

POLITICAL POLARIZATION
AND LEGISLATIVE GRIDLOCK:
A COMPARATIVE
HIGH-FREQUENCY APPROACH

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Abstract

We propose a narrative-based approach to construct high-frequency measures of political polarization and legislative gridlock for seven democracies: France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. Our indices reveal that polarization has risen markedly since the Global Financial and Sovereign Debt Crises, with a faster increase in North America than in Europe. Through a range of exercises we show that the two indices respond differently to elections and unified government control, and that the latter weakens the pass-through between political polarization and gridlock. Consistent with the literature, we also find that investment declines following an increase in either index. Together, these high-frequency, cross-country measures provide a new tool for comparative political economy analysis.

Keywords: political polarization, legislative gridlock, textual analysis, cross-country analysis.

JEL classification: D72, D74, H3, P16.

Resumen

En este documento, proponemos un enfoque basado en narrativas para construir medidas de alta frecuencia de polarización política y bloqueo legislativo para siete democracias: Francia, Alemania, España, Italia, Reino Unido, Estados Unidos y Canadá. Nuestros índices revelan que la polarización ha aumentado de forma notable desde la crisis financiera global y la crisis de deuda soberana, con un incremento más acusado en Norteamérica que en Europa. Mediante distintos ejercicios, mostramos que ambos índices responden de manera diferente a las elecciones y a los períodos de control unificado del Gobierno, y que este control debilita la transmisión de la polarización política al bloqueo legislativo. En línea con la literatura, también encontramos que la inversión disminuye tras un aumento de cualquiera de los dos índices. En conjunto, estas medidas de alta frecuencia y comparables entre países proporcionan una nueva herramienta para el análisis de la economía política comparada.

Palabras clave: polarización política, bloqueo legislativo, análisis textual, análisis comparado entre países.

Códigos JEL: D72, D74, H3, P16.

1 Introduction

Polarization has become a prominent topic in political and economic debate, encompassing partisan conflict in the United States (Azzimonti, 2014), institutional polarization and its intersection with autocratization in parts of Asia (Fossati, 2024; Slater and Arugay, 2018), and political fragmentation and institutional instability in Europe (Emanuele and Marino, 2024). This is reflected in scientific literature with multiple research strands focusing on defining and measuring both polarization and other, closely linked phenomena. Because polarization and its potential causes and consequences are often manifested in rather distinct ways, finding a unified framework within which to quantify these concepts can be a challenge. This is precisely the objective of our paper: to provide novel high-frequency measurements of both political polarization and one of its possible consequences, legislative gridlock.

Polarization resists a single definition. The seminal paper on polarization in the political and social sciences defines it as the ‘division into two sharply distinct opposites’ (Bramson et al., 2017). In practice, however, the term is applied across social, political, psychological, and economic contexts, and at scales ranging from single issues (Skytte, 2021) to entire populations (McCoy et al., 2018); nor is there consensus on how the various conceptualizations relate to one another (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Barber and McCarty, 2015). Scholars therefore treat polarization as an aggregate or umbrella concept (Lelkes, 2016; Van der Veen, 2023) and describe it through its multiple dimensions rather than through a single, unified definition. Now, a useful way to organize this broad concept is the two-dimensional model of Van der Veen (2023), which maps polarization along its *level* — the group that is polarized — and its *mode* — how it manifests. The level distinguishes *elite* polarization, among politicians, legislators, and other actors with specialized knowledge or power, from *mass* polarization, among the general public. Elite polarization is typically measured from behaviour, most prominently through DW-NOMINATE scores derived from U.S. congressional voting (Lewis et al., 2026); mass polarization is usually inferred from population surveys (e.g. the World Values Survey or Latinobarómetro) or, in an intermediate expert-based position, from V-Dem’s country-level assessments (Coppedge et al., 2025b). The mode distinguishes *ideological* polarization, the growing distance between policy preferences on issues such as

taxation, immigration, or redistribution, from *affective* polarization, which draws on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) to capture the emotional warmth partisans feel toward their own group and hostility toward opponents (Diermeier and Li, 2019). The two need not coincide: Brexit, for instance, produced strong affective divisions that cut across traditional partisan lines (Hobolt et al., 2021).

Our interest in measuring polarization is ultimately motivated by its economic consequences. Yet there is no single accepted framework detailing the channels through which polarization (in as general a sense as possible, without making the distinctions delineated above) filters down to the economic level; the literature points instead to several intertwined channels.¹ Polarization raises *uncertainty* about future political outcomes and policy processes, especially around contested elections, which shapes agents' economic decisions (Azzimonti, 2018; Baker et al., 2016, 2020; Coibion et al., 2020). Polarized alternation produces costly *policy reversals*, as successive shifts in U.S. climate policy illustrate. It generates *inaction and gridlock*, hampering consistent economic policymaking and contributing to an unpredictable regulatory environment (Hussain et al., 2023), in its sharpest form producing government shutdowns with measurable output costs (Vanden Houten, 2025). It distorts the *allocation of spending*, as partisan beliefs bias which firms and projects receive public and private capital (Kempf and Tsoutsoura, 2024). More speculatively, it can erode the independence of the judicial and the central bank through partisan appointments, weaken *social cohesion* and thereby distort the allocation of human capital (Campos Lima and Martín Artiles, 2018; Kleiner, 2018; Martinez-Miera and Sunyer, 2025), and contribute to *geopolitical fragmentation*, reducing investment flows, and disrupting global supply chains.

Guided by the broad framework of the polarization phenomena, and motivated by the possible transmission channels to the economy, the objects we choose for our study are deliberately specific. We set out to measure *reported* ideological political polarization: the ideological rather than the affective mode, captured as it is narrated in the national press

¹Such lack of a unified framework is not only in line with the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon, but also representative of intangible, socially constructed and context-dependent concepts in general, such as economic policy uncertainty or geopolitical risk. As a result, the frameworks used by major policy-making institutions do not necessarily agree (see, for instance, the views of the IMF (International Monetary Fund, 2025) and the ECB (European Systemic Risk Board and European Central Bank, 2026) on the effects of such intangibles on financial stability)

rather than inferred from behaviour or elicited from surveys, and without imposing a prior distinction between elite and mass. This aligns with what Bramson et al. (2017) classify as *Type I* polarization, or *spread*: the population-level widening of opinion distributions. Furthermore, within the same framework we propose to measure one possible consequence of polarization, and a phenomenon in its own right - legislative gridlock. Our motivation is that as opinions become more dispersed toward the extremes, the scope for compromise narrows and it becomes “more difficult for the political system to establish and maintain centrist political consensus” (DiMaggio et al., 1996, p. 694). Thus, the distinction we draw is between polarization itself, understood as a feature of a society’s ideological structure, and the legislative difficulties or political outcomes that may arise from it.

Our main object of interest remains political polarization. Yet measuring polarization alone leaves open an important issue about one of its consequences: greater political disagreement does not necessarily translate into an impaired capacity to govern, since whether it does so depends on the institutional setting in which that disagreement takes place. We therefore construct, alongside our political polarization index, a companion measure of legislative gridlock. This measure captures a more downstream manifestation of political conflict: the difficulty in reaching and implementing policy decisions. It also allows us to investigate when is it that rising polarization is associated with institutional obstruction. This distinction is also natural next step in the context of newspaper-based measurement: the Partisan Conflict Index of Azzimonti (2018), on which our methodology builds, combines language describing ideological division with language describing legislative deadlock, whereas we separate these components explicitly.

Specifically, we develop two high-frequency indices to separately track reported ideological political polarization and reported legislative gridlock. Our work builds directly on the dictionary-based methodology introduced by Azzimonti (2013) as mentioned above, developed to measure partisan conflict and political polarization in the U.S. context.² We compute our indices for four European countries (France, Germany, Italy, and Spain), two Anglo-Saxon countries (the UK and the U.S.), and Canada. Examining these seven cases

²The Partisan Conflict Index (PCI), an extension and renaming of the earlier Political Polarization Index developed by Azzimonti (2013), is available from: the Philadelphia Fed’s website.

together is analytically useful because they differ not only in historical developments and salient national cleavages, but also in structural dimensions such as institutional arrangements, electoral systems, and patterns of party competition; their media systems, moreover, correspond to different models (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), adding further heterogeneity in the informational environments actors face. The harmonized methodology enables cross-country comparisons often missing in the literature, and the indices are high-frequency, media-based, and adaptable across languages and political systems, offering a scalable tool for empirical research and policy analysis.

Two further contributions are close antecedents to our own. Gentzkow et al. (2019) measure elite behavioural polarization directly from political language, defining partisanship as the ease with which an observer could infer a speaker's party from their words, and document a sharp rise in partisan congressional speech from the early 1990s. Being elite, behavioural, and specific to the two-party U.S. Congress, their measure sits close to DW-NOMINATE on the map above, and it is against DW-NOMINATE that we benchmark our U.S. series in Section 5. Closer to our own cross-country ambition, Boxell et al. (2024) measure affective polarization across twelve OECD countries since the 1980s and find no common trend: it rose most in the United States, and also in France and Canada, but fell in Britain and (West) Germany. Our object differs from this one both in mode and in measurement. The comparison with Boxell et al. (2024) is instructive precisely because the two measures need not move together: among the countries we have in common, some in which they find affective polarization falling — Britain and Germany — are ones in which we find reported ideological polarization rising. Rather than a discrepancy, we read this as evidence that the affective and ideological modes are genuinely distinct, reinforcing the case, central to this paper, for measuring the dimensions of polarization separately rather than as a single latent construct.

We find that reported political polarization has risen substantially since the Global Financial and EU's Sovereign Debt Crises, after a decline from the late 1990s, and at roughly twice the European rate in North America; polarization and gridlock co-move closely in France and Germany, begin to co-move in Spain after 2016, and decouple in Italy. Furthermore, our polarization indices correlate with other well-known measures (the Partisan Conflict Index,

DW-NOMINATE, and V-Dem) while remaining distinct from them. We show that polarization and gridlock respond differently to predictable political events: reported polarization rises around elections while reported gridlock does not, and gridlock falls under unified government control while polarization shows a less consistent pattern, direct evidence that the two capture separable dimensions of political conflict. Consistent with this, unified control is seen to weaken the pass-through from polarization to gridlock, which helps rationalize the Italian case. Finally, we show in a formal model that investment responds negatively to both indices, though faster and more precisely to gridlock, in line with the policy-inaction channel.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the data and methodology. Section 3 describes the evolution of the two indices both country by country and in a cross-country comparison. Section 4 validates the indices using robustness exercises, narrative checks, and through examining the response of investment. Section 5 compares our measures to the closest alternatives. Section 6 tests whether the two indices capture distinct phenomena by examining their responses to elections and unified government control, and then analyses their co-movement and the role of unified control in shaping their relationship. Section 7 discusses the main findings and concludes.

2 Data and Methodology

Within the two-dimensional model set out above, each facet of political polarization suggests a different measurement strategy. The data sources most commonly used to recover the underlying construct are roll-call votes, parliamentary speeches, and survey responses. Survey-based measures such as the Eurobarometer or ANES, for example, capture polarization at the societal level but are too coarse to trace institutional (elite) dynamics, and their low frequency limits their usefulness whenever polarization is read as a short-term “pulse” on economic or political conditions. Such approaches deliver genuine insight, yet they are frequently constrained not only in frequency, but also in comparability and coverage. Behavioural measures face a related limitation: Poole and Rosenthal’s DW-NOMINATE scores, built from legislative roll-call voting, and the speech-based indices of Gentzkow et al. (2019) perform well for the U.S. Congress but translate poorly to Europe’s multi-party legislatures.

Our own strategy instead rests on a dictionary-based reading of press articles, in the tradition of Baker et al. (2016) and, especially, Azzimonti (2018). Because it works from text, the method can capture the nuances of political discourse in any country with a single, consistent procedure; and because the Boolean search is deliberately simple and transparent, the resulting series map closely onto the concepts of polarization and gridlock they are meant to measure. Applying an identical procedure country by country yields a comparable and robust set of indices for both ideological polarization and legislative gridlock, opening a new window on the dynamics of political polarization across our sample.

2.1 Constructing the indices

We build both the Political Polarization Index (PPI) and the Legislative Gridlock Index (LGI) using the Dow Jones’s Factiva database. Factiva combines an extensive historical archive of the major media outlets across many countries with a native (Boolean) search engine, which lets us query both the body of each article and the meta-labels that Factiva’s internal classification assigns to it.

We define the two national indices using the narrative from the main national newspapers. The outlets used for each country are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: National newspapers used to construct the indices

Country	Newspapers
Germany	Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Welt, Handelsblatt, Der Tagesspiegel, Die Tageszeitung, Börsen-Zeitung, Berliner Zeitung, Frankfurter AZ
France	Le Figaro, Les Echos, Le Monde, Libération, La Croix, L’Opinion, La Tribune, L’AGEFI Quotidien
Spain	El País, El Mundo, La Vanguardia, ABC, Cinco Días, Expansión, El Economista
Italy	Corriere della Sera, Il Sole 24 Ore, La Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Giornale, Italia Oggi, Il Fatto Quotidiano
United Kingdom	The Guardian, The Independent, The Times, The Evening Standard, The Economist, The Metro, City AM, The Observer
United States	The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, USA Today, New York Post
Canada	Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, National Post, Winnipeg Free Press, La Presse Canadienne, Le Soleil, Le Droit

Coverage is not fully balanced at the start of the sample. For each (newspaper set,

language) pair in a given country, the inclusion date is the earlier of the point at which at least two newspapers become available and the point from which the Factiva regional filter is reliable. Table A.1 in Section A of the Appendix details the coverage period of each newspaper in Factiva. At the index level, our series begin in 1997 for France, Germany, Spain, and Italy, in 1995 for the UK, and in 2003 for the U.S. and Canada. These are index-level start dates, not the availability date of every individual outlet: as Table A.1 shows, some newspapers enter Factiva considerably later, and the start date for each country is the earliest point at which at least two outlets are available and the Factiva regional filter is robust.

For every index we generate two monthly series: a count of all articles drawn from the sources above, which serves as the normalizing denominator, and a count of those same articles that additionally satisfy a given (Boolean) condition associated with the index. Since the indices are dictionary-based, that condition amounts to testing for the presence of specific terms. Dividing by the total article count strips out swings in overall news volume, so each index reflects the relative attention devoted to the topic rather than the raw number of articles, and also mitigates any bias arising from the uneven availability of newspapers in Factiva. A natural concern is that a single newspaper might distort the index through its political leaning or editorial choices. Section 4 addresses this with a robustness exercise: dropping any one outlet leaves the index virtually unchanged, so no individual source is driving the results.

Following Azzimonti (2013), we require each term to relate simultaneously to polarization or gridlock and to politics, so as to isolate the specifically political dimension of the phenomena. The PPI draws on keywords signalling polarization and political disagreement (for instance “polarization”, “ideological division”, or “partisan conflict”), which must co-occur with politics-and-policy terms such as “government”, “legislation”, or “political party” before an article qualifies. The LGI uses keywords for legislative stalling and policy deadlock (“legislative impasse”, “policy deadlock”, “government stalemate”), again paired with the same politics-and-policy terms to pin down genuine legislative difficulty in the press narrative. This design lets us track the frequency and intensity of both phenomena over time in a structured, replicable way.

Figure 1: Selection rule for the indices

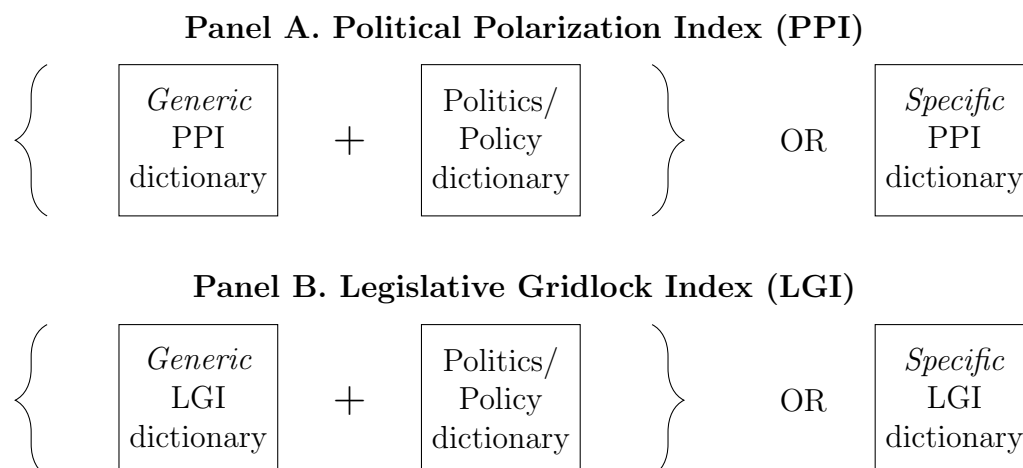


Figure 1 makes the selection rule explicit. An article enters the PPI if it either (a) contains at least one term from the *generic* polarization dictionary *together with* at least one Politics/Policy term, or (b) contains at least one term from the *specific* polarization dictionary, whose terms are political by construction and therefore need no further qualifier. The LGI follows the same two-branch rule, with the gridlock dictionaries in place of the polarization ones. The Politics/Policy dictionary (Table A.2) is common to both indices.

Table 2 illustrates the content of the four dictionaries with the English-language term lists. The dictionaries are built to be conceptually, not literally, equivalent across languages: each is written natively in the language of the outlet, so that idiomatic expressions of deadlock or partisan division are captured rather than translated word for word. Appendix A reports the complete term lists for all seven countries and five languages, together with the shared Politics/Policy dictionary (Table A.2) and the coverage of each outlet in Factiva (Table A.1).

We further drop articles classified by Factiva’s preset filters as sport or entertainment (standard practice in this literature) and restrict attention to articles focused on the country at hand. For Germany specifically, we also exclude any article containing “bundesliga” or “bundesstra*”.*³

Two final steps produce the final series. First, the monthly index is the ratio introduced above — number of articles meeting the index condition divided by the number of articles

³For Germany, we additionally test the robustness of our dictionary, by adding *kanzler* in the position category, removing *bundes** and including *bundestag* or *bundesrat* in the legislative bodies category.

Table 2: The dictionaries: English-language terms

Panel A. Political Polarization Index (PPI)

Dictionary	Category	Terms
<i>Generic</i> (must co-occur with a Politics/Policy term)	Polarization	polariz* or polaris*
	Disagreement	disagreement* or dividing line* or ((politic* or ideologic*) (split* or divi* or clash*))
<i>Specific</i> (stands alone)	Difference	(partisan (divi* or difference* or split*)) or (party (divi* or split* or difference*)) or ((divi* or split* or difference*) between (party or parties))

Panel B. Legislative Gridlock Index (LGI)

Dictionary	Category	Terms
<i>Generic</i> (must co-occur with a Politics/Policy term)	Gridlock	gridlock* or deadlock* or paralys* or stand-off* or stalemate* or impasse*
<i>Specific</i> (stands alone)	Confidence vote	(vote* or motion*) (to or of) (no confidence or censure) or no-confidence (vote* or motion*)

Note. Terms shown are those used for the English-language outlets (United Kingdom, United States, and the English-language Canadian press); an asterisk denotes truncation. Within a category, terms are combined with “or”; an article qualifies if it matches any category of the relevant dictionary. Two minor country-specific variants are not shown: the UK disagreement entry uses (divi* or split) in place of (split* or divi* or clash*), and the U.S. confidence-vote entry additionally includes *impeach**. The complete term lists for all seven countries and five languages (French, Spanish, German, Italian, English), and the Politics/Policy dictionary common to both indices, are reported in Appendix A.

published by the set of selected outlets that month⁴ — which makes values comparable across both time and sources. Second, the series is rescaled to average 100 over the 1997–2009 base period.

Finally, as is standard in this literature, the completed indices are validated narratively, to confirm that they react to actual developments and note any type I errors. We flag peaks — observations more than two standard deviations above the mean, computed on the two-year window preceding each observation — and inspect the articles feeding the numerator at those points. For every peak we read the narrative signalled by the article headlines and judge whether it reflects a real intensification of the phenomenon the index targets, polarization or gridlock as the case may be. The following section develops this narrative exercise in detail.

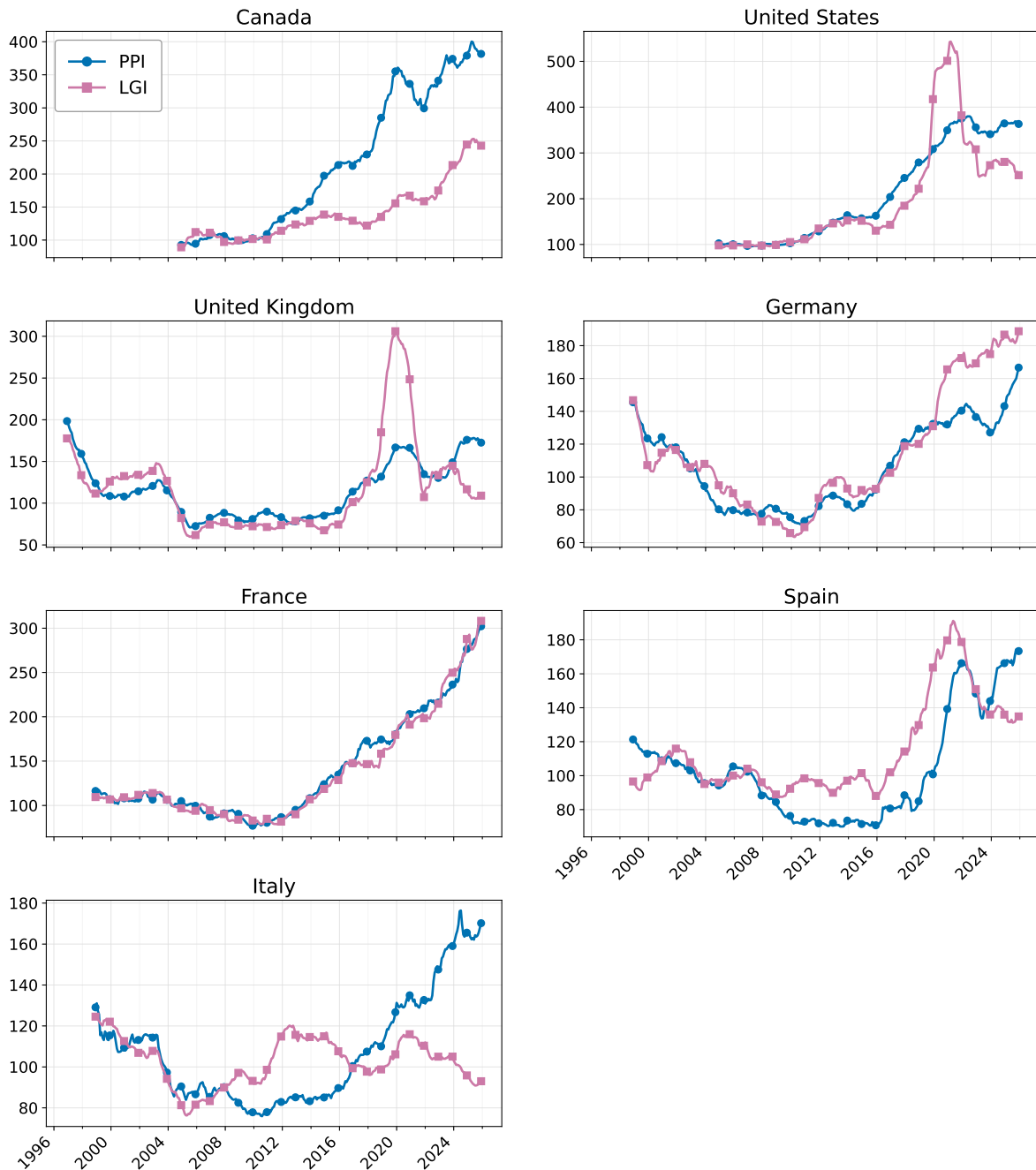
3 Results

3.1 Country-specific Results

Our indices are shown in Figure 2. A common pattern runs through the sample: for the European countries the PPI and LGI are broadly flat through the 2000s and rise markedly after the EU’s Sovereign Debt Crisis from 2009 onward, often following a U-shape that bottoms out around the Global Financial Crisis; the United States and Canada display an earlier and steeper climb. Against this shared backdrop, countries differ in the timing of the rise, in the salient national cleavages that drive it, and —most importantly for what follows— in whether polarization and gridlock move together. France and Germany show a close PPI-LGI link, Spain a co-movement that emerges after 2016, and Italy a clear divergence between the two. We summarize each country in turn below, pointing in each case to the combined index-and-elections plot in Appendix C; the corresponding annotated plots and narrative tables sit alongside it. The formal cross-country comparison follows in Section 3.2.

