his study conducted in Europe that affective polarization is very sharp in multi-party systems, and in some places, it is even higher compared to the United States. Social groups have emerged in Europe whose hostility towards other groups is so sharp that other groups are valued very low (Reiljan, 2020). In addition, it has been pointed out that ethnicity is an important variable in the study of affective polarization, and in countries with a high ethnic division and a large number of political parties representing ethnic groups in parliament, the level of affective polarization is also higher (Ibid.). Wagner (2021) has prepared a study of affective polarization, which includes a significantly larger number of analyzed countries. Similar to the study by Reiljan (2020), Wagner (2021) also found that affective polarization as a phenomenon is much more evident outside the United States. In addition, he points out that the results of such a broad-based study show that in countries with a higher level of affective polarization, satisfaction with democracy is low, but voter turnout and people's involvement in politics are at a significantly higher level compared to countries with a lower level of affective polarization (Wagner, 2021).

The level of the country's affective polarization has been studied in Finland, and this study was primarily based on the country as a whole and it was found that the level of affective polarization has increased significantly in the years 2015-2019 - from 3.9 to 4.45 (Kekkonen & Ylä-Anttila, 2021). In addition to the current state of affective polarization, what causes affective polarization was also assessed. The main reason for the increase in affective polarization was out-party hostility rather than in-party favoritism (Ibid.). A similar study was also conducted in the Netherlands, where it was researched whether respondents distinguish between parties and partisans (Harteveld, 2021). It was found that with the increase in ideological distance, dislike for other groups also increases, and the highest level of polarization is between different political groups, and non-political groups are treated better (Ibid.). Similar to Estonia, where EKRE was most negatively viewed (Reiljan, 2019), it can also be seen in the Netherlands that the biggest affective polarization exists between radical-right populists and their opponents (Harteveld, 2021). In addition to the Netherlands, the same phenomenon can also be seen in other parts of Europe, where supporters of

radical-right parties are uniformly and homogeneously opposed to supporters of other political parties and vice versa (Harteveld et al., 2022).

Until now, affective polarization has been studied in Europe, for example, by country (See Gidron et al., 2019; Harteveld, 2019; Knudsen, 2021), but Bettarelli et al. (2022) conducted the study by region. The results show that although it is possible to assess the situation of affective polarization by country, the research by region has an important role, because the level of affective polarization varies in different regions within countries (Ibid.). Researching by region allows you to discover interesting indicators. Thus, the study shows that Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain or the United Kingdom are countries where regions with both high and low affective polarization exist at the same time (Ibid.). This, in turn, means that when assessing the level of affective polarization, it is sometimes wrong to say that changes are taking place in the country as a whole. Even a change in one specific region can affect the indicator of affective polarization of the entire country, even if the indicator remains at the same level in other regions.

### 2.1.3. Affective polarization in Estonia

Relatively little attention has been paid to affective polarization in Estonia. So far, Reiljan has covered the topic of affective polarization in Estonia in 2019 after the Riigikogu elections. Based on the data of 2019, average ratings of political parties were prepared, in which voters were divided into different groups - voters of the Reform Party, voters of the Center Party, and so on - and their average rating in relation to other political parties was calculated, which illustrated the level of affective polarization in Estonia (Reiljan, 2019). The results of the six analyzed political parties showed that partisan affective polarization is a phenomenon that exists in Estonia and, as expected, EKRE is the political party that is causing the most negative feelings. It can also be seen from the analyses prepared by Reiljan (2019) that Estonia also has a national peculiarity when talking about affective polarization. This is especially visible in the case of the voters of the Center Party, who are, so to speak, divided into the Estonian and Russian camps. This shows that if the opinion of EKRE is moderately negative among Estonian voters, this indicator is significantly lower among people of other ethnicities - mainly Russian (Ibid., 23-24). As expected, the most affectively polarized are the two most different parties - EKRE and Social Democrats, with scores of 2.8 and 2.2 (Ibid., 24).

Reiljan (2019) has also pointed out that the situation of affective polarization has improved in Estonia compared to 2011. At that time, the EKRE party did not exist, but there was great opposition between Reform and the Center Party, and the improvement of the situation was probably helped by the fact that Jüri Ratas became the chairman of the Center Party (Ibid., 27; Talving, 2020), who, in addition to the Russian-speaking electorate, also focused on Estonian-speaking voters. Thus, the situation with affective polarization changed quite a lot between 2011 and 2019, but it still needs a more recent investigation, which would show what the situation is today, how the rhetoric of EKRE has affected this indicator and what is the role of nationality in the development of this phenomenon. As far as I know, there are no more studies on affective polarization in the Estonian context, and it is a relatively unexplored topic.

## 2.2. National identity

National identity is a sense of belonging to a country that is linked to cultural, historical and traditional practices (Triandafyllidou, 1998; McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015). On the basis of this concept, "us" vs. "them" is defined, and the main purpose of national identity is the survival of the state and people, the transmission and preservation of views (Triandafyllidou, 1998). Although national identity is important for people, it is not thought about on a daily basis and is not given much emphasis. It comes up on the agenda only when the situation requires collective action and response, and people need to stand up for certain values (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015). Triandafyllidou (1998) points out that national identity is something that binds people into common groups and makes them work together both within the group and as a group as a whole. The purpose of the following chapters is to describe the nature of national identity in Estonia and its importance. In addition, I will point out the identity of the various political parties in Estonia, the main values the parties stand for and what ideology they represent.

### 2.2.1. National identity in Estonia

Feldman (2001) points out that Estonia's national identity is in danger because more and more attempts are being made to identify with the West, and national identity is disappearing. However, the discourse of national identity has been relatively little studied in the former

federal republics, and its nature has been mapped less than in other parts of the world (Feldman, 2001). Feldman (2001) points out that with the fading of the national identity, more and more of Estonia's policy-making and prominent positions are going into the hands of ethnic minorities, which threatens the survival of the national identity. The purpose of this chapter is to show what is the nature of national identity in Estonia, what it consists of, and what are the main topics that are reflected in the literature on national identity as identity is somewhat linked to ideology.

Estonia's national identity has grown under the rule of the Soviet Union and with the desire to belong to the Western cultural space. Feldman (2001, 11) said that: "Estonian identity is represented as an identity under a constant existential threat from the neighboring alien civilization. Because Soviet occupation forced Estonia into the culturally alien Slavic world, Estonia must purify itself from these alien influences and reclaim its Western character today." It has left a mark and also given impetus to a certain anti-Russian attitude, as the almost 50-year period of Russification during the Soviet Union gave an impetus to resist it (Petersoo, 2007), and this is felt to some extent even today. Estonians distinguish themselves from Russians by firmly saying that they are a separate nation that does not speak Russian, but at the same time, they show support and identification with Finland (Ibid.).

Berg (2002) adds to the Estonian national identity a connection about territorial ownership - the national identity in Estonia is based on the land that belongs to the Estonian state. At the same time, it is pointed out that after being separated from the (Western) world for a long time, people grew up wanting to have their own country, which would be a completely separate entity (Berg, 2002; Feldman, 2001). In general, Estonia's national identity is based on the country's territory, culture, and language. A certain anti-Russian attitude is also important, which is due to the isolation during the Soviet Union and the desire to become a free and Western country. In the context of this work, it is interesting to see the difference between Estonian and Russian voters.

## 2.2. National Minority

To explain the concept of a national minority, it is important to look at where it started. Pan et al. (2018) point out that the idea of a national minority is related to the number of people groups/different cultures found in Europe is over a hundred. Still, the number of countries is about half that, which means that each country does not have "its own" nation, so to speak.

Pan et al. (2018) bring out that in the nineteenth century, the idea of a nation-state arose, aiming to resolve the disparity between peoples and states in Europe artificially. As a result, states should have been created with an ethnically homogeneous population. However, such a situation, as we know it today, is impossible, as it is impossible to create an ethnically homogeneous living environment in any country. Therefore, it is possible to call those people who are not ethnically "belong to the country" in which they live as national minorities - the country's citizens. Still, they are not ethnically citizens of this country. The following chapters outline what national minorities are and what this concept entails. In chapter 2.3.2, Ethnic Minorities in Estonia, I overview the main ethnic minorities living in Estonia, how they are distributed in the Estonian population, and what problems big national minorities may carry.

### 2.2.1. Ethnic minorities

As previously mentioned, ethnic minorities are not the indigenous people of the given country where they currently live - that is, they are immigrants or their descendants whose culture, customs, and language differ from the local one (Pan et al., 2018). However, these minorities are more than just a group of people who live in a certain country - they are a group of people who have to get used to a new political and economic system, being influenced both by the country from which they come, but also by the country where they are currently located (Brubaker, 1995).

The main problem in defining a national minority arises from the nature of this definition. Most texts do not give a general meaning to this term. Benoit-Rohmer (1996) speculates that the lack of a unified definition of "ethnic minority" is because the concept is so broad and understood in different ways that it is difficult to come up with a definition that covers everything and satisfies all parties. Although Benoit-Rohmer's text is written a long time ago, it is still relatively relevant, as even today, I could not find a unified concept of a national minority in the sources available to me. Yes, there is talk about the need to protect the rights of minorities (See Feldman, 2001; Pan et al., 2018 ), but there does not seem to be a common term for a national minority in the scientific literature.

The term "ethnic minority" could be used in different ways. For example, it could represent a group of people that have been historically discriminated against. Still, at the same time, this term could represent a group of people who seek greater political representation. In the context of this paper, a national minority refers to a group of people who are not indigenous

but can participate in the political decision-making process. This means that people who have immigrated to the country and their future generations. The ethnic minority's culture, language, and historical experiences differ from most people's.

### 2.2.2. Ethnic minorities in Estonia

Representatives of approximately 190 different ethnic groups live in Estonia, the largest of which are Russians, Ukrainians, Finns, and Belarusians (Ministry of Culture, 2021; Integratsiooni Sihtasutus). The Ministry of Culture (2021) has brought out that a national minority means an Estonian citizen who: “reside in the territory of Estonia; have long-term, sound and permanent ties with Estonia; differ from Estonians by their ethnic belonging, cultural characteristics, religion or language; are led by their wish to collectively maintain their cultural customs, religion or language which are the basis for their common identity.” The largest ethnic minority in Estonia is the Russians, whose abundance in Estonia was caused by the activities of the Soviet Union after World War II and who arrived in Estonia primarily as workers through "controlled" migration (Lindemann & Saar, 2012).

The share of Russian-speaking Estonians, who are at the center of this analysis as an ethnic minority, remained relatively unchanged during the analyzed period, 2011, 2019, and 2022. Data shows that in 2022 23.8% of Estonia's population were Russian-speaking Estonians (Population Figure, 2022); in 2019, 24.8% (Population figure, 2022), and in 2011, this figure was 24.8% (Statistikaamet, 2012). There has been a small movement, but Russian-speaking Estonians remain the largest ethnic minority in Estonia, approximately a quarter of the population.

