

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Southern Political Science Association

A New Partisan Voter

Author(s): Joseph Bafumi and Robert Y. Shapiro

Source: *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan., 2009), pp. 1-24

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#) on behalf of the [Southern Political Science Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30218923>

Accessed: 23/07/2013 15:01

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press and Southern Political Science Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Politics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

A New Partisan Voter

Joseph Bafumi Dartmouth college
Robert Y. Shapiro Columbia University

*The American electorate today is different from that described in *The American Voter*. Both the 1950s era of ideologically innocent party voting and the subsequent period of partisan dealignment are over. Some political scientists began to describe the New American Voter as a new partisan evolution occurred. What has not been fully appreciated in the twentieth/twenty-first century history of voting studies is how partisanship returned in a form more ideological and more issue based along liberal-conservative lines than it has been in more than 30 years. This is visible in the strength of partisan voting, in the relationship between partisanship and ideology, and in the strength of the relationship of partisanship and self-reported liberal-conservative ideology to the public's economic, social, racial, and religious attitudes and opinions. Not only has the public responded in a striking way to changes in politics and its context, but the current transformation has also appeared to be strikingly enduring and difficult to shake, based on survey evidence for this new partisan voter.*

The ongoing debates about “political polarization” or “partisan polarization” and the nation’s Republican “red states” and Democratic “blue states” have pointed to an American politics and electorate very different from those described in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960). An increasing number of scholars have tracked the changes that have occurred and have begun to assess their causes and implications for American politics and policymaking (Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Nivola and Brady 2006, 2007). It is now time to take stock of the long-term changes that have occurred in the American electorate.

We first review questions asked and answered in the research that began with *The American Voter*'s analysis of postwar political behavior. Fast forwarding, we show that while 1950s-style partisan voting looks alive and well, the 1950s' ideologically innocent party voting is over. Whatever partisan dealignment ostensibly occurred after the 1950s also ceased, although independent voters have remained decisive in determining election outcomes.

Some political scientists began to describe a *New American Voter* (e.g., Miller and Shanks 1996) as a new partisan evolution occurred. What has not been fully appreciated in the twentieth/twenty-first century history of voting studies is how partisanship has returned in a form that is both more ideological and more issue based along liberal-conservative lines than

it has been in more than 30 years. This is visible in the strength of partisan voting, in the relationship between partisanship and ideology, and in the strength of the relationship of partisanship and self-reported liberal-conservative ideology to the public's economic, social, racial, and religious attitudes and opinions. Not only has the public responded in a striking way to changes in politics and its context, but the current transformation has also appeared to be enduring and difficult to shake, based on survey evidence for this new partisan voter.

The Changing, Unchanging, and New American Voter

While it is impossible to summarize more than 60 years of survey research on the American voter, two of the most important debates in this research have concerned the “democratic competence” of the American public and how voters are influenced by longer-term partisan factors and shorter-term election-specific factors. We are concerned with the second debate, although it has an important bearing on the first. While usually contrasted with each other, the presidential voting studies led by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and

Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954) and Angus Campbell and his colleagues at the emerging Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan (Campbell et al. 1960) shared an interest in and emphasis on the partisan-Democratic versus Republican bases of voting.

When Lazarsfeld's group did not find the short-term campaign and communication effects they had expected, they focused on the more prevalent socio-economic bases of partisanship and the importance of interpersonal communication that reinforced the sociological influences on voting or provided new information on the current campaign. In contrast, Campbell et al. (1960) emphasized the deeper psychological aspects and influences of partisanship involving the enduring effect of the New Deal realignment (and its socioeconomic bases), affect, generational transmission, and how, in effect, psychological balancing and avoiding dissonance led voters to adhere to partisan predispositions at election time. Election-specific variables, such as candidate characteristics and specific major issues (e.g., war, the economy), had smaller effects, although they could be decisive in producing deviations from the partisan balance in the electorate.

What was striking about the findings of these studies was not the centrality of partisanship but the limited effect of policy issues on voting. This, along with voters' limited factual knowledge, helped to spark the debate regarding the public's political competence, which the next wave of voting studies examined further. Some of these studies argued that the findings of the 1940s and 1950s may have been "time-bound." Post-New Deal elections to the 1960s were, relatively speaking, not ideologically tumultuous, in contrast to the 1930s or earlier periods (for which adequate national survey data were not available). The 1960s period saw expanded political conflict precipitated by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war protests, and other emerging left-right ideological conflicts.

Two important and widely debated political science works that examined the effects of the new political context were *The Changing American Voter* (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979) and the "Issue Voting" symposium in the 1972 *American Political Science Review*, led by Pomper's (1972) "From Confusion to Clarity" (see also Pomper (1975)). Nie, Verba and Petrocik (1979) showed a decline in the number of party identifiers as the number of self-identified independent voters increased. This could be related to disenchantment with the two major parties, the lapse of time since the New Deal realignment, and the

entry of a new generation of voters. The relationship between partisanship and vote choice thus appeared to weaken. The authors also got bogged down in a messy debate about whether the politics of the 1960s made voters more ideologically attuned and consistent or "constrained" in the Converse (1964) sense. One change from the 1950s that Pomper emphasized was that the grounding of partisanship in opinions on policy issues became more apparent, so there was a clear substantive policy dimension to self-identified partisanship. These findings reflected better on the electorate's competence, and the argument that political context mattered was persuasive, especially as data from 1972 to 1976 showed that by 1976, the effects of political conflict—over civil rights, the Vietnam War, law and order, and other issues—wore off somewhat (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979; Pomper 1975).

So had the American voter changed in any fundamental way after all? One immediate response to Nie, Verba and Petrocik (1979), Pomper (1972, 1975) and others was that methodological and data limitations raised questions about whether any significant change occurred in the 1960s concerning the public's ideological thinking and the issue content of partisanship. Subsequent to *The American Voter* (1960), the National Election Study (NES) changed its question format, so "changes" in the 1960s and 1970s could have been artifacts of the differences in measurement. Smith's (1989) *The Unchanging American Voter* contributed significantly to this debate and critique. Further, Pomper's findings of the increasing relationship between partisanship and policy opinions were based on only six policy questions. So what could we confidently say about the changing American voter by the mid-1970s? Probably that partisanship was somewhat less important than in the 1950s, that there was some evidence for a weakening of party ties—a dealigning in the electorate—and that greater changes were possible if the political context changed further, especially in a systematic and sustained way.

When Miller and Shanks (1996) revisited *The American Voter* in *The New American Voter*, they emphasized the continued and increasingly important role of partisanship (see also Hetherington (2001), Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002) and Bartels (2000)) along with election-specific concerns such as policy preferences, candidate evaluations, perceptions of current conditions, and retrospective evaluations, all of which had been studied extensively since the 1950s. One further consideration that Miller and Shanks placed on the same stage in their causal sequencing of variables were "policy predispositions"

and—whether separate or part of these predispositions—liberal-conservative ideology, as measured by self-placement along a seven-point scale. The NES started to measure this in the 1970s (related to the empirical study of spatial theories of voting). To the extent that Miller and Shanks (1996) saw ideology as important, it had to do with a general overarching liberal/conservative perception triggered by ongoing politics and not the pressures toward ideological constraint that Nie, Verba and Petrocik (1979) and Smith (1989) had tracked with no clear conclusion. Perceived liberalism-conservatism of this sort could be analyzed in all subsequent NES and other surveys, as researchers acknowledged that a large segment of the public was able to understand and respond to these labels (e.g., Knight and Erikson (1997)).

A New Partisan Voter

To what extent is the American voter in the early 21st century different from the American voter of past decades? While political scientists in the 1960s were limited in the extent which they could reliably track changes in ideologically based partisanship and voting, we are better able now to examine what has happened in the last 30 years. As we observed at the outset, current debates regarding “partisan polarization” and red state/blue state politics describes an American politics and electorate that are different from those described in *The American Voter*. There is one similarity, however: the importance of partisanship. But the political contexts are very different. The 1950s was a period in which there was a domestic consensus on an enlarged American welfare state compared to the pre-New Deal era and a Cold War consensus in foreign policy. American politics is currently situated at a transformation that has broad implications for American politics. The nation’s political parties, at the elite and activist level, have become more ideologically coherent than they were in the mid-1970s. The partisan polarization that has occurred at the elite level (Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1996; McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006) has become increasingly evident in the mass electorate (Bartels 2000). The strength of party identification in predicting the vote has grown comparable to, if it has not exceeded, what it was in the era of party voting, the 1950s (Campbell et al. 1960). Although its predictive strength is reminiscent of another day, political partisanship today is of a different sort (Hetherington 2001).

The New Deal divisions were transformed as new issues came to the fore in American politics and public discourse. As noted above, during the 1960s and 1970s, members of the electorate became less bound by past partisan loyalties (and those of their parents) as the effect of the 1930s realignment faded and new issues, conflicts, and resulting cleavages emerged (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979). These changes have given way to an electorate that is more strongly driven by liberal/conservative ideological concerns (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). This ideological positioning has been driven by a set of new issues (racial, social, religious) and by leadership that has produced visible partisan divisions (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Niemi and Jennings 1991; Adams 1997; Wolbrecht 2000; Layman 2001). These divisions have been more pervasive and enduring than any changes that have occurred since the 1950s.

In the rest of this paper, we systematically examine what has occurred. While some of this overlaps with the important research and writing of others, we have framed our analysis in the longer history of the study of the American voter, and we examine both partisan and related influences on voting. We present some of the latest available data situated within other recent research. After presenting evidence for a level of partisan voting that is unparalleled since the 1950s, we examine to what extent this is a new sort of partisanship—one that is substantively different from partisanship of the past. We find that this partisanship has voters more strongly anchored than ever before by left/right ideological thinking. This ideology is still steeped in economic issues, but it has become increasingly rooted in social issues and religious values. It also, even more so than earlier, has an important underpinning in racial issues.¹

Resurgent Partisanship

The evidence that partisan and ideological polarization has increased in the United States since the 1970s can be found in measures of interparty divergence and intraparty convergence in legislative behavior, which have reached levels unseen in 60 years (Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1996; McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006). The relationship between elites and mass public opinion is a dynamic one in which

¹It may extend to what used to be thought of as non-partisan foreign policy, but this is beyond the scope of this paper (Bloch-Elkon and Shapiro 2005; Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon (2006, 2007)).

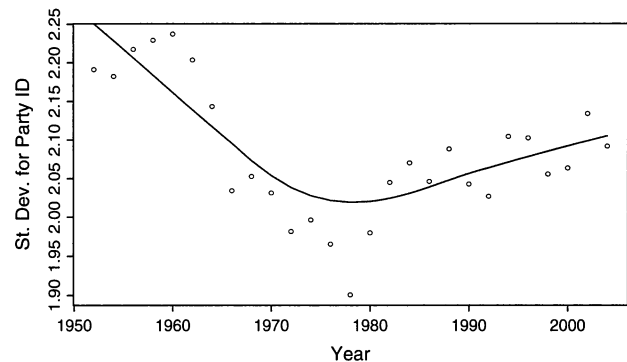
we would conjecture that elite level polarization might either lead to, or result from, changes among the mass public.² Either way, we would expect to see evidence of public opinion polarizing along partisan and ideological lines. Where elite level polarization leads, we would expect more clearly defined platforms and diverging issue stances over time between the Democratic and Republican parties—and especially their leaders in government—to contribute to polarization among partisans in the public at large. To what extent, then, has the American electorate polarized along party lines and in ideologically definable ways? The evidence that this has occurred is striking, beginning with what is suggested by trends in partisanship and voting in presidential elections.

First, a simple graph of the standard deviation in seven-point partisan identification taken from the National Election Studies (NES) data is telling. Figure 1 plots the standard deviation, as a proxy for polarization of party identification in the mass public, over all years in which NES asked the question from 1952 to 2004, the last available survey (there was no 2006 NES congressional election study).³ As the figure shows, partisan polarization of this sort has made a noticeable comeback in recent years. In the beginning of the series, polarization is quite high, and then, in the mid-1960s, it begins to drop off substantially. By the 1980s the trend reverses and the standard deviation increases. As of 2004, the level of partisan polarization has not reached the heights of the 1950s, but it has risen to well beyond what one would expect if partisan dealignment had endured. It may be that this polarization is driven by a small segment of the public, while the rest remain more neutral independents. However, the evidence suggests that this is not the case. For example, according to the NES, the number of pure independents among voters in the 2004 presidential election was close to twice as many (about 10%) as in the 1952 election (around 5%), whereas during the intervening period, this

²This interesting and enduring question in political science asks: Do elites change first and then the general public follows suit, or do elites realign themselves for electoral purposes in response to newly emerging or widening cleavages among the American public? Largely, it will depend on the issue. For example, positions on racial issues may be more top-down, while movement by the religious right may be characterized as bottom-up. See, for example, Sundquist (1983); Carmines and Stimson (1989); Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) for a discussion of elite/public interactions.