⁴In the case of Canada, the numerator and denominator are computed by first retrieving the relevant articles in both English and French, and then summing the counts from both languages. The final index is then the ratio of these two sums. This is in line with how a unique index is obtained for a country with multiple available official languages, from Alonso-Alvarez et al. (2026).

Figure 2: PPI and LGI for each country



France. The PPI for France is broadly flat until around 2009 and then rises steadily (Figure C.1). The LGI follows the same profile closely, and the two series track each other throughout the sample, indicating that in the French case reported political polarization and legislative gridlock are tightly intertwined. The rise is driven above all by social mobilization and contested reforms: pension-reform strikes, the Yellow Vests movement, and

the recurrent use of Article 49.3 to pass legislation without a parliamentary vote, which repeatedly converted policy disputes into open institutional confrontation. Electoral turning points—the 2017 and 2022 presidential contests and the 2024 snap legislative elections—add further peaks.

Germany. The PPI for Germany declines until 2003, remains stable for a decade, and rises steadily from 2014 onward (Figure C.3). The LGI follows a similar profile, and the two indices co-move closely. The link runs largely through a single set of issues: migration, asylum, and security, which since the 2015 refugee crisis have driven both the ideological divisions the PPI captures and the coalition difficulties the LGI records. The rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) sharpened this dynamic, with successive electoral gains culminating in the February 2025 federal elections, while contested climate and energy decisions supplied additional gridlock episodes.

Italy. The PPI for Italy declines until 2003, is stable through the financial and sovereign-debt crises, and rises from 2014 onward, driven by the erosion of the traditional party system, the rise of the Five Star Movement, and its 2018 coalition with the League around contested migration policy (Figure C.5). The LGI, by contrast, remains comparatively flat throughout: Italy is the clearest case in the sample in which polarization rises without a parallel rise in gridlock. We read this decoupling as the product of two opposing forces—rising polarization making agreement harder, and successive electoral reforms shifting the system toward majoritarian outcomes that reduce the need for broad coalitions—and examine this institutional moderation formally in Section 6.

Spain. The PPI for Spain drifts slightly downward from 1997 to 2015 and then rises sharply, intensifying through 2021 (Figure C.7). The LGI is flat until around 2016 and rises thereafter, so that the two indices—initially unrelated—begin to co-move only in the second half of the sample. The turning point is the fragmentation of the party system: the inconclusive 2015 and 2016 general elections, the rise of Podemos, Ciudadanos, and later Vox, and the Catalan crisis together converted a stable two-party landscape into a setting in which polarization and government-formation difficulty reinforce each other.

United Kingdom. The UK is distinctive in that its LGI contains peaks so large that, on a common scale, they compress the PPI and make it appear comparatively flat (see Figure C.9). The rescaled trend of the PPI can be found in Figure 3. Both indices are shaped by a single recurring theme, i.e. national identity, in relation both to the UK's constituent nations and to Europe, which increasingly cuts across traditional party lines from 2015 onward. Early volatility reflects dissatisfaction with the Conservative government, leadership churn, and austerity-versus-protection debates around the 2008 crisis; the dominant and most sustained disruption is Brexit, whose polarizing effects combine with repeated prime-ministerial turnover to produce the unprecedented LGI spikes of 2019–2020 and 2022.

United States. Both U.S. indices trend clearly upward, though the rise begins only around 2009, in line with the European results (Figure C.11). The PPI climbs through the Obama years and enters a persistently high phase from 2016, marked by disputes over electoral legitimacy, impeachment, and executive authority, with the 2020 election a major peak. The LGI is comparatively stable through the 2000s and becomes more volatile with the 2011 debt-ceiling confrontation and the 2013 government shutdown, thereafter recurring around appropriations, impeachment, and shutdown episodes. The U.S. thus combines a long-run rise in reported polarization with recurrent bouts in which partisan conflict spills into outright legislative deadlock.

Canada. Canada differs from the European cases in its first-past-the-post system, which favours single-party majorities and stabilizes prime-ministerial turnover; only since 2015, with the return of minority governments, has this coincided with rising polarization (Figure C.13). The PPI is stable between 2003 and 2009 and climbs steadily thereafter, increasingly tied to identity and regional conflicts and, more recently, to immigration, trade, and relations with the United States. The LGI is less a single trend than a series of recurrent peaks (minority-government instability, federal-provincial tensions, and protest episodes such as the 2022 truck convoy) so that reported gridlock follows a more episodic, peak-driven pattern than the steadier rise in reported polarization.

3.2 Cross-Country Comparison

Having described each country in turn, we now compare the countries directly. Figures 3 and 4 show cross-country comparisons for the PPI and the LGI. To make subgroup trends legible, each figure is split in two: the bottom panel drops the outlier series so that the remaining countries could be read on a common scale.

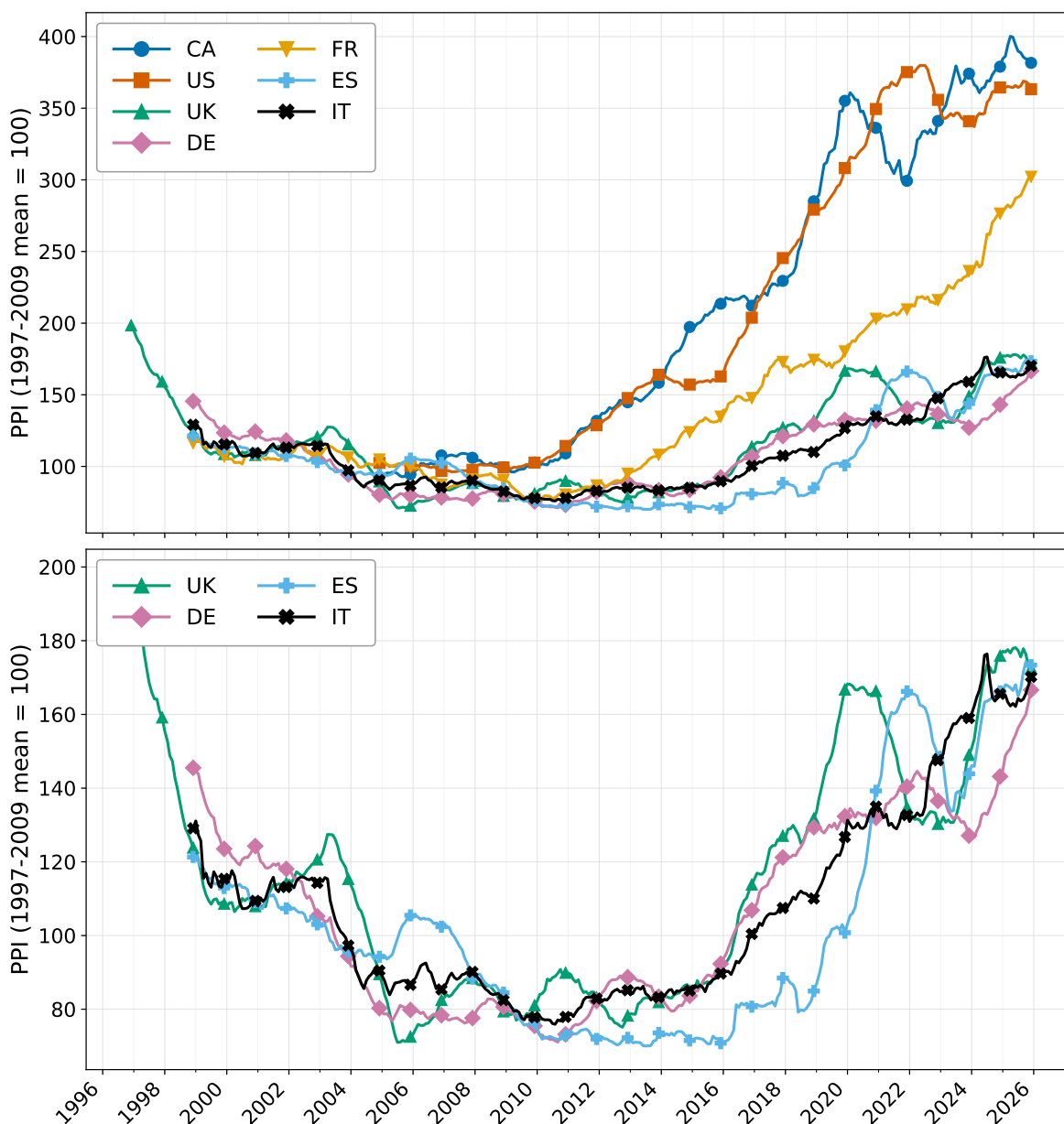
All countries show a marked increase in political polarization, but the rate at which it rises separates them into roughly three groups. Taking a common 2005-2025 window (which also matches the start of the North American series) Canada and the United States rise the most, reaching roughly four times their 2005 level by 2025. France rises more slowly, to around three times its 2005 level, while the remaining four European countries increase by a factor of about 1.5-2. The North American series partly reflect their shorter runway, since 2005 sits near their start; even so, the implication is clear: reported political polarization increased in North America at roughly twice the European rate. A further feature of the five European countries, for which we have data from at least 1997, is that polarization was undergoing an earlier peak in the late 1990s, falling to its lowest point around the Global Financial Crisis of 2009 before the sustained rise that followed.

For legislative gridlock, the cross-country picture is dominated by two upheavals: Brexit in the UK and the first Trump presidency in the U.S.. Setting these aside, the U.S. LGI still grows steadily, in line with the other countries, and for the UK, Germany, and France the LGI draws the same U-shape as their PPI. The main exception is Italy, whose LGI stays relatively flat despite rising polarization; although Spain shows a small recent decline in gridlock as well. We return to these divergences below.

While these two figures describe the cross-country pattern country by country, we close the section by quantifying it for the sample as a whole. Table 3 splits the sample into six subperiods and reports, for each, the mean of each index pooled across the seven countries.

Both indices are mostly flat through 2015, close to the full-sample baseline of 100, and rise steadily thereafter. They reach 173 and 166, respectively, in 2016-2019, and 237 and 187 by 2023-2025. Taken together, the pooled averages and the country series in Figures 3 and 4 show that this increase is broad-based and becomes pronounced in the mid-2010s

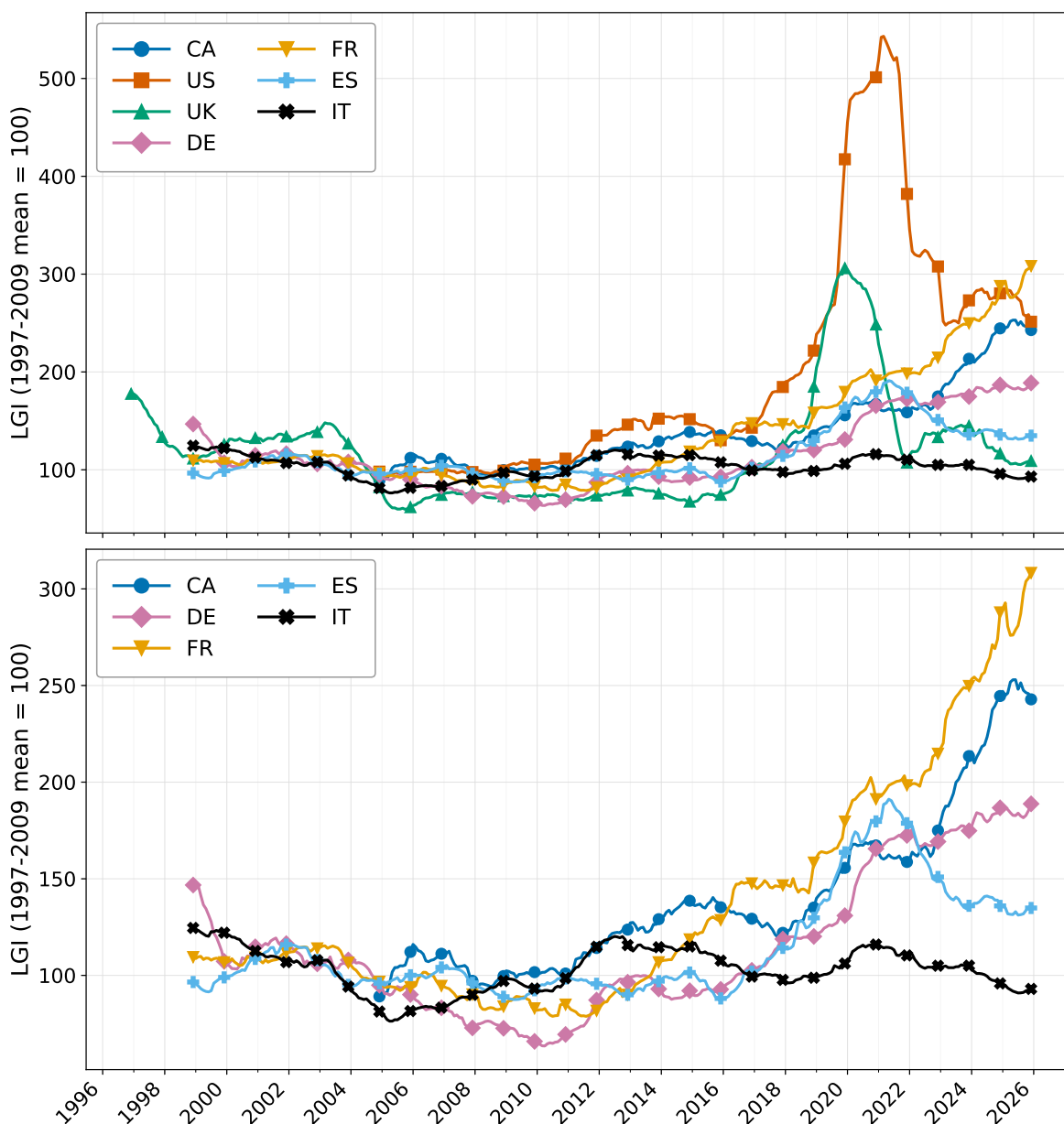
Figure 3: Cross-country comparison of political polarization



rather than during the crisis years. This is consistent with Azzimonti (2018)'s U.S. Partisan Conflict Index, who shows an upward shift after the Global Financial Crisis.

The pooled means also show that the two indices, which move almost in tandem until 2015, begin to separate afterwards: by 2023-2025 the PPI stands 50 points above the LGI, having differed by roughly a point or less in every subperiod before 2016. The main driver of this discrepancy is Italy, whose PPI rises with the rest of the sample, while LGI falls to

Figure 4: Cross-country comparison of legislative gridlock



96, the only latest-period value below the full-sample average.

This cross-country comparison invites two additional comments. First, the broad rise in both newspaper-based indices raises the concern that they may reflect a general increase in the volume and intensity of political reporting rather than the political concepts they are intended to capture. Section 4 allays this concern by validating the indices by means of a narrative approach and by testing whether they predict macroeconomic outcomes in the

Table 3: PPI and LGI pooled mean by subperiod

Period	PPI (mean)	LGI (mean)
1997–2001	115.2	114.4
2002–2008	91.3	91.8
2009–2015	103.5	102.4
2016–2019	173.4	166.3
2020–2022	207.2	184.8
2023–2025	237.2	186.6

Note: pooled mean across all seven countries within each subperiod. Indices are normalized so that the full-sample country mean equals 100; which is equivalent to including country fixed effects.

expected direction. Second, the divergence between the two series after 2015, visible in the pooled means and especially pronounced in Italy, confirms that polarization and gridlock are distinct phenomena rather than alternative measures of the same underlying conflict. Section 6 further examines the relationship between the two indices more systematically.

4 Robustness and Validation

This section shows that our indices capture the concepts they are intended to measure. We carry out three exercises. First, in appendix B we show that our indices are impervious to reasonable changes in both the dictionary and the set of sources. The second exercise of narrative validation in section 4.1 successfully attributes all peaks in the indices to the “correct” underlying phenomena, corresponding to our understanding of the type of events that might cause a peak in the index. Finally, in section 4.2 we complement these comparisons with a macroeconomic test: if the indices capture genuine political phenomena rather than news volume, shocks to each should predict macroeconomic outcomes in the direction the literature anticipates.

4.1 Narrative Validation

Before describing our indices in detail, we state the headline result of the narrative validation: across all seven countries, the exercise is affirmative. Every peak flagged by the PPI and the LGI corresponds to an episode that an independent observer would readily classify as, respectively, political polarization or legislative gridlock (e.g. contested elections, coalitions).

tion breakdowns, mass protests and contested reforms, confidence votes, and government shutdowns) with no peak left unexplained by such an event. We take this correspondence as the first, narrative-based evidence that the indices track the phenomena they are designed to measure rather than unrelated news volume.

The material underpinning this exercise is extensive, and for reasons of space we collect it in Appendix C rather than in the main text; it is nonetheless central to the validity of everything that follows. For each of the seven countries the appendix provides three complementary pieces. First, a summary plot of the two indices against national election dates (for France, Figure C.1), which lets the reader read the two series and the electoral calendar together. Second, peak-annotated plots of the PPI and the LGI (for France, Figures C.2a and C.2b) that mark every observation exceeding the two-standard-deviation threshold. Third, detailed narrative tables (for France, Tables C.1 and C.2) that identify the specific episode behind each flagged peak, separately for polarization and for gridlock. The annotated plots and the narrative tables are the substance of the validation and the basis for the affirmative result stated above.

4.2 Macroeconomic relevance: the response of investment

Finally, we carry out a macroeconomic validation exercise. The aim is to check whether macroeconomic indicators respond to the indices in a direction consistent with the literature. Investment, which we measure throughout as real gross capital formation, is a natural candidate because it is forward-looking and very sensitive to macroeconomic expectations which are influenced by the political context (Coibion et al., 2020). Higher political conflict can raise uncertainty about the timing, size, and composition of future policies, delaying difficult-to-reverse investment decisions. Legislative gridlock can also limit the ability of policymakers to respond to shocks or implement reforms that improve the economic environment (Azzimonti, 2018).

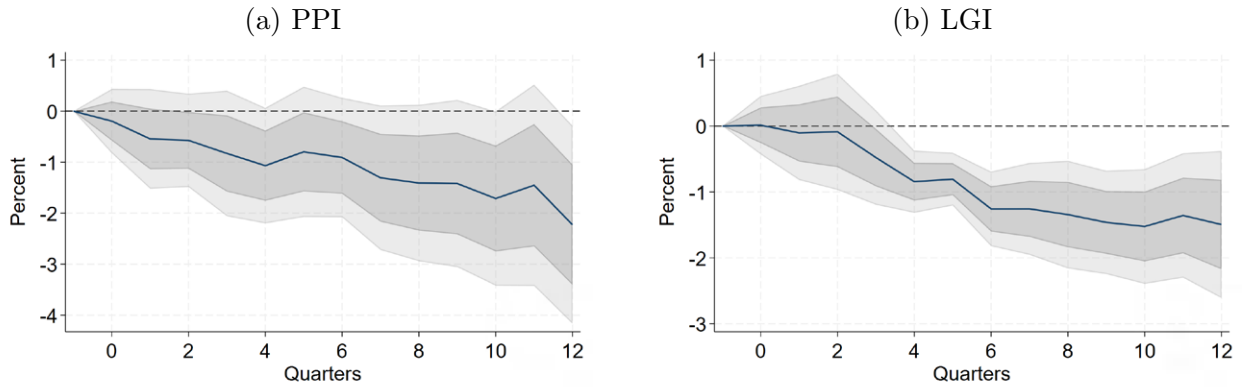
If our indices capture economically relevant political polarization and gridlock rather than only media noise, investment should respond negatively to both. We expect the response to be clearer for LGI, since gridlock is the closest empirical counterpart to the policy-inaction channel, while reported polarization is further upstream.

The objective of the exercise is intended as a consistency check rather than a causal estimate. To analyse this, we estimate panel local projections (Jordà, 2005) on quarterly data. For each horizon $h = 0, \dots, 12$, we estimate:

$$y_{i,t+h} - y_{i,t-1} = \alpha_i^h + \gamma_t^h + \beta_h Index_{it} + \sum_{l=1}^4 (\delta_l^h Index_{i,t-l} + \phi_l^h \Delta y_{i,t-l} + \psi_l^h \Delta GDP_{i,t-l}) + \varepsilon_{it}^h \quad (1)$$

Here, y_{it} is log real gross capital formation, deflated with the GDP deflator, and $Index_{it}$ is the quarterly average of the monthly PPI or LGI indices, expressed in standard deviation units. The coefficient β_h is the cumulative response of investment associated with the index being one standard deviation higher at time t . The specification includes country fixed effects, α_i^h , and year-quarter fixed effects, γ_t^h . The latter absorb shocks common to all countries in each quarter, including common seasonal patterns.⁵ Controls enter with four lags and include the index, investment growth, and real GDP growth. Standard errors are Driscoll–Kraay.

Figure 5: Cumulative response of real investment to PPI and LGI



Note: cumulative response, in percent, of log real gross capital formation associated with the index being one standard deviation higher at time t . Panel local projections with country and year-quarter fixed effects, and four lags of the index, investment growth, and GDP growth. Quarterly data for seven countries. Driscoll–Kraay standard errors. Inner band: 68% ; outer band: 90% confidence interval.

Figure 5 plots the cumulative responses β^h of investment to a one-standard deviation increase in PPI and LGI, estimated from the panel local projections of equation 1, with 68%

⁵As previously stated, time fixed effects also address the non-stationarity of the index, whose trend is common across countries. Results are also robust to using detrended indices and are available upon request.

and 90% Driscoll–Kraay confidence bands. It shows that investment declines gradually and persistently, with cumulative responses of -2.2% for PPI and -1.5% for LGI after twelve quarters. The response to LGI is faster and more precisely estimated, becoming significant at the 90% level from the fourth quarter onward. The response to PPI is also negative although the confidence bands are wider.

These results show that our indices contain economically relevant information: higher polarization and gridlock are followed by lower investment, in line with the literature linking political frictions and policy inaction to adverse real economic outcomes. The more precise response of LGI is also consistent with that index representing a more direct manifestation of policy inaction, while polarization may affect the economy through more indirect channels, whether through uncertainty or through potential later translation in legislative gridlock.

5 Comparison with Existing Measures

We compare the indices with three related polarization indicators: the Partisan Conflict Index of Azzimonti (2018), text-based like ours but merging our two dimensions; DW-NOMINATE, behavioural rather than reported but confined to the U.S. Congress; and V-Dem, covering all seven countries but annual and expert-based. Because none rely on our underlying data, both similarities and differences are informative.

5.1 The Partisan Conflict Index

The closest antecedent to our indices is the Partisan Conflict Index (PCI) of Azzimonti (2018), which counts U.S. newspaper articles reporting lawmakers' disagreement about government policy. The PCI is instructive precisely because its search dictionary combines the two dimensions our indices separate: it includes terms capturing ideological division⁶ alongside terms capturing legislative outcomes⁷. Its documented properties reflect this blend: the PCI rises around presidential elections, as our PPI does and our LGI does not, and is higher under divided government, as is our LGI. Yet, by definition a single index cannot distinguish whether reported conflict reflects deepening ideological division or its institutional consequence.