The opinion of the indigenous and minority peoples living in Estonia, especially the Russians, is divided, and the ethnic gap is palpable. This is also confirmed by a survey conducted in Estonia, in which nearly a quarter of Russians living in Estonia think Russia justified the attack on Ukraine (Palgi, 2022). In contrast, 94% of Estonians think this matter is unjustified (Ibid.). Such differences of opinion can also be reflected in the political process and who people vote for - minority groups vote for more pro-Russian candidates and indigenous peoples for other political parties, but this deepens the formation of the ethnic divide and the fact that the representation of minorities at the national level is low.

One of the reasons for such a gap and the emergence of such a radically different opinion can be the low level of integration of the minority into the country. In 2004, a really low knowledge of the local language was recorded among national minorities - only 13.7 percent of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia reported proficiency in Estonian (Elsuwege, 2004). However, 84% of the Estonian population speaks or understands the Estonian language, so the percentage among minorities is 12% do not speak Estonian (Estonia Counts, 2022). Thus, the integration of minorities has worked a little. However, a certain number of people still do not speak the local language and may therefore be left out of the Estonian-language information space.

### 2.3. Political ideology

The other central part of this master's thesis is people's political identity. Jost *et al.* (2009) describe political ideology as a set of beliefs about the proper functioning of society and how to do it. With the help of political ideology, people can be divided into groups for whom different values are essential and see different approaches to creating a living environment and functioning in society (Ibid.). In this chapter, I provide an overview of the central nature and specific definitions of political ideology and conceptualize this term to fit my work.

Political ideology is a tool to achieve economic and social goals within the country (Ibid.). However, different political ideologies invite social competition, during which one tries to reach the furthest with one's ideology (Ibid.). The emergence of political ideology develops with the first political encounters and is related to partisan identification, based on which, and also most simply, it is possible to divide people based on liberal and conservative views (Jacoby, 2009). The liberal-conservative definition makes people make choices based on their own political identity, and it has been emphasized that such self-positioning has polarizing undertones, as the choice is based on an "us" versus "them" principle (Ibid.).

Group affiliation is formed on the basis of culture and values, including political ideology. When people are strongly part of a political group and share similar ideologies, they have a stronger group identity (Kriesi, 2010). Such formation of political ideology through groups is also a factor causing nine divisions. In the context of this master's thesis, political identity is primarily related to the group in which one has placed oneself. Jacoby (2009) divides people into conservative and liberal. In my work, liberal-conservative, as well as left-right

self-placement is used, which is the basis for determining people's political ideology and, through this, their membership in a political group.

### 3. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Affective polarization, scope, and spread have been discussed. Still, this approach has been relevant mainly in the context of the USA (Reiljan, 2021), and less emphasis has been placed on Europe and the situation of affective polarization here. Regarding the causes of affective polarization, the views are divided into two: some researchers emphasize the importance of partisan ideology and note that it is the main factor that drives affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019; Mason, 2015), while other researchers (Webster and Abramowitz, 2017) claim that affective polarization is based on rational foundations. According to rational choice theory, humans are rational beings whose choices depend on the most beneficial action (Wendt, 1999). This can also be carried over to the process of making political choices. Upcoming chapters aim to show how the rational-ideological approach has influenced affective polarization and which part is influenced by partisan "tribalism." In doing so, I connect theories to show the reasons behind affective polarization and which processes can influence this phenomenon.

#### 3.1 Rational-ideological approach

Evans (2004, p. 71) brings out that: "the individual will always choose the most preferred alternative" and ".when faced with a decision which affects his interests, the rational individual is interested in the most cost-effective means of maximizing his gains." Therefore, the goal of the voters is to make the most rational choice possible. For example, suppose a person supports a specific party but sees that this party cannot enter the government. In that case, another alternative is chosen, which is the most sympathetic to the voter and which best represents his views. Those political parties where there is no consensus of views are left aside. People follow an ideological line, which can be one of the reinforcers of various social differences and affective polarization. Webster and Abramowitz (2017) pointed out that affective polarization is primarily related to differences in ideological views and disagreements between elites and voters. Thus, although rational choice plays an important role in making a political choice, ideological views and the emergence of political debate also play a role. Webster and Abramowitz (2017) bring out that the negative mood of voters is clearly related to their rationality and rational choice since political issues arise in which disagreements lead voters to prefer certain parties and reject others. However, voter behavior and polarization do not only result from the voters' choices. Webster, Abramowitz (2017), and

Rogowski and Sutherland (2016) point out that the behavior of voters is also largely influenced by how elites express themselves. The polarization of the elites is also visible in the behavior of the voters - if the political elite is more hostile and clearly polarized in its statements, then this is generally reflected in the voters as well. Although the elites may be polarized and strong tensions exist between them, their voters are often significantly more moderate and less polarized (Rogowski & Sutherland 2016; Webster & Abramowitz 2017).

### 3.2. The tribalist underpinnings of partisan feelings

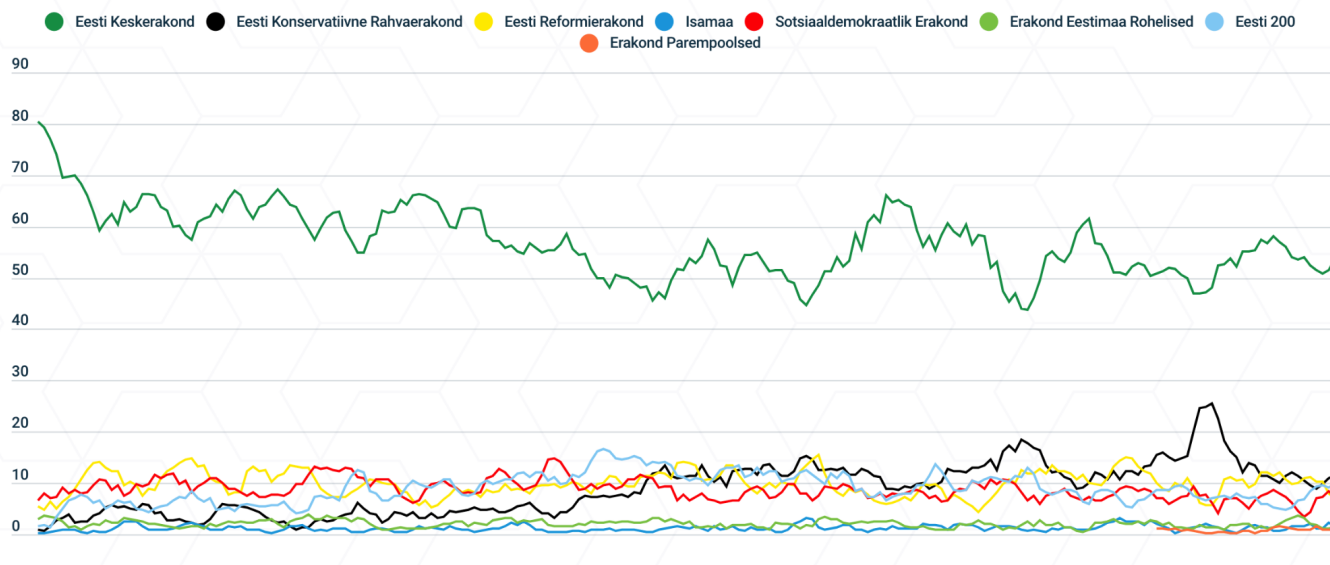
Beside the rational-ideological approach, the tribalist underpinnings of partisan feelings, which are based on the social identity and intergroup conflict theories, are also in a central place when trying to understand the origins of affective polarization (Reiljan, 2021). Iyengar et al. (2019) point out that partisanship has developed specifically in the context of the United States, where this term denotes identification with either Republicans or Democrats. Based on this, in-group and out-group belonging arise, in which positive feelings exist primarily towards those who belong to the same group, but also negative feelings towards those outside the group (Iyengar et al., 2019). These negative feelings can lead to discrimination and prejudice towards individuals not part of the group, creating a harmful and divisive social dynamic.

Partisanship has become a central part of politics, especially in the US context, and is one of the main factors shaping political identity. The relationship between partisan identity and affective polarization has also been shown with regression models, saying that the importance of policy position was low (Reiljan, 2021). However, it is important to note that policy positions can still significantly impact public opinion and voting behavior, especially in highly polarized political environments. A strong affiliation with one's chosen party may prompt individuals to value their loyalty, overreaching agreements or working collaboratively with those who support the opposing side, thus thwarting efforts toward policy agreement (Iyengar et al., 2019). Furthermore, seeing things through partisan eyes might hinder people from keeping an open mind on alternative opinions or participating in positive discussions that lead toward progress. Even if the voter is moderately supportive of his party and his views are not so radical, it can still be seen that hostility is shown towards out-party groups (Mason, 2015). This means that even if partisans of different parties can agree on a number of political issues, they still tend to dislike each other and Mason (2015) described it by the expression "disrespectfully agree." Partisans develop an emotional connection with political

parties, similar to the connection of a fan supporting a sports club (Mason, 2015). This emotional attachment often leads individuals to overlook the flaws and shortcomings of their preferred party and blindly support their decisions and actions.

People's political identity is the root cause of affective polarization, and with the growth of political identity, the level of affective polarization also increases (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008). It is mainly related to the emotional ideological bond - people have developed a certain emotional bond with the political party, without actively participating in debates and discussions (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019). People also create connections with political elites and start to follow what the political elites say so more negative signals arise. Rogowski & Sutherland (2016) point out that elite polarization also plays a role in voter behavior. This can lead to a lack of compromise and cooperation among elected officials, hindering progress and effective governance. When elites are strongly polarized on certain issues, voters' decisions are also more certain and less considered (Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016).

Mason (2015) points out that partisan-ideological sorting has taken place in recent centuries. On this basis, partisan sorting has increased the strength of political identities and polarized mass political behavior (2015). This means that voters with socially similar characteristics primarily support those political entities with which they identify the most, so their partisan identity is aligned with their social identity. In the context of the USA, this phenomenon means, African Americans predominantly support the Democratic Party (Wamble et al., 2022), so their partisan identity is aligned with their social belonging (Mason, 2015). This phenomenon is also important in the Estonian context. In Estonia, a large number of Russian voters support one party - the Center Party (Party Ratings, 2023). Therefore, a certain partisan-ideological sorting is also an important phenomenon in the Estonian context. Figure 1. (Party Ratings, 2023) shows that this phenomenon is visible in Estonia. The data presented in the figure shows the support of people of other nationalities for various political parties in Estonia between 2019 and 2023. While the support indicator for other political parties remains below 20% (EKRE has made a momentary increase to 25%, but this support has fallen back to the usual 12%), the support of the Center Party among voters of other ethnicities has always remained above 40%, reaching up to 80% (Party Ratings, 2023).