³The data are from the American National Elections Studies (NES) cumulative file. For descriptive statistics on party identification and all other individual level variables used throughout the study, see appendix A.

FIGURE 1 Standard deviation of the seven-point partisan identification self-placement item from 1952 to 2002. The variability in partisanship begins very high but takes a downward turn beginning in the mid-1960s to the 1970s. Polarization then reemerges beginning in the 1980s.



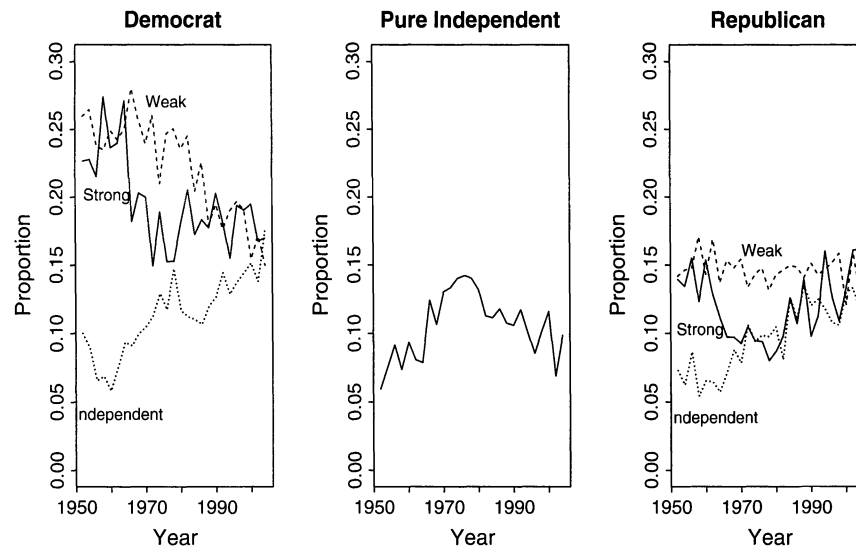
share of the electorate tended to be noticeably higher (about 15% in 1976).⁴

Figure 2 offers further evidence for this, showing the trend for strong, weak, and independent partisans as well as for pure independents. Beginning with pure independents, we see that their ranks were low in the 1950s, increased substantially in a period of partisan dealignment, and shrank back down again in the late 1970s. If voters are becoming more partisan, we would expect declines in pure independents to result in increases in independent partisans. This is evident for both Democrats and Republicans. Since the 1970s, independent partisans have grown substantially. Meanwhile, at the extremes of the scale, strong Republicans have grown substantially and strong Democrats have trended slightly upward since the 1970s. This is particularly revealing in light of the fact that the number of Democrats relative to Republicans in the electorate has declined over this time, leading to closely balanced proportions of partisans. Last, weak Republicans have remained fairly stable over time, while weak Democrats have declined, suggesting that this is where Democrats have lost support. Generally, the number of partisans has grown, while fewer Americans place themselves in the middle of the scale. We see, then, that growing polarization is evident, but to what extent has this increase in partisanship influenced how people vote?

The authors of *The American Voter* first emphasized in sweeping terms the importance of

⁴Pure independents are those respondents who placed themselves in the middle of the seven-point partisanship scale.

FIGURE 2 Plot of responses to the seven-point NES partisan self-placement item.



partisanship in explaining and predicting the vote and affecting how people perceive and react to politics (Campbell et al. 1960). This potent influence of partisanship seemed less relevant as evidence of dealignment was found in the 1960s and 1970s (Wattenberg 1994). This raised questions for political scientists who thought party allegiances served many important galvanizing and mobilizing functions and helped to foster processes of political representation in a republican democracy (Aldrich 1996). Multivariate evidence indicates that partisanship, controlling for demographic variables, has grown substantially as a predictor of the vote since the dealignment period of the late 1960s and 1970s (Miller and Shanks 1996).

Figure 3 presents a series of logistic regression coefficients (and their standard errors) for predictions of the vote for the Republican presidential candidate in each presidential election from 1952 to 2004.⁵ The control variables in this multivariate analysis include sex, age, education, religion, income, region (south), and a statistical interaction term to allow for a differing effect of partisanship for white southerners, who have undergone a major shift in partisan allegiance from the Democratic to the Republican party.⁶ The effects of most predictors in this multivariate analysis are dampened by the inclusion of party identification. The effect of partisanship itself

was strong in the early post-World War II period, but it declined somewhat as a dealigning period occurred until about the end of the 1970s. Beginning in the 1980s, the effect of partisanship began to grow substantially as a predictor of the vote. By the 2004 presidential election its effect was on a par with or exceeded its impact in the 1950s. At the mean of the probability curve, a one unit change in partisanship resulted in about a 30 percentage-point shift in the vote from a Democratic to a Republican candidate in the first two (1952, 1956) and last two (2000, 2004) elections studied, holding other variables constant. This contrasts with an analogous shift of about 20 percentage points in 1976.⁷ Partisan voting has grown significantly since the period that was thought to be part of a potentially longer-term dealignment.

But how important, overall, is the role of partisanship? How much difference does partisanship make compared to other predictors of vote choice? If partisanship matters a great deal, what is the process explaining these changes over time? Few would disagree with the importance of partisanship as a predictor of the vote.⁸ Even casual observers of

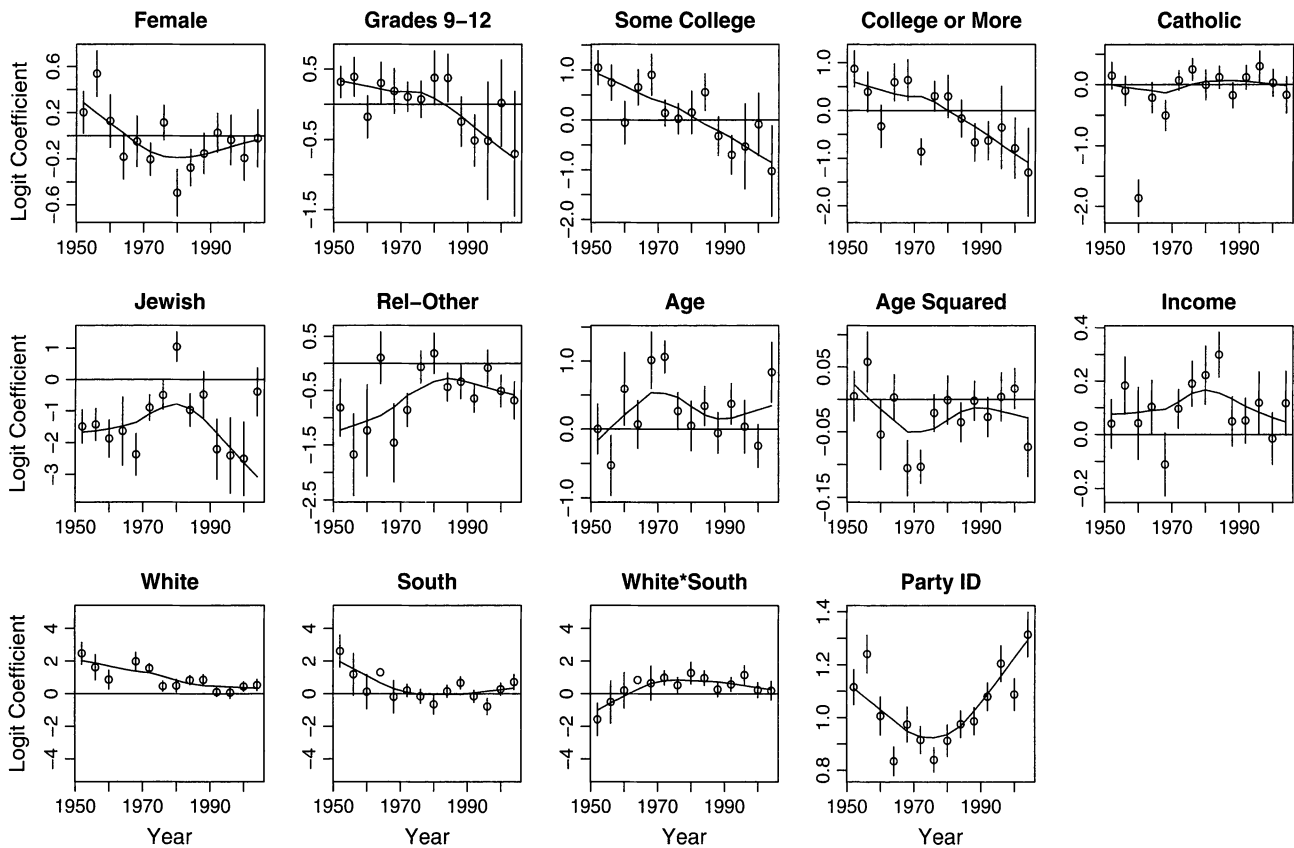
⁷This is often called the marginal effect and is equal to the slope of the probability curve at its mean. Other predictors are also held to their mean.

⁸Much research has focused on the stability of partisanship as a series. For example, researchers ask whether it can be considered an exogenous political measure or not. While individuals' partisanship based on panel data studies has been shown to be one of the most stable political orientations or attitudes (Converse and Markus 1979; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002), there is some evidence of short-term fluctuations (Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson 1989).

⁵Each year represents a separate regression equation.

⁶The data are from the American National Elections Studies (NES) cumulative file. Republican voters are coded 1 while Democratic voters are coded 0 in the outcome variable. Partisanship is measured on a seven-point scale. Age is divided by 10 so that age squared has a reasonable range.

FIGURE 3 Logistic regression predicting presidential vote choice from 1952 to 2004. Each year represents a separate regression equation. The missing parameter estimate for whites, southerners and their interaction in 1964 can be explained by a collinearity problem stemming from all blacks in the NES sample voting Democratic in that year. After a lull, the effect of partisanship has grown to or exceeded 1950s levels.



electoral politics readily note the nearly unanimous support that strong partisans give to their party's presidential candidate. The extent to which partisanship matters may nonetheless be surprising when compared to other characteristics of voters. Figure 4 shows the explanatory power of a multivariate versus a bivariate vote choice equation predicting the vote.⁹ The full vote choice equation includes all the predictors listed above. The bivariate equation includes only party identification. What we see is that the equation that includes all demographic predictors rarely has a much better fit than the equation with party identification alone. Even in the ostensibly weak days of party voting (1972), the full vote choice equation explains only about 13 percent more of the variability in the vote than party identification alone.

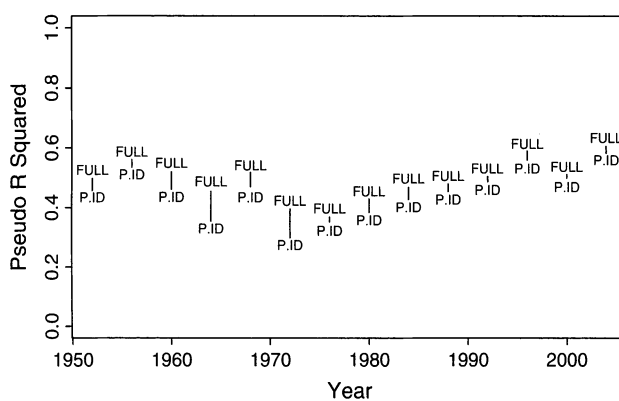
⁹The explanatory power is defined as $1 - (\text{deviance} / \text{null deviance})$ and is labeled "Pseudo R Squared." The deviance is equal to -2 times the log likelihood.

Clearly, party identification is the workhorse in the series of regressions viewed here. Interestingly, in terms of explanatory power, party identification reaches its highest level in 1996 and 2004, not in the early periods of the series.

