



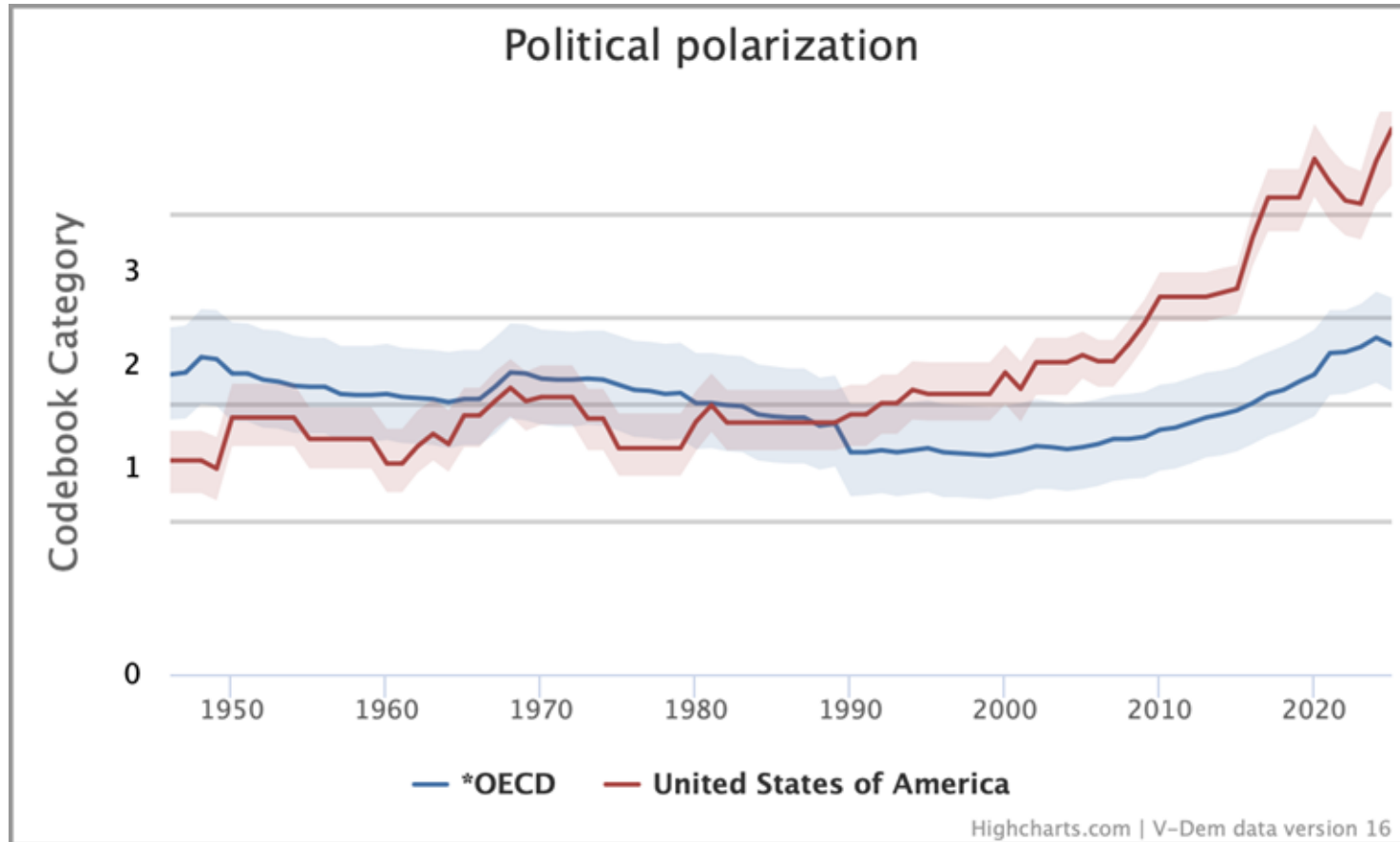
APSA Virtual Research Meeting

Shaping Consolidation: *Influence of Political Polarization on Voting in the United Nations*

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Conceptualization



Political (affective) polarization is a state of society, in which *bipolar political groups* have a *negative perception and distrust towards each other*, leading to animosity, extending beyond policy disagreement and affecting social relations (Iyengar, et al. 2012).