**Figure 1.** Party Ratings in 2019-2023 (2023).

### 3.4. Hypotheses

This hypothesis is mainly related to partisanship and the fact that, in most cases, there are positive feelings towards those who belong to the same political group, that is, who share the same or a similar ideological worldview. The more different the ideology becomes, i.e. the greater the ideological distance between different political parties, the greater their disagreement and negative feelings towards each other. However, this means that the indicator of affective polarization also increases.

In addition, Ehin and Solvak (2012) have pointed out that the left-right dimension does not dominate the political struggle in Estonia. This is an old article, but the analysis also includes information about 2011 data. EKRE's entry into Estonian politics has emphasized the importance of the left-right dimension and added another dimension to it - the liberal-conservative dimension.

Based on the rational-ideological approach, I prepared a hypothesis for this research, according to which:

*H1: Ideologically more extreme voters (at the ends of the left- right spectrum) are affectively more polarized*

The second hypothesis is primarily related to the fact that national minorities may not agree with certain political parties and the ideas of their elites. Through disagreement, one wants to

contrast oneself with these political parties. Through this, the emotional gap also increases, which in turn causes greater negative feelings and an increase in affective polarization. In addition, most of the population may not pay as much attention to issues that focus on minority rights so these issues may have little weight for the majority. Thus the impact of feelings may be different compared to minorities.

In addition, this hypothesis is also based on Mason's (2015) partisan-ideological sorting, on the basis of which people with certain ideological characteristics choose those political parties that match their profile. However, Mason (2015) also points out that based on such sorting, hatred grows between different groups in society, which in turn influences the situation of affective polarization. Minorities are divided into certain groups, in which it is seen that one party is chosen, as a comparison, the rest of the population also prefers other parties, which is why partisan sorting is likely. This leads to the second hypothesis:H2: *“The level of affective polarization of ethnic minorities is higher than that of the rest of the population.”*

The transformation of affective polarization into an ideology-based phenomenon is supported by the fact that Estonia's political landscape has changed significantly compared to 2011. In 2016, the chairman of the center party changed, and Jüri Ratas started to lead the party instead of Edgar Savisaar. This, however, could push away the Russian-speaking electorate, which previously supported this party, primarily because Edgar Savisaar focused on capturing the votes of the Russian-speaking electorate. In addition, Estonian politics has been influenced by the arrival of EKRE on the political landscape, which is why the political views of many voters have become more aligned with those of EKRE, and their ideological worldview has changed as a result.

H3a: *"The importance of ideological self-placement as a driver of affective polarization has increased in Estonia over time. "*

H3b: *"The importance of ethnicity as a driver of affective polarization has decreased in Estonia over time"*

## 4. Methods and data

In the framework of this master's thesis, I use quantitative analysis, during which I will find out what is the relationship between affective polarization, ideology, and ethnicity. In the process, I perform an individual-based analysis, in which I calculate the affective polarization index of each individual and then group people according to their ethnicity and ideology. I do all this for the years used for the analysis - 2011, 2019, and 2022 - in order to be able to compare what the role of affective polarization is for each group in the years under consideration and to find how ethnicity and ideology have influenced this indicator. In the second half of the analysis, I perform regression analyses, during which I find out which independent variables, ideology and ethnicity, and control variables, gender and age, influence the affective polarization indicator the most.

### 4.1. Variables & operationalization

The main independent variable of this work is people's ethnicity, and this is primarily because one of the goals of the work is to find out the relationship between ethnicity and affective polarization in Estonia. In doing so, the existence of ethnic minorities is taken into account, and the aim is to explain how this variable has contributed to the situation of affective polarization. To operationalize this variable, 2011 (CSES Module 3), 2019 (Reiljan & Mölder, 2019) and 2022 (Reiljan & Mölder, 2022) datasets have asked what a person's ethnicity is. People have indicated whether they are Estonian, Russian, or from other ethnicity.

The main dependent variable of this work is affective polarization, as the goal is to find the relationship between affective polarization and people's ethnicity. People are asked how they feel about different political parties and ask them to rate it on a scale of 0-10 or -5...5. In both cases, it is an 11-point scale, based on which it is possible to see how polarized people are. On a 0-10 scale, 0 means maximum dislike score, and 10 means maximum like score for the given party. The same system applies to the -5...5 scale, where -5 represents complete dislike of the party, and 5 represents maximum to like.

The second main independent variable is ideology. Based on this, it is possible to see people's self-positioning on the political scale - conservative, liberal, moderate or other. For this

purpose, I use the right-left scale presented in the datasets, which shows whether a person has positioned himself as a left- or right-wing. 2011 and 2019 datasets have general left-right, and the 2022 dataset has economic left-right and cultural liberal-conservative separately. Ideology is a variable that is one of the potential factors based on which people make political decisions and choices. Then it is possible to say the ideological difference and affective polarization between the voters of different political parties. In the given data, people are divided into left-wing respondents, centrist respondents, right-wing respondents, and ideologically extreme respondents (at the ends of the left-right spectrum), and in the case of the 2022 data, liberal self-placement, centrist, conservative self-placement, and ideologically extreme voters (at the ends of the liberal-conservative spectrum). In the case of respondents who fall into the extremes, the respondents are coded in such a way that for both scales, both left-right and liberal-conservative, respondents who marked 0-1 and 9-10 are coded as ideologically extreme, respectively.

The work aims to analyze the indicators of affective polarization based on ethnicity and ideology, so the analysis must be carried out by looking at the variables by political party. First, the general level of polarization must be analyzed, which is the average polarization of the individual. Based on this, it is also possible to find the average polarization of different nationalities. In the questionnaires, the respondents were asked who they would be ready to vote for if the Riigikogu elections were held. In addition, the respondents were asked about their attitudes toward other political parties. Based on this, it is possible to see what the ratio of positive and negative feelings is, that is, what is the indicator of affective polarization.

First, I calculate the level of affective polarization by the party to see the level of affective polarization among supporters of different political parties. Six major political parties in Estonia have been selected for analysis - Reform Party, EKRE, Center Party, Fatherland (IRL), Social Democratic Party (SDE), and Eesti 200. The following formula can be used to calculate the affective polarization index:

$$\text{API} = \text{in-party evaluation} - \text{average out-party evaluation}$$

In this formula, affective polarization is calculated based on the score given by voters to their party and other parties. In other words, in-party evaluation is the score the voter gives to his party on a scale of 0-10. The average score given to other political parties is subtracted from this, and the remaining number represents an indicator of affective polarization. This means that if, for example, a voter gives a Reform Party a score of 9 points but other parties a score

of 3, according to the given formula, the index of affective polarization is 6. It is then possible, to sum up these scores based on various characteristics - for example, to see if the index of affective polarization is higher among Estonians or Russians. After that, it is possible to look at each party and analyze whether the score for a certain party is influenced by nationality or not.

To find people's party affiliations, I use the scores they give to different parties. In this analysis, the party to which the person has given the highest rating, on a 0-10 scale, is the party that the person prefers and on the basis of which the level of affective polarization of the given individual is also calculated. The same system was used by Wagner (2021) who named this system "mean-distance" where the measure captures how much lower on average an individual's affect on other parties is. By using this method, I do not eliminate those voters from my analysis who had no partisanship or who did not vote.

During the work, I evaluate how the level of affective polarization differs between people who place themselves at the extremes (at the ends of the left-right and liberal-conservative spectrum) and the rest of the voters. To do this, I create groups with people who have placed themselves up to two places from the maximum value on the left scale towards the center, or up to two places towards the center on the right scale. This provides opportunities to see the complete extremes of both spectrums and to calculate an affective polarization index for them. I do the same thing with the liberal-conservative scale, where people are divided into extreme liberals and extreme conservatives.

Then it is possible to take the ethnicity variable and see which ethnicity supports which political party and whether there are big differences in the ideological views of different nationalities. In addition, it is possible to calculate the average level of affective polarization of nationalities. Therefore, it is first important to calculate the average affective polarization by political party, then the affective polarization among Estonians, and then the affective polarization among the ethnic minority, the Russians. As a result, I prepare matrices to illustrate the likeability ratings of various political parties among Estonians and Russians and point out the main differences.

When examining the relationship between ideology, ethnicity, and affective polarization, it is important to control for potentially confounding variables. In this paper, I am using two control variables, age, and gender. This is because both gender and age can influence an individual's political attitudes and behavior, as well as how they perceive others with different

political views. Using these two variables in my analysis helps me to account for their potential influence when studying the phenomenon of affective polarization and reduce the risk of alternative explanations for my findings. Using these variables will help to increase the accuracy and validity of my research.

## 4.2. Case selection

In this master's thesis, Estonia has been selected as the analyzed country. Estonia has a population of just over 1.3 million people but is ethnically and linguistically diverse, with significant Russian and Estonian-speaking populations. About 24% of people living in Estonia are Russian-speaking citizens, which shows that there is a large ethnic minority. The existence of such an ethnic minority can cause tensions (Hewstone et al., 2002). This kind of tension between Estonian-speaking people and Russian-speaking people can deepen partisan affective polarization. A situation arises where minority groups oppose themselves to others and vice versa. This could potentially lead to a state where minority groups are seen as outsiders, and their values differ significantly from those of the indigenous people. The topic of affective polarization is understudied in Estonia, and no emphasis has been placed on it. However, there is a large ethnic minority, the Russians, in this country, and political polarization could be visible. There is also a strong political divide, primarily between liberals and conservatives and their supporters. Such domestic political problems are also reflected in voters and, more broadly, in indicators of their affective polarization. The problem of ethnicity has also been pointed out by Bradley and Chauchard (2022), who have found in their research that there is a significant connection between affective polarization and ethnicity. In addition, the authors point out that if it is possible for such minorities to easily gain access to power, the possibility of conflicts is not high (Bradley & Chauchard, 2022). In Estonia, however, there is no such party that fully stands for the rights and wishes of the Russians, that is, the aspect of easily coming to power is not fulfilled, which is why conflicts are likely to arise. Thus, an ethnic minority in Estonia is a potential factor affecting the level of affective polarization, and it would be essential to focus on its effects when studying the subject of affective polarization.