A New Partisanship

How do we explain apparent fluctuation in the power of party identification to predict the vote? Again, the political historical context provides most of the answer. In the mid-20th century, the country had just survived years of severe economic depression followed by a world war. The depression era spurred a major realignment in the group bases of party support (involving immigrants, urban residents, black Americans, southerners, blue-collar workers, and others) that weighed heavily in favor of the

FIGURE 4 Variance explained in presidential vote choice equations from 1952 to 2004. The points labeled “FULL” show the variance explained after accounting for race, gender, education, age, income, party identification and region while the points labeled “P.ID” show the variance explained with only party identification. It is clear that party identification is the workhorse in the first equation but is weakest during the period of partisan dealignment.



Democrats (Key 1955).¹⁰ After the depression and World War II, the 1950s were a period of relative calm in which the New Deal coalition essentially held together, although the Republican party had rebounded and was a competitive force in presidential voting.¹¹ Converse (1964) regarded this as an era of ideological innocence. It was the social psychological aspects of partisanship that anchored the electorate (Campbell et al. 1960). Absent new issues to shake up the party system once more, partisanship remained stable and continued to strongly predict the vote. The demographic group-based politics of the time, as well as the relative political calm, was expected to socialize new entrants into the American political system into existing partisan divisions with partisan loyalty remaining high. Voters would tend to inherit or otherwise take up the party attachment of their parents.

Figure 5 plots the coefficients based on a series of linear regressions predicting a respondent's partisan identification from the respondent's parent's party

identification and the controls listed earlier.¹² Parental party was asked with the same question wording in NES during four years from the 1950s to the dealignment period. Although this does not constitute a long series, the effects of the demographics trend as we might have expected. For example, females became more likely to identify with the Democratic party over time, whereas white southerners became much more likely to self-identify as Republicans. Thus, even with a short series, shifts in the power of parental party to predict partisanship can be informative. In 1958, during the period in which the impact of socialization on partisanship is expected to be clearest, the party of the respondent's parents is a stronger predictor of the vote compared to a decade or more later. A difference of one category in parent's party affiliation (on a five point scale) in 1958 is associated with a change of greater than 0.7 on the seven-point partisan self-placement scale. This effect declines to about 0.5 in 1970. Parental socialization had its greatest impact on party identification early in the series, absent new realigning issues. The political calm also resulted in the importance of party identification in predicting the vote, as we saw in Figure 3. Partisanship acquired from parents helped indirectly to anchor vote choice decisions during this first period for which we have NES data.

Whatever equilibrium there was in partisanship and voting did not last. As discussed earlier, what followed was a period of greater political turbulence through the 1960s and into the 1970s. The civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, social unrest, political assassination and more led to increased conflict and political antagonism.¹³ Ideology began to take on new meanings in this period (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979), and whether the old ideological innocence persisted became an open question. The lack of fully comparable data makes it difficult to compare the 1950s with later periods in this regard, although the aggregate opinion changes that occurred are well known (Page and Shapiro 1992; Mayer 1992; Stimson 1991). New issues and the persistent salience of racial and civil rights issues that came increasingly to the

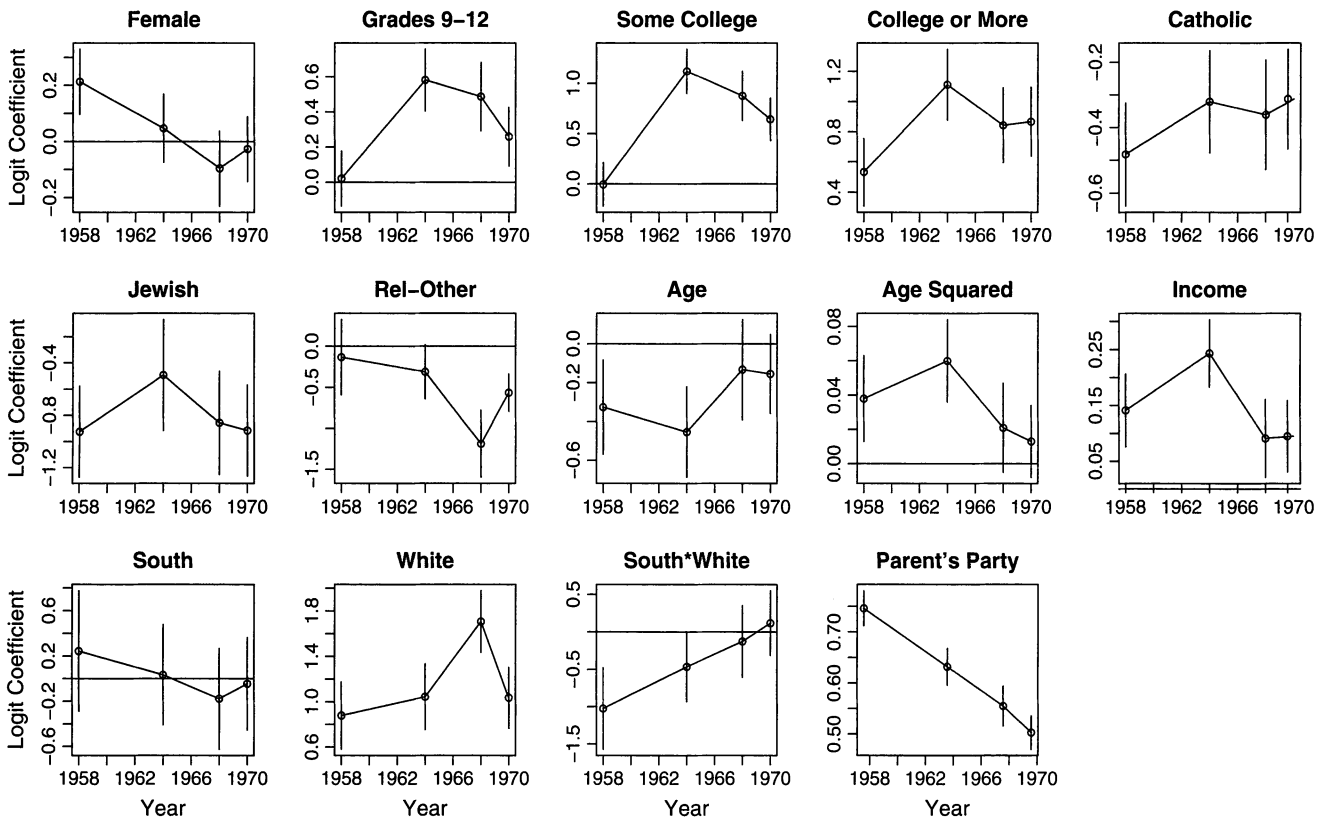
¹⁰This is one of several periods of partisan realignment (Key 1955).

¹¹To understand how a Republican president could be elected while a partisan coalition in favor of the Democrats remained strong, see Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002).

¹²Each year represents a separate regression equation. Partisan self-placement is again measured on a seven-point scale from strong Democrat to strong Republican. Both father and mother's party are coded -1 for Democrats, 0 for independents and 1 for Republicans. A composite scale labeled parent's party is constructed by adding the two. This is the variable used in the model. Multivariate equations estimated with an ordered response model shows the same results.

¹³For evidence that context effects matter, see Bafumi (2003).

FIGURE 5 Linear regression predicting party identification. The standard controls work as expected. Females have become significantly more Democratic over time while southern whites become more Republican. Most importantly, here, parental socialization has weakened as a predictor of partisan identification from the 1950s to the dealignment era.



fore became part of a revised left-right ideological spectrum at the elite level in American politics. This is a spectrum which expanded from the somewhat more limited economic/big government aspects of New Deal liberalism.

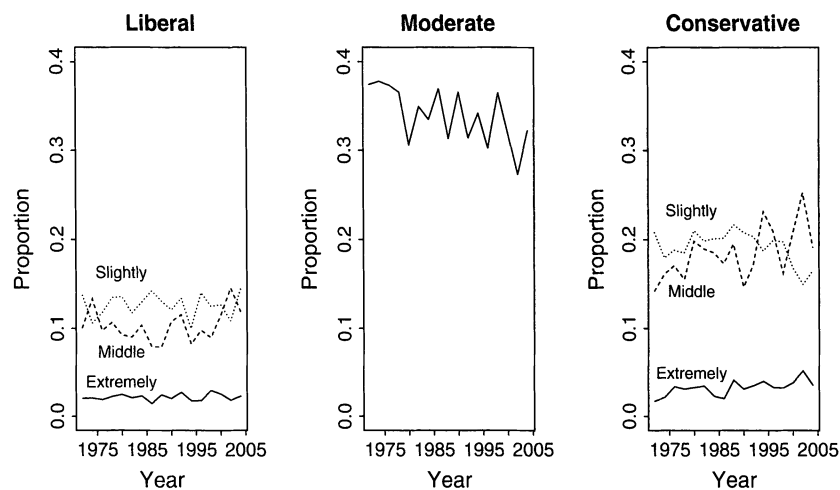
This affected how Americans related to the political parties and the degree of their partisan allegiances (Carmines, McIver and Stimson 1987). Most visibly and most important, white southerners grew increasingly uncomfortable with the national Democratic party, as that party fully accepted the mantle of civil rights and racial equality throughout the nation. This period first gave way to the brief partisan dealignment in which party became a less important predictor of the presidential vote, as new generations came onto the scene and old partisan loyalties were reconsidered. With the election of an unabashed ideological conservative, President Ronald Reagan, in the 1980s, and the realignment that had occurred in Congress (conservative southern Democrats declined in number and liberal northern Republicanism was on the wane as well), the resurgence of partisanship began. The issues that emerged from

the 1960s and 1970s increasingly divided the two major parties, as voters sorted themselves anew (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998).¹⁴ The issues that would further divide the two parties included abortion, women's rights, the availability of guns, religious values in politics and government, gay rights, capital punishment, environmental protection, and other related matters. Being liberal or conservative began to take on a more visible and somewhat new meaning. It became more closely associated with partisanship at the elite level and, as we will examine further, the level of the mass public.

Figure 6 tracks responses since the 1970s to the seven-point liberal-conservative self-placement scale. The midpoint of the scale (representing moderates) has remained the modal response, but it has been trending downward somewhat in a way similar to but not as striking as the fall-off of pure Independents. Those saying liberal (labeled "Middle" in the plot

¹⁴This is due in no small part to Ronald Reagan's success in redefining the Republican party as the party of conservatives in 1980, an effort 1964 presidential candidate Barry Goldwater had initiated but with less success.

FIGURE 6 Plot of responses to the seven-point NES ideological self-placement item.



since it is in between the responses slightly and extremely liberal) have increased somewhat since the 1990s. The main change, in tandem with Republican partisanship, has been the increase in those calling themselves extremely conservative so that at the macro level, overall, we see a clear connection between trends in partisanship and ideology. Is this, then, reflected at the micro level?