Relevance

Although there is a growing number of works suggesting that political polarization in the US undermines allies' assessment of US credibility and assurance (Perrings, Hechter, and Mamada 2021; Dodge 2024), the evaluation of this effect has been made mainly through theoretical (Friedrichs and Tama 2022) or survey assessment (Myrick 2022).

At the same time, research has been conducted on the links of political polarization and decreased international cooperation and coordination, and general stability of the world order (Frieden 2021; Hefeker and Neugart 2023).

But these two frameworks were not yet tested on the voting patterns in the United Nations General Assembly – one of the key markers of international cooperation.

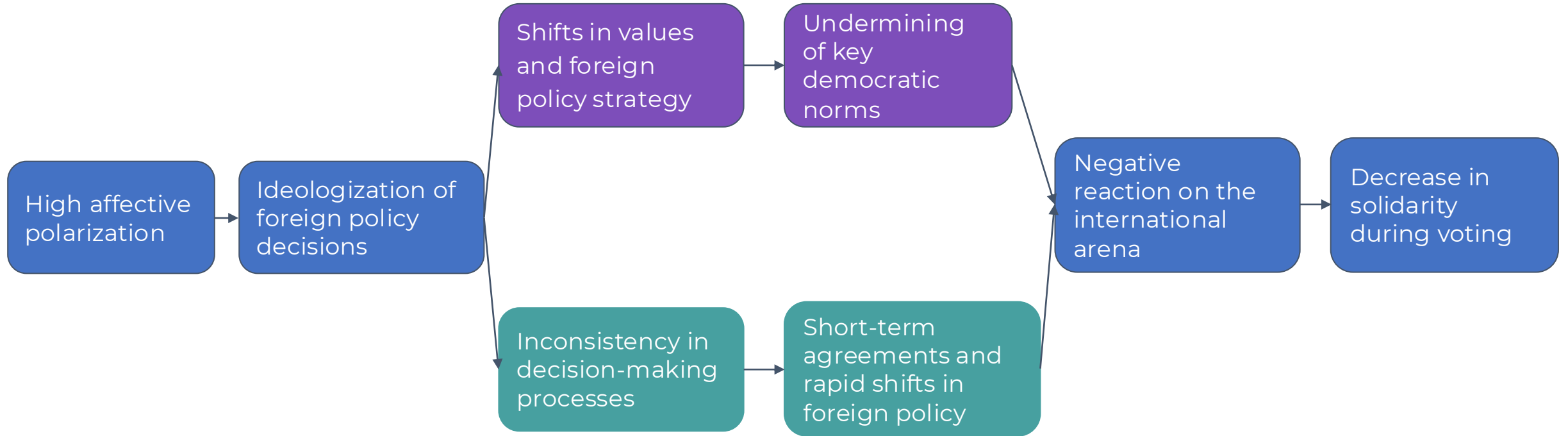
Theoretical framework

Building on neoclassical realism, we treat affective polarization as a domestic intervening variable that filters systemic pressures into fragmented Western foreign policy responses and inconsistent norm promotion.

Existing work on polarization shows it erodes liberal-democratic norms, elite consensus, and public tolerance via partisan cue-taking and out-party hostility, thereby weakening the credibility of Western norm entrepreneurs at home and abroad.

This challenges Finnemore & Sikkink's (1998) norm life-cycle by suggesting that emotional dissonance generated by polarization blocks persuasion and internalization, delegitimizing Western-supported norms before they can be routinized.

Causal mechanisms



Research Question and Hypotheses

Does affective polarization in Western democracies undermine the ability of the West to maintain international support for its promoted norms?

H1 Higher levels of affective polarization across Western democracies decrease the share of non-Western countries voting in alignment with Western-promoted resolutions in the UN General Assembly.

H2 The negative effect of Western polarization on resolution support is stronger in non-Western democracies than in non-Western autocracies.