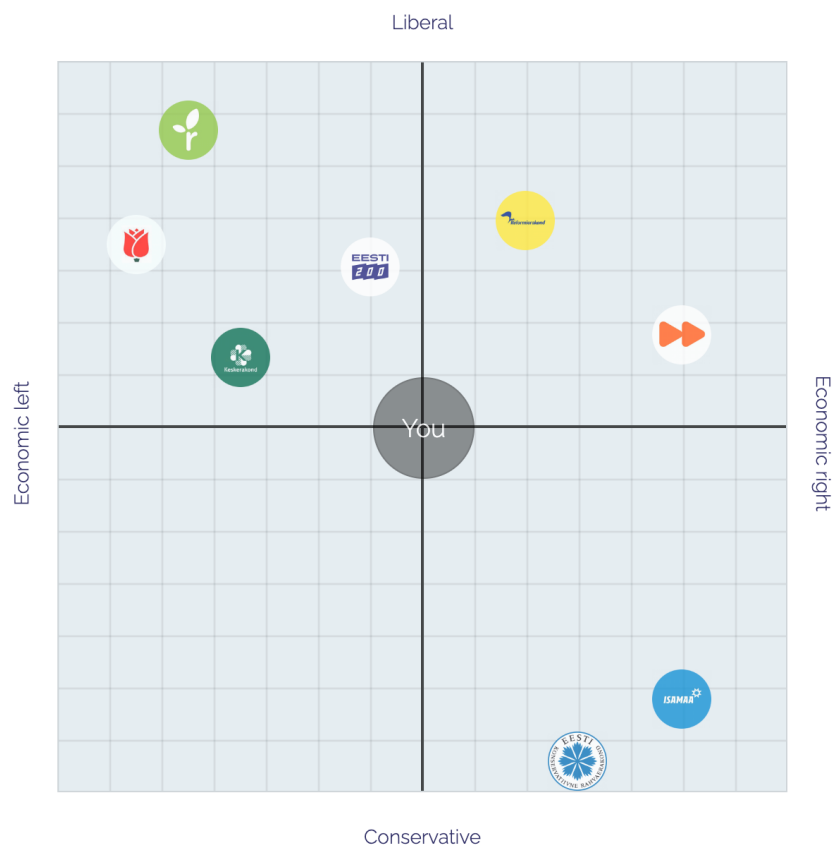
Estonia is a new country in terms of democracy. In the first year after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the country had to create a new democratic system, make changes in the former economic system, and adopt market-oriented economic policies. This means that

people had to get used to changes, which can also be one of the important factors that have influenced the situation of affective polarization in the country under review.

The years to be analyzed are 2011, 2019, and 2022. The reason for this lies in the fact that since Estonia is very understudied in terms of affective polarization, it is also difficult to find data on the basis on which it would be possible to conduct such studies. However, there is data for the given years, on the basis of which it is possible to calculate the indicator of affective polarization, and in addition, it is also possible to find from these questionnaires, what is the ethnicity and political self-placement of people. Other years could be included in the analysis, but unfortunately, as far as I know, no such studies have been done or are not available for other years.

### 4.2.1 The political ideology of Estonian political parties

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief overview of the location of Estonian political parties on the two-dimensional political landscape (liberal-conservative and left-right on the scale) (Figure 2). For this purpose, I use the two-dimensional system created by Reiljan (2023), in which the largest political parties in Estonia and their location on the political landscape are indicated.



**Figure 2.** *Party placements on two dimensions (left-right; liberal-conservative)* (ERR, 2023).

The y-axis of this table characterizes the conservative-liberal worldview, and the x-axis characterizes the economic. It can be seen that economically EKRE, Isamaa, Reform Party and The Right ones (*Parempoolsed*) are on the right, and economically the Social Democrats, Central Party, Estonia 200 and the Green Party are on the left (Reiljan, 2023). Since the Green and Right parties are not reflected in the analysis during this master's thesis, more attention will not be paid to their location. The parties with the most conservative views in Estonia are EKRE and Isamaa, although Isamaa is slightly more liberal and economically more right-wing (Ibid.). They are counterbalanced by the Social Democrats, Estonia 200, and the Central Party, all of whom are liberal and economically left-wing (Ibid.). At the same time, it can be seen from the graph (Table 2) that Estonia 200 is rather centrist in nature on the x-axis. In the context of this analysis, the liberal but economically right-wing party is the Reform Party (Ibid.).

### 4.3. Data

For the purpose of this work, I use three surveys. The first of these is a study created by the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), from which data for 2011 can be found. I am going to look at CSES Module 3: 2006-2011. To measure affective polarization, I use the CSES (CSES Module 3) survey question: "I would like to ask your opinion about our political parties. I will read out the name of the party and ask you to rate it on a scale from zero to ten, where 0 means that you do not like this party at all and 10 means that you like this party very much. If I name a political party that you haven't heard of or that you don't think you know enough about, please say so." I use questions that ask people to identify themselves ideologically as right-wing or left-wing supporters and ask them what nationality they are.

From the 2019 dataset (Reiljan & Mölder, 2019), I use the following question to calculate people's affective polarization: "We would like to know what you think about each of the following political parties. Please rate each party on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that this party is Very unpleasant for you and 10 means that you like this party very much." From the same questionnaire (Ibid.), I use the following question to determine people's ideological self-position: "When talking about politics, the terms "left" and "right" are used. Where would you place yourself on a scale where 0 is left and 10 is right?" Since there is no direct

information about people's ethnicity in the dataset, the ethnicity variable is taken based on the language people speak at home, using the following question (Reiljan & Mölder, 2019): "What language do you speak most often at home?" This gives me the opportunity to distinguish between Estonians, Russians, and people of other nationalities during the analyses.

To find out people's ethnicity, I use the question from the 2022 data (Reiljan & Mölder, 2022): "What is your ethnicity?" This allows me to define whether the respondent is an Estonian, a Russian or a citizen of another nationality. Similar to the 2019 questionnaire, respondents in the 2022 questionnaire have also been asked to estimate what score they would give to different political parties. To get people's ideological background, I use the question that asks (Reiljan & Mölder): "My point of view - People and political parties can also be distinguished based on their social and cultural views. Some support more traditional views on family and moral issues, while others are more liberal. Where would you place yourself and subsequent political parties on this issue?" So I use the liberal-conservative scale when talking about ideology.

In the CSES questionnaire and in the 2019 survey (Reiljan & Mölder, 2019) the likeability of political parties is rated from 0 to 10 (CSES Module 3), and in the Reiljan and Mölder questionnaire, from -5 to 5 (Reiljan & Mölder, 2022), i.e., 11-point scale is used for all three surveys. For the purposes of this analysis, I will code answers from 2022 on a scale of 0-10 so that data comparison would be much easier.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1. Descriptive Statistics

In the following chapters, I present the results of the analyses. Since EKRE and Estonia 200 were not part of Estonian politics in 2011, the results of these voters are not represented in the table either. During the analyses, I calculated an Affective Polarization Index (API) for each individual and then grouped people according to their ethnicity or ideological self-identification. The tables show the average API scores according to which political party one supports.

#### 5.1.1 The level of affective polarization in 2011

**Table 1.** visualises the indicators of affective polarization in 2011. This table summarizes the level of affective polarization of political party voters based on their ideological self-placement and ethnicity. The table shows that the level of affective polarization of Russian-speaking people is significantly higher than that of Estonians - in comparison 4.96 and 4.41. In the case of ideological self-positioning, it can be seen that the highest level of affective polarization is among left-wing Pro Patria and Res Publica Union supporters and the lowest among centrists who support Reform Party.

Regarding the average polarization indicator, the analysis showed that the average API level of people who marked themselves as ideologically right-wing is 4.50. The average API of left-wing respondents is the highest, which is 4.52. The gap is not big compared to right-wing supporters, but it still exists. Centrists with the lowest API score in 2011 had an API level of 4.01. People who do not know how to define themselves ideologically had an average API of 4.40 in 2011.

**Table 1.** *The level of voters' affective polarization in 2011 based on their ideological self-placement and ethnicity.*

Party	RE	KE	SDE	IRL
Estonian	3.89	4.79	4.52	4.66
Russian	4.13	6.00	4.64	3.55
Right-wing respondents	4.59	4.90	4.74	4.78
Left-wing respondents	4.06	4.07	4.90	5.05
Centrist	3.18	4.75	4.10	4.02
Did not know	3.86	4.68	4.26	4.80
Radical left-wing respondents	5.36	6.18	6.18	5.61
Radical right-wing respondents	Na	Na	5.09	Na

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES); author's calculations

(RE - Reform Party; KE - Centre Party; SDE - Social Democratic Party; IRL - Fatherland)

Looking at the polarization of voters at the party level, it can be seen that the Russian-speaking people of the Center Party are the most polarized, with a level of affective polarization of 6.0. However, this is not a surprising finding, since in 2011 the Center Party was one of the main parties, if not the only one, that represented the interests of Russian-speaking voters the most. Under the leadership of Edgar Savisaar, the focus was on capturing the votes of Russian-speaking voters and satisfying their needs. In the case of the Russian-speaking voter, a strong feeling of belonging to a group and opposition to others probably started to play a role, which is why the affective polarization indicator is also significantly higher than the others.

At the party level, a higher polarization can also be seen among left-wing supporters in the case of IRL voters, whose average API was 5.05. It can also be seen that the average API of the voter of the Social Democratic Party among left-wing supporters is higher, 4.90, and the voter of the Center Party among right-wing supporters is 4.904.

**Table 1.** also characterizes the levels of affective polarization of people at the extremes (at the ends of the left and right spectrum). According to this, it can be seen that in 2011, the most extreme were the voters of the Center Party and the Social Democratic Party, who had ideologically positioned themselves as extreme right-wing. Their level of affective polarization was 6.18. At the same time, it can be seen that the API level is also high for Reform Party and IRL voters, being 5.36 for Reform Party voters and 5.61 for IRL voters. In the case of left-wing supporters, it can be seen that the only ones who have ideologically defined themselves as left-wing extremists are the voters of the social democratic party, whose average level of affective polarization was 5.090.

### 5.1.2 The level of affective polarization in 2019

**Table 2.** shows the level of affective polarization of voters in 2019, and the data presented in the table shows the level of affective polarization on the basis of ideological self-placement and also on the basis of ethnicity. Looking at the level of affective polarization based on ethnicities, this indicator is on average 4.25 for Estonian-speaking, while the value of this index is 4.44 for Russian-speaking voters. At the same time, this difference is not as big as in 2011. However, looking at the average indicators of affective polarization based on ideology, the differences are larger. Right-wing supporters have the highest affective polarization. Their average level of affective polarization is 4.56. Followed by left-wing supporters with an API of 4.22 and people who can't place themselves ideologically anywhere and whose affective polarization index is 4.16. The lowest level of affective polarization is among the centrists, whose level of affective polarization is 3.81.

If we look at the average affective polarization levels of ideological self-alignment and ethnicity, it can be seen that the mean for ethnicity in determining affective polarization is 4.35, and for ideological self-alignment, this figure is 4.19. Thus, it can be seen that ethnicity has a greater weight than ideological self-placement in determining affective polarization in 2019.