Figure 7 presents the individual level evidence of the increasing importance of ideology in predicting partisanship.¹⁵ Again, a series of linear regression coefficients are estimated over time. Ideological self-placement on a seven-point scale can now be included as a predictor, since this measure has been included in the NES since the 1970s. While it is tempting to interpret it as fully causal in its effect on partisanship—which we do not think it is—for our purposes, it is sufficient to examine the extent to which the two variables are increasingly intertwined. While the coefficients for the various controls tend to

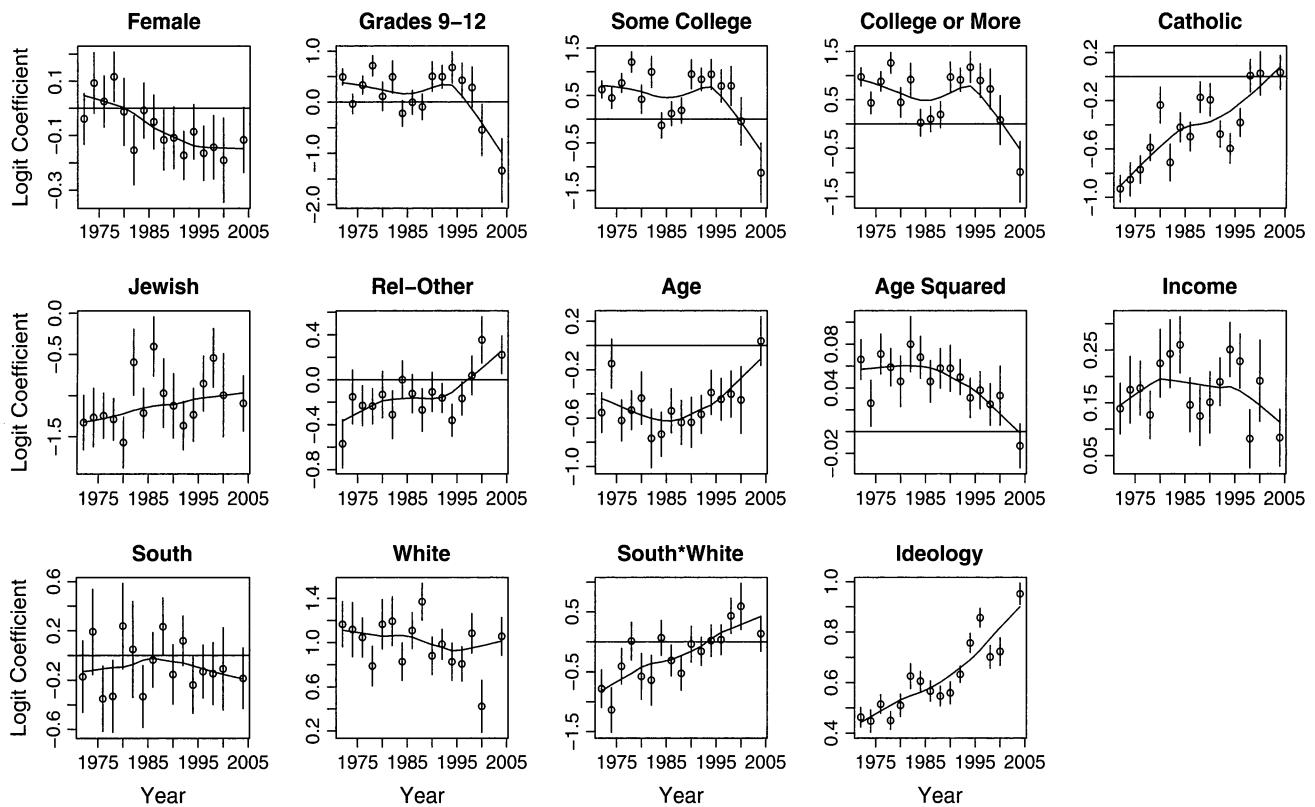
work as before, the effect of ideological self-placement appears to have increased from its earliest measurement in 1972. As new and old issues sorted partisan attachments anew, the public increasingly linked how they saw themselves ideologically with their partisan identification (Luskin, McIver and Carmines 1989). Unfortunately, the ideological self-placement question was not asked in the NES surveys before 1972. There is, however, a useful and longer longitudinal series in the form of a composite liberal/conservative “feeling thermometer” measure. The thermometer score is based on two questions in which respondents were asked to place liberals and conservatives on a 100-point scale, depending on their degree of “hot” or “cold” affect toward each group.¹⁶ This measure can serve as a reasonable proxy for left/right ideological orientations. When ideological self-placement is replaced with the thermometer score (results not shown), this measure is an increasingly strong predictor of partisan identification beginning in the 1960s. Early in the series, a ten-point change in the score results in about a 0.4 shift in partisan self-placement. In the 1990s, such a change is associated with as much as twice the shift.

Thus, we see that, first, partisanship has taken on a new importance in predicting the vote in recent years, and second, the data indicate that ideology has increasingly informed this partisanship. Ideology,

¹⁵As we show below, both partisanship and ideology are becoming increasingly important in explaining change in attitudes on domestic issues and this has also been shown on foreign policy issues. There is the potential for endogeneity here. One could also argue, of course, that party predicts ideology. Panel data from the early 1990s show that changes in respondents’ attitudes on issues had a reciprocal effect on changes in their party identification, with a significant influence in both directions (see Carsey and Layman (2006)). In contrast, panel data, including both domestic and foreign policy issues, from 2000, 2002, and 2004 show that the effect of changes of party identification and of ideology on issue attitudes overwhelms the reverse effect. This finding is consistent with the view that Bush’s ideological framing of both domestic and foreign issues has effectively polarized the way people evaluate these issues, whether positively or negatively, along both partisan and ideological lines (Snyder, Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2007; Veghte, Shaw and Shapiro 2007).

¹⁶The composite thermometer score is calculated by NES as follows: first, the value for liberals is subtracted from 97 and that difference is added to the value for conservatives; this sum is then divided by 2, and 0.5 is added to the result; finally, the solution is truncated to obtain an integer value. The composite score correlates with seven-point ideological self-placement at about 0.6 from 1972 to 2002.

FIGURE 7 Linear regression predicting party identification. Ideology has grown as a predictor from the 1970s to present times.



as associated only with the terms “liberal” and “conservative”, is in itself not very informative.¹⁷ We need to know what the issues are that give ideological labels meaning to political elites and voters alike. These include issues associated with the New Deal and the Great Society of the 1960s, as well as values-based concerns that are racial, social, and religious in nature. To the extent that these issue areas are represented by or reflect ideology and, ultimately, partisanship, they are increasingly important in understanding voting behavior. To what extent, then, has opinion on these issues at the individual level become increasingly related to ideology and partisanship? That is, to what extent has the public become divided on these issues in ideological and partisan terms?

To examine this further, we use the available longitudinal data from the 1972-2004 NES cumulative surveys and the rich data from the NORC

General Social Surveys from 1972 through the most recent 2006 survey. These data have been used by others to study and track the relationship between partisanship and issue opinions, but we focus as well on their connections to ideology and to update analyses of the GSS data to 2006 as we put these findings into historical perspective.

If liberal and conservative ideological thinking, as well as Democratic and Republican partisan attachments, have been increasingly defined by racial (since the 1960s) and especially social and religious issues (since the 1970s), then we should see these groups’ stances diverging over time on these issues. We find that such differences have indeed increased. This takes us into the middle of the ongoing debate in which political scientists have attempted to refute journalists who overstate such divergences when examining the politics of “red versus blue” states (Gelman et al. 2007; Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2006; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2006). We agree with Fiorina, Abrams and Pope (2006) that states are a poor unit of analysis when studying political polarization and that a great many Americans take positions in the ideological center. However, what all this understates is that there have been real

¹⁷Although its increasing relationship with partisanship (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998) leads to different inferences about the ideological attentiveness of the public when compared to other measure of ideological awareness based on individuals’ opinions on specific issues (Converse 1964).

changes among a portion of the electorate consisting of liberals and conservatives as well as Democrats and Republicans who have continued to sort themselves on racial, social, and religious values issues. These changes in public opinion and the electorate have occurred over a very extended period, have fed back into party politics, and show no sign of reversing. The data for this deserve full consideration.

The Issues

We begin with the core “big-government” policy issues that have divided the parties from at least the New Deal through the Great Society to the present. These domestic, economic, and social welfare issues also serve as a benchmark to study racial issues and the newer social and religious values issues. Partisan divisions on these issues have not weakened, and there is some evidence for further polarization along them as well. We then turn to values-laden issues. Partisans, and to a lesser extent ideologues, are increasingly divided over abortion, homosexuality, and the role of religion in society. This is particularly apparent since the earlier 1990s, but it can be seen in the early 1980s for some issues. What we find for issues of race and civil rights is perhaps most surprising. While these issues sharply divided the parties in the 1980s, if not much earlier, they have not been high on the radar screen in the recent debate about “culture wars” and partisan polarization. It took the full force of Hurricane Katrina and the Bush administration’s mishandling of aid and recovery efforts to bring them again to the fore. But the role of race in ideological and partisan polarization continued long after the height of the American civil rights movement.

Economic Welfare

Economic welfare issues have been long-standing party “cleavage” issues since the 1930s (Page 1978; Stimson 1999; Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002). They provide a frame of reference for examining other types of issues. While we find some evidence for increasing party and ideological divisions on a few economic welfare issues, the predominant story is one of consistency and continuity. Some of the illustrative NES and GSS data are plotted on the *Journal of Politics* website. We have included three trend lines in each of our graphs, including ideological moderates and Independents. We do not distinguish

strength of liberalism-conservatism or Democratic/Republican partisanship since this does not alter the basic results that we report.¹⁸

With respect to ideology, the NES items show fairly stable differences across the number of economic welfare issues we examined. It is interesting to note that for the most part moderates and Independents, as would be expected, fall in between liberals and conservatives and partisans, respectively. Also, there is a tendency in some cases for moderates and Independents to gravitate closer to liberals and Democrats. With respect to ideological differences on economic welfare issues, there appear to be slight increases in the mean differences in 2004 compared to 2000, including spending on welfare, spending on assistance for the poor, and spending on homelessness, but large differences existed or emerged earlier. There is also a growing division—the largest gaps in the time series—among Republicans and Democrats on their attitudes towards government’s role in guaranteeing jobs and spending on the homeless over the long term. However, the differences between the two partisan groups on other items have remained fairly consistent over time.

We also examined economic welfare items from the GSS. These data show similar results and also that 2004 was a polarizing election year, as conservatives and liberals separated somewhat on attitudes toward the government reducing income differences, improving people’s standard of living, spending on cities, spending on assistance to the poor, and spending on the nation’s health, but this reversed in 2006. We find the same pattern, but more dramatically and beginning earlier than 2004, for Republicans and Democrats, with Independents behaving much more like Democrats than Republicans. Overall, there is evidence of sustained if not growing ideological and partisan differences on these long-standing domestic welfare issues. These findings are important, since this continuing and possibly growing source of partisan conflict has been underappreciated in debates about the “moral values” issues that emerged to divide the parties on expanded ideological lines (Langer and Cohen 2005).

Abortion

Whether described in terms of morality, “family values”, “religious values”, or “culture”, these issues

¹⁸In general, the strong partisans and ideologues differ more from each other, and when partisan and ideological divergence occurs, it appears to occur more at the extremes.

have produced the most visible conflict in domestic politics in the United States. Fiorina, Abrams and Pope (2006) have challenged claims that Americans are polarized on these issues across “red and blue states” in the U.S., and they disagree with the interpretations of others regarding the magnitudes of these divisions and how much they have increased (see Carsey and Layman (2006), articles in Nivola and Brady (2006)). In the context of sharply partisan voting and clearer ideological divides between the parties, we find the public’s increasing divisions on these values issues to be impressive.

Abortion has been one of the most contentious and emotional of these issues. Based on NES data, Figure 8 shows the growing division between conservatives and liberals on attitudes toward the legality of abortion (in the first plot) and an even more striking polarization for Republicans and Democrats (in the second plot). At one time Republicans and Democrats could not be differentiated on this issue, a far different picture from that of 2006. GSS data going back further in time to the early 1970s involved more conditional questions. Figures 9 and 10 track responses to the GSS battery of questions on whether it should be possible to obtain a legal abortion in a variety of circumstances. They show a striking growth in the differences between the opinions of Republicans and Democrats as well as liberals and conservatives. Across all these questions, ideological and partisan polarization is evident. It is not surprising that the largest differences occur over support for

legal abortions for reasons unrelated to the health of the mother or birth defects. These differences do not diminish in the latest 2006 survey, and in the case of partisanship the differences between Democrats and Republican reaches an all-time high, with Independents falling closer to Republicans when the reason is not health related.

Homosexuality

We find the same divergence, though somewhat less striking, for opinions toward homosexuality and gay rights. Figure 11 shows data from the NES and the GSS for ideological and partisan subgroups. The first row show data from the NES. There is slight ideological divergence but more substantial growth in the partisan gap, especially concerning support for gay adoption. The time series is very short; it begins in the early 1990s and may miss earlier signs of sorting. The GSS, however, provides more extensive data. These data are shown in the second row of Figure 11. There is a relatively steady mean difference between ideological groups toward support for allowing homosexuals to teach in schools, although there was a divergence following a short period of convergence in the 1980s. Generally, both groups have grown more accepting over time toward homosexual teachers. From 1985 through 2006, differences between conservatives and liberals grew substantially in their feelings regarding the moral acceptability of homosexual relations. Liberals have been much more

FIGURE 8 Mean position of conservatives/moderate/liberals and Republicans/Independents/Democrats on whether abortion should be legal. Source: NES Cumulative File.