Data and Methodology

Sources of data:

- UN Voting Database (Barash 2023)
- Affective polarization index – V-Dem (v2cacamps) - political polarization (-3 to 3)

Dependent variable

Share of non-Western countries voting in alignment with the OECD bloc on *contested* resolutions where $\geq 75\%$ of OECD members voted Yes, with unanimous resolutions being excluded from the observations

Independent variable

Mean affective polarization across OECD member states (v2cacamps), lagged one year

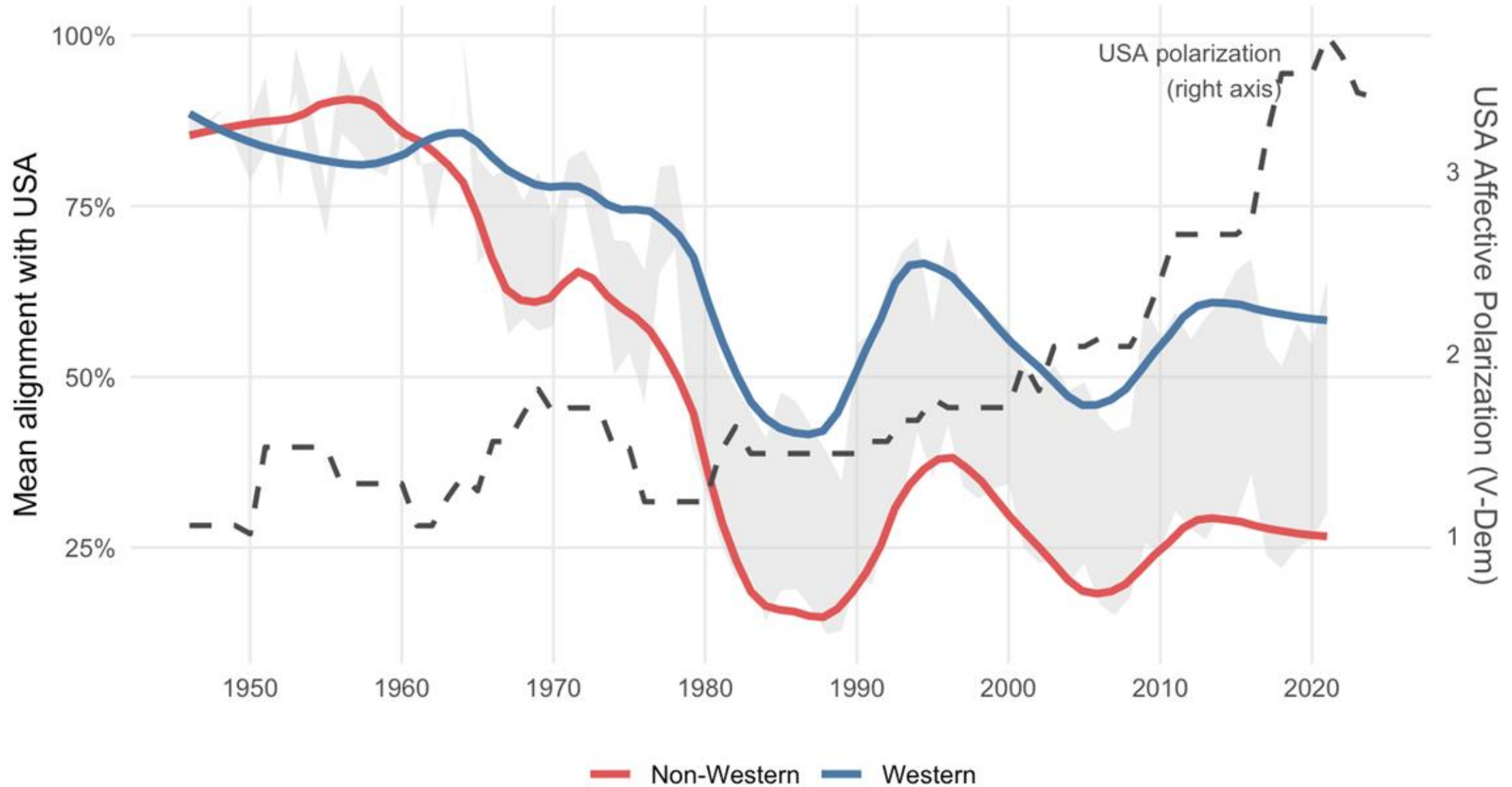
Method:

Large-N study, Fixed effects panel regression (feols)

- Country fixed effects absorb all time-invariant country characteristics
- Standard errors clustered by country
- Controls: log USAID disbursements, democracy level (V-Dem polyarchy), log GDP per capita, log population, UN membership tenure, Cold War dummy)