**Table 2.** *The level of voters' affective polarization in 2019 based on their ideological self-placement and ethnicity.*

<b>Party</b>	E200	EKRE	IRL	KE	RE	SDE
Estonian	3.86	4.93	4.23	4.34	4.22	3.95
Russian	3.00	6.25	NA	4.61	5.11	3.24
Right-wing supporter	4.04	5.16	4.52	5.06	4.42	4.17
Left-wing respondents	3.28	5.25	5.15	4.31	3.28	4.07
Centrist	3.00	4.40	3.86	4.13	3.70	3.74
Did not know	4.33	4.82	3.62	4.57	4.46	3.13
Radical right-wing respondents	3.74	5.80	4.89	6.46	4.97	5.12
Radical left-wing respondents	Na	6.85	Na	5.62	3.43	5.25

Source: Affective Polarization Dataset (2019); author's calculations

(E200 - Estonia 200)

Looking at the average levels of affective polarization of political party voters, we can see differences for all variables. In the case of Ethnicity, it can be seen that Russian-speaking voters, who are EKRE voters, are the most polarized - their API is 6.25. At the same time, it

can also be seen that the Russian-speaking voters of Estonia 200, whose API is 3.0, are the least polarized, but this may also be due to the proportion of respondents who are voters of Estonia 200. A similar picture can be seen in the case of Estonian-speaking voters, among whom the most polarized are EKRE voters, whose API is 4.93. The voters of Estonia 200 are also the least polarized among Estonian-speaking voters, API of 3.86, but a lower level of polarization can also be seen among the voters of the Social Democratic Party, whose API is 3.95.

According to the ideological self-placement arrangement, the highest level of affective polarization is among those voters whose first-party preference is EKRE and who have marked themselves as ideologically left-wing. At the same time, it can also be seen that the level of affective polarization of right-wing supporters of EKRE is higher than that of supporters of other political parties, being 5.16. With a higher level of affective polarization, the right-wing supporter of the Center Party voter, whose API is 5.06, and the left-wing supporter of the IRL voter, whose API is 5.15, also stand out. With the lowest level of affective polarization are the voters of Estonia 200, who have placed themselves on the scale of ideological self-placement as either left-wing supporters, API 3.28, or centrists, API 3.007. In addition, a low level of affective polarization can also be seen in the case of supporters of the left-wing Reform Party, whose API is 3.28.

Radical-right wing supporters shown in **Table 2**, it can be seen that the highest level of affective polarization is the voter of the Center Party, whose API is 6.46. They are followed by EKRE voters who have placed themselves ideologically on the radical right, with an average API of 5.80. It can also be seen that Estonia's 200 voters, who generally have a lower API level, but ideologically a relatively high level according to the right-wing definition, have achieved a low API score of 3.74 according to the radical definition. In the case of radical left-wing supporters, it can be seen that the voters with the highest level of affective polarization are those who have marked themselves as left-wing by ideological definition and are EKRE voters. Their API level is 6.85. A higher API level can also be seen for the voters of the Center Party, whose average API is 5.62, and for the voters of the Social Democratic Party, whose API is 5.25. With the lowest average API level is the radical left supporter of the Reform Party with an API of 3.43. Among the results presented in the study, it was not possible to define the average level of affective polarization of Estonian 200 and IRL voters, based on the radical left-wing self-positioning, because there were no people in this study who would have placed themselves on such a left-right scale.

### 5.1.3 The level of affective polarization in 2022

**Table 3.** illustrates the average levels of affective polarization of voters in 2022 based on their ideological self-position and ethnicity. Based on nationality, the average affective polarization level of Estonian-speaking voters is 4.55, while that of Russians is 3.56. The difference is noticeable, and compared to previous years, the indicator of affective polarization of Russian-speaking people has dropped significantly. At the same time, it is important to remember that in the case of the Russian-speaking population, the number of respondents to the questionnaire was not as large as in the previous two years, so the results may have suffered.

**Table 3.** *The level of voters' affective polarization in 2022 based on their ideological self-placement and ethnicity*

Party	E200	EKRE	IRL	KE	RE	SDE
Estonian	4.55	5.20	4.55	4.39	4.27	4.38
Russian	-	2.3	-	4.56	-	3.82
Liberal	4.46	5.54	3.93	3.97	4.93	4.88
Conservative	4.47	5.73	5.03	4.80	3.97	3.64
Centrist	3.59	2.95	4.33	3.27	4.01	4.8
Did not know	5.4	4.8	4.2	4.82	2.6	-
Radical liberal	4.76	6.60	3.45	3.90	5.30	5.09
Radical conservative	4.39	5.88	5.63	4.92	3.96	3.73

Source: Affective Polarization Dataset (2022); author's calculations

Looking at the indicators of affective polarization based on ideological self-position, it can be seen that the highest API has been obtained by liberals, whose corresponding score was 4.62.

The second highest result was given by voters with conservative ideological self-placement, whose API was 4.61. The centrists had the lowest API score of 3.95 and those who did not know had an API score of 4.36. The low API level of centrists can be seen in all analyzed years. One reason may be the nature of centrists' more moderate views and willingness to compromise. When it comes to the ideological spectrum, people at the extremes are probably less oriented towards cooperation, which is why they don't participate as much in political debates and don't try to find solutions.

Based on ideology, voters who have marked themselves conservative in terms of ideology and are EKRE voters have the highest API - their API was 5.73 on average. The second highest API level is for those voters who have marked their ideological definition as liberal and are also EKRE voters - their API was 5.54. EKRE voters have shown a high level of affective polarization, regardless of their ideological orientation. Only centrists and ethnically Russian-speaking Estonians have the lowest API level among EKRE voters, but in general, the voters of this party still have the highest level of affective polarization. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that the government changed and EKRE lost its place in the coalition, which caused a strong reaction among EKRE's political elite, which was also transferred to their voters. In addition to this, the political elite of EKRE incited enmity on corona and security issues, which are also factors that can influence voters' attitudes towards other political parties and thereby increase the level of affective polarization. In addition to this, the displeasure of EKRE supporters is also probably due to the fact that due to the Russia-Ukraine war, the prices of electricity, gas, and food in Estonia increased, which EKRE opposed, but which nevertheless rose due to inevitability. In addition, a number of Ukrainian war refugees entered Estonia, whose control and stronger supervision EKRE demanded. Since in the case of the EKRE political elite, you can also see a strong opposition to other political parties and opposition on the topics mentioned above, it is probably also one of the factors that are reflected in the level of affective polarization of these voters.

From the 2022 data, **Table 3.**, can also be seen the levels of affective polarization of those people who have defined themselves as either radical liberal or radical conservative. On the Radical liberal scale, it can be seen that the voters with the highest level of affective polarization are those who have marked themselves as radical liberal and have marked EKRE as their party preference. It should be mentioned here that there were not many such respondents and this may be one of the factors affecting the results. This is a somewhat surprising factor, as EKRE has emphasized its conservatism as a political party and standing

for traditional values. The average affective polarization level of EKRE, a radical liberal, voter is 6,60. In the case of other political parties, it can be seen that the level of affective polarization remains lower, but in the case of voters of the Reform Party, who placed themselves in the radical liberal category, the API level is 5.303. In addition, it can be seen that the API of the voters of the Social Democratic Party is also 5.097. The average API of 200 voters in Estonia, according to ideologically extreme placement, is 4.76. IRL and Center Party voters have the lowest level of affective polarization, with an API of 3.45 and 3.90, respectively.

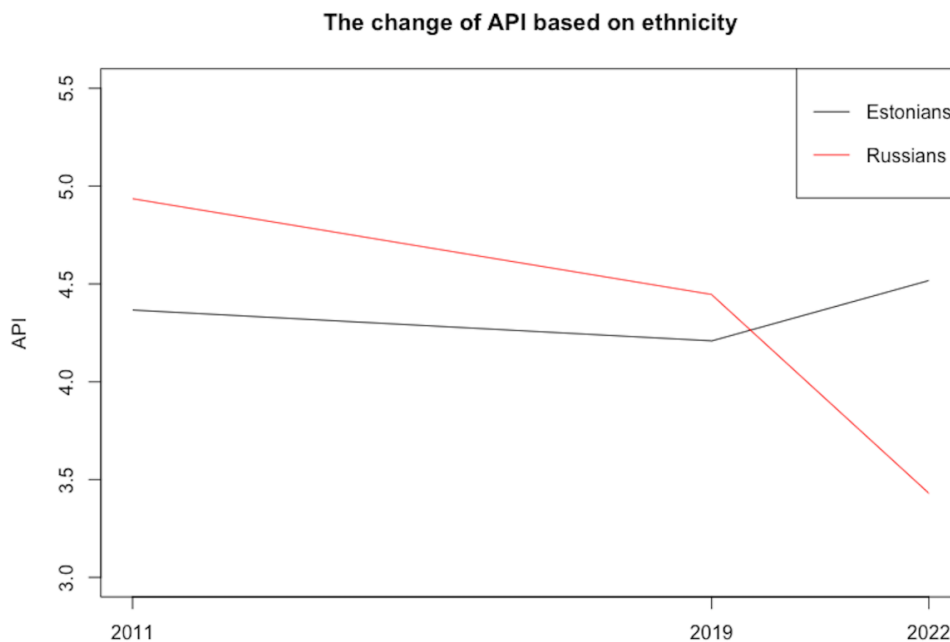
Looking at the radical conservative self-positioning, it can be seen that here too the level of affective polarization of those who have marked themselves as EKRE voters is the highest, their API is 5.88. They are followed by IRL voters with an API of 5.63. With the lowest affective polarization score, according to the radical conservative placement, those voters who have marked the Reform Party and the Social Democratic Party as their party preference - their API is 3.96 and 3.73, respectively. The API of Estonia's 200 voters was 4,39 in 2022, and that of the Center Party was 4,92.

#### 5.1.4 A three-point comparison on the level of affective polarization over 11 years

**Graph 1.** shows the change in affective polarization according to ethnicity in 2011, 2019 and 2022. This graph shows that the level of affective polarization of the Russian-speaking voters has been in constant decline. If in 2011 the average level of affective polarization of Russian-speaking voters was 4.93, by 2022 it had dropped to 3.43. In 2019, the same indicator was 4.44. The reason for this can lie in several different factors. One factor can be pointed out that in the case of Russian-speaking voters, the political party representing them transformed, and part of the votes were also divided between other political parties. In addition to this, the increasing importance of ideological self-definition is also a potential factor.

In the case of Estonian-speaking voters, however, it can be seen that the level of affective polarization has decreased, but in 2022 it will be significantly higher than the level of the Russian-speaking electorate. In 2011, the average API of an Estonian-speaking voter was

4.36, but by 2022 it had risen to 4.51. In 2019, this indicator was on 4.20. Potential factors in such a change in the API level could be the fact that the voters of the EKRE party have become the biggest influence on the overall API level. In 2019, EKRE was in a coalition, which is why their voters could be more moderate in their evaluations of other political parties. At the same time in 2022, it can also be seen that EKRE voters have had the highest API level, and this may in turn raise the general API level of Estonian-speaking voters.