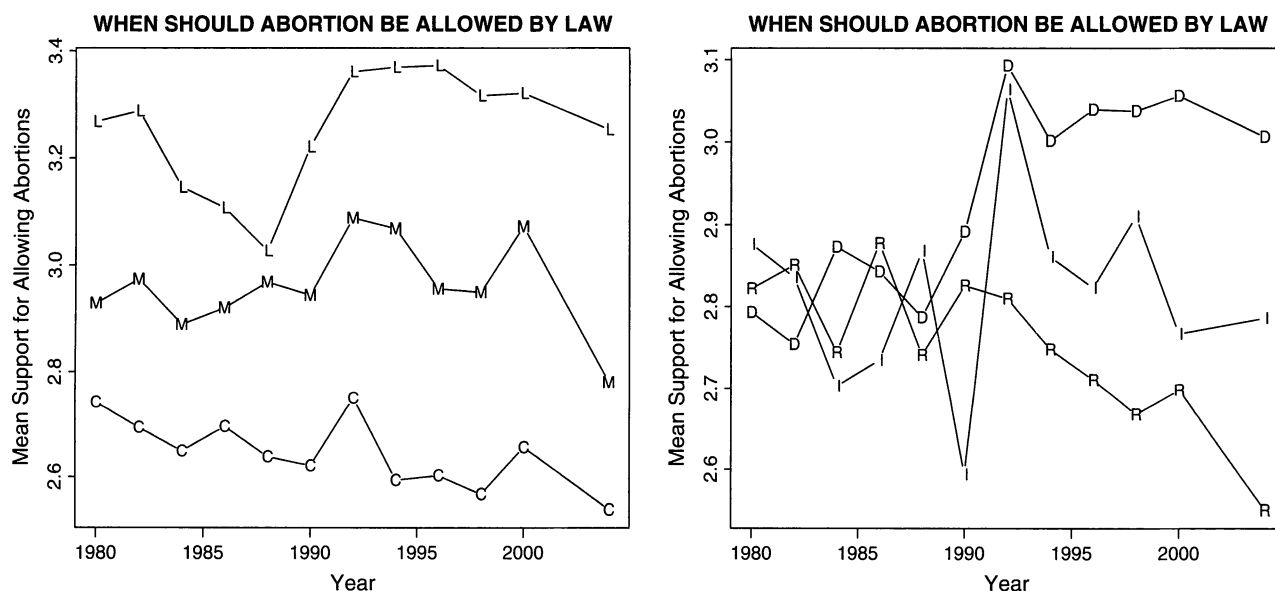
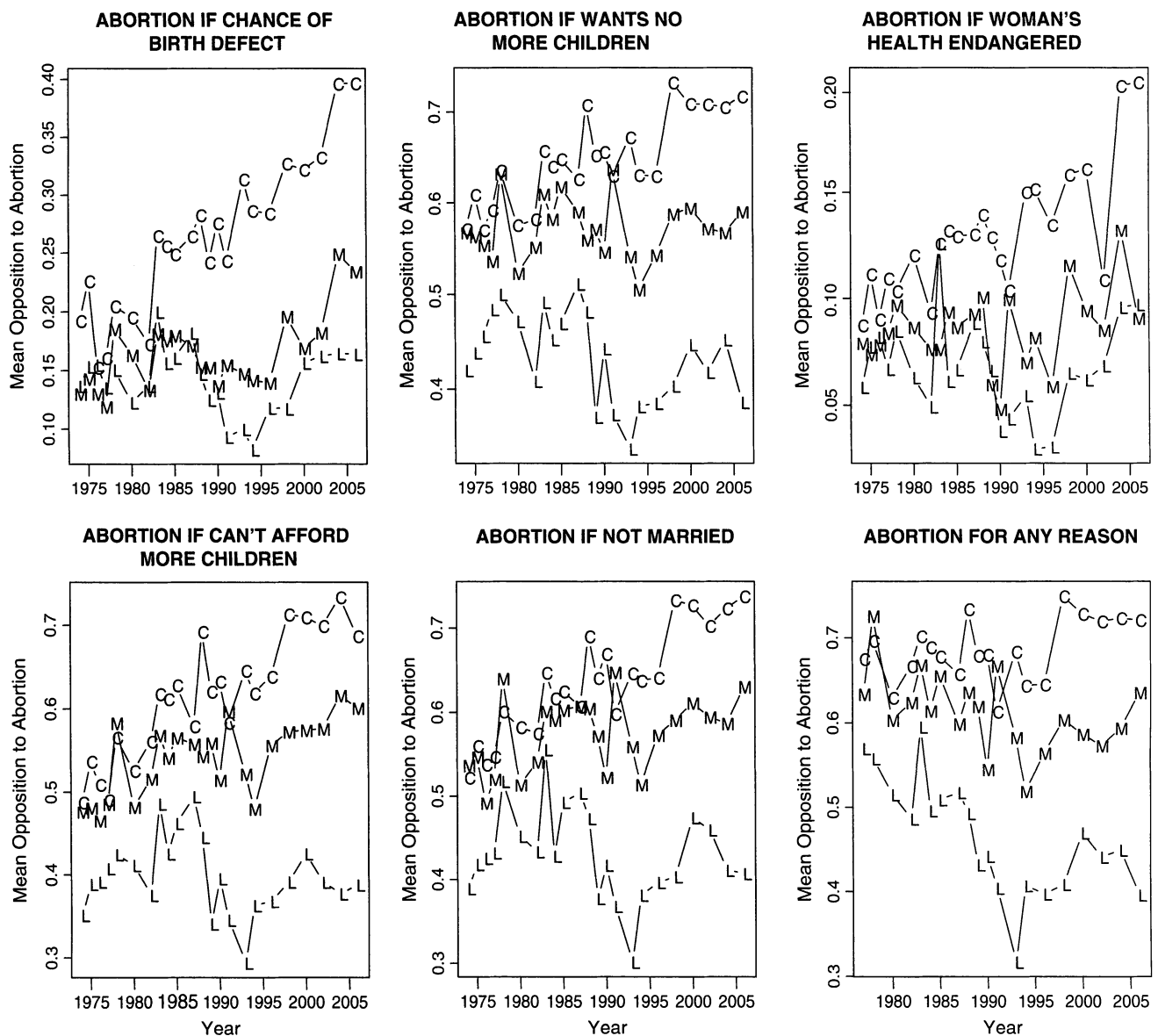


FIGURE 9 Mean position of conservatives, moderates and liberals on abortion. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

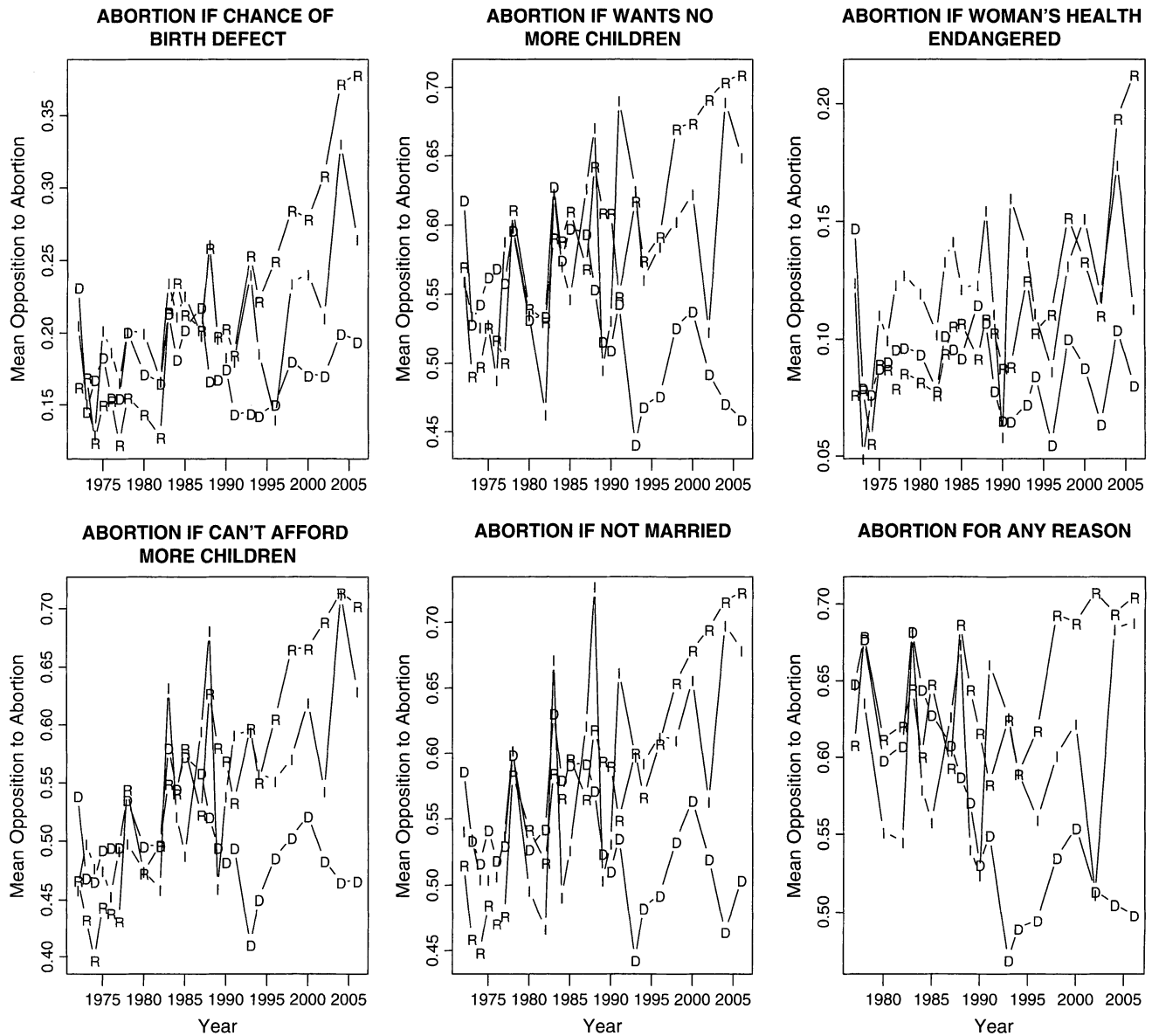


accepting than conservatives of such relations. The partisan differences are also apparent. The third and fourth plots in row 2 of Figure 11 show that Republicans and Democrats have become more differentiated since the late 1980s in their opinions toward allowing homosexuals to teach, although these partisan differences are less than ideological ones. Most striking is the finding that the mean positions of Republicans and Democrats on the acceptability of homosexual relations diverged sharply during the twenty-year period from the mid-1980s to 2004 and grew even wider in 2006. Moderates and Independents usually split the difference between the partisan and ideological groups.

Moral/Family Values

Similarly, other opinions related to religious, moral, or family values issues have become more strongly related to ideology and partisanship. Based on the NES data, Figure 12 shows how conservative versus liberal, and Republican versus Democratic views on family values, moral standards, and prayer in schools have become increasingly disparate since the 1980s. In fact, the school prayer stances of Republicans and Democrats were opposite from the expected direction before they grew apart in the late 1980s. Moderates favor conservatives on emphasizing family values and allowing school prayer meanwhile independents side

FIGURE 10 Mean position of Republicans, Independents and Democrats on abortion. Source: GSS Cumulative File.



with Democrats on family values and tolerating different moral standards.