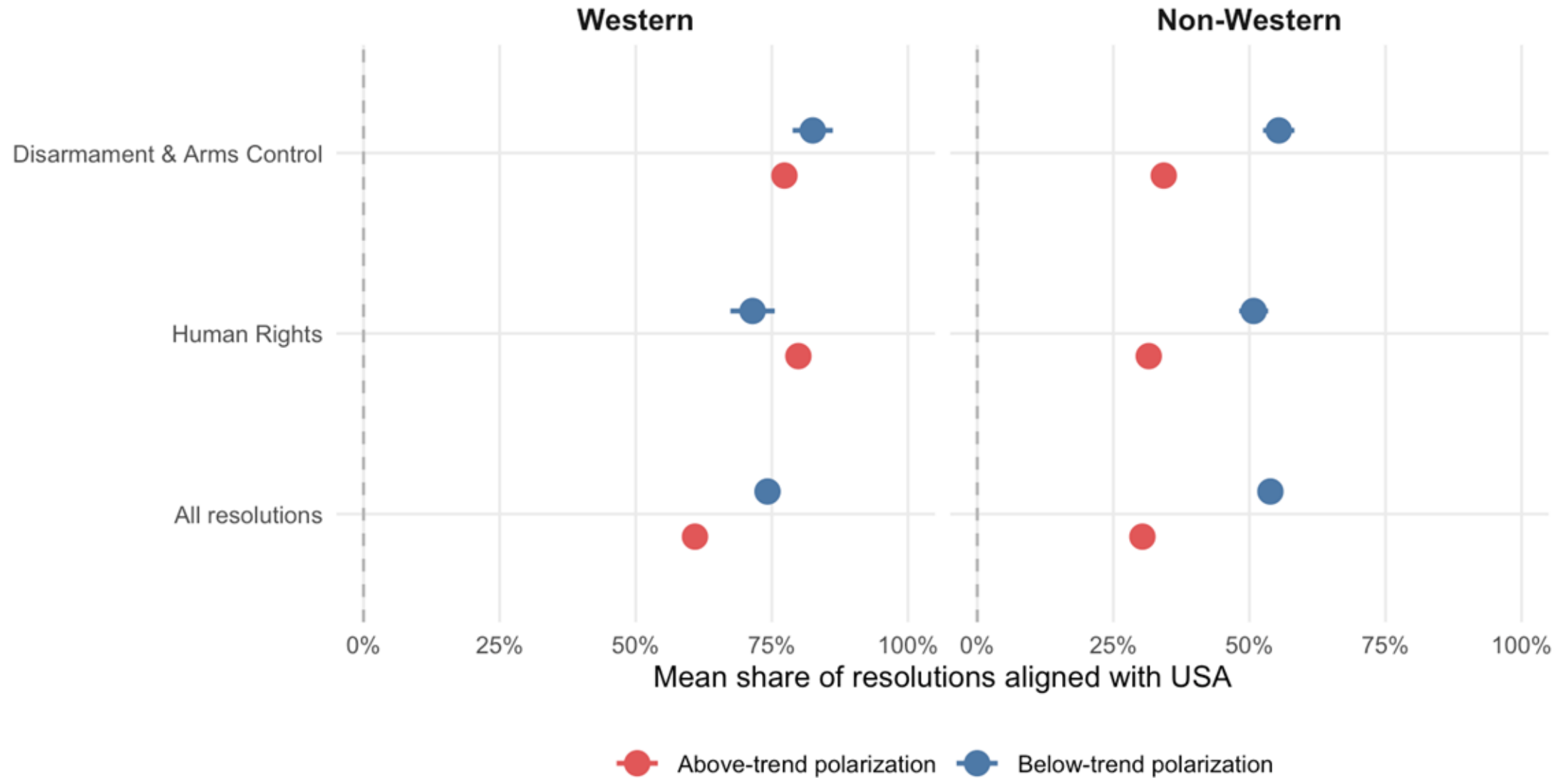
Western vs Non-Western Voting Alignment with USA over Time