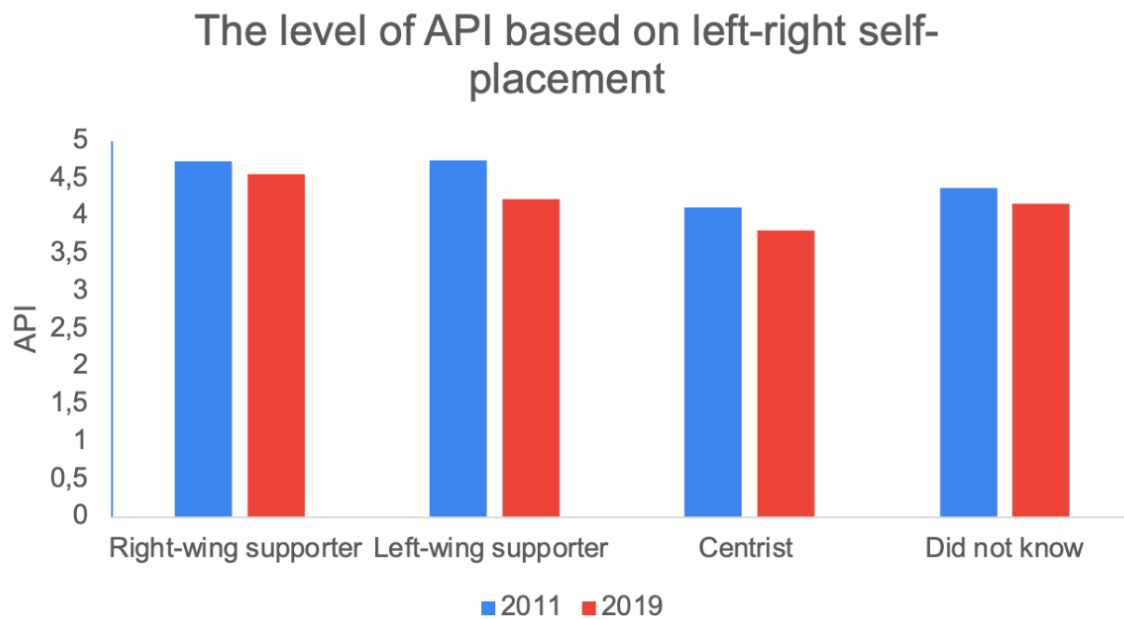
**Graph 1.** *The change of API based on ethnicity*

For this work, I prepared hypothesis H2, according to which I tried to find an answer primarily based on the given data.

H2: *“The level of affective polarization of ethnic minorities is higher than that of the rest of the population.”*

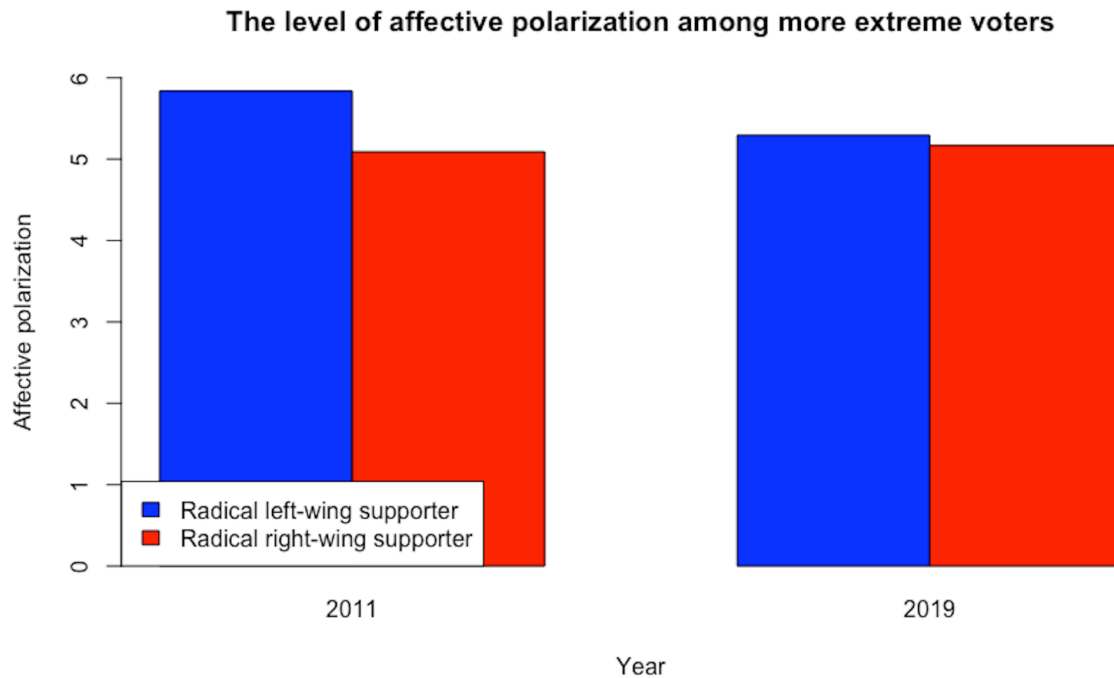
Hypothesis 2 was based on the assumption that ethnic minorities may not agree with political parties and their elites and want to oppose themselves to different political parties, which in turn increases the emotional distance between political groups. In the case of hypothesis 2, it can be said that it is initially proven because in 2011 and 2019 it can be seen that the API level of a Russian-speaking voter is significantly higher than that of an Estonian-speaking voter. At the same time, it was expected that the API level of the Russian-speaking voter would decrease, as, according to the assumption, ideological self-positioning would become a

more important factor. But the relationship of the given variables and the hypothesis will be tested with multivariate regression.



**Graph 2.** *The level of API based on left-right self-placement*

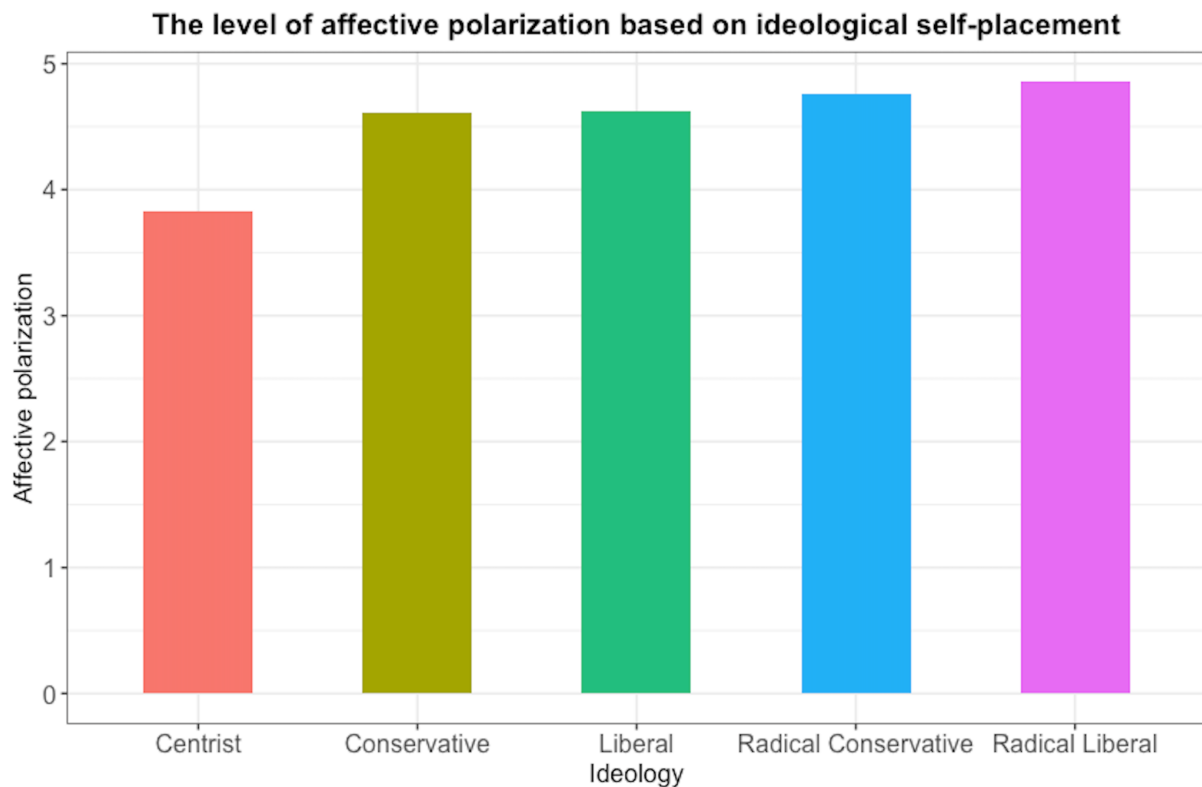
**Graph 2.** visualizes the Affective Polarization Index based on people's left-right self-placement. Surprisingly, the table shows that, compared to 2011, API has fallen in 2019 among all ideological self-positions. If the average level of affective polarization of a right-wing supporters was 4.72 in 2011, in 2019 this figure was 4.565. A similar thing can be seen with left-wing supporters. In 2011, the average API of a left-wing supporter voter was 4.74, and in 2019 this indicator was 4.228. At the same time, the graph also shows that the API of both right-wing and left-wing supporters has been higher than other ideological self-positions in both years. The average API for centrists, also at its lowest level in the years shown in this chart, has also fallen. If in 2011, this indicator was 4.12, then in 2019, this indicator was 3.81. The level of affective polarization of those people who could not determine their ideological position has also decreased - in 2011 it was 4,37 and in 2019 it was 4,16.



**Graph 3.** *The level of affective polarization among more extreme voters in 2011 and 2019*

**Graph 3.** shows the average level of affective polarization of voters who were at the extremes in terms of ideological self-placement in 2011 and 2019. The graph shows that the level of affective polarization of radical left-wing supporters has been lower than that of radical right-wing supporters in both 2011 and 2019. At the same time, it can also be seen that while the API of radical right-wing supporters has decreased in comparison to the analyzed years, that of radical left-wing supporters has remained relatively at the same level.

Looking at **Graph 2.** and **Graph 3.**, it is possible to see from the results that the level of affective polarization of radical-left wing and radical-right wing supporters is higher than when looking at people's self-placement across the entire spectrum. The hypothesis H1 prepared for the work: "ideologically more extreme voters (at the ends of the left and right spectrum) are affectively more polarized" can be initially considered true based on the analyzes of 2011 and 2019. According to this hypothesis, the ideological distance between different political parties is a determining factor. The greater the ideological distance between different people, the more negative feelings appear between them, and this in turn affects affective polarization and increases the level of affective polarization. However, the relationship and statistical significance will be analyzed during regression analysis.



**Graph 4.** *The level of affective polarization based on ideological self-placement in 2022*

**Graph 4.** shows the data for the year 2022, where people's ideological self-placement and the level of affective polarization for different groups can be seen. It can be seen from the table that for all ideologically self-defined groups, people have different levels of affective polarization. The lowest average level of affective polarization is the group of voters whose ideological self-identification is centrist. Their level of affective polarization is 3.82. The reason for this, as mentioned earlier in the work, probably lies in the fact that centrists do not tend to create such strong feelings with different political parties as people who are ideologically located elsewhere. This means that they are not so much influenced by the ideas and views of different political groups, and their ideological self-definition is not inclined toward the extremes, so they are more prone to compromise, and their level of affective polarization is therefore lower.