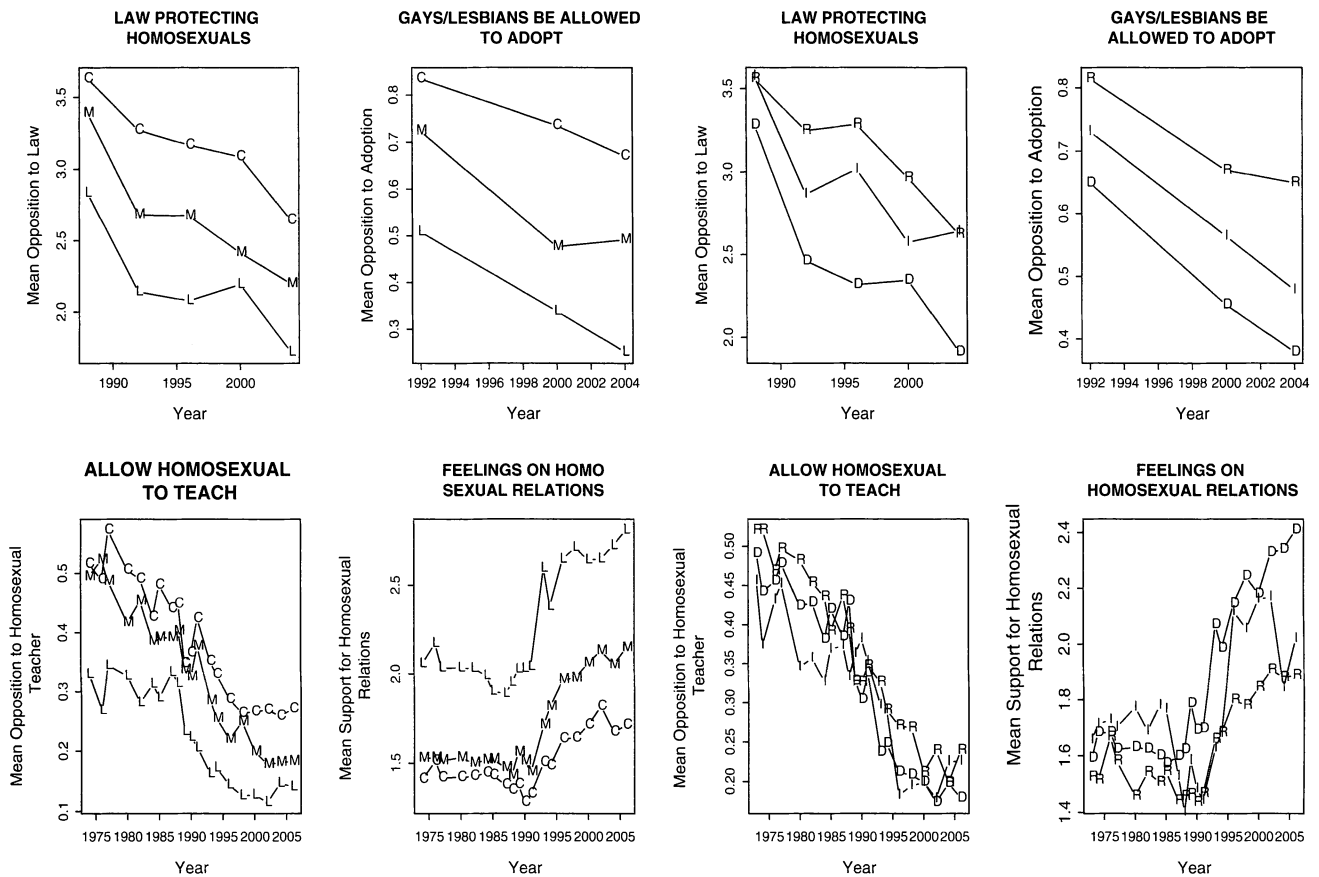
The GSS data, shown in Figure 13, shows a clear increase in the difference between conservatives and liberals on their confidence in organized religion. Somewhat more complicated (due to some earlier convergence and then wider separation), but still evident, is the growing difference in conservatives' versus liberals' support for prayer in public schools. The growing differences on this issue are clearer for Democrats than Republicans, as shown in the second row of Figure 13. These partisans have also become less alike in their confidence toward organized religion. As in the NES data, moderates side with conservatives in support for school prayer. Independ-

ents are as liberal as Democrats in their degree of confidence in organized religion. Independents are quite erratic in their support for school prayer perhaps because they are ambivalent but also owing to small sample sizes.

Race and Equality

We end our analysis with issues of race and equality in the United States. Racial issues became increasingly central in 20th-century American partisan politics after it was clear that the Democratic party, minus its old southern wing, had become *the* civil rights party. Racial issues have been given scant attention in the partisan polarization debate. These

FIGURE 11 Mean position of conservatives/moderates/liberals and Republicans/Independents/Democrats on homosexual relations. The first row reports results from the NES while the second row reports results from the GSS. Source: NES and GSS Cumulative File.



issues did return to the fore somewhat after the government’s mishandling of assistance to the large African-American community in Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina, but they have been largely ignored in the polarization debate. Like social and religious values issues, civil rights and related issues have helped drive increases in ideological polarization and, especially, partisan polarization.

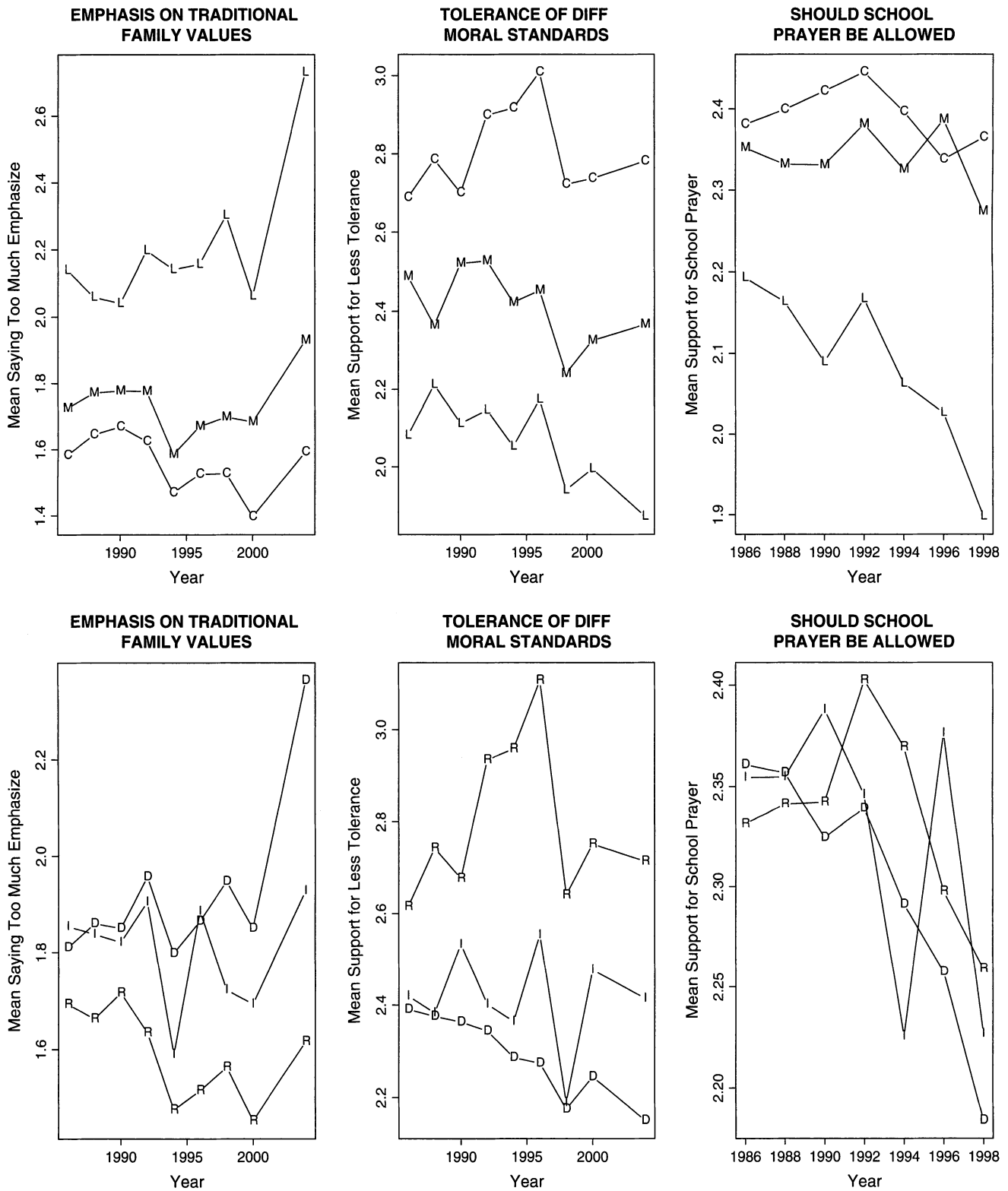
Figure 14, tracking NES data, shows clear evidence of increasing divergence between conservatives and liberals on the following attitudes: that conditions make it difficult for blacks in America, that blacks should not have special favors, that blacks should try harder, and that we should worry about equality in this country. There is less clear divergence in responses to the other items, though the ideological differences are substantial and have not diminished. In the case of partisanship we might expect that the racial attitudes of Republicans versus Democrats would become more consistently and sharply different as opponents of initiatives toward racial equality found their desired party home. For all but one survey item plotted in Figure 15, the mean

position of Republicans and Democrats has substantially diverged over time. The one exception—attitudes toward affirmative action—witnessed some convergence in the early and mid 1990s before diverging thereafter. Moderates tend to side with conservatives on these issues but they have grown closer to liberals on ensuring school integration and finding unequal chances unacceptable. On the whole, Independents side with Republicans on racial issues with some evidence of movement toward the Democrats over time.

The NORC General Social Survey data in Figure 16 tell the same basic story: the mean positions of ideological and partisan groups (row 1 and 2, respectively) have tended to move somewhat in opposite directions on support for spending more money to improve the conditions of blacks and offering more government aid to blacks, and there is no sign of convergence in 2006.¹⁹ Moderates and Independents move from conservative and Republican stances

¹⁹The results remain the same if we analyze subgroups such as whites, southerners, or non-southerners.

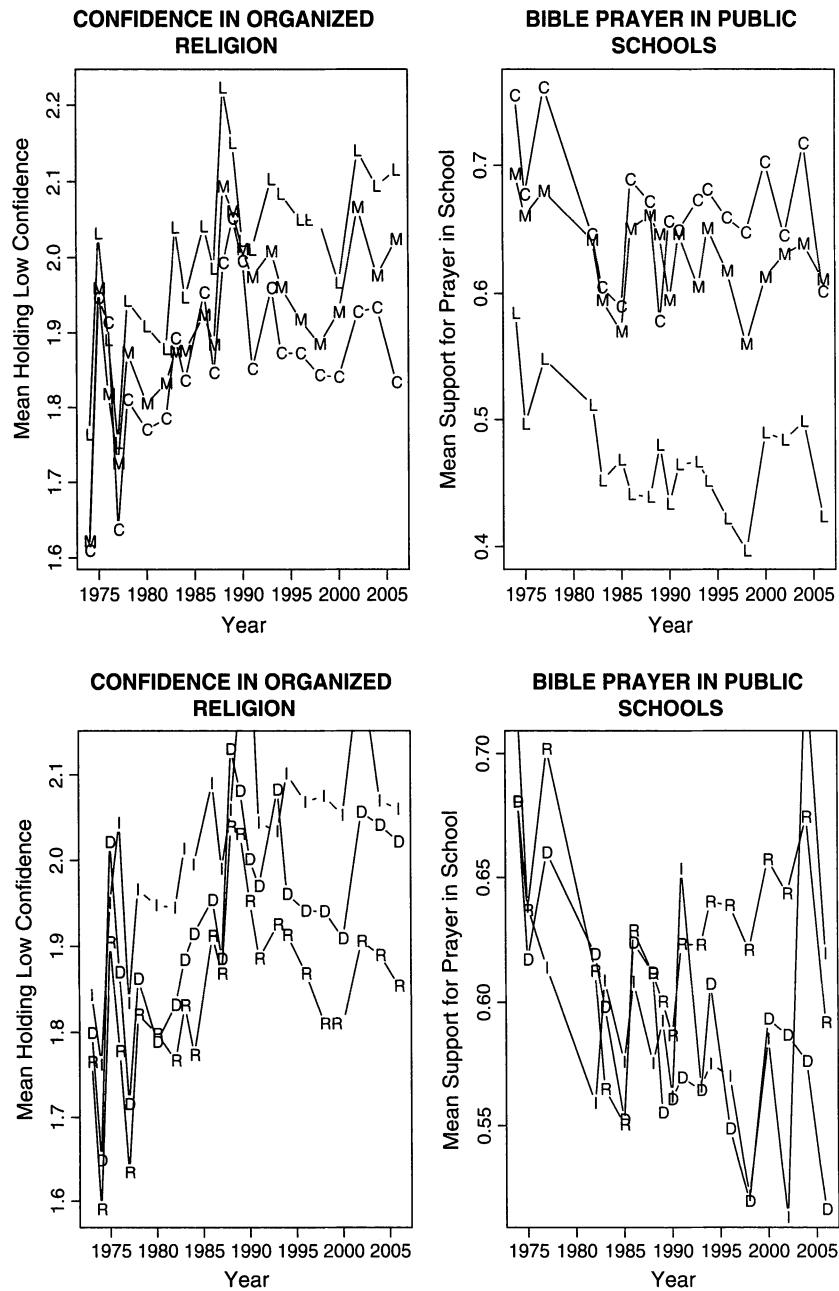
FIGURE 12 Mean position of conservatives/moderates/liberals and Republicans/Independents/Democrats on family/moral values issues. Source: NES Cumulative File.



toward liberal and Democratic stances on these issues over time. What this analysis of racial issues suggests most is that in addition to the debate about moral and religious values issues polarizing American politics, not only has the centrality of party divisions on economic

welfare issues continued, but also the underlying role of race as a continuing source of political conflict persists. Not surprisingly, the issue of race has the potential to resurface suddenly, as it did after Hurricane Katrina struck.