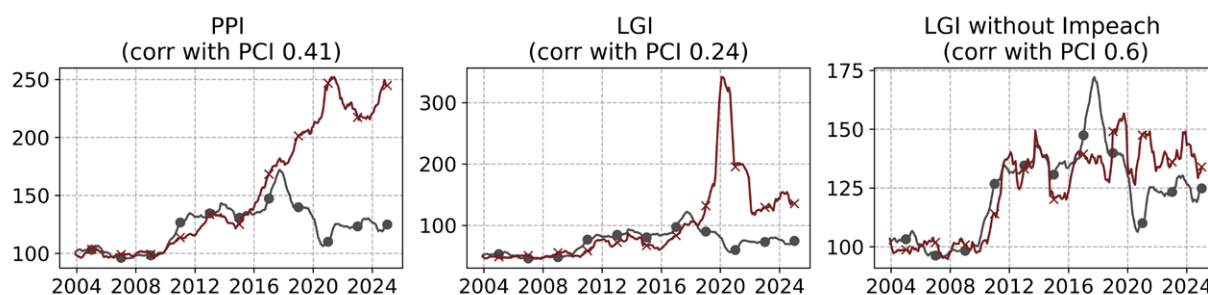
⁶ “polariz*”, “ideological differences”, “divided”

⁷ “gridlock”, “stalemate”, “deadlock”, “filibuster”, “veto”

Figure 6 compares the PCI with our U.S. indices. Until the mid-2010s the three series co-move closely and start diverging thereafter. The largest trend difference is between the PCI and our Political Polarization index (PPI): whereas the PCI declines after 2020 and continues broadly flat, our PPI, which tracks reported ideological division regardless of legislative outcomes, continues rising to historical highs. This rise is in line with that observed across all the other countries in our sample, and reflects the growing intensity of narratives emphasizing ideological division.

Our LGI also diverges from the PCI, rising steadily from 2016 and spiking in 2019-2021 (impeachment proceedings, pandemic-relief standoffs and election-legitimacy disputes) before receding partially. Part of this divergence reflects a deliberate difference in the index construction: unlike the PCI, the LGI includes impeachment-related terms to capture specific institutional manifestations of the legislative-executive conflict. Removing such terms makes the LGI track the PCI much more closely, with correlation between the two indices increasing from 0.24 to 0.60. We therefore interpret the 2020 spikes not as false positives, but rather as evidence that these events constitute an integral part of the legislative gridlock narrative in the U.S. institutional context.

Figure 6: Comparison with the Partisan Conflict Index



Note: Comparison of measures for the U.S. Values are means over the backward-looking one-year rolling window. In each subplot the Partisan Conflict Index (PCI) is shown in grey with round markers. The PCI is taken from <https://www.philadelphiafed.org/surveys-and-data/macroeconomic-data/partisan-conflict-index>. The LGI without Impeach is our LGI computed without including the impeachment and vote of no-confidence-like terms given in Panel 2 of the Specific legislative gridlock dictionary in Table A.7.

5.2 The DW-NOMINATE measure

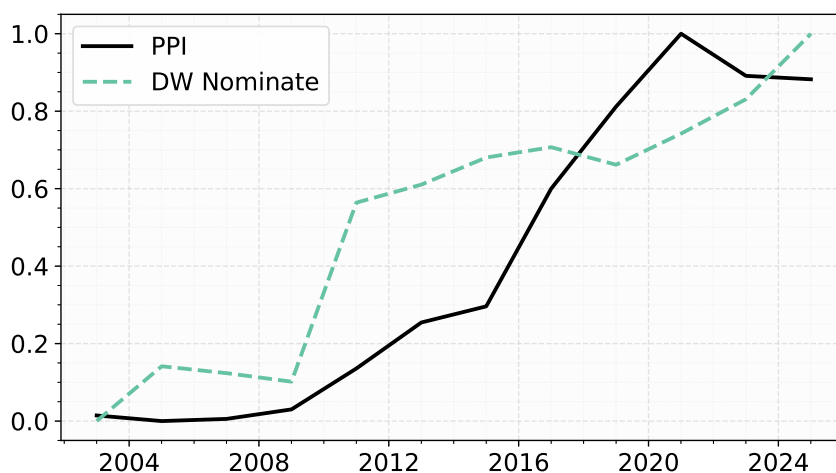
The DW-NOMINATE indicator was originally developed to represent U.S. legislators on an ideological map based on their roll-call voting behaviour. The method identifies multiple

ideological dimensions. The first dimension captures the traditional liberal–conservative spectrum, while the second reflects historically salient ideological divisions in U.S. politics, such as those related to slavery or nativism. These dimensions are interpreted as measures of legislators’ latent ideological preferences (Lewis et al., 2026). For the purposes of comparing with our reported political polarization index (PPI) we construct a DW-NOMINATE-based polarization series for the U.S. House of Representatives using only the first ideological dimension. For each Congress, we compute the mean DW-NOMINATE score of Democratic representatives and the mean score of Republican representatives. We then define polarization as the absolute difference between these two averages. This procedure yields a time series of partisan separation in the House along the main ideological dimension of congressional voting.

The two measures differ in three respects. DW-NOMINATE is based on legislative behaviour, whereas the PPI measures reported polarization—a more removed phenomenon that requires society to be conscious of the underlying divergences. DW-NOMINATE is confined to elite behaviour, whereas the PPI places no restriction on the focal point of the underlying narrative. And the two rest on different data, different production biases, and different modelling assumptions. The indices should therefore be read as complementary rather than interchangeable.

The two indices are shown in Figure 7. Both display a similar near-monotonic upward trend in political polarization since the Global Financial Crisis. However, the timing and intensity of this increase differ across measures. While the DW-NOMINATE index shows a sharp rise in polarization immediately after 2008 and then levels off substantially from 2010 onward, our index exhibits a much steeper increase beginning in 2016. Another notable difference is that our index shows a modest decline in polarization following the COVID-19 period, whereas the DW-NOMINATE series displays only a negligible decrease after 2016. That both indices nonetheless display an almost unrelenting upward trend suggests that the broader phenomenon of polarization manifests across quite disparate settings.

Figure 7: PPI and the DW-NOMINATE for the U.S.



Note: The yearly PPI and DW-NOMINATE, rescaled by subtracting the mean and dividing by the range.

5.3 The Varieties of Democracy dataset

The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset is a comprehensive source that provides annual country-level evaluations of political, social, and institutional conditions. Each country-year datapoint represents observations by multiple independent experts with deep specific knowledge, including academics, journalists, legal professionals, and civil-society practitioners (Coppedge et al., 2025a). Their ratings aim to capture complex and often unobservable aspects of political life, among which are the perception on the degree of polarization.

There are five questions relating to polarization. These variables are of the C-type: country experts score them on an ordinal scale, and the raw ratings are then aggregated through a Bayesian item-response model. Given the complicated nature of their data production and interpretation, we have closely followed the authors' indications. This conditions the availability of the data, as the profitable use we can make of their data begins in the year 2000 due to reliability factors (Coppedge et al., 2025c). V-Dem's polarization-related questions measure societal, political, and social-media polarization. None aligns exactly with our framework, so we retain the two whose conceptual content is closest to the PPI: societal polarization (`v2smpo1soc`) and political-camps polarization (`v2cacamps`), reported in Table 4. Because our conceptualization and measurement approach both differ from that of V-Dem,

Table 4: V-Dem Variables Used in the Analysis

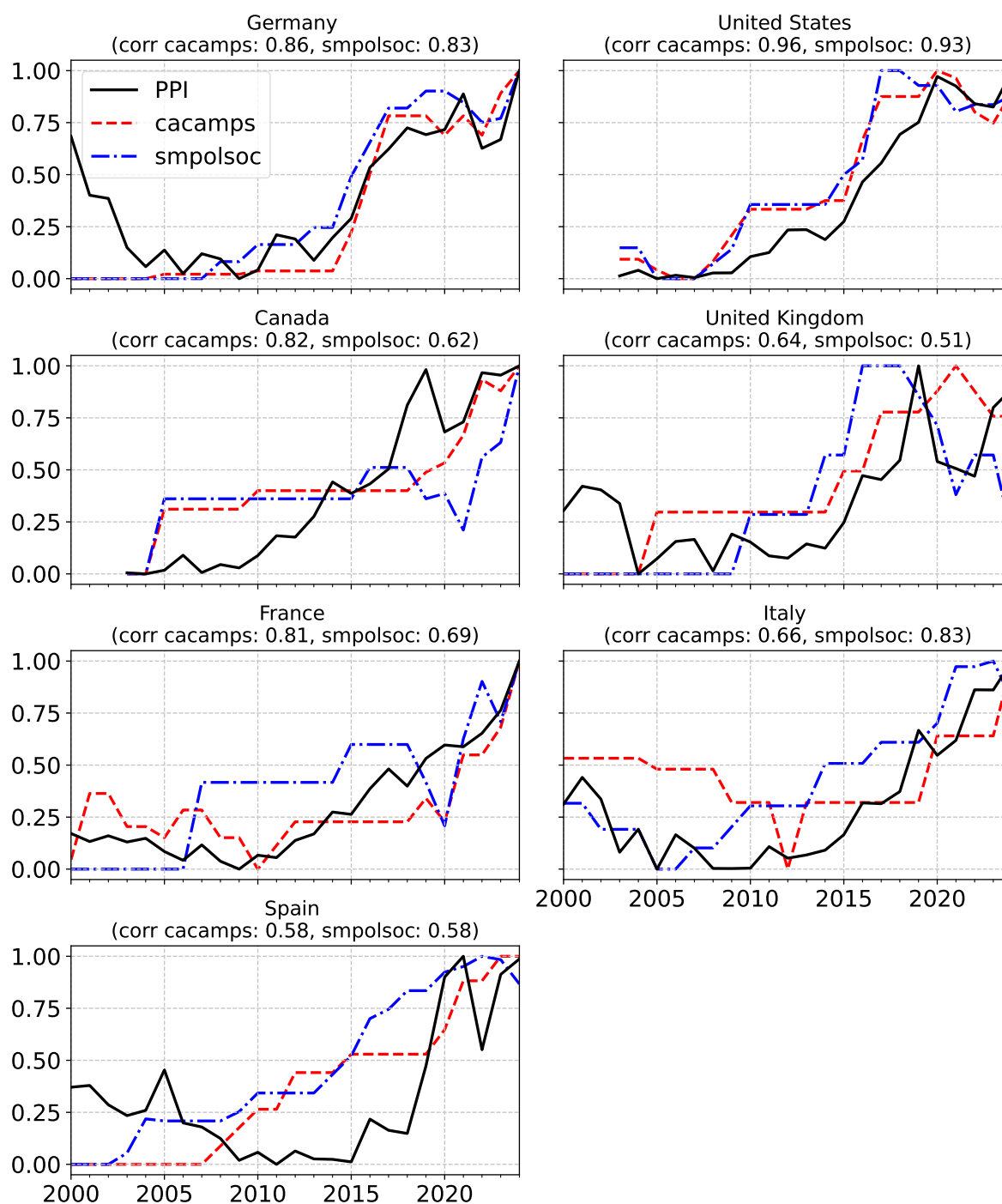
Variable	Label	Description
Societal Polarization	<i>v2smpolsoc</i>	Captures the degree of disagreement and clashes over major political issues within society. This item measures <i>issue-based polarization</i> , i.e., whether disagreements around key political topics generate significant clashes of views.
Political Camps Polarization	<i>v2cacamps</i>	Reflects the extent to which political divisions spill into social life, shaping everyday interactions and potentially creating hostile political camps. It quantifies <i>affective polarization</i> —how far political differences extend into social relationships, friendships, workplaces, and civic life.

we expect the series to diverge from the PPI in places.

Figure 8 displays the comparison between our PPI index and the two selected V-Dem measures of polarization. A first notable observation is that all correlations exceed 0.5. Overall, our index correlates more strongly with V-Dem’s measure of Political Camps Polarization, except in the case of Italy, which is expected given the closer conceptual overlap relative to societal polarization. However, the strength of fit varies across countries. The United States, Germany, and Canada show correlations close to 0.8, whereas in the United Kingdom and Spain the correlations are considerably lower. In the Spanish case, for example, this may reflect the little influence of specific episodes (such as the 15M protests in 2011) on our index relative to the broader dynamics captured by V-Dem.

In short, the two approaches rely on different conceptual lenses. Our index reflects what the media labels as polarizing: events, topics, and conflicts that generate political disagreement or reveal dividing lines in real time. By contrast, V-Dem’s measures draw on expert assessments of the overall degree of mass-level polarization, informed by long-term historical trajectories, institutional context, and sociological knowledge of each country. As a result, experts may evaluate the structural and historical relevance of political divisions differently from how the press portrays and labels them in day-to-day coverage. This hypothesis is sustained by some literature, which finds that the public can perceive partisan divides as different to what they actually are (Westfall et al., 2015).

Figure 8: Comparison of PPI with the V-Dem polarization measures



Note: The monthly PPI is transformed to annual by taking the mean. For each country, for each of the three series shown, we subtract the minimum value and divide by the range.

The comparisons support the validity of the PPI: it moves with all three alternative definitions of polarization despite sharing none of their data, so the rise documented in

Section 3.2 is not an artefact of news volume. Where the series part company they do so intelligibly, i.e. roll-call behaviour registers division before the press names it, and expert ratings smooth the episodic peaks a media index is built to catch.

6 Distinguishing polarization from gridlock

The validation in Section 4 establishes that the indices track politically meaningful phenomena rather than news volume. Here we ask whether they track the *same* phenomena. We first test whether PPI and LGI respond differently to elections and unified government control, i.e. two episodes the literature links to polarization and gridlock through distinct channels. We then examine their co-movement directly, asking whether majority-enhancing institutional configurations moderate the pass-through from reported polarization to reported gridlock.

6.1 The wedge between PPI and LGI: elections and unified control

Elections. Elections are a natural starting point. Electoral periods tend to intensify political competition, increase media coverage of political disagreement, and encourage strategic position-taking by political actors. Consistent with this logic, Azzimonti (2018) shows that the U.S. Partisan Conflict Index rises around election months. If the PPI captures reported political polarization, we should therefore expect it to increase around elections. By contrast, the LGI captures reported legislative stalling, which need not rise by default during election periods.

To test this, we define an election period as the month of a national election and the month immediately preceding it.⁸ Since elections are discrete, high-frequency events, we examine their effect on the cyclical component of the indices, detrended by country using an HP filter.⁹ We then compare the mean of each index in election-adjacent months with its mean in all other months using a two-sided Welch *t*-test.¹⁰

The results align with the conceptual difference between the two indices. PPI is higher

⁸This accounts for the fact that media coverage of elections held early in a month may be concentrated in the previous month, following Azzimonti (2014).

⁹Results are robust to de-trending with the Hamilton (2018) filter instead of the HP filter.

¹⁰We also considered presidential elections, identified only for France and the United States given the institutional composition of our sample. In the detrended series, PPI is on average 32.0 points higher in election-adjacent months ($p < 0.01$), while LGI shows no effect ($+0.8$, $p = 0.83$). As only two countries contribute to this comparison, we treat it as suggestive and do not report it as a separate result.

Table 5: PPI and LGI around parliamentary elections

Country	PPI			LGI		
	Mean (elec.)	Mean (non-elec.)	Diff	Mean (elec.)	Mean (non-elec.)	Diff
Canada	35.76	−1.91	37.67***	25.53	−1.36	26.89***
Germany	5.14	−0.22	5.36	−0.49	0.02	−0.51
Spain	18.06	−0.99	19.05**	−2.02	0.11	−2.13
France	19.24	−0.69	19.92**	3.83	−0.14	3.97
Italy	32.75	−1.17	33.92**	−8.88	0.32	−9.19**
United Kingdom	22.89	−0.90	23.79***	3.35	−0.13	3.48
United States	20.30	−1.59	21.89***	−8.15	0.64	−8.79
Pooled	21.62	−1.02	22.63***	1.32	−0.06	1.39

Note: indices are HP-detrended by country prior to the comparison; entries are means of the cyclical component. An election-adjacent month is the month of a parliamentary election or the month immediately before it. Two-sided Welch *t*-test. **p* < 0.10, ***p* < 0.05, ****p* < 0.01. HP smoothing parameter 129,600 Ravn and Uhlig (2002).

in election-adjacent months in all countries (Table 5), with a pooled increase of 22.63 percentage points relative to non-election months, significant at the 1% level¹¹. LGI shows no comparable pattern: it rises in three countries, falls in four, and the pooled difference is statistically indistinguishable from zero. Elections therefore appear to be moments in which reported polarization increases predictably, while reported gridlock does not.

Unified government control. We now test how unified government control of the legislature (defined as periods in which the executive’s party holds a majority in all the relevant legislative chambers) associates with LGI and PPI. If LGI captures reported legislative stalling, it should be lower when the executive faces fewer veto points within the legislature. The logic is that unified control reduces the executive’s need to negotiate with an opposition-controlled chamber, and should therefore reduce reported gridlock. This prediction is consistent with the veto-player logic in Tsebelis (2002): fewer veto points leave less room for political disagreement to stall legislation. By contrast, the channels for polarization are not that clear, as it may remain high even when the government controls the legislature. Germany is omitted from the country-level comparison because unified control

¹¹The pooled comparison combines all available country-month observations.

Table 6: PPI and LGI under unified vs. divided government control

Country	PPI			LGI		
	Mean (unified)	Mean (divided)	Diff	Mean (unified)	Mean (divided)	Diff
Canada	100.2	84.5	15.7	92.8	93.4	−0.6
Spain	81.1	102.4	−21.4***	87.8	104.1	−16.3***
France	114.4	147.9	−33.4***	80.0	101.7	−21.7***
Italy	110.5	100.9	9.6**	98.6	99.1	−0.5
United Kingdom	104.0	99.5	4.5	93.6	116.1	−22.5**
United States	173.0	345.8	−172.8***	77.4	217.4	−139.9***
Pooled	90.3	98.5	−8.2***	87.8	104.3	−16.4***

Note: Table shows the means of the full-sample normalized indices; “Diff” is the unified mean minus the divided mean, in index points. “Unified” months are those in which the executive’s party controls a majority in both legislative chambers; “divided” months are all others. Two-sided Welch t -test. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

of both chambers never occurs there in our sample. Because government composition is a persistent structural feature rather than a short-run event, we relate it to the level of the indices.

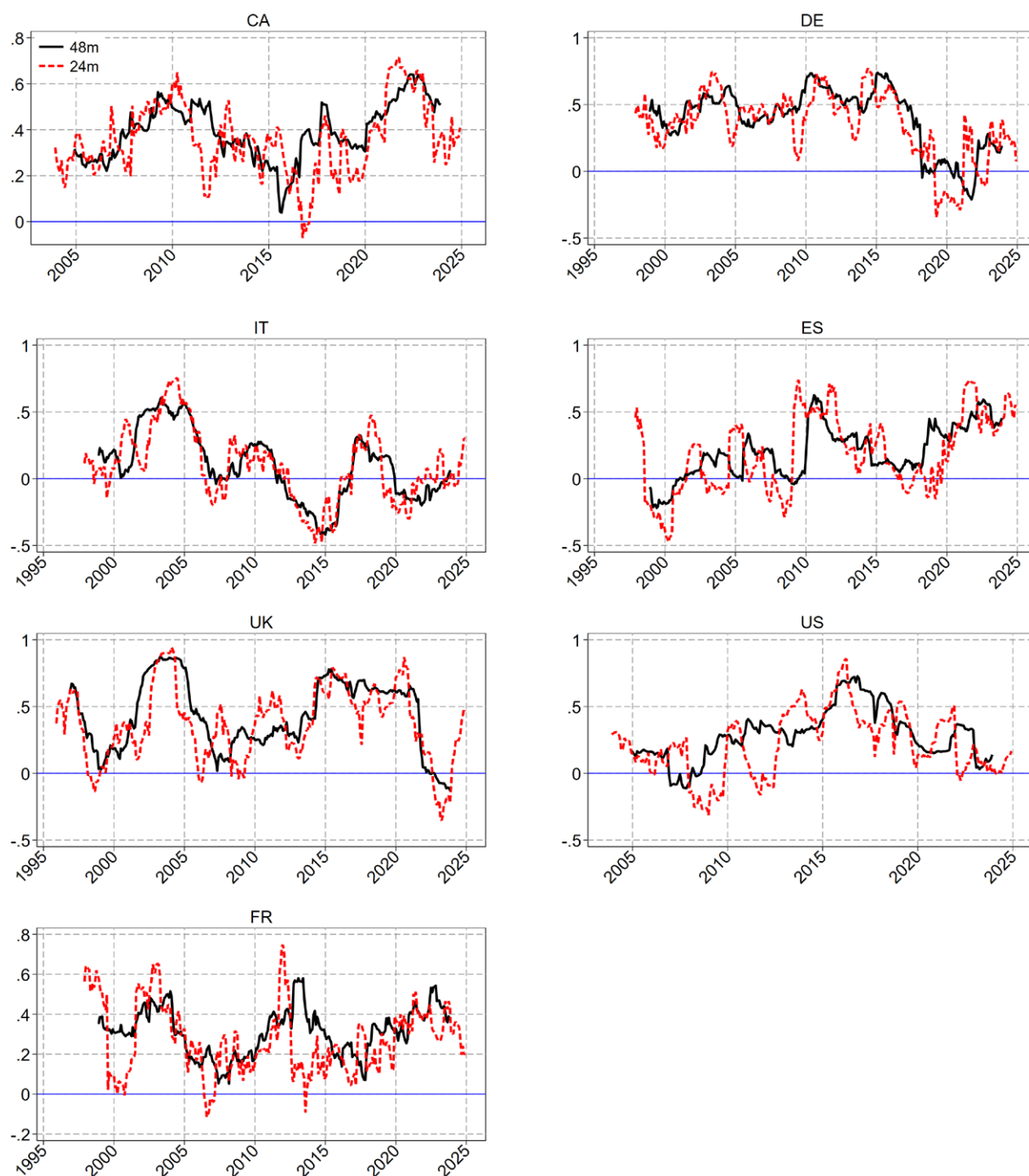
The results are consistent with this interpretation. LGI is lower under unified government control in all countries, with no exception in sign, and the difference is statistically significant in more than half of the sample (Table 6). The pooled difference is -16.4 points ($p < 0.001$). PPI shows an irregular pattern. Its pooled difference is also negative but the decline is smaller in size and, unlike LGI, it shows no sign consistency across countries.

6.2 Co-movement of the indices

The tests above show that elections and government control relate to PPI and LGI in different ways, underlining the distinction between the two indices. We now examine their relationship more directly, beginning descriptively with rolling correlations between PPI and LGI for each country (Figure 9).

The picture is far from uniform. The United Kingdom and the United States show consistently high co-movement for most of the sample, spending long stretches above 0.5 and at times above 0.8. France and Germany show a similar but more moderate and more volatile pattern, including a sustained negative dip in Germany between 2018 and 2021. Canada

Figure 9: Rolling correlation between PPI and LGI, by country



Note: rolling correlation between PPI and LGI computed over a variable-length moving window, by country.

shows moderate correlations throughout the sample. Spain is essentially flat or negative until around 2009-2010, after which co-movement rises markedly. Italy is the clearest and most persistent exception: its rolling correlation is negative or near zero for roughly a decade, from 2012 to 2022.

Given this cross-country variation, we next estimate the relationship between PPI and LGI more formally. We start with a simple baseline specification in which LGI is regressed on PPI, using the indices in levels and including country and year fixed effects ¹²:

$$LGI_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 PPI_{it} + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it}. \quad (2)$$

While this baseline captures the average relationship, our earlier results suggest it may not be constant. Since unified control relates more strongly to LGI than to PPI, a natural question is whether it also shapes the relationship between the two indices, not just their separate levels. The logic follows the veto-player argument discussed above: if unified control reduces the number of effective legislative veto points, the same increase in reported polarization should translate into a smaller increase in reported gridlock. To examine this, we add the dummy for unified control and interact it with PPI:

$$LGI_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 PPI_{it} + \beta_2 UNIFIED_{it} + \beta_3 (PPI_{it} \times UNIFIED_{it}) + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_{it}. \quad (3)$$

Equation (2) is estimated with country and year fixed effects. The baseline relationship is positive and statistically significant (column 1 of Table 7): a one-point higher score in PPI is associated with a 0.82-point higher LGI.