Smoothed trends · grey ribbon = gap between groups · dashed = USA polarization



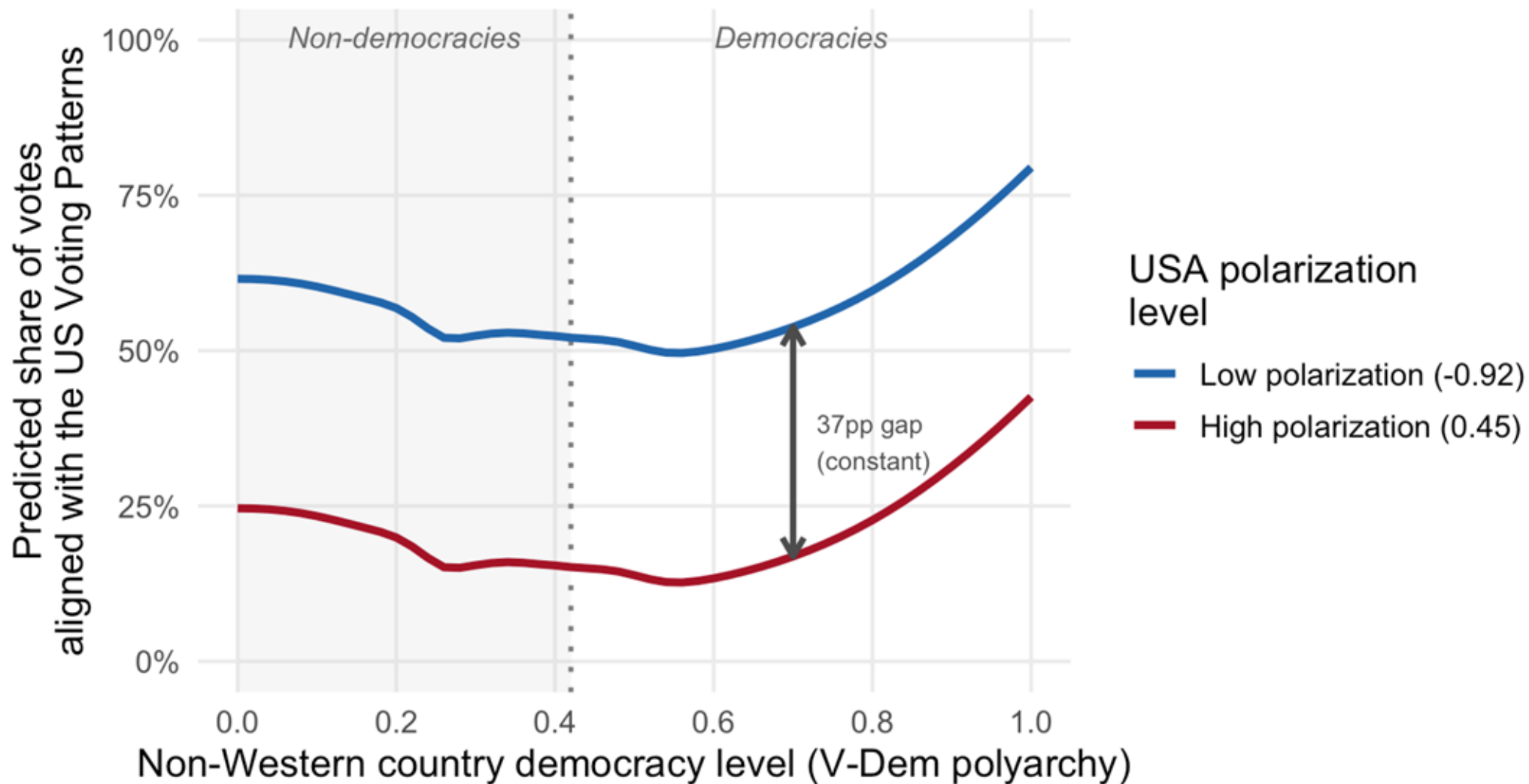
Voting Alignment with USA: Below vs Above Trend Polarization by Topic