FIGURE 13 Mean position of conservatives/moderates/liberals and Republicans/Independents/Democrats on religious attitudes. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

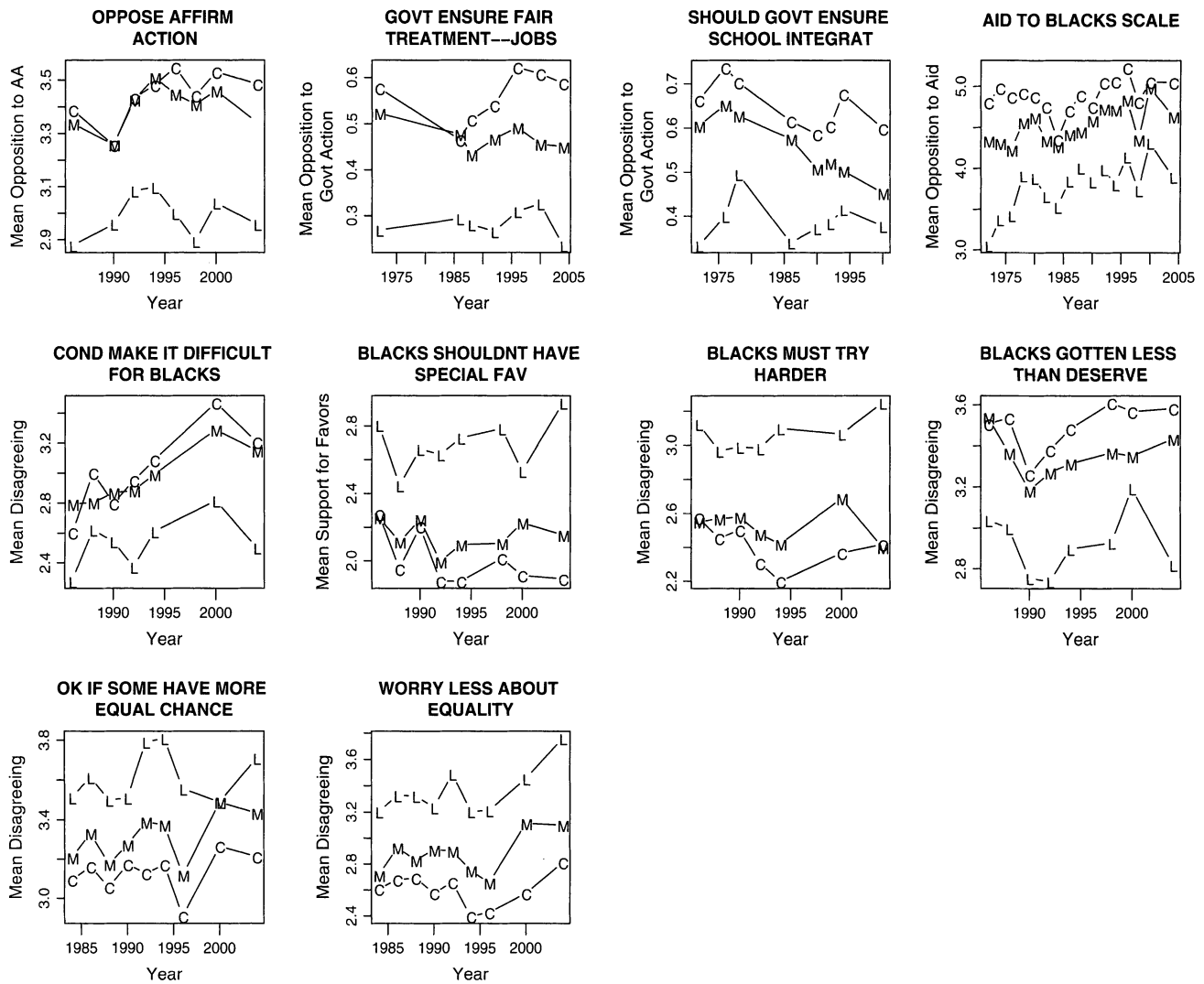


Conclusion

With the advent of survey research and the behavioral revolution in political science, students of American politics have continually re-evaluated the individual level characteristics of the American voter. From the start, this reflection looked at alternative explanations or interpretations of voting behavior and at changes that might be occurring in the electorate and in public opinion. Partisanship became central and has remained so in these explanations and interpretation,

beginning with its social and psychological bases. This includes the role of interpersonal communication and transmissions (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944; Campbell et al. 1960), and then increasingly—as we have reviewed here—its connection to voters’ other political attitudes and preferences. While the apparent statistical effect found in surveys of individuals’ partisan attachments on voting looked the same at the start of the current century as it did more than a half-century earlier, the partisanship of today’s American voters is different: it is more connected to salient policy issues and to

FIGURE 14 Mean position of conservatives, moderates and liberals on racial issues. Source: NES Cumulative File.



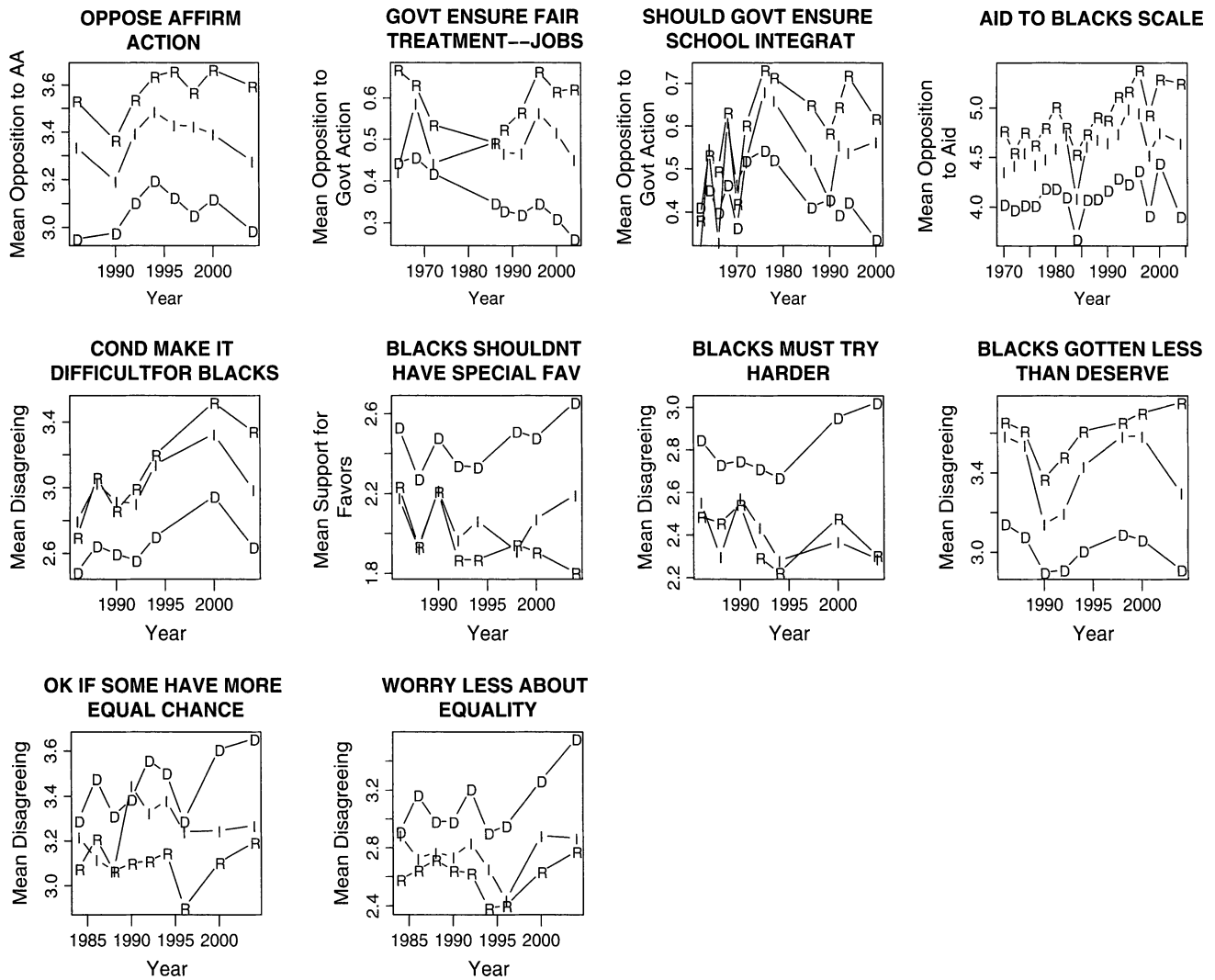
liberal-conservative ideological identification than it was at least as far back as the 1970s.

Socialization-based partisanship of the 1950s appeared, albeit limited by the available data, to give way in the 1960s and early 1970s as new issues and the internal realigning of the parties on the issue of race forced voters to reconsider their largely inherited partisan loyalties. New voters and some existing voters rejected any party label when responding to opinion surveys. What followed from the mid-1970s to the time in which we are writing (fall 2008) have been decades of an increasing connection between individuals' expressed partisanship and their self-reported ideology and a stronger connection between both partisanship and expressed liberal-conservative ideology and the opinions of Americans on policy-related issues. This kind of partisan and ideological sorting and polarizing process increasingly reflected,

and in turn further fueled, an even more pronounced partisan and ideological conflict among political leaders in both parties.²⁰

²⁰We have focused on voters in presidential elections. For offices lower than the presidency, we have seen increased partisan voting in congressional races suggesting that the growing ideological divide is apparent there as well. This has resulted in both parties being equally competitive for control of the House of Representative and the Senate (see Bartels (2000); Jacobson (2007b)). What has happened in the cases of voting for state and local executive and legislative offices is a subject that requires further research. Current research suggests that the relationship between state level partisanship and ideology has increased substantially since the Carter presidency (Erikson, Wright and McIver. 2006) as divided government outcomes and split-ticket voting have grown in state elections (Fiorina 2003). Overall, the relationship between partisanship and voting in gubernatorial and state legislative elections is strong but not quite as strong as for the presidency and Congress. Incumbency continues to have a very substantial influence on voting, but overall there is considerable variation across states that deserves further scrutiny (see Jewell and Morehouse (2001)).

FIGURE 15 Mean position of Republicans, Independents and Democrats on racial issues. Source: NES Cumulative File.