The coefficient of (3) shows the differential effect of the relationship between PPI and LGI when there is unified control versus when there is not. The interaction coefficient β_3 is negative and statistically significant: -0.335 including country and time fixed effects ($p < 0.10$). This suggests that the association between reported polarization and reported gridlock is weaker under unified government control.

Results are robust to using z -score standardized PPI and LGI, which equalizes each

¹²After removing common time effects, both indices are stationary (Im–Pesaran–Shin test, $p < 0.001$), so these level regressions with year fixed effects are not subject to spurious-correlation concerns.

Table 7: PPI-LGI relationship and unified control

	(1) Baseline	(2) No country FE	(3) Country FE
PPI	0.818*** (0.166)	0.807*** (0.163)	0.807*** (0.169)
Unified control		20.430 (14.849)	16.924 (15.137)
PPI $\times$ Unified control		-0.323* (0.182)	-0.335* (0.186)
Constant	18.198 (15.948)	23.967 (14.893)	26.112* (15.100)
Observations	191	173	173
R^2	0.656	0.697	0.713
Country FE	Yes	No	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: dependent variable is LGI. PPI and LGI are full-sample normalized indices. Column (1) estimates the baseline relationship. Columns (2)–(3) add unified control and its interaction with PPI. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

country’s contribution to the estimation regardless of its absolute scale and rules out single country’s scaling driving the result.¹³

The interaction is a conditional association rather than a causal effect, but it points to a mechanism that could account for part of the cross-country heterogeneity shown in Section 4. Italy is a good example: the country shows an increase in polarization without a parallel rise in gridlock (figure 2), and its rolling PPI-LGI correlation is negative or near zero throughout 2012-2022 (figure 9). This coincides with a period of electoral reforms that facilitated larger governing majorities, precisely the majority-enhancing setting in which the interaction predicts a weaker pass-through from reported polarization to reported gridlock.

Whether other, more structural institutional features (democracy levels, governance quality, accountability, federalism, or civil-society strength) moderate the polarization–gridlock link is a natural next question, but not one our sample can answer. The seven countries are all long-consolidated democracies that vary too little on these dimensions over the period covered to identify such effects credibly. Unified government control is thus the one institutional moderator we can speak to here; a fuller treatment awaits future work with broader

¹³Standardized by country, using the full-sample mean and standard deviation. The interaction coefficient remains negative and of comparable significance under this alternative specification.

country coverage, for which the separate, validated indices constructed in this paper are a precondition.

7 Discussion and concluding remarks

In this paper we propose a narrative-based, cross-country approach to separately measure reported political polarization and legislative gridlock across a set of Global North democracies. Using dictionary-based analysis of national press coverage in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the UK, the U.S., and Canada, we construct two high-frequency indices, the Political Polarization Index (PPI) and the Legislative Gridlock Index (LGI), that track, respectively, reported ideological division and reported policy stalling. Because the two are measured separately and with a harmonized methodology, they can be compared both across countries and against one another over time, as well as adapted to new countries in future work.

Descriptively, reported political polarization has risen substantially in recent decades, though the timing and pace differ across cases: the increase is especially visible in Europe after the Sovereign Debt Crisis and follows an earlier decline from the late 1990s, while North America rises earlier and at roughly twice the European rate. The national cleavages behind these trends vary: migration and asylum in Germany, social protest and contested reforms in France, the Catalan crisis and party-system fragmentation in Spain, national identity and Europe in the UK, and conflictive elections and fiscal standoffs in the U.S.. However, the broad upward movement is common to all seven.

The indices correlate with related measures (the Partisan Conflict Index, DW-NOMINATE, and V-Dem) while remaining distinct from each. We see that, in line with what is suggested by literature, investment responds negatively to both indices, though faster and more precisely to gridlock, consistent with the interpretation of gridlock as policy inaction. Furthermore, our indices respond to predictable political events in theoretically sensible but *different* ways: reported polarization rises around elections while reported gridlock does not, and gridlock falls under unified government control while polarization does not. We take this to be direct evidence that the indices measure separable dimensions of political conflict rather than a single latent construct. In addition, we show that unified government control weakens the pass-through from polarization to gridlock. In this respect Italy, where

electoral reforms have facilitated larger governing majorities, emerges as the clearest case in which sharp polarization coexists with contained legislative gridlock. Distinguishing polarization from gridlock therefore matters: gridlock may be one consequence of polarization, but whether it materializes depends on institutional design and other political factors.

In future work we plan to exploit these high-frequency measures of the two dimensions of political disagreement to study the causal links between the two, and to relate both to their potential economic causes and consequences.

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Appendix

A Index Construction

Table A.1: Time coverage of considered newspapers

Newspapers	Availability in Factiva
Germany	
Süddeutsche Zeitung	12 January 1995
Die Welt	3 May 2004
Handelsblatt	25 February 2013
Der Tagesspiegel	3 February 2006
Die Tageszeitung	1 April 1997
Börsen-Zeitung	20 July 2013
Berliner Zeitung	30 September 1998
Frankfurter AZ	14 January 2011
France	
Le Figaro	31 October 1996
Les Echos	1 January 1997
Le Monde	19 December 1944
Libération	16 February 1998
La Croix	13 January 2003
L'Opinion	3 July 2014
La Tribune	2 January 1996
L'AGEFI Quotidien	14 April 2004
Spain	
El País	1 February 1995
El Mundo	2 January 1995
La Vanguardia	4 May 1997
ABC	16 May 1997
Cinco Días	15 August 1996
Expansión	1 August 1995
El Economista	27 April 2007
Italy	
Corriere della Sera	27 January 1997

Newspapers	Availability in Factiva
Il Sole 24 Ore	10 March 2001
La Repubblica	9 July 2005
La Stampa	5 September 1996
Il Giornale	22 October 2002
Italia Oggi	9 September 2002
Il Fatto Quotidiano	19 July 2015
United Kingdom	
The Guardian	2 January 1981
The Independent	1 June 1988
The Times	5 January 1980
The Evening Standard	6 January 1981
The Economist	4 January 1981
The Metro	10 May 2006
City AM	15 November 2010
The Observer	11 November 1981
United States	
The Wall Street Journal	13 June 1979
The New York Times	1 January 1969
The Washington Post	1 January 1977
Chicago Tribune	1 January 1985
Los Angeles Times	1 January 1985
USA Today	1 April 1987
New York Post	15 September 1997
Canada	
Toronto Star	1 January 1986
The Globe and Mail	14 November 1977
National Post	12 January 1985
Winnipeg Free Press	6 August 1991
La Presse Canadienne	12 May 2000
Le Soleil	2 June 2023
Le Droit	2 June 2023

Note. Newspapers are available in Factiva repository since the date reported in the table.

Table A.2: Policy/politics dictionary – European Union Countries

Category	France	Spain	Germany	Italy
Government	gouvernement*	gobierno*	regierung*	governo*
Seat of executive power	elysee or matignon	moncloa	bundeskanzleramt	palazzo chigi or quirinale
Executive person	president or premier ministre	presidente del gobierno	bundeskanzler* or kanzler	presidente del consiglio
Legislature	assemblee or senat or parlement*	senado or parlament* or cortes or congreso	bundestag or bundesrat	senato or camera or parlament* or palazzo montecitorio or palazzo madama
Politics, policies, parties	politique* or parti or partis or partisan* or coalition* or politic* or opposition*	partido or partidos or partidist* or politic* or coalicion* or opposition*	koalition* or partei* or politisch* or politik* or opposition* or fraktion*	politic* or coalizion* or partito or partiti or opposizion*
General terms	or impot* or taxe* or deficit* or defense or reform* or fiscal* or fiscaux or (public* or public* or national* or etat) near1 (dette* or depense* or budget*)	fiscal* or deficit* or defensa* or impuesto* or reform* or (public* or nacional* or del estado) near1 (gasto* or deuda* or presupuesto*)	steuer* or staatsverschuldung* or defizit* or haushaltsdefizit* or staatsdefizit* or fiskal* or verteidig* or staatshaushalt* or offentliche* ausgaben* or reform* or handelsdefizit* or staatsausgaben* or staatshaushalt* or bundeshaushalt	tass* or impost* or fiscal* or deficit* or difesa or riform* or (bilanci* or debito* or spes*) near1 (public* or nazional* or dello stato)
Constitution	constitution*	constitucion*	verfassung* or landesverfassung*	costituzion*
Regional	conseil* departementa* or conseil* regiona* or conference* nationale* des territoires	comunidad* autonoma* or conferencia* de presidentes or estatuto* de autonomia or Xunta or Generalitat or lehendakari	landesregierung or landerfinanzausgleich* or landespolitik* or ministerprasidentenkonferenz*	consigli* regional* or region* a statut* or conferenza* delle region*
Other	loi* or legisla*	ley* or legisla*	gesetzgebungsverfahren* or kompetenzstreit* or schuldenbrems* or gesetz* or grundgesetz*	*legg* or legisla*
Extra			sozial-polit* or aussenpolit* or wirtschafts-polit*	

Table A.3: Policy/politics dictionary – UK, US and Canada

Category	UK	US	Canada (en)	Canada (fr)
Government	government*	government*	government*	gouvernement*
Seat of executive power	downing street or number 10	the white house or pennsylvania avenue		
Executive person	prime minister*	president*	prime minister*	premier ministre
Legislature	house* of (lords or commons) or westminster or parliament*	congress or senate or house of representatives or capitol	parliament or house of commons or senate	parlement or chambre des communes or senat
Politics, policies, parties	partisan* or parties or party or politic* or coalition* or policies* or policy* or opposition*	parties or party or coalition* or politic* or policies* or policy* or opposition* or caucus* or partisan*	party or parties or coalition* or caucus or opposition* or politic* or policy* or policies* or partisan*	parti or partis or partisan* or politic* or politique* or coalition* or caucus or opposition*
General terms	tax* or (public or national) near1 (spending or expenditure or debt or budget) or defence or defense or fiscal* or reform* or deficit* or stability rule* or (government (spending or expenditure)) or debt ceiling or (autumn (statement or budget))	tax* or ((public or national or federal or state) (debt or budget or spending or expenditure)) or defence or defense or fiscal* or reform* or deficit	tax* or (public or national or federal or provincial*) near1 (debt or budget or spending or expenditure) or defence or defense or fiscal* or reform* or deficit	fiscal* or fiscaux or reform* or taxe* or deficit or impot* or defense or ((public* or public* or national* or federal* or provincial*) near1 (dette* or depense* or budget*))
Constitution	(statute or rule of or common) law	constitution*	constitution*	constitution*
Regional	Senedd or Holyrood or Stormont or Cardiff Bay or First Minister or Northern Ireland Executive or devolved administration* or joint ministerial committee	governor*	premier* or council of the federation	conseil de la federation
Other	law or laws or legislat*	law or laws or legislat*	law or laws or legislat*	loi* or legisla*
Extra				

Tables A.4 to A.7 report the full term lists underlying the two indices, for each country and language. Panel 1 of each table covers the four continental European countries; Panel 2 covers the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, for which the Canadian press is searched in both English and French. Every term must be matched in conjunction with the Politics/Policy dictionary above, except for the *specific* dictionaries, which qualify an article on their own.

Table A.4: *Generic* political polarization dictionary

Panel 1: European Union Countries

Category	France	Spain	Germany	Italy
Polarization	polaris*	polariz*	polarisie*	polarizza*
Disagreement	divergence* de vue* OR divergence* d'opinion* OR desaccord* OR differend* OR (difference* (ideologiq* OR politiq*)) OR (division* (ideologiq* OR politi*)) OR (clivage* (ideologiq* OR politi*))	desacuerdo* OR diferencia* de opinion* OR discrepancia* OR (diferenc* (ideologic* or politic*)) OR (division* (ideologic* or politic*))	meinungsverschiedenheit* OR uneinig* OR auseinandersetzung* OR weltanschaulich* unterschied* OR ((ideolog* or politisch*) near1 unterschied*) OR ((ideolog* or politisch*) near1 differenz*) OR ((ideolog* or politisch*) near1 gegensatz*)	disaccord* OR differenz* di opinion* OR (division* (politic* or ideolog*)) OR (differenz* (politic* or ideolog*))

Panel 2: UK, US, and Canada

Category	UK	US	Canada (en)	Canada (fr)
Polarization	polaris* or polariz*	polariz* or polaris*	polariz* or polaris*	polaris*
Disagreement	disagreement* or dividing line* or ((politic* or ideologic*) (divi* or split))	disagreement* or dividing line* or ((politic* OR ideologic*) (split* or divi* or clash*))	disagreement* or dividing line* or ((politic* OR ideologic*) (split* or divi* or clash*))	divergence* de vue* OR divergence* d'opinion* OR desaccord* OR differend* OR (difference* (ideologiq* OR politiq*)) OR (division* (ideologiq* OR politi*)) OR (clivage* (ideologiq* OR politi*))

Note. For an article to contain a term from this table it needs to contain the term from either of the categories; in other words, the search query will have the elements of each category separated by an “or”.

Table A.5: *Specific* political polarization dictionary

Panel 1: European Union Countries

Category	France	Spain	Germany	Italy
Difference	((division* OR difference*) partisan*) OR (division* OR difference*) (des partis OR entre partis OR entre les partis)	((division* or difference*) partidista*) OR ((division* OR difference*) (de partido* OR entre partido*))	(parteien-streit* or koalitions-streit* or misstrauens-votum* or koalitions-konflikt* or verfassungs-streit* or partei-politische spaltung)	((division* OR difference*) di partit*) OR ((division* OR difference*) tra partit*))

Panel 2: UK, US, and Canada

Category	UK	US	Canada (en)	Canada (fr)
Difference	(partisan (divi* or difference* or split*)) or (party (divi* or split* or difference*)) or ((divi* or split* or difference*) between (party or parties))	(partisan (divi* or difference* or split*)) or (party (divi* or split* or difference*)) or ((divi* or split* or difference*) between (party or parties))	(partisan (divi* or difference* or split*)) or (party (divi* or split* or difference*)) or ((divi* or split* or difference*) between (party or parties))	((division* OR difference*) partisan*) OR ((division* OR difference*) (des partis OR entre partis OR entre les partis))

Table A.6: *Generic* legislative gridlock dictionary

Panel 1: European Union Countries

Category	France	Spain	Germany	Italy
Gridlock	blocag* or bloqu* or paralys* or impasse* or embouteillage*	bloqueo* or bloquea* or parali* or punto-muerto* or estanca* or impas*	stillstand* or blockade* or blockier* or sack-gass* or gelahmt* or lahmung* or patt* or verhandlungs-stillstand*	blocca* or impasse* or stallo* or paralis* or punto* morto* or vicolo* cieco*

Panel 2: UK, US, and Canada

Category	UK	US	Canada (en)	Canada (fr)
Gridlock	gridlock* or deadlock* or paralys* or stand-off* or stalemate* or impasse*	gridlock* or paraly* or impasse* or stalemate* or deadlock* or stand-off*	gridlock* or paralys* or impasse* or stalemate* or deadlock* or stand-off*	blocag* or bloqu* or paralys* or impasse* or embouteillage*

Note. For an article to contain a term from this table it needs to contain the term from either of the categories; in other words, the search query will have the elements of each category separated by an “or”.

Table A.7: *Specific* legislative gridlock dictionary

Panel 1: European Countries

Category	France	Spain	Germany	Italy
Confidence vote	(motion* or vote*) de (censure or defiance or non-confidence)	(mocion* or voto* or votacion*) de (censura or no confianza)	misstrauens-votum* or misstrauens-antrag*	(mozion* or vot*) di (censura or sfiducia)

Panel 2: UK, US, and Canada

Category	UK	US	Canada (en)	Canada (fr)
Confidence vote	(vote* or motion*) (to or of) (no confidence or censure) or no-confidence (vote* or motion*)	(vote* or motion*) (to or of) (no confidence or censure) or no-confidence (vote* or motion*) or impeach*	(vote* or motion*) (to or of) (no confidence or censure) or no-confidence (vote* or motion*)	(motion* or vote*) de (censure or defiance or non-confidence)

B Robustness

In this section we show that the main properties of our indices are robust to variations in our methodology. We focus on two methodological choices: the selection of sources, and the particular dictionary considered.

Sources We carry out two distinct exercises with respect to the suitability of the sources used. First, we check whether our strategy of computing the index by summing the contributions of all the sources indiscriminately is robust to computing the index source by source, and then aggregating the resulting subindices in the manner proposed by Baker et al. (2016). A substantial difference between the methods would imply that our index is being dominated by a few sources only, which can be a problem if they experience drastic changes in coverage. However, we find that the correlation between the normalised versions are always no less 0.89, with a strong visual coincidence of peaks. This lowest correlation is due to the LGI Canada index, within which the correlation between HP trends ($\lambda = 1600$, quarterly standard) is 0.96, and HP cycle is 0.80. These numbers being high enough, especially in picking up long-term trends, we therefore conclude that there are no significant structural breaks in our index, and no single source is biasing the outcome.

The second exercise we do is checking whether the index is robust to the random removal of sources. We compare the index to the index with one source removed, and compute the correlation in all cases. High correlation (which implies little change) means that the weight of the signal is not carried by few sources only, but rather that it is present in a number of newspapers. Table B.1 shows that the index is significantly robust even to the removal of two random sources, the correlation never decreasing below 0.71.

High correlation (which implies little change) means that the weight of the signal is not carried by few sources only, but rather that it is present in a number of newspapers. Table B.1 shows that the index that the correlation never decreases below 0.79. This number refers to the exercise done for Italy, where the biggest outlier is the financial periodical “Il Sole 24 Ore”. Because of its subject matter it is fundamentally different to the remainder of Italian sources, which we believe is the reason behind its somewhat distinct behaviour. Nevertheless, we underline the fact that the *average* correlations will be higher than the

Table B.1: Robustness to source removal

Index	US	UK	CA	DE	FR	ES	IT
PPI	0.995	0.954	0.986	0.936	0.986	0.944	0.918
LGI	0.997	0.989	0.940	0.948	0.995	0.924	0.786

Note: The lowest correlation between the original index and the index obtained when removing a source. Correlations are computed within the time period window when at least two of the remaining sources are present.

minimum numbers, and that we can therefore conclude that the general index behaviour is representative of the media ecosystem as a whole.

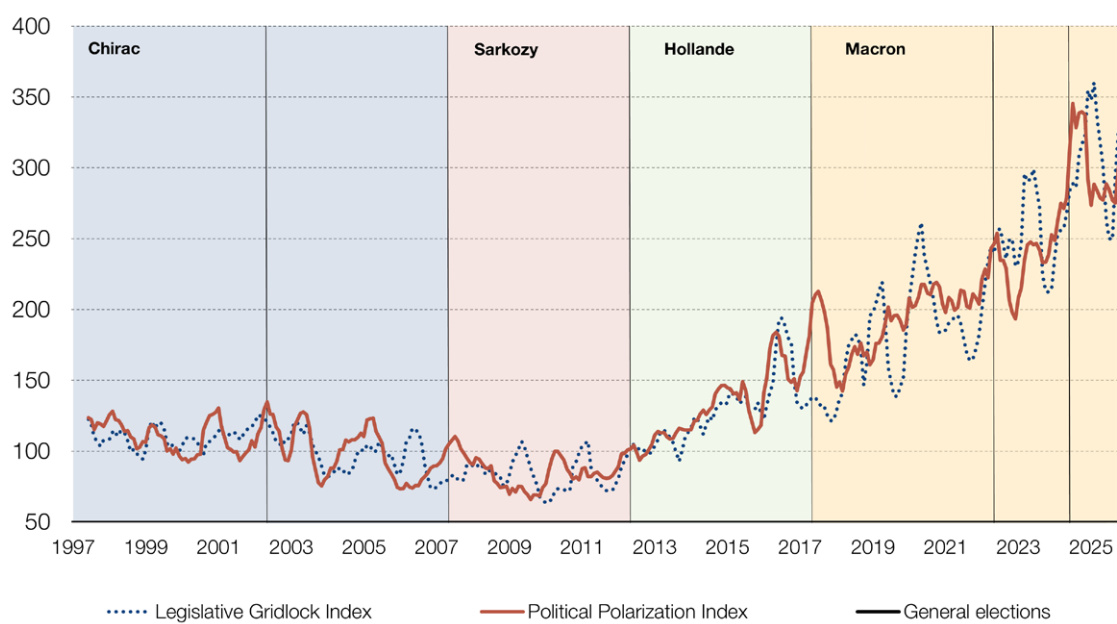
Dictionary choice The idea behind testing the dictionary choice is to ensure that the majority of the articles selected using that criterion treat the topic in question (thereby avoiding type I error). Given enough resources that could be done using manual inspection of a random selection of articles; however, in our case this check is effectively achieved by evaluating the soundness of index peaks - that is, by narrative validation. Given that all the identified peaks correspond to relevant events, we can conclude that the noise that will inevitably get picked up by the dictionary methodology is not systematic enough to pick up other phenomena and its respective peaks.

We also test robustness of our indices to the specific words used. In principle, we cannot test the removal of crucial terms simply because they are critical to the intended meaning of the index. We therefore focus on seeing the effect of removing words with a possibly tangential meaning - the “Regional”, and “Other” categories from the Policy/politics dictionary from Tables A.2 and A.3. For each country and each index we compute the correlation of the index to the corresponding index constructed when removing either set of terms. The resulting indices remain almost identical in none of the cases the correlations drop below 0.99 (again, due to LGI Italy and the “other” category). We therefore conclude that the regional and legislative terms do not distort the index.