The graph also shows the levels of affective polarization of voters who classified themselves as ideologically liberal and conservative. A relatively similar level of affective polarization can be seen in the case of liberal and conservative voters - liberals have an API of 4.62, and conservatives have an API of 4.61. It is not surprising that these indicators are so similar for both ideological groups because among the voters of EKRE, which classifies itself as a conservative party, and the Reform Party, which classifies itself as a liberal party, relatively

negative feelings towards each other can be seen both in the media and elsewhere. It also plays a role that the given results show the results of a larger spectrum.

Looking at the results of **Graph 4.** regarding radical liberal and radical conservative voters, we can see significantly greater polarization in the case of voters who place themselves in this way. The people with the highest level of polarization in 2022 were those who had marked themselves on the edge of the spectrum on the liberal scale, that is, radical liberals in the context of this work. The level of affective polarization of these voters was 4.854 in 2022. People who marked themselves as ideologically radical conservatives are close to liberals with their results, but the difference is still 0.1 points. The average level of affective polarization of a radical conservative voter was 4.754 in the given year. The results are unsurprising, as the gap between the political elite of EKRE and the Reform Party and the voters is palpable. Both parties show a strong dislike and negative feelings towards each other. In addition to this, it can also be seen that there is a strong power struggle between the political elites. EKRE criticized the Reform Party in 2022 for the high prices caused by the war in Ukraine, and the Reform Party criticized EKRE for the work left undone and for "wrong decisions" during the previous government. This is also reflected in voters' and voters' evaluations of political parties, which is why the gap between radical liberals and radical conservatives is so large.

Hypothesis H1: "Ideologically more extreme voters (at the ends of the left and right spectrum) are affectively more polarized" is initially true based on the data of 2022, but the statistical significance will be determined with multivariate regression.

## 5.2. Multivariate analysis

### 5.2.1 The level of affective polarization in 2011

**Table 4.** is a summary of the linear regression model that predicts the levels of affective polarization based on the respondents' ethnicity and ideological self-placement. It can be seen from this model that the intercept estimate is 4.79, which means that if the values of other variables are 0, the level of affective polarization is 4.79. Significant relationships are seen in this model. First of all, it can be seen that the relationship between the ethnicity variable and affective polarization has a statistically very high significance. It can be seen from the regression that the p-value of those people whose ethnicity is Russian is  $1.87e-08$  \*\*\* ( $<0.001$ ), which characterizes a statistically strong and significant relationship between the dependent variable, affective polarization, and the independent variable, ethnicity. In addition, it can be seen that there is also a significant relationship between people of other nationalities and the level of affective polarization, the p-value is 0.01.

A statistically significant relationship can be seen between people who have marked themselves as centrists on the ideological self-placement scale and affective polarization. The P-value for those respondents was  $8.67e-05$  \*\*\*, which shows a strong relationship between these two variables. The results of ideological self-placement, present that there is no statistically significant relationship between those people who indicated that they do not know how to place themselves anywhere in terms of their ideology and those who indicated themselves as left-wing and affective polarization. The p-values of these variables were 0.29 and 0.68, respectively.

**Table 4.** *Regression - the relationship between the level of affective polarization, ethnicity and ideological self-placement*

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
(Intercept)	4.79	0.11	43.15	$< 2e-16$ ***
Factor (Ethnicity):	0.99	0.18	5.68	$1.87e-08$ ***

Russian				
Factor	1.39	0.56	2.48	0.01
(Ethnicity):				
Other				
Factor	-0.20	0.19	-1.07	0.29
(Ideology): Do				
not know				
Factor	-0.007	0.19	-0.41	0.68
(Ideology):				
Left-wing				
respondent				
Factor	-0.71	0.18	-3.95	8.67e-05 ***
(Ideology):				
Centrist				
R <sup>2</sup> : 0.07				
N: 753				

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Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES); author's calculations

Looking at the integrity of the model, it can be seen that the multiple R-squared value is 0.07, which means that approximately 7% of the variance in the affective polarization can be explained by the variables presented in this regression. The F-statistic of this model was 8.591, with 7 and 753 degrees of freedom. The p-value of this model is 3.698e-10, which shows that the regression model as a whole is statistically significant and the variables used in the model have a statistically significant effect on affective polarization.

**Table 5.** represents the regression to find the level of affective polarization and the respondents who ideologically place themselves in the extremes. The table shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between respondents who ideologically define themselves as extreme leftists and the level of affective polarization. A p-value of 0.75

represents that there is no statistically significant relationship between the affective polarization variable and the ideologically extreme variable.

**Table 5.** *Regression - the relationship between the level of affective polarization and ideologically extreme respondents*

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
(Intercept)	5.97	0.18	31.71	<2e-16 ***
Factor				
(Ideology):				
Extreme left-wing respondent	0.10	0.32	0.325	0.75
R <sup>2</sup> : 0.0009				
N: 116				

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES); author's calculations

The residual standard error of this model is 1.652. The multiple R-squared value is 0.0009. The given regression model describes a non-existent part, 0.09%, of the variance in the dependent variable affective polarization. Since the number of people who identify themselves as ideologically extreme was so small in this study, it is also reflected in the F-statistics in this regression. F-statistics for this model is 0.10, with 1 and 116 degrees of freedom. The p-value of the model is 0.75, indicating that the given regression model as a whole is not statistically significant and that the predictors do not have a significant effect on the level of affective polarization.

The control variables gender and age do not have a statistically significant effect on the level of affective polarization. For both variables, the p-value is lower than 0.05 and they can explain only a very small part of the affective polarization.

### 5.2.2 The level of affective polarization in 2019

**Table 6.** is a regression to find the relationship between affective polarization, ideological self-position, ethnicity and gender. The results show that the intercept is significant at  $p < .001$ , which suggests that affective polarization is visible even if these variables are not considered. Among the given variables, it can be seen that only three variables are significant predictors of affective polarization. For centrists, it is associated with a decrease in affective polarization, with a p-value of 0.005. At the same time, it can be seen that gender and other nationality have a negative effect on affective polarization. The p-value of these variables is 0.08 and 0.18, respectively, but these associations are not statistically significant. The same can be said about the ideological self-positioning of left-wing supporters and those who did not know how to define themselves ideologically. These variables are also not statistically significant predictors of affective polarization.

**Table 6.** *Regression - the relationship between the level of affective polarization, ideology, ethnicity, and gender*

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
(Intercept)	4.86	0.67	7.22	1.54e-12 ***
Factor				
(Ideology):				
left-wing	-0.23	0.27	-0.84	0.39
respondent				
Factor	-0.55	0.19	-2.79	0.005 **
(Ideology):				
Centrist				
Factor	-0.22	0.20	-1.09	0.27
(Ideology): Did				
not know				
Factor	0.30	0.23	1.34	0.17
(Ethnicity):				
Other				

Factor (gender):	-0.27	0.15	-1.75	0.08
Woman				
R <sup>2</sup> : 0.02				
N: 674				

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Source: Affective Polarization Dataset (2019); author's calculations

Both p-value of 0.74 and a t-value of -0.32 give the idea that the factor of ideological extreme does not play a statistically significant role in affective polarization. Furthermore, extremism characterizes a very small part of the total affective polarization.

In this model, it can also be seen that the multiple R-squared value is 0.02, which gives the idea that the given demographic variables explain only a small part of the affective polarization. The F-statistic, 3.075, and associated p-value, 0.009, show that the overall model is statistically significant and shows that the demographic values visible in the regression as a group affect affective polarization, but the effect size is relatively small.

**Table 7.** shows the regression to find the relationship between the level of affective polarization and ideologically extreme respondents. This table shows the value of intercept 5.34. In addition, it can be seen that there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of affective polarization and people who ideologically place themselves in the extreme left, p-value 0.74.

**Table 7.** *Regression - the relationship between the level of affective polarization and ideologically extreme respondents*

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
(Intercept)	5.34	0.22	24.6	<2e-16 ***
Factor				
(Ideology):	-0.17	0.50	-0.328	0.74
Extreme				
left-wing				
respondent				

R<sup>2</sup>: 0.001

N: 73

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Source: Affective Polarization Dataset (2019); author's calculations

The multiple R-squared value for this regression is 0.001, which indicates that this model describes a very small part, 0.1%, of the variance in the dependent variable. Since the number of people who place themselves as leftists on the ideological self-placement scale was not large, this can also be seen in the results. For this regression, the F-statistic was 0.1, with 1 and 73 degrees of freedom. The p-value is 0.74, which shows that the given regression model as a whole is not statistically significant and predictors do not have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable.

### 5.2.3 The level of affective polarization in 2022

**Table 8.** characterizes the results of the regression, which examines the relationship between affective polarization, ideology, ethnicity, age, and gender. For the gender variable, it can be seen that the coefficient for women is positive, 0.02, which suggests that women have a higher level of affective polarization than men. Still, this difference is not statistically significant as  $p = 0.89$ .

The ideology coefficients show differences between the mean affective polarizations of those who identify as centrists, liberals, conservatives, or do not know their ideological alignment. The coefficient for centrists is negative, -0.83, indicating that centrists have a lower level of affective polarization than those who do not know how to define themselves. Still, the difference is marginal and not statistically significant, as confirmed by  $p = 0.07$ . The coefficients for liberals and conservatives are not statistically significant and both p-values are below 0.05.

**Table 8.** *Regression - the relationship between affective polarization, ideology, ethnicity, age, and gender*

---

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
(Intercept)	4.84	0.48	9.94	<2e-16 ***

factor(Ideology): Centrist	-0.83	0.46	-1.80	0.07
factor(Ideology): Liberal	-0.06	0.41	-0.14	0.88
factor(Ideology): Conservative	0.31	0.41	0.75	0.45
factor(ethnicity): Russian	-0.71	0.36	-1.94	0.05
factor(ethnicity): Other	-0.05	0.83	-0.06	0.94
factor(gender): Woman	0.02	0.15	0.13	0.89
factor(age_group): 25-34	-0.22	0.31	-0.71	0.47
factor(age_group): 35-44	-0.29	0.30	-0.98	0.32
factor(age_group): 45-54	-0.16	0.30	-0.54	0.58
factor(age_group): 55-64	0.04	0.32	0.13	0.89
factor(age_group): 65-74	0.43	0.34	1.26	0.20
factor(age_group): 75-99	-0.26	0.32	-0.80	0.42
R <sup>2</sup> : 0.05				
N: 605				

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Source: Affective Polarization Dataset (2022); author's calculations

In the case of the age variable, it can be seen that the coefficients are not statistically significant for all age groups, and the p-value is lower than 0.05 for all groups. At the same time, for the age group 65-74, it can be seen that the coefficient is positive, 0.43, which indicates that people belonging to this age group have a higher level of affective polarization than younger people.