Detrended polarization (deviation from 10-year rolling mean) · 95% CI



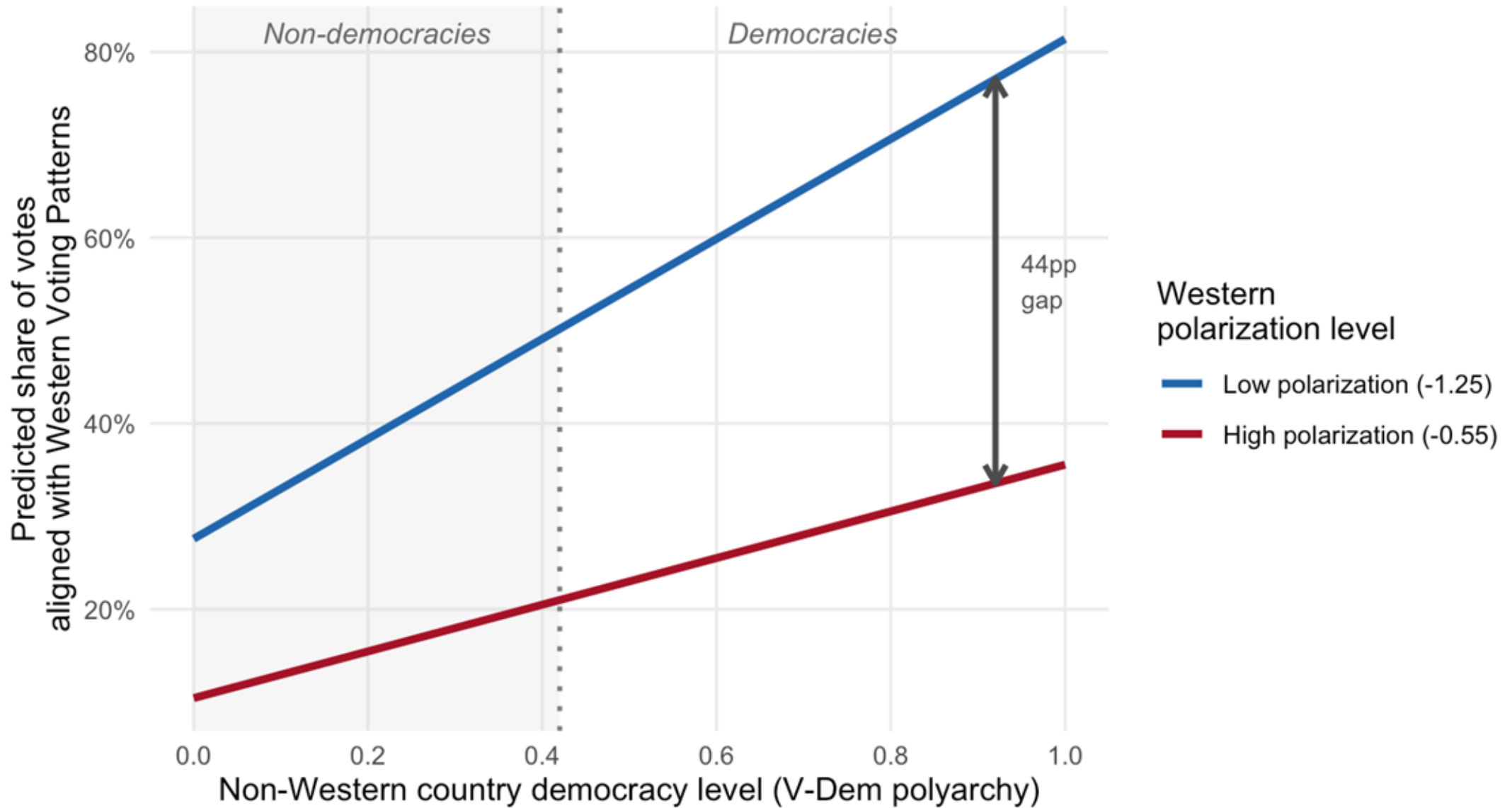
Topics: Voeten (2021) + Voelsen et al. (2025). Polarization lagged 1 year.

Predicted Alignment with the US during UN Voting



Model: country FE, clustered SEs, administration dummies, USAID, GDP, population, UN tenure.
Contested resolutions · ≥75% OECD YES votes.
Shape = LOESS-smoothed observed alignment. Vertical gap = model contrast (37pp, uniform).