C Narratives

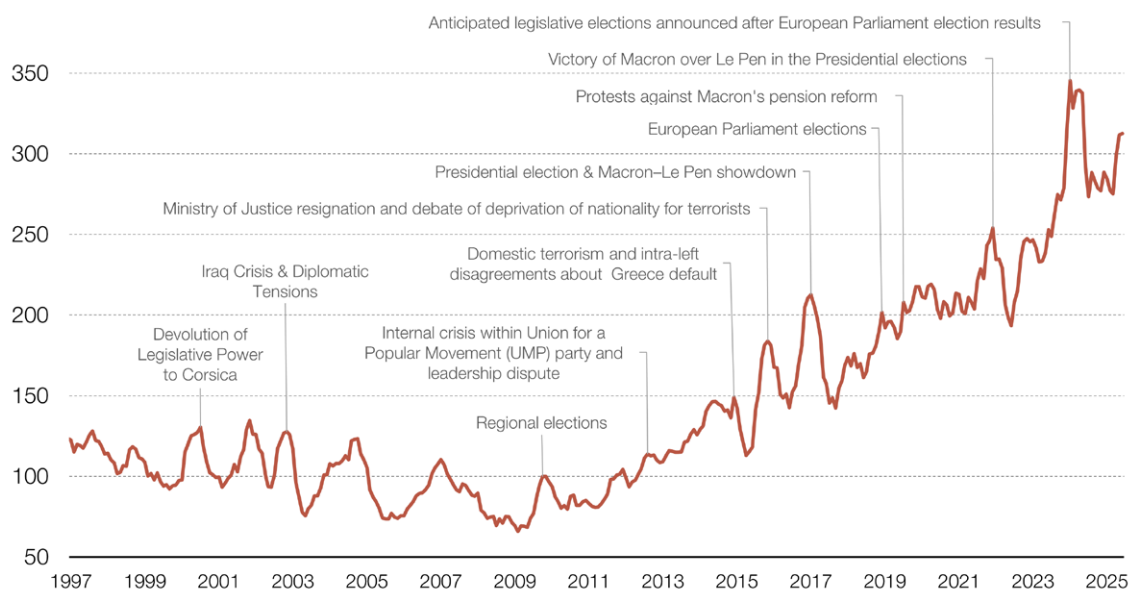
C.1 Narrative for France

Figure C.1: Political Polarization and Legislative Gridlock indices for France

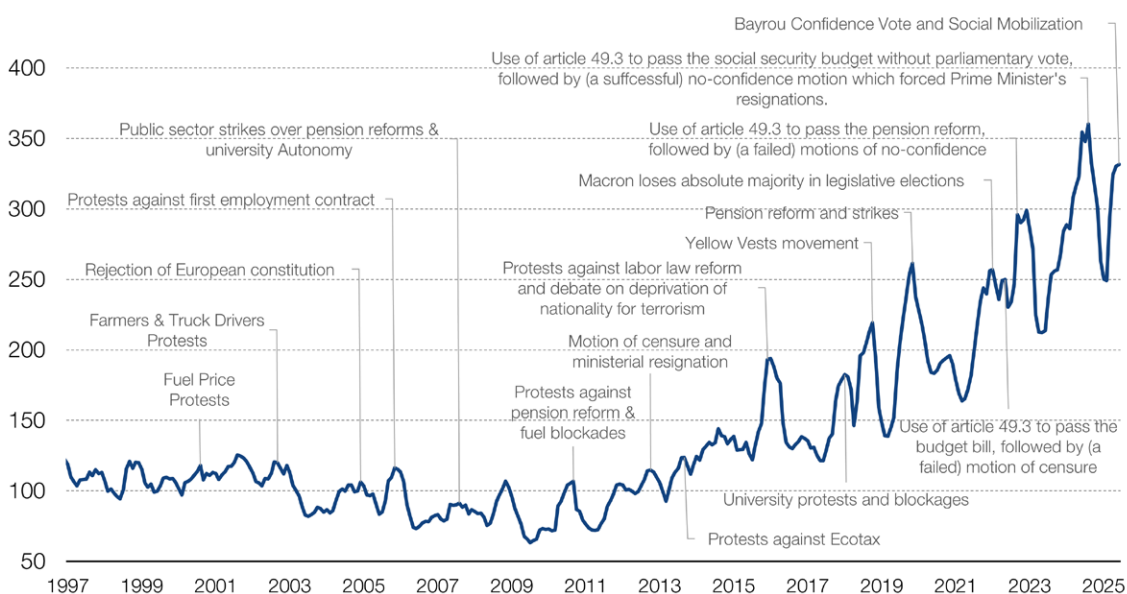


Note. PPI and LGI are monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility. Solid vertical lines represent general elections. Coloured areas refers to government cycles.

Figure C.2: France



(a) Political Polarization



(b) Legislative Gridlock

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value. Monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility.

Table C.1: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: France

Peak	Event
08-2000	Devolution of Legislative Power to Corsica: disagreement between prime minister (Jospin) and interior minister (Chevènement), followed by Interior Minister's resignation, violence related to Corsican nationalist movements
02-2003	Iraq Crisis and France's opposition to the US-led intervention in Iraq, as well as internal disagreements within the European Union: President Chirac coordinated with Germany and Russia to block authorization for force. France (with Germany and Belgium) even vetoed NATO military preparations for Turkey, causing an unprecedented deadlock in the Alliance.
03-2010	France's regional elections turned into a quasi-referendum on Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency, and delivered a landslide victory for the left over President Sarkozy's ruling conservatives: Socialist-led coalitions won most regions and the electoral map dramatically shifted the country's center of political gravity to the left. This dramatic mid-term rebuke exacerbated political polarization, as the triumphant opposition unified in an explicitly anti-Sarkozy front to resist Sarkozy's policies, while fractures deepened within the president's camp.
11-2012	Internal crisis within Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party and leadership dispute: Contentious election for the UMP party's presidency (between Jean-François Copé and François Fillon), leading to intense disagreements, accusations of irregularities, and a deep division within the party
06-2015	ISIS-inspired Isère terrorist attack jolted France and magnified ideological divides (Prime Minister Valls warned a "war of civilizations". Instead of unity, his words sparked bitter disagreement – the right welcomed what it saw as realism, but outraged left-wing leaders decried the rhetoric). In addition, the escalating Greek debt crisis split the French left-of-center: while Hollande and Valls toed a firm line with Europe (insisting Athens accept budget constraints), left-wing stalwarts openly sided with Greece's defiant prime minister, Alexis Tsipras.

Continued on next page

Table C.1: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: France (Continued)

Peak	Event
01-2016	Ministry of Justice (Christiane Taubira) resignation due to major political disagreement over the constitutional reform on the deprivation of nationality for terrorists
05-2017	Presidential Election: Macron–Le Pen showdown. Macron’s decisive victory did not end the polarization. Instead, it triggered turmoil within France’s traditional parties, forcing political actors to take sides, effectively acting as a referendum on France’s identity and direction.
05-2019	European Parliament elections: With the center-left and center-right humbled, France effectively moved toward a “two-bloc” system (Pro-EU centrists vs nationalist-populists). The campaign and results of this vote were framed as a high-stakes referendum on Macron’s presidency vs. a nationalist challenge, consolidating a deep divide between pro- and anti-Establishment camps.
01-2020	Protests against Macron’s pension reform which aimed to create a universal state retirement plan, replacing the existing 42 individual retirement plans in France. It introduced a “points system” to give pensions in proportion to the contributions paid.
04-2022	April 2022 presidential election forced a binary choice between a pro-European centrist (Emmanuel Macron) and a nationalist far-right challenger (Marine Le Pen), sharply dividing voters into opposing camps. Victory of Macron over Le Pen in the Presidential elections.
06-2024	Legislative Elections were announced following the dissolution of the Parliament by President Macron, after the substantial gains made by the National Rally (RN) and a significant loss of seats by Macron’s <i>Besoin d’Europe</i> electoral list in the 2024 European Parliament election.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the

mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

Table C.2: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: France

Peak	Event
09-2000	Widespread protests against fuel price hikes, which led to significant disruptions in transportation and fuel supply, and subsequent political reactions and negotiations.
11-2002	Widespread protests and blockades by farmers protesting against the practices of large distribution companies and by truck drivers demanding better wages and working conditions, which led to significant disruptions in transportation and production chain, and subsequent government negotiations and responses.
06-2005	Rejection of the European Constitution and the subsequent political crisis.
03-2006	Widespread protests against the first employment contract (Contrat Première Embauchée) and subsequent government responses and political reactions.
11-2007	Widespread protests and strikes by public sector workers, including railway workers, energy sector employees, and university students, and subsequent government responses and political reactions.
10-2010	Widespread protests and strikes against the proposed pension reform and subsequent government responses and political reactions.
03-2013	Motion of censure and resignation of Minister of the Budget Jérôme Cahuzac at the Minister of the Economy and Finance under President François Hollande.
10-2013	Suspension of the Ecotax on heavy goods vehicles and the subsequent protests and blockades by farmers and transport workers, which led to significant disruptions in transportation and supply chains.
05-2016	Protests against El Khomri (Minister of Labour) labor law, which aimed to reform the labor code to make it more flexible, and constitutional reform debate on deprivation of nationality for terrorism..

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Table C.2: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: France (Continued)

Peak	Event
07-2018	University students carried out anti-Macron demonstrations, protesting against increased fees and selection processes. They argued the current reforms limited university access, which attempted against the traditional open-to-all system.
12-2018	Yellow Vests movement and political reactions.
12-2019	Prime Minister Édouard Philippe's announcement of the pension reform, with introduction of universal points-based system, "age pivot" at 64 for full pension benefits, and minimum pension of 1000 euros. Strong opposition from unions.
06-2022	Legislative elections took place in June 2022 and the incumbent President Macron's coalition lost its absolute majority, leading to political uncertainty and the need for new alliances. Discussions on forming a "government of action" led by Prime Minister Borne.
10-2022	Prime Minister Borne invoked Article 49.3 to pass the first part of the budget Bill without a parliamentary vote. Opposition filed motions of censure against government, which failed, allowing Borne to remain in office. Also, the government responded with emergency measures to the strikes at TotalEnergies refineries.
03-2023	Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne invoked Article 49.3 to pass the pension reform without a parliamentary vote, followed by two (failed) motions of no confidence. The reform aimed to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64, sparking widespread protests and political backlash.
12-2024	Prime Minister Michel Barnier invoked Article 49.3 to push through the social security budget without a parliamentary vote. This triggered a no-confidence motion, which succeeded, leading to Barnier's removal from office.

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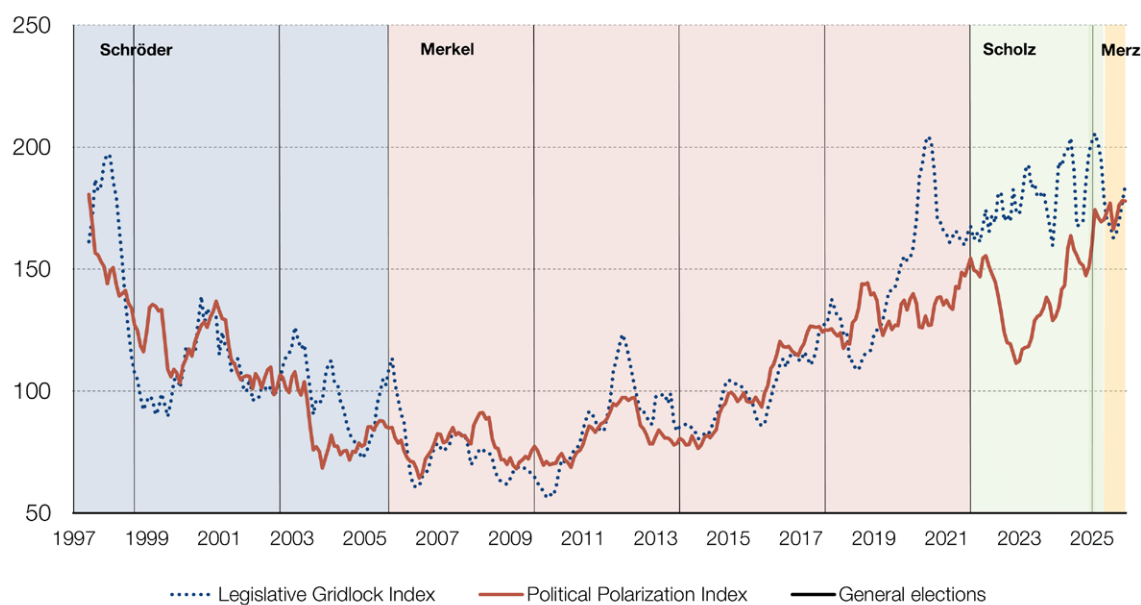
Table C.2: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: France (Continued)

Peak	Event
09-2025	A confidence vote concerning François Bayrou’s government government coincided with social mobilizations and union activity (10/18 Sept: “Bloquons tout”) and EU–Mercosur advancing in Brussels. Long-dated OATs spike as investors re-price risk, CGT energy actions roll, Zelensky rallies allies in Paris, and a tentative housing rebound strains under higher rates.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

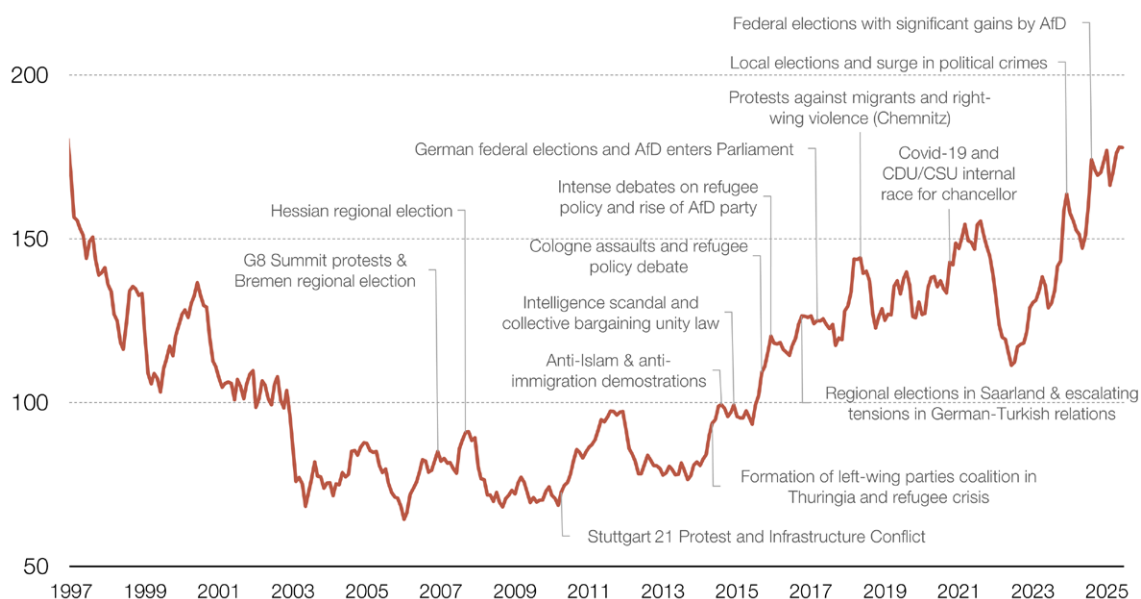
C.2 Narrative for Germany

Figure C.3: Political Polarization and Legislative Gridlock indices for Germany

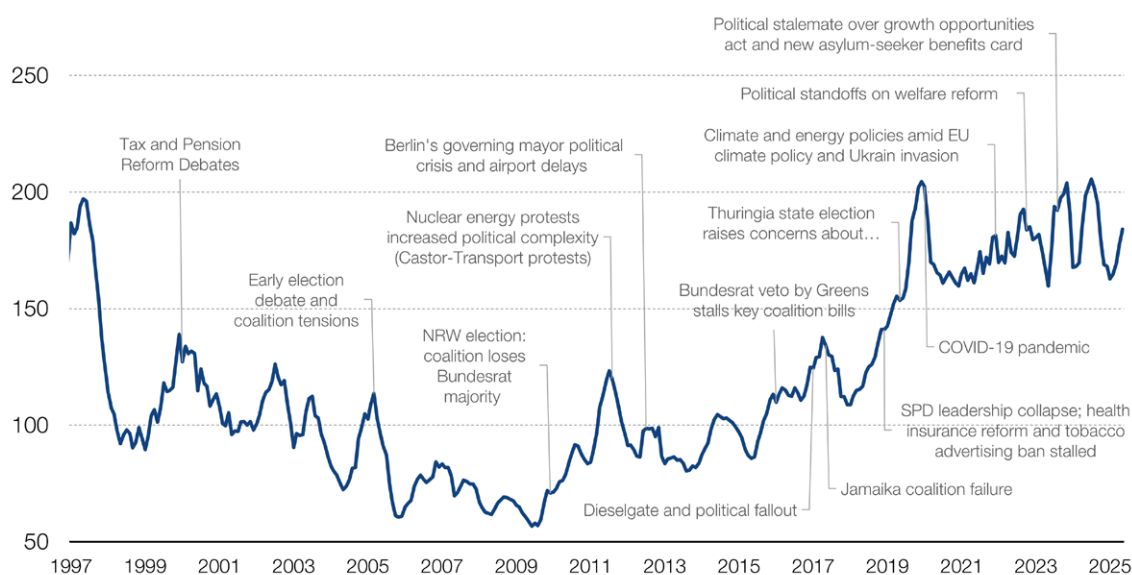


Note. PPI and LGI are monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility. Solid vertical lines represent general elections. Coloured areas refers to government cycles.

Figure C.4: Germany



(a) Political Polarization



(b) Legislative Gridlock

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value. Monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility.

Table C.3: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Germany

Peak	Event
05-2007	G8 Summit protests (in Heiligendamm) involved widespread demonstrations and clashes (about anti-globalization sentiment, security measures and police actions, environmental concerns); Bremen regional election in May 2007.
01-2008	Hessian state election: Incumbent CDU Minister-President Roland Koch launched an aggressive campaign centered on youth crime and immigration, after a highly publicized case of violent assault by teenagers of foreign origin on a Munich subway in December 2007. Koch's campaign caused open conflict in the ruling Grand Coalition at the national level. Koch's party plunged in the elections, losing its absolute majority. At the same time, a new parliamentary force rose that unsettled Germany's political order: Die Linke (The Left), a democratic socialist party formed from the merger of two left-wing parties (the East Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism and the West German Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative).
10-2010	Popular protests against the infrastructural public transport project Stuttgart 21 arised, given its Protests against Stuttgart 21, Europe's longest-running infrastructure dispute, stem from immense cost overruns (estimated over €9 billion), massive delays (opening delayed to 2026/2027), and environmental concerns regarding the destruction of city parkland.
11-2014	Germany's first "red-red-green" coalition (Social Democratic Party, Die Linke, and Greens) with a head of government from the Left Party (Die Linke). Nationally, Thuringia's left-wing coalition stoked debate about Die Linke's role. At the same time, there were anti-immigrant protests that forced politicians to take clear stances on multiculturalism and law enforcement in a context of refugee crisis and debate about asylum policies.

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Table C.3: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Germany (Continued)

Peak	Event
01-2015	Demonstrations of a new anti-Islam, anti-immigration movement called “Pegida” (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) in Dresden created a stark divide among establishment parties - even though the movement itself began to implode at the end of the month. In addition, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) Party was involved in internal discussions over both (i) the organizational leadership structure (AfD founder Bernd Lucke, a moderate conservative economist, pushed to concentrate power in his hands by replacing the AfD’s three-person leadership with a single-chair model), and (ii) the party’s ideology and stance toward movements like Pegida.
05-2015	Two major issues lead to increased political confrontations (i) intelligence scandal (revelations emerged that Germany’s foreign intelligence service had assisted the U.S. NSA in spying on European officials and firms. This led to confrontation within Chancellor Angela Merkel’s governing Grand Coalition); (ii) disruptive labor strikes (train drivers’ union, daycare workers) which led to debates in Parliament about limiting the power of small unions. The culmination was the passage of the Collective Bargaining Unity Law.
01-2016	Assaults in New Year’s eve in Cologne served as a trigger for debates and internal clash within the governing coalition over refugee policy, which in turn contributed to the rise of Alternative für Deutschland and right-wing populism.
05-2016	Intense debates on refugee policy, public safety, security, and immigration, and rise of Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) party
03-2017	regional election in Saarland with CDU’s victory, which served as a barometer for Merkel’s party strength and escalating tensions in German-Turkish relations

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Table C.3: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Germany (Continued)

Peak	Event
09-2017	German federal elections. Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right CDU/CSU bloc remained the largest, but both it and the center-left SPD suffered historic losses, while the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) surged to become the third-strongest party in the Parliament
09-2018	Anti-migrants unrest (Chemnitz events): tensions within the governing coalition due to Hans-Georg Maaßen's declarations, the head of the domestic intelligence agency, who publicly questioned Chancellor Merkel's stance and the challenged the authenticity of the videos recording violent facts related with these events.
04-2021	CDU/CSU Chancellor candidacy conflict (Laschet vs. Söder) for the upcoming federal elections of September of the same year split the ruling coalition leadership. In addition, there was an intense debate over National "Emergency Brake" COVID Law.
05-2024	Local elections, characterized by a surge of physical attacks and threats against politicians.
02-2025	Federal elections characterized by a wave of politically motivated violence against public officials (several German politicians were physically attacked or threatened in the run-up to elections) and intense debate over the far-right AfD rise.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

Table C.4: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Germany

Peak	Event
07-2000	Simultaneous stalemates on two flagship reforms: a sweeping tax cut plan (Steuerreform) stalled in the Bundesrat by opposition-led states, and a pension overhaul (Rentenreform) whose cross-party consensus talks collapsed. The tax bill remained effectively blocked until a last-minute deal and the pension reform was temporarily put on hold.
05-2005	2005 German federal election (originally intended for the autumn of 2006). The snap election was called after the government's defeat in the North Rhine-Westphalia state election, which caused them to intentionally lose a motion of confidence to trigger an early federal election. The outgoing government was a coalition of the centre-left Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and Alliance 90/The Greens, led by federal chancellor Gerhard Schröder. The formation of a new government required careful negotiations, as no conventional arrangement could achieve a majority. Finally, a grand coalition between the CDU/CSU and SPD was formed with Angel Merkel as chancellor.
05-2010	North Rhine-Westphalia election dealt a heavy blow to Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right coalition, which lost its majority in the Bundesrat. As a consequence, Angela Merkel's center-right coalition could no longer pass key laws without opposition consent. Opposition-led states in the Bundesrat vowed to block or reshape the government's agenda, from tax cuts to nuclear energy.
11-2011	Legislative Gridlock in Germany due to Stuttgart 21 Referendum and Castor-Transport Protests. Widespread protests against the transportation of nuclear waste in "Castor" containers (Casks for Storage and Transport of Radioactive material) to the Gorleben storage facility. These protests were part of a larger, ongoing movement against nuclear power and waste storage in Germany.

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Table C.4: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Germany (Continued)

Peak	Event
01-2013	Berlin's Mayor, Klaus Wowereit, survived a vote of no confidence in the German capital's senate over repeated delays in the opening of the new airport BER Flughafen-Debakel.
06-2016	Angela Merkel's Grand Coalition grappled with internal disagreements that slowed legislation. Two laws stalled in Bundesrat: Safe Countries Asylum bill (a bill to designate Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia as safe countries of origin for asylum purposes), Inheritance Tax reform (it came only under a court deadline, and key initiatives like pay equity and rent control languished for lack of consensus).
07-2017	Part of the automotive industry used an illegal software to miscount CO2 emissions. This led to more stringent emission regulations and a greater focus on environmental concerns, which sometimes clashed with existing political priorities and industry interests, contributing to legislative delays.
11-2017	Efforts to form a "Jamaica" coalition government in Germany (consisting of the CDU/CSU, the Greens, and the Free Democratic Party), failed. The FDP withdrew from the talks, leaving Germany in a political crisis and raising the possibility of new elections.
06-2019	SPD Chair Nahles quits and policy-making slows to a crawl in the interim. Two issues stand out: (i) health Insurance Reform (plan to merge/rationalize public insurers) is blocked (the proposal is tabled indefinitely amid partisan and state-level vetoes) and minister Spahn (CDU) is forced to retreat; (ii) tobacco advertising ban stalled despite moral suasion by the Chancellor. In addition, far-right extremism shock (Lübcke murder) monopolized debate and sharpened conflicts (particularly with the AfD) and contributed to slowing progress on other policy fronts.

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Table C.4: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Germany (Continued)

Peak	Event
10-2019	In Thuringia, the absence of a majority coalition leads to prolonged government formation issues. Thuringia election results triggered internal CDU and SPD turmoil, with the SPD's unstable leadership and the rise of extremist influences further complicating coalition dynamics and legislative progress.
04-2020	Covid-19 outbreak gave way to renewed partisan clashes and stalled reforms: (i) covid-19 related aid and recovery measures stalled (e.g. fight over enhancing the short-time work benefits for furloughed workers); (ii) and non-Covid legislative business froze, from energy to defense procurements (e.g. dispute over Tornado fighter jet replacement)
06-2022	Coalition infighting stalled or watered down major initiatives, directly slowing the parliamentary process and leaving key policies in limbo: (i) EU climate policy clash (the EU proposal to end sales of combustion-engine cars by 2035, which affects Germany's crucial auto industry) tears apart the ruling coalition; (ii) energy policy (nuclear vs coal) is thrown into turmoil by the war in Ukraine; (iii) fiscal relief measures – Debt brake vs. inflation relief amid spiking fuel and energy costs.
11-2022	Deep rifts within the ruling coalition over policy and priorities kept other key initiatives on hold: (i) a Bundesrat veto by opposition-led states stalled the welfare reform until a compromise was forced; (ii) infrastructure acceleration (highways, rails, renewables) was blocked (the FDP pushed for a broad acceleration including roads and LNG terminals, the Greens were wary about environmental shortcuts especially for fossil or road projects, and the SPD oscillated in between), (iii) criminal justice reform quarrel (adjusting the penal code to reduce short prison terms for unpaid fines).

