Segregation and polarization: two sides of the same coin or not? Insights from computer simulation studies and empirical research

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Abstract
Due to mass migration, ethnic diversity is increasing in many Western countries. One issue in particular is that ethnic diversity seems to come almost inevitably with segregation of different subgroups in their spatial and social networks. Many fear that segregation may threaten societal consensus and foster instead a polarized society with large opinion divisions between and strong coherence within opposed factions. The current paper presents computational agent-based models that highlight alternative and competing theoretical perspectives on the effects of segregation on polarization. Models are compared that formalize different behavioral theories of social influence. Models assuming repulsive influence explain polarization based on psychological mechanisms derived from balance theory. Models assuming reinforcing influence draw on the theory of persuasive argument communication. It is shown how different models entail competing predictions about the effects of segregation. It will be further discussed how an integration of computational modelling with empirical data – micro-level and macro-level data, as well as experiments and field data – can be used to better understand how segregation affects opinion pluriformity and polarization.