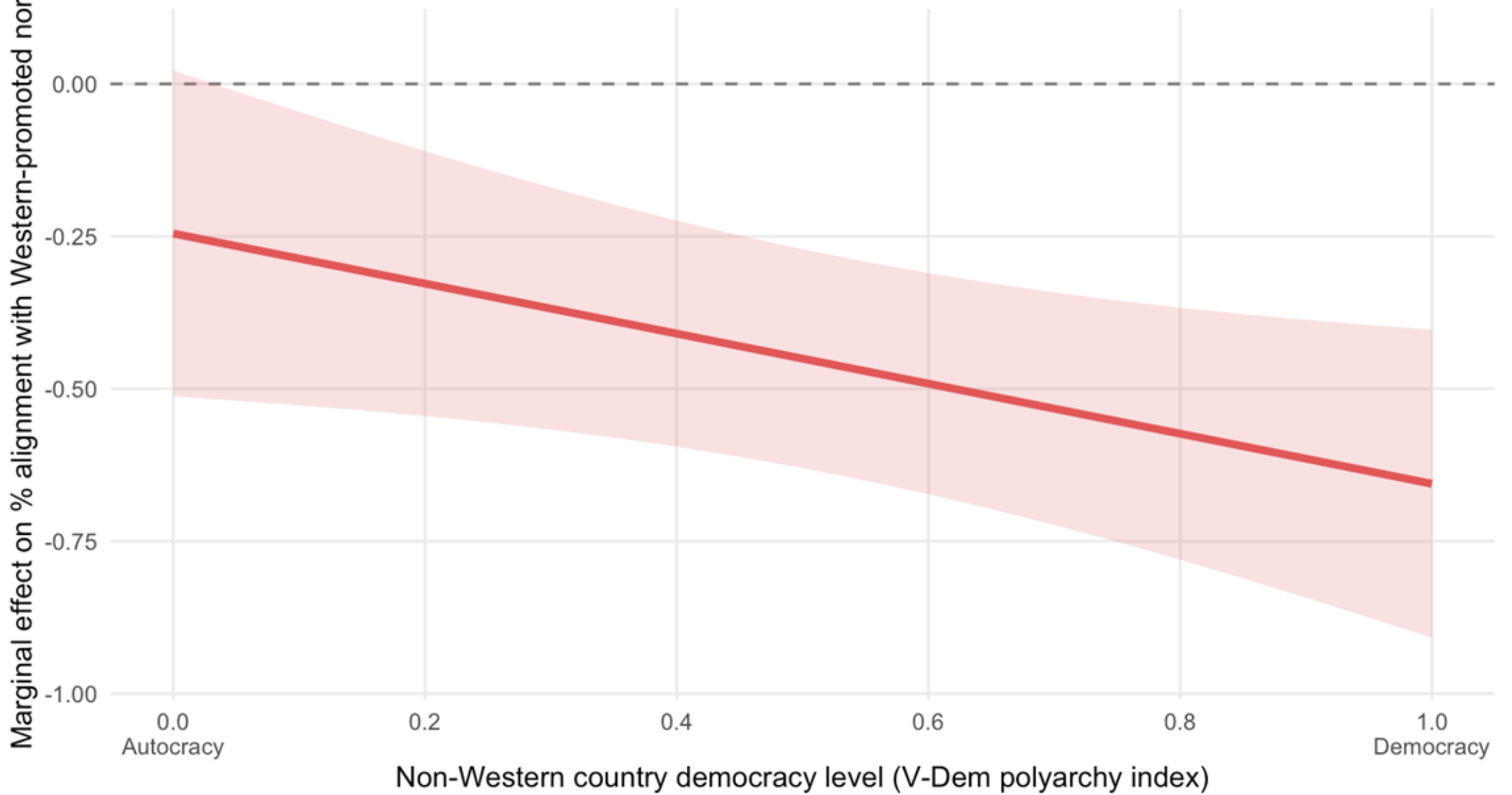
Predicted Alignment with OECD during UN voting



Model: country FE, clustered SEs, administration dummies, USAID, GDP, population, UN tenure.
Contested resolutions · ≥75% OECD YES votes .

Western Polarization Reduces Norm Support in Non-Western Democracies

Marginal effect of OECD mean polarization · 95% CI · OECD formal definition



Country FE · clustered SEs · contested resolutions with $\geq 75\%$ OECD YES votes.

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Q&A