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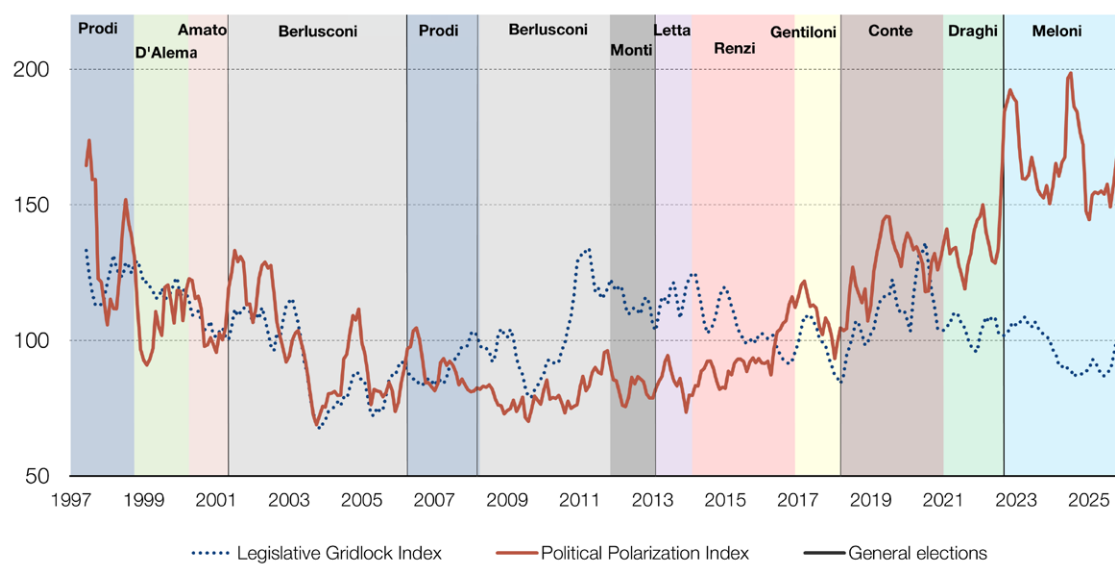
Table C.4: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Germany (Continued)

Peak	Event
02-2024	(i) Opposition-led states vetoed the coalition's Growth Opportunities Act (a major tax relief and investment incentives package) in the Bundesrat, forcing mediation with no quick resolution and leaving urgent economic relief stuck in limbo. (ii) Internal coalition disputes over a new asylum-seeker benefits card (intended to replace portions of monthly cash allowances with a debit card system) halted policy rollout as partners deadlocked on details.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

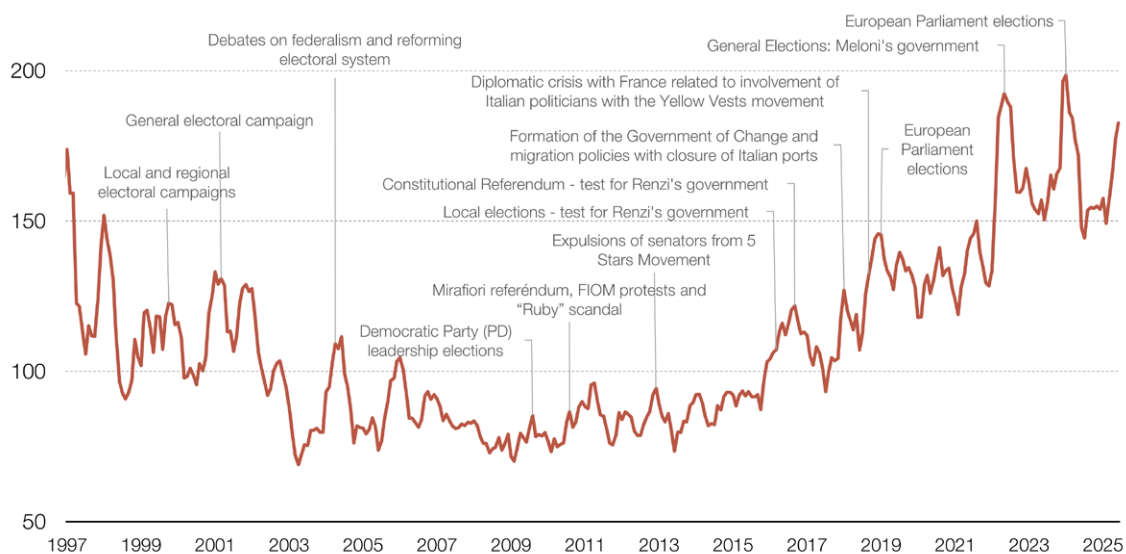
C.3 Narrative for Italy

Figure C.5: Political Polarization and Legislative Gridlock indices for Italy

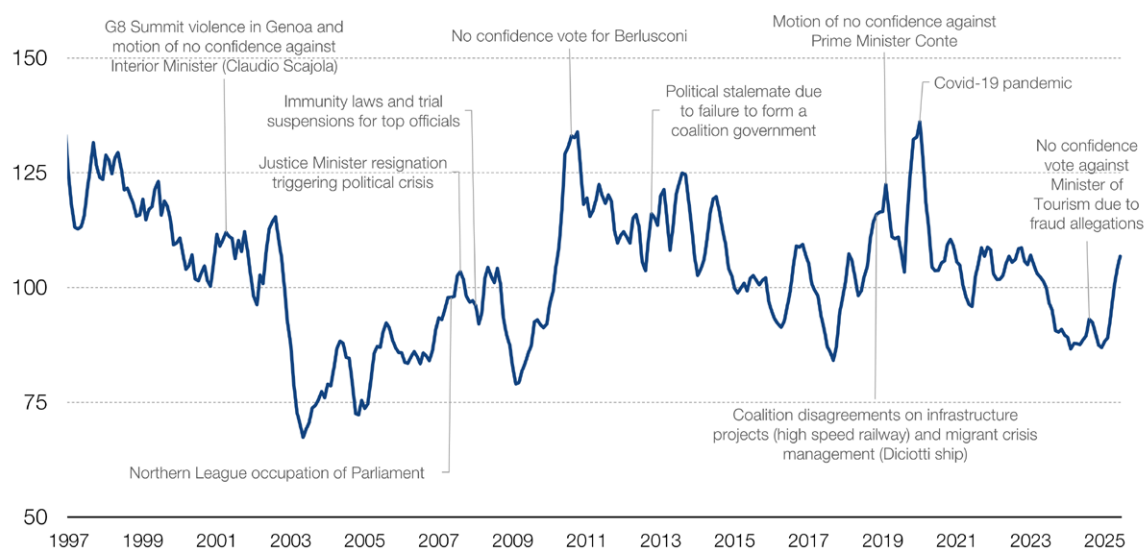


Note. PPI and LGI are monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility. Solid vertical lines represent general elections. Coloured areas refers to government cycles.

Figure C.6: Italy



(a) Political Polarization



(b) Legislative Gridlock

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value. Monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility.

Table C.5: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Italy

Peak	Event
03-2000	Discussions about government's proposed tax cuts and a new Southern development plan. In addition, electoral campaign for upcoming local and regional elections (April 2000, most Italian regions).
05-2001	General election, which fundamentally polarized the political system into two camps: Silvio Berlusconi's center-right coalition (the Casa delle Libertá) against the incumbent center-left (the Ulivo). The election resulted in a decisive center-right victory with the collapse of the Center and "Third Pole".
07-2004	Discussions about the modification of the second part of the Constitution, including federalism and electoral reform.
09-2009	Democratic Party (PD) leadership elections, culminating in the victory of Pier Luigi Bersani at the end of October 2009, contributed significantly to the increase in the polarization index for September 2009.
01-2011	The Mirafiori referendum saw FIAT workers accept a controversial productivity pact, heavily opposed by the FIOM union due to reduced worker rights. Concurrently, the "Ruby" scandal erupted, involving allegations against PM Silvio Berlusconi of sex with an underage minor (Karima El Mahroug) and abuse of office.
06-2013	Expulsions of senators from 5 Stars Movement (5SM). In late May and early June, M5S performed poorly in various local elections, especially in big cities. Some M5S members openly criticized M5S's leader Grillo for his aggressive rhetoric. As a consequence, some members were expelled from the movement and others quitted.
06-2016	Local Elections - Crucial Test for Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's government (considered as a measure of public support for Renzi's leadership and his reform agenda).

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Table C.5: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Italy (Continued)

Peak	Event
11-2016	Constitutional Referendum - test for Renzi's government stability. The proposed amendments aimed at streamlining governance, reducing costs, and enhancing efficiency. Prime Minister Matteo Renzi had promised to resign if the referendum failed.
06-2018	Formation of the Government of Change, a coalition between the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and right-wing League (Lega) under Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, after three months of hung parliament. The political discussion was dominated by migration policies and the Aquarius crisis: the Interior Minister Matteo Salvini (Lega) refused to allow the Aquarius, a humanitarian rescue ship carrying migrants, to dock in Italy. The Aquarius incident escalated into a Europe-wide issue.
02-2019	Tensions within the coalition government and the diplomatic crisis with France (involvement of Italian politicians with the Yellow Vests movement which led to the recall of the French ambassador)
05-2019	The European Parliament elections were the first major electoral test for Italy's government since the general election of 2018. The vote essentially turned into a referendum on the two ruling parties (anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and right-wing League (Lega)), which ran as rivals. Official results confirmed the League's victory and the M5S' plunge. The leader of the M5S Luigi Di Maio sought (and won) a confidence vote from M5S members to shore up his position. In this climate, the coalition government was plagued by almost daily quarrels and a growing lack of trust.

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Table C.5: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Italy (Continued)

Peak	Event
09-2022	The general election pitted a right-wing coalition led by Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) against a fragmented center-left led by Enrico Letta's Partito Democratico (PD), with the Five Star Movement (M5S) and a centrist "Third Pole" running separately. The right-wing victory – FdI becoming the largest party – marked a historic political shift.
06-2024	The European Parliament election in Italy effectively became a nationwide showdown between the governing right-wing bloc and the center-left opposition. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni framed the vote as a mandate on her leadership and policies. Conversely, opposition leader Elly Schlein of the Partito Democratico (PD) positioned the PD as the only credible alternative to Meloni.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

Table C.6: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Italy

Peak	Event
07-2001	G8 Summit violence in Genoa and motion of no confidence against Interior Minister (Claudio Scajola)
06-2007	Northern League MPs "occupying" Parliament to demand new elections dramatized Italy's political stalemate. This shocking protest halted legislative business: legislative output slowed as debates were derailed and votes delayed (stalling reforms on pensions, welfare, and budget plans).
01-2008	Resignation of Justice Minister Clemente Mastella resigned after corruption scandal; Prime Minister Romano Prodi faced a no-confidence vote in the Senate, also related to Naples waste management crisis, and consequently resigned.

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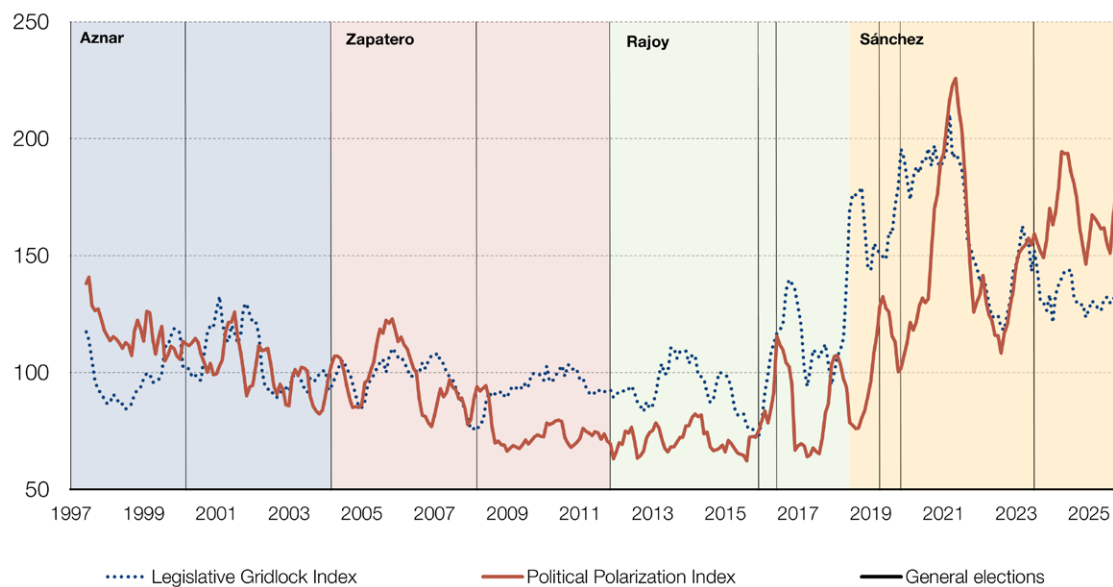
Table C.6: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Italy (Continued)

Peak	Event
07-2008	The Parliament passed laws (Lodo Alfano and Blocca-Processi) that granted immunity and trial suspensions for high-ranking officials (later declared unconstitutional in October 2009).
12-2010	Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi faced a no confidence vote, which he narrowly won
04-2013	Failure to Form a Coalition Government, finally resolved with the re-election of Giorgio Napolitano as President of Republic and Enrico Letta as Prime Minister.
02-2019	Coalition disagreements on infrastructure projects (high speed railway) and migrant crisis management (Diciotti ship)
08-2019	Motion of no confidence against Prime Minister Conte, which offered to resign. As a consequence, it was agreed to form a new government with Conte remaining at its head (supported by M5S and the Democratic Party)
03-2020	Covid-19 pandemic: Parliament fast-tracked urgent public health measures with overwhelming support, but this came at the cost of comprehensive debate and normal checks.
02-2025	The Parliament rejected a no confidence motion filed against Tourism Minister Daniela Santanchè after she was indicted for fraude allegations

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

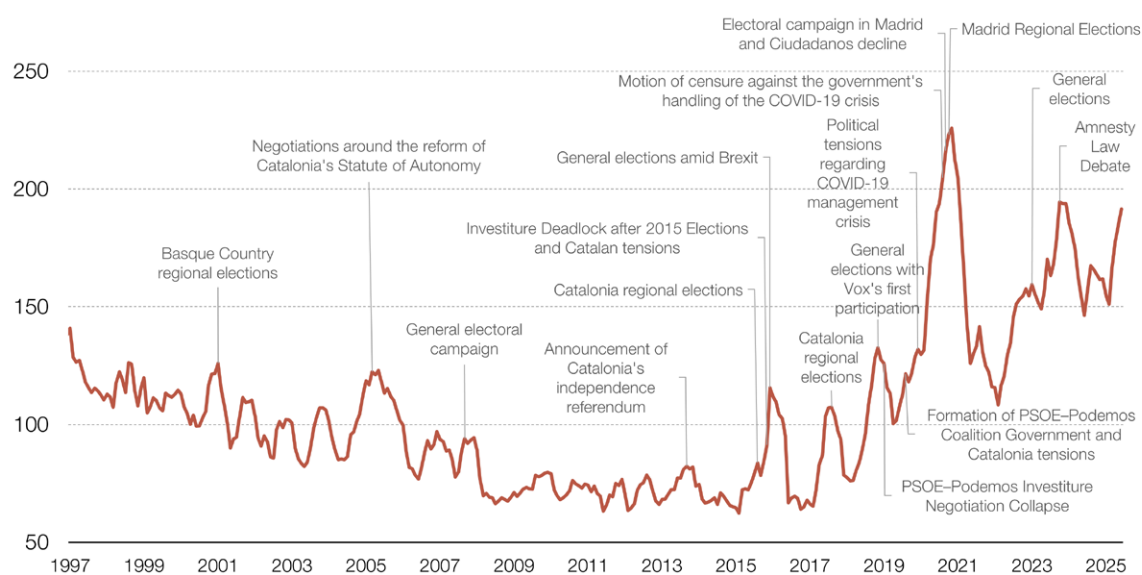
C.4 Narrative for Spain

Figure C.7: Political Polarization and Legislative Gridlock indices for Spain

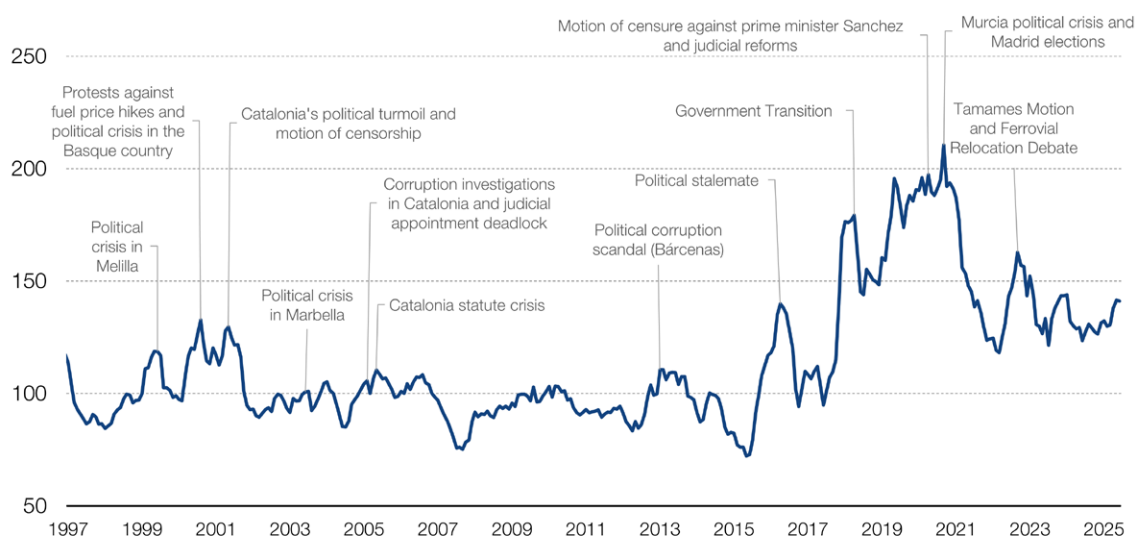


Note. PPI and LGI are monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility. Solid vertical lines represent general elections. Coloured areas refers to government cycles.

Figure C.8: Spain



(a) Political Polarization



(b) Legislative Gridlock

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value. Monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility.

Table C.7: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Spain

Peak	Event
05-2001	Basque Country regional elections marked by extreme rhetoric and mutual accusations between nationalist and unionist parties.
06-2005	The majority of Catalan parties, except the PP, agreed to include the term "nation" in the new Statute. The summit aimed to reach a consensus on these issues, but the PP's refusal to recognize Catalonia as a nation created significant tension and disagreement
02-2008	General electoral campaign, with intense rivalry between Rajoy and Zapatero amid economic crisis
12-2013	Catalonia pro-independence parties strike a deal to hold an independence referendum in November 2014. This move provokes a clash with Madrid, which vows to block the illegal vote. In addition, the ruling party (PP) approves a bill to roll back abortion rights, pleasing its base but isolating it politically. The entire opposition (and even some PP voices) condemn the reform as regressive.
09-2015	Catalonia regional elections were framed as a plebiscite on independence: nationalist coalition achieves absolute majority in seats but falls short of 50% of votes
06-2016	General elections amid Brexit, which heightened political tensions (participation of Ciudadanos and Podemos)
12-2017	Catalonia regional elections heightened political tensions across the country amid independence debate
04-2019	General election campaign, in which the dissolution of the old PP–PSOE political duopoly gave way to fragmented "blocks": a left-leaning bloc (PSOE with Podemos) versus a right-leaning bloc (PP with Ciudadanos, and the newcomer Vox). In addition, the Catalan pro-independence parties used the campaign to push their agenda, which magnified polarization.

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Table C.7: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Spain (Continued)

Peak	Event
07-2019	After five days of intense negotiations, the coalition government was not able to emerge given the sudden break in negotiations between Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) AND Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)
01-2020	In Catalonia, political tensions escalated after the disqualification of Quim Torra, president of the regional government and a figure aligned with the Junts per Catalunya camp. His removal heightened confrontation with the central government and coincided with ongoing negotiations between ERC and the PSOE over Pedro Sánchez's investiture.
05-2020	Political tensions regarding COVID-19 management crisis: e.g. parliamentary showdown over renewing Spain's "state of alarm" (emergency lockdown) and the controversy of a secret deal with Basque party EH Bildu, in exchange for Bildu's abstention. When this pact leaked, it provoked immediate backlash, and the ruling party PSOE walked back the "full repeal" promise overnight.
10-2020	The extremist right-wing party (Vox) presented a motion of censure against the government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis. However, the main right-wing party (PP) publicly rejected it. This led to divisions within the right-wing parties.
03-2021	Madrid's regional president Isabel Díaz Ayuso (PP) dissolved the regional assembly and called a snap election for 4 May. Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias (leader of Podemos party) announced he would quit the national government to run against Ayuso.
04-2021	Madrid Regional Elections, marked by aggressive rhetoric (including series of death threat letters with bullets sent to prominent public figures). The discussion focused on the covid-19 crisis management.

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Table C.7: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Spain (Continued)

Peak	Event
07-2023	The general elections were announced by surprise in May by the President of the Spanish Government and leader of the PSOE, Pedro Sánchez, six months earlier than anticipated, in response to the results of the local and regional elections held in May, in which the main opposition party (Popular Party) managed to gain access to a majority of mayors' offices and regional governments (although in many cases necessarily through government pacts with the Vox party).
12-2023	Debate surrounding the proposed Amnesty Law, which aimed to grant amnesty to individuals involved in the Catalan independence movement

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

Table C.8: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Spain

Peak	Event
08-1999	Coalition meltdown in Melilla: first Muslim mayor (Mustafá Aberchán) took power in Melilla by allying with the controversial GIL party, bypassing both national ruling party (PP) and the main opposition (PSOE), sparking a national outcry.
09-2000	Nationwide protests against rising fuel prices and the political turmoil in the Basque Country
10-2001	Motion of censorship to the President of Catalanian Parliament (Jordi Pujol)
08-2003	Motions of censure against the mayor of Marbella (Julián Muñoz) after accusations of corruption and malfeasance.