It can be seen between the ethnicity variable and affective polarization, the level of affective polarization of Russian-speaking Estonians is negative, -0.71, which indicates that those people who marked their ethnicity as "Russian" have a lower level of affective polarization than those who define it as did not wish. The p-value also indicates the relationship between the ethnicity variable and the level of affective polarization. P-value for Russian-speaking Estonians is 0.05, so it can be said that the relationship exists with 05% likelihood. The coefficients for those who could not indicate their ethnicity or indicated that it is "other" are also statistically insignificant and their p-value is below 0.05.

Looking at the whole model, it can be seen that the adjusted R-squared value is 0.05, which means that the independent variables describe only 5% of the variance in the affective polarization.

For the present regression, the number of cases was 605. The p-value visible from there, 0.001, shows that a statistically significant effect still exists. At the same time, a low R-squared indicator is visible, which indicates that this model does not fit the data well, and in the study of affective polarization, there may be variables that better explain this phenomenon, which are not included in these models.

In the case of the extreme variable presented in **Table 9.**, it can also be seen that it is not a statistically significant variable, and the t-value of 1.51 and the corresponding p-value of 0.13 of this variable indicate that this coefficient is not statistically significant at the conventional significance level of 0.05.

**Table 9.** *Regression - the relationship between the level of affective polarization and ideologically extreme respondents*

Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
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(Intercept)	4.87	0.17	29.17	<2e-16 ***
Factor				
(Ideology):				
Extreme	0.33	0.22	1.52	0.13
conservative				
respondent				
R <sup>2</sup> : 0.007				
N: 323				

---

Source: Affective Polarization Dataset (2022); author's calculations

The multiple R-squared value of this model is 0.007, which shows that only a very small part of the variance in the affective polarization variable is explained by the predictors in the model. F-statistics is 2.296, with 1 and 323 degrees of freedom. The p-value is 0.13, which shows that the regression model as a whole is not statistically significant and predictors do not have a significant effect on the dependent variable.

## 6. Conclusion

The objective of this master's thesis was to investigate how ethnicity and the political self-placement of voters - their political ideology - affect affective polarization. In the case of affective polarization, a situation may arise where there is no consensus between the political parties because they are so negative toward each other that they are not ready for cooperation (Reiljan, 2021). This means that adopting political decisions can slow down and become almost impossible. This master's thesis investigated the phenomenon of affective polarization in Estonia in 2011, 2019 and 2022 to find how different demographic variables influenced this phenomenon and how the importance of these variables has changed in the analyzed years. The availability of data became decisive for the analyzed period. Since affective polarization has not been studied in Estonia, finding important data for analysis in other years was also difficult. Previously, the topic of affective polarization was discussed by Reiljan in 2019, but as far as I know, it has not been done more. In addition, as far as I know, the topic of affective polarization at the individual level has not been studied in Estonia, as in this master's thesis.

During the first chapter, I conceptualized the concepts important to the work and opened up their background. I pointed out what affective polarization is and what can be found by reading different literature about this phenomenon. In this chapter, I pointed out that in the case of affective polarization, a completely unambiguous concept has not been developed that would help to understand the existence of this phenomenon in different political systems. This work combines Reiljan's (2021) and Wagner's (2021) definitions, according to which affective polarization is a combination of how political parties view each other and how voters view their favorite party and other parties. Then I pointed out how the phenomenon of affective polarization has been studied in Europe. I found that in Europe, the opposition of the radical right to other social groups is strongly visible. It is important to address the issue regionally in each country because, in all countries, affective polarization is not a nationwide problem but exists only in certain regions. Then I pointed out what the studies of affective polarization have been like in Estonia and found that the Center Party's policy has played an important role because, at least in 2011, it created tensions between Estonian and Russian-speaking voters and gathered Russian-speaking voters under it.

I also talked about the term ethnic minority and what is meant by it in the context of this work. In this work, ethnic minority refers to those people and future generations who have immigrated to Estonia. The main ethnic minority in Estonia is Russian-speaking people, and they are also the focus of this work. In addition to that, I wrote about how there is tension and division between ethnic minorities and Estonians, which is why it is important to examine whether this is also reflected in affective polarization.

In the course of this thesis, I also investigated the relationship between political identity and affective polarization. In the context of this work, political identity is how a person defines himself on a left-right political scale or a liberal-conservative scale. This is because the data available to me did not use the usual left-right scale in 2022 but the liberal-conservative scale. In addition to the fact that in the case of Estonia, not so much of the left-right scale plays a role in people's self-placement, but in recent years also the liberal-conservative one (Ehin & Solvak, 2012). This can be seen especially strongly after EKRE came into Estonian politics, and therefore it is reasonable to look at ideological self-placement from this aspect as well.

During this thesis, I tried to answer three research questions. As a first question, I wanted to know how strong is the connection between affective polarization and ethnicity in Estonia. To do this, I prepared an affective polarization indicator for each person, which was calculated by finding the party that the person supports the most and which has been given the highest score and subtracted from it the sum of the average scores given to other parties. I was then able to group people based on their ethnicity. The analysis revealed that the level of affective polarization of the Russian-speaking population has been higher than that of Estonian-speaking voters in 2011 and 2019. However, in 2022, this figure dropped drastically. However, the conducted regression analyses show either a marginally small relationship or no relationship at all between affective polarization and ethnicity. The hypothesis H2 prepared for the work: "*The level of affective polarization of ethnic minorities is higher than that of the rest of the population,*" was partially true. The compiled descriptive data graphs show that the level of affective polarization of minorities is lower than that of Estonian-speaking voters. Still, regression analyses revealed that the level of affective polarization of minority groups is statistically significant. It could be seen that in 2011 there was a significant relationship between people of other ethnicity and affective polarization, as the p-value was 0.001. This hypothesis was based on the assumption that minorities oppose themselves more with political parties and elites, and through this, the social gap between groups also grows. In the years 2011 and 2019, the level of affective polarization among

ethnic minorities was indeed higher. Still, in 2022 it dropped significantly, and an increase in the level of affective polarization of the Estonian-speaking voter could be seen. It was an expected result based on the fact that the indicator of affective polarization tends to move towards the importance of ideological variables and the role of the ethnicity variable decreases. In addition, the conducted regression analyses proved a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and the level of affective polarization in Estonia.

As second research question, I wanted to find out how people's ideological self-placement affected their feelings towards different parties? The analyzes revealed that according to the arrangement of the left-right scale, the general level of people's affective polarization has decreased between 2011 and 2019. If in 2011 the level of affective polarization of the right-wing supporter was 4.72 and that of the left-wing supporter was 4.74, then in 2019 these indicators were 4.56 and 4.22, respectively. The level of affective polarization of left- and right-wing supporters was higher for the analyzed years than that of centrists and those who could not place themselves anywhere. The level of affective polarization of centrists was lower than that of others in all analyzed years. From the analyzes of 2022, it can be seen that centrists have the lowest level of affective polarization, as in the two previously analyzed years. The next in terms of affective polarization are conservatives and liberals, although the difference is not big, but the level of affective polarization of liberal people is slightly higher. The rivalry between EKRE and the Reform Party and the quarrels between the political elites there probably surrounds it. During my master's thesis, I prepared hypothesis H1, according to which: *"ideologically more extreme voters (at the ends of the left and right spectrum) are affectively more polarized."* This hypothesis turned out to be false for each analyzed year. The regressions performed for all years revealed that ideological extremism does not play a statistically significant role in affective polarization. At the same time, it can be seen that the level of affective polarization of voters who define themselves as more ideologically extreme is still higher when looking at the descriptive statistics. But, with regression analysis, it came out that there is no statistically significant relationship between these variables. It is important to point out here that for all regression analyses where extremes were discussed, the sample was very small, and the number of people who defined themselves to be ideologically extreme was very low, which is why this is also reflected in the results.

Based on descriptive statistics could be said that, in 2011 and 2019, radical-right and radical-left wing supporters had a higher level of affective polarization than those who had positioned themselves simply as right-wing or left-wing. At the same time, it can also be seen

that the general level of affective polarization decreased in 2019 and was also lower among the extremes. The analysis also revealed the fact that in both years the indicator of affective polarization was higher among radical right-wing supporters. The same thing could be seen in the list of literature, where it was pointed out that in the European context, in the case of the study of affective polarization, the radical right is one of the biggest influencers of affective polarization. However, in the case of the regressions carried out during the study, it can be seen that ideological self-placement is also not statistically significant for any year to explain affective polarization. Only in the case of centrists, the analyzes showed that they could be associated with a lower level of affective polarization. Still, it was also seen in their case that the relationship is statistically very marginally significant.

With the third and last research question, I wanted to find out how the importance of ethnicity and political self-placement has changed over time. Ethnicity meant whether people define themselves as Estonians or Russian-speaking Estonians. For this purpose, I prepared two hypotheses, H3a: "*The importance of ideological self-placement has increased in the case of affective polarization,*" and H3b: "*The importance of ethnicity in affective polarization has decreased.*" The given hypotheses were based on the assumption that the political landscape of Estonia has changed significantly compared to 2011. At the same time, the chairman of the Center Party was changed, and this party no longer focuses as much on capturing the votes of Russian-speaking voters as before. In addition to this, EKRE has also entered Estonian politics, which has changed the political landscape and voters' preferences, and also emphasized the importance of nationalism. The analyzes show that the level of affective polarization has increased in the case of ideological self-placement, and the level of affective polarization has decreased in the case of the ethnicity variable. In addition, it can also be seen that in 2022 the level of affective polarization of Estonian-speaking voters has increased significantly, so it can be assumed that the role of national identity has also increased. Of course, this can also be due to other factors and the fact that there are tensions between the voters of EKRE and the Reform Party and the political elites, which are expressed in the level of affective polarization of their Estonian-speaking electorate.

During the analyzed period, a continuous drop in the statistical significance of ideological self-placement in determining affective polarization can be seen. The ethnicity p-value, especially for Russian-speaking Estonians, has increased for all analyzed years. In addition, it can be seen that the value of ethnicity has been decreasing for all analyzed years, being 0.99 in 2011, and in 2022 this indicator was already negative, so it can be said that the importance

of ethnicity in affective polarization has decreased. Therefore hypothesis H3b is proven to be true. Over time the importance of the ideological self-placement statistically decreased and the p-value of ethnicity has increased. The value of the ideological variable has been decreasing during the analyzed time, similar to that of ethnicity, so H3a has been proven wrong, and the analyzes show that ideology has not become an important factor in explaining affective polarization.

This master's thesis fulfilled its goals and found answers to the questions presented here. Based on the given results, it is possible to draw certain conclusions about other countries where the same gap exists between different ethnic groups. However, it is important to note here that based on the regressions, the variables used in the study have little weight in explaining the phenomenon of affective polarization. The models sometimes had a statistically significant weight, but in percentage terms, they explained a relatively small part of the affective polarization. To create a bigger picture, it would be important to include more variables and find the main and deepest cause of affective polarization. This would provide an opportunity to transfer better the analyzes and results prepared at the individual level to other countries.

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