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Table C.8: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Spain (Continued)

Peak	Event
03-2005	Catalan President Pasqual Maragall faced a scandal related to the public housing company Adigsa, which was under investigation for alleged corruption; moreover, new law's supermajority requirement left 12 Supreme Court seats vacant when members of the judicial council belonging to the major parties (PP and PSOE) refused to compromise
10-2005	Catalonia Statute Crisis unleashed debates about Spain's constitutional framework and strained the governing coalition; this was coupled with strikes in transport and fisheries, which diverted government attention and required executive actions
07-2013	Bárcenas corruption scandal that affected the ruling party (PP); Prime Minister Rayoj was forced to address the parliament by the threat of a motion of censure.
09-2016	Electoral setbacks for the PSOE party in the Basque and Galician regional elections (September 2016), which led to Pedro Sánchez's ouster as leader after the inconclusive previous general elections (June 2016). As a consequence, incumbent Mariano Rajoy (leader of PP party) was re-elected as Prime Minister with the support of PSOE's abstention, despite public outcry and internal opposition.
06-2018	Prime Minister Mariano Rayoj (head of PP party) resigned after losing a motion of no confidence, and Pedro Sánchez (head of PSOE party) was appointed as the new Prime Minister
10-2020	Vox's motion of censure against Pedro Sánchez related to the management of COVID-19 crisis
03-2021	Failed motion of censure against PP in Murcia, due to a late change of vote from three parliamentaries from Ciudadanos, and contested Madrid elections

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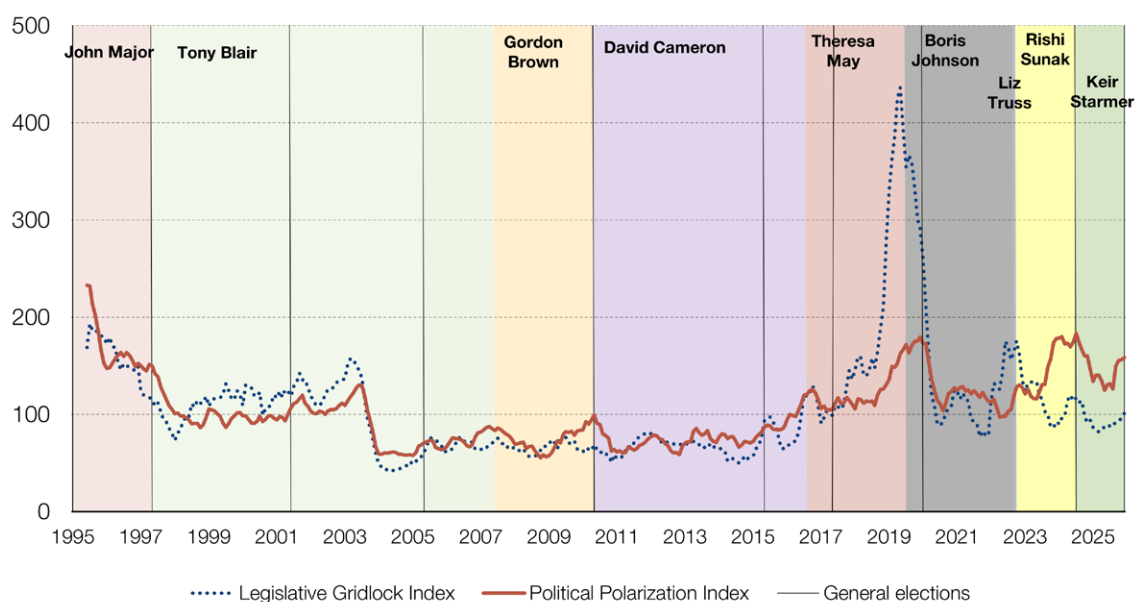
Table C.8: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Spain (Continued)

Peak	Event
03-2023	Parliament discussed Vox's no-confidence motion, reflecting confrontation between government and opposition. At the same time, Ferrovial's planned headquarters relocation generated political and regulatory debate. Ongoing discussions on housing measures and pension reforms contributed to an environment of legislative difficulty.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

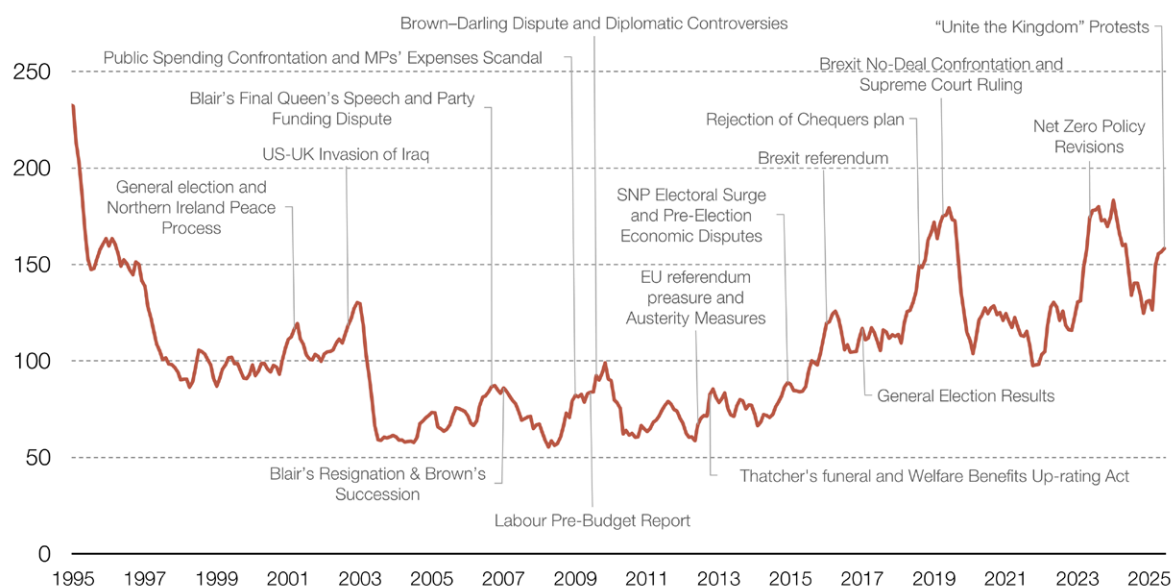
C.5 Narrative for United Kingdom

Figure C.9: Political Polarization and Legislative Gridlock indices for the UK

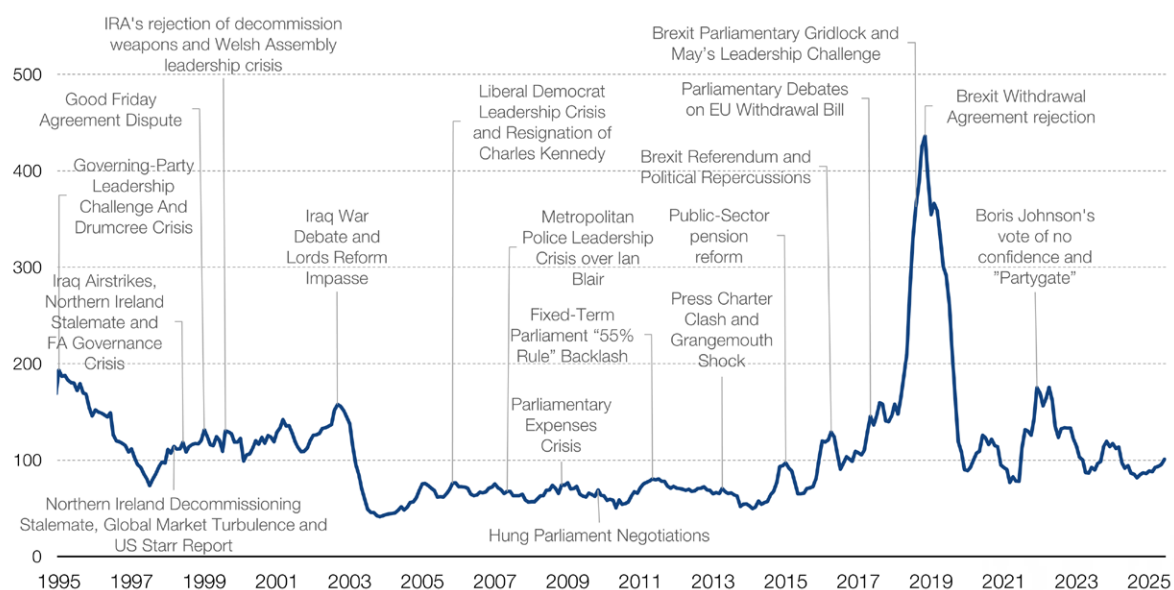


Note. PPI and LGI are monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility. Solid vertical lines represent general elections. Coloured areas refers to government cycles.

Figure C.10: United Kingdom



(a) Political Polarization



(b) Legislative Gridlock

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value. Monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility.

Table C.9: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: UK

Peak	Event
02-1995	PM John Major faced disputes over the UK's role in Europe and the proposed single European currency. He clashed with EU leaders and opposition MPs, while his Conservative Party was split: Chancellor Kenneth Clarke pushed conditions for joining the Euro, and Major proposed a referendum, exposing tensions between pro- and anti-Europe Tories.
07-2001	William Hague resigned as Conservative leader after the 2001 general election, triggering a divisive leadership contest. The split within the Conservative party regarding the European Integration solidified with this leadership race of Ken Clarke against Iain Duncan Smith. At the same time, Northern Ireland's power-sharing government was in crisis after David Trimble, resigned over the IRA's failure to disarm, stalling progress in peace process and prompting urgent talks between PM Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern.
03-2003	UK participation in the US-led invasion of Iraq triggered domestic and international divisions. On 17 March 2003, Robin Cook resigned from the Cabinet in protest at going to war without explicit UN authorization. Internationally, the conflict deepened a rift between the UK and France, which had opposed military action at the UN.
11-2006	PM Tony Blair delivered his final Queen's Speech, signaling Gordon Brown as his successor. At the same time, both Labour and the Conservatives faced scrutiny over party financing linked to the "loans-for-peerages" affair, intensifying cross-party confrontation over political funding rules.
05-2007	Tony Blair announced his resignation after sustained pressure from within the Labour Party, ending a decade-long leadership rivalry with Gordon Brown. The transition exposed internal divisions over Iraq, domestic reform, and succession that had weakened Labour, but senior figures quickly coalesced around Brown, who became Prime Minister unopposed in June 2007.

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Table C.9: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: UK (Continued)

Peak	Event
06-2009	The MP's expenses scandal triggered resignations, disciplinary action and open challenges to Brown's leadership within Labour. At the same time, Labour and the Conservatives advanced sharply contrasting approaches to addressing the post-crisis fiscal deficit (investment vs. cuts), reinforcing both partisan and intra-party polarization.
12-2009	Chancellor Alistair Darling's Pre-Budget Report proposed higher taxes for top earners, fiscal stimulus and targeted investment to foster growth and Conservative leader David Cameron publicly criticised the measures, since as the leader of the Opposition, he argued for spending cuts to tackle the debt crisis.
02-2010	Tensions between PM Gordon Brown and Chancellor Alistair Darling highlighted internal disagreements over economic policy, as the former wanted to increase spending while the latter stayed put. Meanwhile, UK foreign relations were strained by two incidents: the assassination of a Hamas leader in Dubai and a diplomatic dispute with Israel over passport use, both generating widespread media attention.
12-2012	PM David Cameron faced growing internal pressure from Conservative MPs to commit to an EU referendum amid rising UK Independence Party support. Continued austerity measures announced by Chancellor George Osborne were heavily opposed by the Labour opposition, as the proposed tax increases were not considered fair over the middle class.
04-2013	UK Parliament debated over the Welfare Benefits Up-rating Bill, which capped annual increases in most working-age benefits at 1% for three years, exposed sharp divisions over redistribution, social protection and fiscal restraint. During the same period, the death of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her state funeral revived the debate over her legacy and policy record.

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Table C.9: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: UK (Continued)

Peak	Event
03-2015	After Scotland's 2014 independence referendum, the Scottish National Party (SNP) rose in the polls ahead of the May 2015 general election, increasing expectations of a larger SNP presence at Westminster. The party's positions on the renewal of the UK's submarine-based nuclear deterrent (Trident) and on potential cooperation with Labour became prominent issues in the UK-wide campaign. Meanwhile, the major UK parties debated economic policy, including the future of austerity measures, budget plans, and proposed public spending levels.
06-2016	The June 2016 referendum produced a 51.9% vote for the UK to leave the EU. Following the referendum, the Labour Party entered a leadership crisis: dozens of MPs resigned from their shadow ministerial roles, and a no confidence motion was passed against leader Jeremy Corbyn. MP Angela Eagle launched a leadership challenge amid disputes over whether Corbyn should automatically appear on the ballot.
06-2017	The June 2017 snap general election produced a hung parliament, with PM Theresa May losing her Conservative majority.
09-2018	EU leaders rejected Theresa May's Chequers plan—a proposal for close UK-EU alignment on goods and a new customs arrangement—arguing it was incompatible with EU single-market rules and insufficient on the Irish border question. At the same time, Labour faced a prolonged antisemitism controversy over its initial refusal to adopt the full definition proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, reversing course after pressure from MPs and Jewish groups.

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Table C.9: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: UK (Continued)

Peak	Event
09-2019	PM Boris Johnson's push for a 31 October no-deal Brexit led Parliament to pass legislation blocking such an outcome, and 21 Conservative MPs were expelled after voting against the government. In September, the UK Supreme Court ruled his five-week prorogation of Parliament unlawful, reopening Parliament and heightening tensions between pro- and anti-Brexit MPs.
09-2023	PM Rishi Sunak announced delays or revisions to several Net Zero climate policies (e.g., postponing a ban on petrol cars). The decisions generated disagreement within the Conservative Party and across the political spectrum over environmental commitments and economic trade-offs.
09-2025	"Unite the Kingdom" rallies all over the country created tensions in the country, Initiated in London and led by Tommy Robinson with support from Reform UK, drew more than 110,000 attendees, these protests caused severe clashes with police. Later that month, at Labour's conference, Prime Minister Keir Starmer addressed Reform UK's surge, describing it as a central political test for Labour.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

Table C.10: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: UK

Peak	Event
05-1995	Debate focused on executive pay at British Gas and ongoing NHS wage negotiations. Simultaneous foreign policy pressures, including the Bosnia crisis, and EU-related tensions increased demands on government attention, limiting legislative capacity.

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Table C.10: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: UK (Continued)

Peak	Event
07-1995	A governing-party leadership contest (Major–Redwood) exposed intra-party divisions. Simultaneous setbacks in the Northern Ireland process—as the Drumcree/Portadown unrest—absorbed parliamentary attention. Nationwide 24-hour train-driver strikes paralysed the rail network and demanded ministerial engagement.
09-1998	Deadlock over IRA decommissioning following the Omagh bombing dominated political negotiations. This occurred alongside global financial volatility, political developments abroad and a wave of coverage on US institutional paralysis surrounding the Starr Report and impeachment debate.
12-1998	UK participation in Operation Desert Fox coincided with unresolved Northern Ireland negotiations and domestic governance controversies. Simultaneous U.S. impeachment proceedings and EU disputes diverted political attention and constrained legislative activity.
03-1999	Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement of Northern Ireland’s peace framework stalled over disagreements between Unionists and Republican leaders regarding IRA’s disarmament. Intensive mediation by US Senator George Mitchell and President Bill Clinton led to late-March talks in Belfast, headed by Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Bertie Ahern to salvage the accord.

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Table C.10: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: UK (Continued)

Peak	Event
02-2000	In Northern Ireland, the peace process faced a major setback when the IRA refused to decommission its weapons. In response, the British government suspended the newly created power sharing administration. Although officials from the UK, Ireland, and the United States held intensive negotiations, they were unable to reach an agreement before the deadline, slowing progress on the peace process. At the same time, Wales experienced its own political difficulties. The UK suspended Northern Ireland's new power sharing institutions over the IRA's refusal of weapon decommissioning. Meanwhile in Wales, opposition parties introduced a no confidence motion against the First Secretary, Alun Michael, due to disagreements over the budget and EU funding.
02-2003	The US and UK pushed for a second UN resolution declaring Iraq not complying with the Resolution 1441 regarding weapons of mass destruction, and debate intensified within the UN, NATO split over Turkey and Blair's Commons push, while the reform over the House of Lord collapsed into stalemate, leading to a conservative political crisis.
10-2003	Internal conflict within the Conservative party culminated in a formal no-confidence vote against its leader, Duncan Smith. The vote enforced Duncan Smith's resignation after two years, and Michael Howard succeeded him unopposed. The protracted challenge temporarily paralyzed the opposition.
01-2006	A leadership crisis in the Liberal Democrats resulted in the resignation of party leader Charles Kennedy following his public acknowledgment of health related difficulties and declining support from senior MPs. A substantial proportion of the parliamentary party called for his departure, leaving the party without a leader until a successor was appointed.

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Table C.10: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: UK (Continued)

Peak	Event
11-2007	Following the 2005 de Menezes shooting and a health-and-safety conviction against the Metropolitan Police, Commissioner Sir Ian Blair faced calls to resign; the London Assembly passed a no-confidence motion, but the Metropolitan Police Authority later backed him, prolonging leadership uncertainty.
05-2009	Revelations about MPs' expenses led to significant public and parliamentary criticism and undermined the authority of Commons Speaker Michael Martin. Faced with cross-party pressure and a no-confidence motion, he became the first Speaker to resign under such circumstances.
05-2010	The general election of May 2010 produced no overall majority, leaving the Brown's Labour government in caretaker role while coalition negotiations took place; on 11 May, a Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government was formed.
11-2011	The Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition agreement included a proposal requiring 55% of MPs to approve an early dissolution of Parliament. MPs from multiple parties criticized the measure, arguing it reduced the power of the House of Commons to dismiss a failing government.
10-2013	Discussion on press regulation following the Leveson Inquiry coincided with the Grangemouth industrial dispute affecting energy supply.
05-2015	The government faced legislative gridlock over proposed public-sector pension reforms, contributing to a nationwide strike involving approximately two million workers. Negotiations had not resolved key disagreements, and the domestic impasse coincided with the broader European financial and political crisis.

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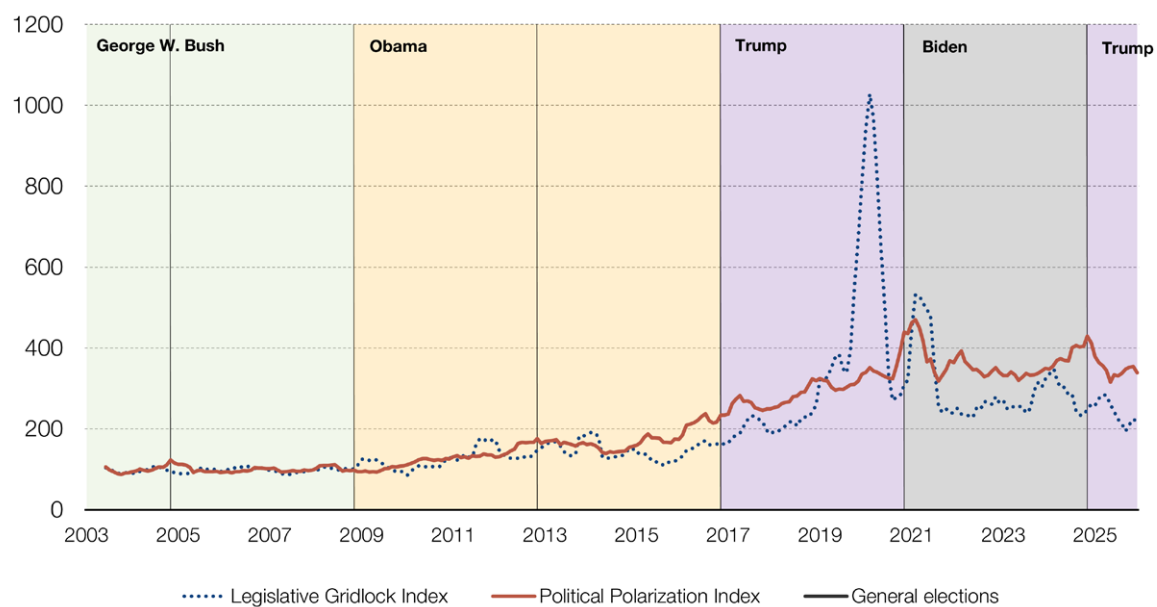
Table C.10: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: UK (Continued)

Peak	Event
07-2016	Following the June 2016 referendum in which a majority voted for the UK to leave the EU, the Labour Party experienced internal divisions, with numerous MPs resigning from official positions and supporting a no-confidence motion in leader Jeremy Corbyn. In July, Angela Eagle initiated a leadership challenge, later replaced by Owen Smith. A group in the House of Lords advocated delaying or opposing the triggering of Article 50.
10-2017	The EU Withdrawal Bill, which aimed to repeal the European Communities Act and incorporate EU law into domestic legislation, faced extensive amendments from opposition parties and some governing-party MPs, concerning the parliamentary oversight, some delegated powers and right protections.
12-2018	Prime Minister Theresa May postponed a scheduled vote on the EU withdrawal agreement, citing insufficient parliamentary support. On 12 December, she survived a Conservative Party confidence vote, though a significant minority of MPs opposed her, reflecting continuing divisions. During this period, calls for a second referendum gained prominence.
01-2019	In January 2019, the House of Commons held its first votes on Theresa May's withdrawal agreement, rejecting it by a large margin. Subsequent attempts to secure alternative arrangements and further negotiations with the EU did not resolve the parliamentary deadlock.
06-2022	In June 2022, Conservative MPs held a confidence ballot: Prime Minister Boris Johnson survived but significantly weakened as "Partygate" controversy and the Northern Ireland Protocol legislation strained party unity and international relations.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

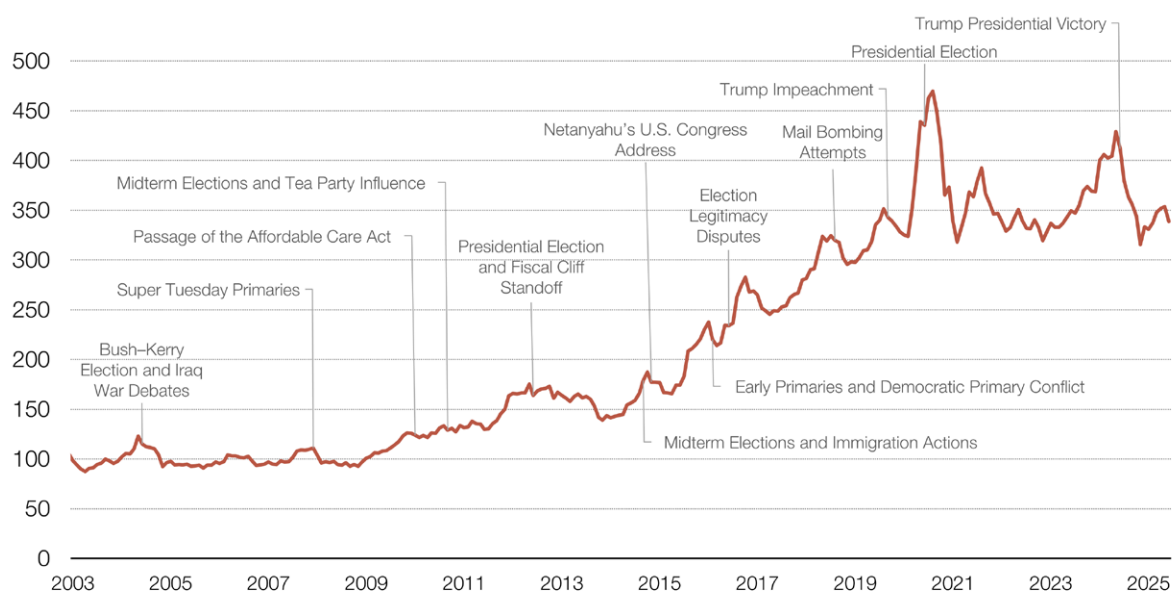
C.6 Narrative for United States

Figure C.11: Political Polarization and Legislative Gridlock indices for the US

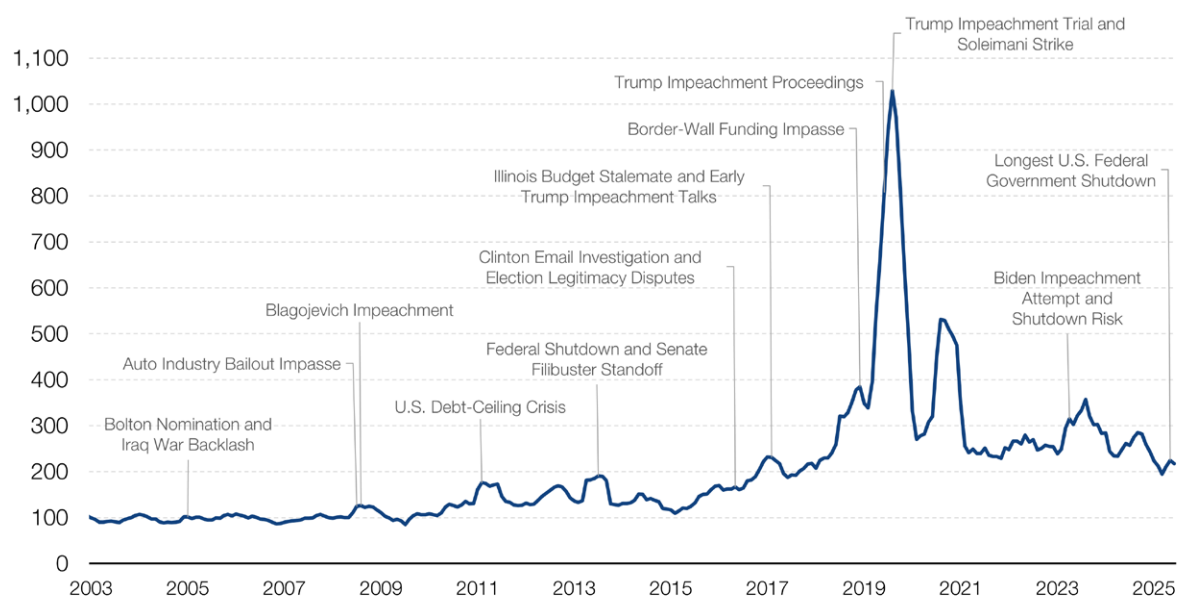


Note. PPI and LGI are monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility. Solid vertical lines represent general elections. Coloured areas refers to government cycles.

Figure C.12: United States



(a) Political Polarization



(b) Legislative Gridlock

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value. Monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility.

Table C.11: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: US

Peak	Event
11-2004	The 2004 U.S. presidential election between George W. Bush and John Kerry highlighted ideological, cultural, and geographic divisions across the electorate. In fact, the Iraq War was a central issue, with debates over its justification, U.S. military strategy, casualties, and Kerry adopting a critical posture against Bush's strategy.
02-2008	The 2008 Democratic presidential primaries featured a highly competitive contest between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. The Super Tuesday primaries left the nomination unresolved, and subsequent contests in states such as Texas, Ohio, and Wisconsin underscored differences within the party related to ideology, demographics, and voter-group preferences. These dynamics contributed to ongoing discussions about candidate electability and campaign strategy.
03-2010	The passage of the Affordable Care Act followed months of highly contentious debate, narrow congressional votes, and public mobilization for and against the reform.
11-2010	In the 2010 midterm elections, Republicans made substantial gains, winning control of the House of Representatives and reducing the Democratic majority in the Senate. These results highlighted divisions within President Obama's electoral coalition. At the same time, the Tea Party movement played a significant role in shaping Republican candidate selection, policy debates, and post-election strategy, contributing to increased partisan conflict and legislative polarization in Congress.
11-2012	The 2012 presidential election between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney highlighted partisan divisions, with swing-state contests, voter mobilization, and demographic-based voting patterns. Immediately afterwards, disputes over expiring tax cuts and automatic spending reductions – the “fiscal cliff” – reinforced polarization over fiscal governance.

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Table C.11: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: US (Continued)

Peak	Event
11-2014	In the 2014 midterm elections, Republicans gained control of the Senate, expanded their majority in the House of Representatives, and won several notable governorships. That same year, President Obama issued executive actions on immigration that deferred deportations and provided work authorization for certain undocumented immigrants. These actions prompted legal and political debate concerning their scope, the authority of the executive branch, and the appropriate role of Congress.
03-2015	Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed a joint session of Congress to criticize negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. The speech, delivered without White House coordination, intensified partisan debate in the United States over foreign policy authority and U.S.-Israel relations.
02-2016	Early primary contests revealed ideological and demographic divisions within both major parties. In the Democratic race, debates between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders over economic policy, health care, and campaign finance sustained visible intraparty polarization.
11-2016	In late 2016, the FBI reopened its investigation into Hillary Clinton's private email server, prompting renewed public debate over investigative procedures. At the same time, Donald Trump and some of his supporters claimed that the election was unfair. These claims prompted public discussion about issues such as voter fraud, intimidation, and incidents reported during the campaign, contributing to broader polarization surrounding the electoral process.
10-2018	Multiple improvised explosive devices were mailed to prominent critics of President Trump (including Democratic politicians and media figures), prompting nationwide investigation by federal law enforcement. The incident heightened political tensions and sparked scrutiny of President Trump's rhetoric.

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Table C.11: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: US (Continued)

Peak	Event
12-2019	The House of Representatives impeached President Donald Trump on allegations of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress related to Ukraine. The process included legal testimonies, debates over evidence, and partisan divisions in Congress.
11-2020	The 2020 U.S. presidential election Biden vs Trump took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to expanded mail-in voting, high turnout, and competitive battleground-state races. After the election, Trump reclaimed his victory and legally challenges to the results.
11-2024	Donald Trump won the 2024 U.S. presidential election, defeating the Democratic Party's incumbent presidential and vice-presidential nominees (Biden–Harris, respectively). The aftermath included analysis of the results, shifts within the Republican Party, discussions of policy priorities and cabinet appointments, legal controversies, and episodes of social unrest, as well as domestic and international reactions.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

Table C.12: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: US

Peak	Event
06-2005	Senate Democrats repeatedly blocked votes on John R. Bolton's nomination as U.S. ambassador to the U.N., leading to failed cloture votes and discussions of a possible recess appointment. Meanwhile, public support for the Iraq War waned amid Vietnam War comparisons and bipartisan criticism, fueling debates over U.S. war strategy.

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Table C.12: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: US (Continued)

Peak	Event
12-2008	Congress could not agree over a proposed bailout for U.S. major automobile manufacturers. Although the House approved an emergency loan package, the Senate failed to pass it, forcing the executive branch to intervene through temporary funding mechanisms.
01-2009	The Illinois House impeached Governor Rod Blagojevich following corruption allegations, and the state Senate conducted impeachment proceedings.
07-2011	The Republican Party gained control of the House of Representatives back in January, and consequently, insisted to Obama on negotiating over a deficit reduction to increase debt ceiling. This generated risk of government default until this month, where compromise was found in raising the debt ceiling in exchange of significant future spending cuts.
10-2013	Failure to pass appropriations bills resulted in a 16-day federal government shutdown. Meanwhile, the Republicans at the Senate used the filibuster on all Obama's executive and judicial nominations, obstructing the legislative activity.
11-2016	The FBI reopened its investigation into Hillary Clinton's private email server, a praxis that violated federal law. Moreover, Donald Trump claimed the election was "rigged," fueling disputes over the election's legitimacy.
05-2017	Illinois faced a legislative stalemate as Democrats proposed income and sales-tax increases, and school-funding reforms, while Republicans threatened vetoes and called for a property-tax freeze, prolonging partisan gridlock. Meanwhile, early discussions about impeaching President Trump in Congress led to partisan debate over investigative steps and impeachment standards.

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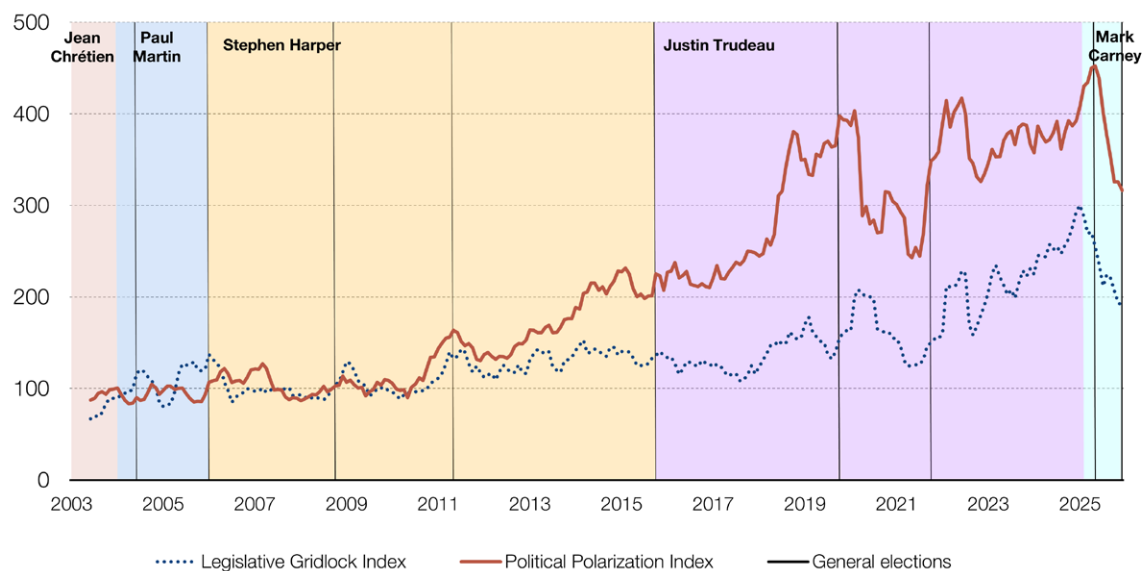
Table C.12: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: US (Continued)

Peak	Event
12-2018	Congress faced a spending standoff over funding for the U.S.–Mexico border wall. Lawmakers repeatedly passed short-term continuing resolutions to avoid an imminent government shutdown as negotiations dragged on until a final deal in December.
11-2019	The House of Representatives pursued impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump over Ukraine-related allegations of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. These proceedings culminated in the House approving articles of impeachment.
01-2020	President Trump’s impeachment trial commenced in the Senate, while the country conducted a drone strike in Baghdad that killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, heightening tensions with Iran.
09-2023	Some Republican House members launched an inquiry to impeach President Joe Biden, focusing on misconduct and prompting partisan debate over its legitimacy. In parallel, the U.S. federal government faced a potential shutdown in September due to unresolved appropriations which threatened federal employee furloughs and disruption of services.
10-2025	From October to November 2025, the U.S. federal government underwent the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, after Congress failed to pass appropriations for fiscal year 2026. The impasse furloughed roughly 900,000 federal employees and left about two million working without pay, while essential programs like Medicare and Medicaid continued, many federal agencies were partially or fully closed.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

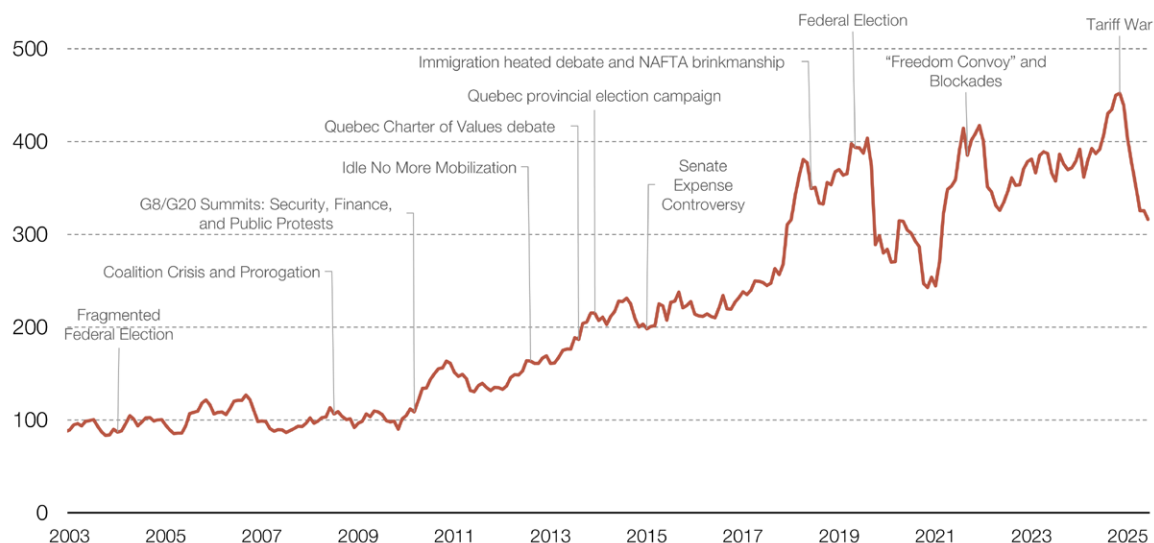
C.7 Narrative for Canada

Figure C.13: Political Polarization and Legislative Gridlock indices for Canada

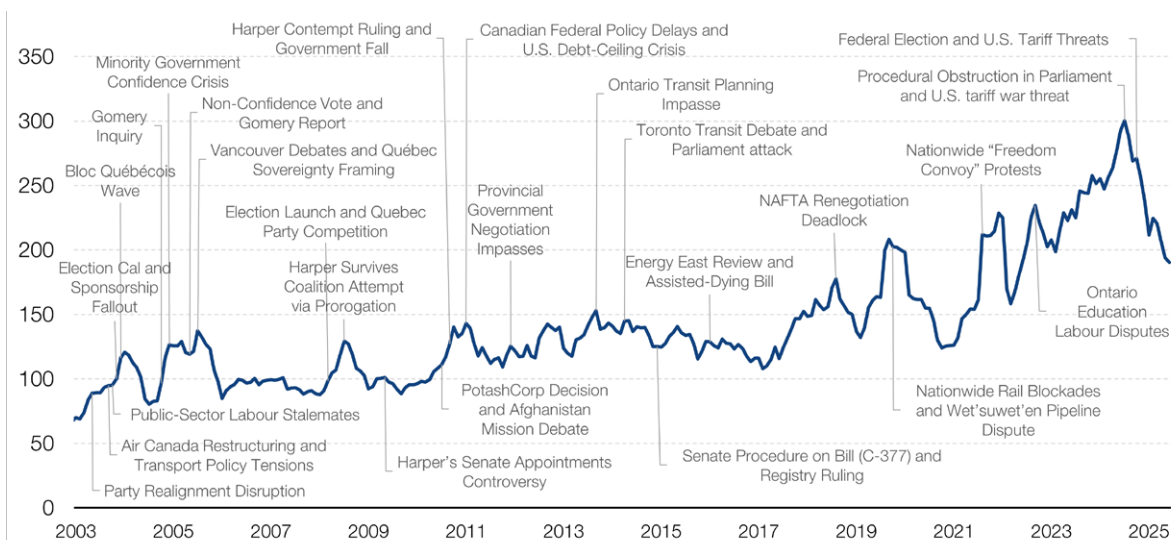


Note. PPI and LGI are monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility. Solid vertical lines represent general elections. Coloured areas refers to government cycles.

Figure C.14: Canada



(a) Political Polarization



(b) Legislative Gridlock

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value. Monthly data transformed in 6-months moving average to reduce volatility.

Table C.13: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Canada

Peak	Event
06-2004	The 2004 federal election was closely contested between the Liberals, Conservatives, New Democratic Party (NDP), and Bloc Québécois, marked by tight polls in key regions, policy disputes, contentious debates, and accusations of negative campaigning.
12-2008	The proposed coalition between the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party (NDP), with additional support from the Bloc Québécois, threatened Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative minority government. Prorogation by the Governor General delayed a confidence vote, raising constitutional and national unity concerns.
06-2010	Canada hosted both the G8 and G20 meetings on 2010, where heads of governments evaluated the financial reform, the need for stimulus measures, and debated other global financial proposals. There were disputes about policing methods, e.g., the Canadian PM, Stephen Carper had already announced an economic stimulus before the summits. In general, the public protested against the high costs citizens had to bear to hold such meetings.
01-2013	Idle No More protests expanded across Canada as Indigenous leaders and community members called for renewed dialogue with Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government, raised concerns about federal legislation affecting Indigenous rights and environmental protections, challenged internal leadership within the Assembly of First Nations, and criticized the absence of the Governor General from key discussions.

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Table C.13: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Canada (Continued)

Peak	Event
10-2013	The contents of the Québec values charter were unveiled in this month, aimed at creating a secular society and religion neutrality. Several demonstrations took place, as the demonstrators perceived the charter as racist since this proposition was thought to favor Catholicism. At the federal level, all parties except the Block Québécois opposed to this charter, considering it unconstitutional and antithetical.
03-2014	The campaign was marked by intense public debate over the Parti Québécois's push for a potential sovereignty referendum and its controversial Charter of Values promoting secularism.
06-2015	The Auditor General of Canada reported that several senators had claimed expenses they were not entitled to, which led to some resignations, referrals of cases to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and a broader debate about how the Senate oversees spending and ensures institutional accountability.
08-2018	Due to the US election of Trump, more asylum seekers entered Canada, and the government cooled down their welcoming position to them in response. The topic of immigration created party conflicts, at the same time that Trump escalated NAFTA threats and its economic implications on Canada which also caused strong party divisions.
10-2019	Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party won a minority government. The campaign was intense due to by sharp Liberal–Conservative divisions over climate policy, energy development, taxes, and regional issues.
02-2022	Truck convoy protests against COVID-19 mandates occupied downtown Ottawa and blockaded key border crossings, disrupting transportation, leading to confrontations with police, and sparked federal–provincial disputes over the response.

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Table C.13: Narrative for the Political Polarization Index: Canada (Continued)

Peak	Event
04-2025	Escalating trade tensions and retaliatory tariff measures intensified political debate over economic strategy and border governance. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Conservative Party MPs disagree on trade retaliation, asylum-seeker management, and federal-provincial responsibility sharing, reinforcing partisan and regional polarization over economic and immigration policy.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

Table C.14: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Canada

Peak	Event
02-2003	Canada's position on Iraq at the UN drew sustained attention, alongside parliamentary dissent and debates over fiscal room before the federal budget. Discussions on softwood lumber, Kyoto-protocol-related tensions, and fuel prices added to federal-provincial and economic strains.
10-2003	The still prevalent internal party leadership conflict affected federal politics contributed to stalled legislative activity and limited policy progress, despite merger talks between the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party.
03-2004	Air Canada's restructuring process stalled amid labour disputes and regulatory intervention. Concurrent debates over urban transport policy and congestion measures in Toronto increased intergovernmental tensions and contributed to perceptions of policy gridlock.

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Table C.14: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Canada (Continued)

Peak	Event
04-2004	Several major public-sector labour disputes escalated simultaneously—including back-to-work threats in Newfoundland and Labrador and a health-care show-down in British Columbia—while an intense rights-versus-security debate over Khadr and big-city congestion politics dominated the agenda. Air Canada’s restructuring and Martin–Bush preparations on BSE and softwood rounded out a month of federal–provincial and cross-border frictions.
05-2004	Paul Martin’s request to dissolve Parliament for a June election coincided with intensified coverage of the sponsorship scandal and a strong Bloc Québécois showing in Quebec. Labour negotiations at Air Canada and mediation efforts in Kanesatake added to an already strained governing context.
06-2004	As the federal campaign advanced, the Bloc Québécois surged and there was a possibility of a minority government. Sponsorship-related tensions and disputes over Air Canada bilingualism and health policy kept institutional conflict salient.
04-2005	The sponsorship scandal and Gomery inquiry increased pressure on Prime Minister Paul Martin’s government, leading to confidence vote tensions. Budget negotiations and election timing uncertainty further constrained legislative activity.
05-2005	Paul Martin’s Liberal minority government faced a confidence crisis when testimony in the Sponsorship Scandal led to a tied confidence vote. Opposition parties then blocked parliamentary business, prompting a standoff resolved when Speaker Peter Milliken, in his role as the presiding officer of the House of Commons, cast the tie-breaking vote that allowed the government to remain in power.

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Table C.14: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Canada (Continued)

Peak	Event
11-2005	After the Gomery report hardened parliamentary lines, coordinated opposition efforts culminated in the 28th of November non-confidence defeat and an election set for 23rd of January. The month's backdrop combined Indigenous funding pledges, financial-market enforcement headlines, and rendition-flight disclosures with shifting polls and public-sector labour tensions, marking a decisive turn from minority management to full-scale campaigning.
12-2005	The federal campaign was shaped by the leaders' debates and by strong messaging in Quebec around unity and sovereignty. The debates were surrounding the topics of taxation, child care, defense, and firearms, together with lingering sponsorship issues.
09-2008	After Stephen Harper dissolved Parliament in September, the October electoral campaign centered on competition between the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois in Quebec. Lehman-era market stress reframed the economic conversation, while culture-funding disputes, and value-based campaign controversies added to the strained political setting.
12-2008	Opposition Liberals and the New Democratic Party (NDP), backed by the Bloc Québécois, attempted to form a coalition to replace Prime Minister Stephen Harper's minority government. Harper requested that Governor General Michaëlle Jean prorogue Parliament, delaying the no-confidence vote and keeping his government in power.
01-2009	Prime Minister Stephen Harper appointed 18 senators all at once shortly before a possible coalition government could take power, drawing criticism due to his initially alleged objections to appointments and intensifying partisan tensions amid debates over Senate reform.

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Table C.14: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Canada (Continued)

Peak	Event
11-2010	Ottawa's decision to block BHP's takeover of PotashCorp—prompting the bid's withdrawal— dominated economic and political coverage. At the same time, the government confirmed a post-2011 Afghanistan training mission (around 950 troops through 2014), and other and legislative disputes increased institutional tensions.
03-2011	Stephen Harper's minority government was found in contempt of Parliament, followed by a successful no-confidence vote. The government fell in March, and an election was called for May.
07-2011	Minor federal policy delays in Canada (e.g., disputes over infrastructure funding and budget matters) occurred, while a simultaneous U.S. federal debt-ceiling standoff between President Obama and a divided Congress created legislative gridlock and market volatility, raising concerns about spillover effects on Canada.
05-2012	In Quebec, negotiations over tuition fee increases repeatedly stalled, triggering mass protests and a deadlock between Premier Jean Charest's government and student groups. In Ontario, a new Physical Services Agreement was ratified by the Ontario Medical Association's. Legislative effort was into supporting such negotiations.
10-2013	Disputes over expanding transit in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area created political and planning gridlock between the Ontario Liberal and Progressive Conservative parties. At the same time, a U.S. federal government shutdown and debt-ceiling crisis heightened economic uncertainty and raised concerns about cross-border impacts on Canada.
10-2014	Toronto's mayoral race, centered on transit policy, as well as the terrorist attack in Ottawa on October 22nd produced a legislative paralysis.

Continued on next page

Table C.14: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Canada (Continued)

Peak	Event
06-2015	Senate showdown overruled the Speaker to accelerate Bill C-377, alongside a Federal Court directive to release Québec’s long-gun registry data. Moreover, debates surrounding G7 climate messaging and Québec labour pressures, which headed into the pre-campaign summer.
06-2016	As the National Energy Board opened its assessment of the Energy East pipeline, Ottawa advanced medical assistance in dying: Bill C-14 passed the House of Commons while senators challenged its “reasonably foreseeable death” limit.
09-2018	Canada and the U.S. hit a stalemate in NAFTA renegotiations over dairy, drug patents, cultural exemptions, and dispute settlement mechanisms, amid U.S. threats of a Mexico-only deal and protracted negotiations.
02-2020	Solidarity blockades in support of Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs protesting the Coastal GasLink pipeline shut down major rail lines across Canada. These blockades disrupted Canadian National Railway (CN) freight shipments and the passenger services of Canada’s national passenger rail operator (Via Rail), causing supply shortages, travel cancellations, and temporary layoffs. The crisis persisted amid unresolved political disputes between provincial governments, the federal government, and the Wet’suwet’en hereditary leadership.
02-2022	Truck convoy protests opposing COVID-19 mandates occupied downtown Ottawa for weeks, blocking streets, disrupting daily life, straining police resources, and prompting debates over federal and international responses.

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Table C.14: Narrative for the Legislative Gridlock Index: Canada (Continued)

Peak	Event
11-2022	Bill 28 invoked the notwithstanding clause to impose contracts and ban strikes for Ontario education workers. The legislation triggered walkouts by roughly 55,000 education workers, widespread school closures, and intense public backlash. In response, the government pledged to repeal the bill, but negotiations again reached an impasse with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the union representing many of the affected education workers.
11-2024	Parliament was unable to pass bills or advance committee work for nearly two months due to prolonged procedural delays and heightened partisan disagreement, as the Liberal government tied legislative progress to affordability measures during inter party negotiations. Moreover, after winning the U.S. presidential election, Donald Trump threatened both Mexico and Canada with 25% tariffs on all products until the “war against drugs” was over. This caused some political and legislative uncertainty in Canada.
04-2025	The 36-day campaign ended on April 28th, as Mark Carney’s Liberals formed the next government following two leaders’ debates and several days of advance voting. U.S. tariff threats, drove the agenda and prompted pledges on trade and border security, while language debates and a brief Parliament Hill lockdown added volatility.

Note. A peak is defined as a value that is more than two standard deviations from the mean, where both the mean and the standard deviations are computed in a two-year window preceding the value.

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