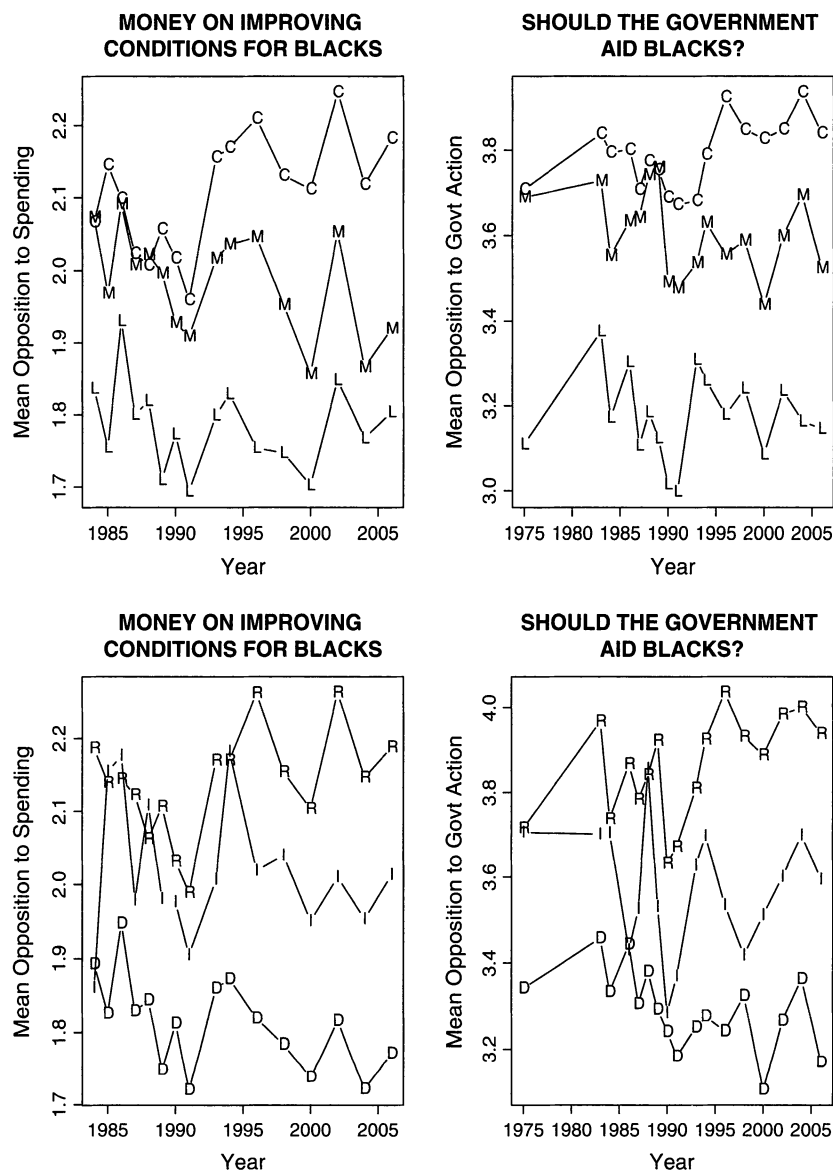
An array of economic, racial, and new social and religious values issues have become aligned more visibly to partisanship and to liberal-conservative labels and cues, producing an increasingly issue-based and ideologically based partisan alignment. Self-identified Democrats or Republicans today have been as consistent partisan voters as their counterparts were in the 1950s era of party voting defined by the New Deal economic-based coalition and its opponents. Partisans in the first decade of the 21st century have ideological beliefs which are more heavily defined by issues beyond economic ones. Economic issues remain very important (still most important for voters and partisans, based on some compelling analyses; see Bartels (2006); Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder (2006)), but an ideologically based partisanship has been increasingly connected to racial issues, certain social values issues,

and even foreign policy.²¹ We refer to this as polarization because it is individuals who consider themselves strongest in terms of partisanship and ideology who separate themselves most clearly on policy preferences and other political attitudes.

So strong is this connection of partisanship, ideology, and issue opinions that we must be cautious in saying that partisan voting has increased since the 1970s, returning to its 1950s prominence. It has, in the simple correlational sense, even when controlling for other demographic characteristics, but not in the sense of the psychological attachment that voters in

²¹As noted earlier (footnotes 1 and 15), partisan polarization has been tracked elsewhere on foreign policy issues (see Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon (2006, 2007); Snyder, Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon (2007)), and it has been most pronounced in the case of partisan differences in support for the Iraq war (see Jacobson(2007a, b)).

FIGURE 16 Mean position of conservatives/moderates/liberals and Republicans/Independents/Democrats on racial opinions. Source: GSS Cumulative File.



the 1950s had—an attachment which was largely independent of any ideological or issue opinions they held.

What other implications can we draw from the existence of this new partisan voter? For one, such voters constitute the strong base that party leaders can appeal to and are obliged to respond to, particularly in primary elections. These voters, once created, may contribute to the increasingly visible partisan conflict that occurs at the elite level. On the other hand, the large number of voters who have not sorted themselves into the extremes remain the decisive, ostensibly centrist, voters in elections. The level of partisan conflict that the contemporary mass media thrive on and magnify will only change if the

parties put forth candidates to appeal to these moderate voters.²²

More broadly and normatively, these new partisan voters constitute new evidence bearing on the question of the “democratic competence” of the American voter. The critics who referred to the apparently mindless, non-ideological, non-issue driven voter that Columbia and Michigan scholars found in the 1940s and 1950s surely must change their tune. Issues and ideology have become deeply linked to

²²The importance of centrist voters was clear in the 2006 midterm congressional elections when, as shown in the exit polls, Independents’ negative evaluations of President Bush and the Iraq war drove them decisively in favor of Democratic congressional candidates (Jacobson 2007b, p.20).

partisanship. Curiously, this may involve such a wide range of issues that individuals link to liberal-conservative ideology that no one has yet found a substantial increase in the kind of ideological consistency or “constraint” in the mass public that Converse (1964) sought to find. For example, Baldassarri and Gelman (2007) have reported for the available NES data that there has been only a modest increase in ideological consistency across issues. This has, however, occurred more so, as we would expect, among strong partisans and especially among Republicans who perhaps more aggressively than others staked out sharp positions on the new issues of abortion and gay rights (cf. Stimson (2004)). In any case, the importance of issues and ideology to partisanship would seem to speak well to the political competence of voters.

On the other hand, there is a possible downside that may come with strong partisanship of this sort, which requires further study. At the elite level, we know that political polarization has led to a high level of visible political conflict, one that has reached high levels of incivility, as we saw in the debate over Clinton’s impeachment, the 2000 election results, and the Iraq war, as well as in the 2004 and 2006 elections. While incivility and polarization in government are not necessarily correlated, there is evidence that Congress—both the House and the Senate—had become less civil by the 1970s, and this decline became more pronounced as partisan conflict increased into the 1990s (see Uslaner (2000)). The broader policymaking consequences of this are not fully clear and warrant further research (see Fiorina and Abrams (2008); Jacobs and Shapiro (2000)).

At the level of the mass public, what may appear to be increasing competence may have negative consequences. Strong partisan attitudes may lead to rigidity of attitudes and opinions in the face of new and credible discrepant information. Not only might such new information be avoided through selective exposure, but its accuracy and validity might be denied as a result of “motivated bias” or flawed reasoning or no reasoning at all (see Marcus (1988); Lord and Lepper (1979); Taber and Lodge (2006); Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon (2006)). For example, might some voters be less engaged in retrospective voting, and therefore less likely to hold incumbents accountable, as they become more strongly anchored by their partisanship, ideology, and/or social, racial, and religious attitudes (e.g., Bafumi (2004))? Will polarized voters be pressured more greatly than voters in the past by processes of attitudinal balance, cognitive dissonance, or rationalization as they are exposed to new political information that challenges

their existing attitudes and preferences (e.g., Bafumi (2004); Erikson (2004); Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon (2006); Wawro (2006)). The new partisan voter poses important normative as well as empirical questions for research on political behavior.

Another question that deserves attention is why has partisanship become more ideological in recent times? This is a question that continues to engage scholars. Some believe that the polarization of political elites has set an example for the public to follow (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2006). This does not explain why elites have polarized. Perhaps there have been major party candidates who have successfully shifted the position of their party on major issues in hopes of gaining electoral advantage. For example, Barry Goldwater became the state’s rights candidate in 1964 to attract southern voters. Although his campaign ended unsuccessfully, the Republican Party would eventually become the state’s rights party and lose the mantle of civil rights to the Democrats. This helps to explain some of the ideological divergence between Republican and Democratic legislators in the United States in the 1970s. Many scholars regard race as the first issue that began to sort out political elites and then voters in the two major parties (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Hetherington 2001). Of course, candidates have long sought to exploit cleavages that may bring electoral advantage (see Stimson (2004)) and yet some attempts are made with greater fervor and success than others. Also, the steepest growth in the divergence between Republican and Democratic legislators began in the early 1990s. Further, the realignment of southern conservatives to the Republican party (following the lead of elites) took off in the early 1990s but increased less before (see data in McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal (2006) and Jacobson (2007a)).

So what explains the skyrocketing polarization in recent times? Some have argued for the growth of income inequalities and the effects of the mass media as explicators (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Mutz 2006; Jacobson 2007a; Prior 2007). While these explanations have merit, they are more likely symptoms rather than causes of partisan polarization. Parent and Bafumi (2008) offer the argument that polarization by elites in the United States is largely driven by the state of international external threat. When threats subside, as with a unipolar world for a superpower, elites lose incentives to work together and they gain incentives to compete over the allocation of economic and political benefits. When external threats increase, domestic polarization should decline. In turn, the posturing of elites affects the degree of polarization in the American electorate.

Much of our data fit well with this explanation concerning when candidates can produce and exploit cleavages toward electoral gains (Snyder, Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2007). A slightly different theory proposed by Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) argues that once parties begin to become more homogenous (perhaps because of party leaders, critical issues, diminished external threat or some other reason), they can eschew public preferences to pursue and achieve policy goals. Thus, once the process of polarization begins, there are motivations that lead it to worsen. This helps to explain some of what our data show. The sources of partisan polarization remain an important topic for further research.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the editor, the anonymous reviewers, Robert Erikson, Andrew Gelman, Delia Baldassarri, Justin Phillips, and Eric Uslaner for their comments and assistance. Robert Shapiro is grateful to the Russell Sage Foundation for supporting this research as a 2006/2007 Visiting Scholar and to Columbia University's Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy.

Appendix A

Appendix A1: Descriptive statistics for all individual-level variables used for regression analysis in this study. Each variable's statistics are reported with their maximal sample size. For a variety of reasons, the actual sample sizes vary throughout the analysis.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Rep. Pres. Vote	0.506	0.5	0	1	17551
Female	0.552	0.497	0	1	41395
Education	2.395	0.958	1	4	41059
Religion	1.537	0.89	1	4	41053
Age	46.14	16.996	17	99	39532
Income	2.935	1.149	1	5	37020
White	0.833	0.373	0	1	41498
Party ID	3.61	2.114	1	7	40109
Ideology	4.309	1.419	1	7	22293
Parental Party	-0.531	1.748	-2	2	12779
Ideology Therm.	52.298	15.577	0	97	25862

Appendix A2: Descriptive statistics for NES issue variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Affirm Action	3.312	1.018	1	4	10959
Fair Treatment-Jobs	0.464	0.499	0	1	10578
School Integration	0.517	0.5	0	1	15322
Aid to Blacks	4.453	1.813	1	7	27033
Difficult for Blacks	2.884	1.358	1	5	10344
Blacks-Special Favors	2.193	1.22	1	5	11640
Blacks-Try Harder	2.584	1.289	1	5	10341
Blacks-Less than Deserve	3.288	1.243	1	5	11572
More than Equal Chance	3.288	1.268	1	5	15165
Worry Less Equality	2.856	1.378	1	5	15194
Abortion	2.848	1.086	1	4	21003
Trad. Family Values	1.774	0.992	1	5	14266
Tolerant Diff Moral Stand	2.511	1.235	1	5	14231
School Prayer	2.324	0.818	1	4	11222
Law Protect Homosexuals	2.832	1.863	1	7	8019
Gay Adoption	0.617	0.486	0	1	4810
Gov't Guar Jobs	4.348	1.868	1	7	24287
Spending Soc. Sec.	1.467	0.569	1	3	18115
Spending Welfare	2.263	0.725	1	3	10118
Spending Poor	1.565	0.648	1	3	7736
Spending Food Stamps	2.159	0.698	1	3	15175
Spending Homeless	1.404	0.615	1	3	7984

Appendix A3: Descriptive statistics for GSS issue variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Abort-Defect	0.189	0.392	0	1	33566
Abort-No More	0.560	0.496	0	1	33404
Abort-Women's Health	0.1	0.301	0	1	33721
Abort-Can't Afford	0.52	0.5	0	1	33332
Abort-Not Married	0.554	0.497	0	1	33309
Abort-Any Reason	0.599	0.49	0	1	26092
Homosexual Teach	0.353	0.478	0	1	27479
Homosexual Relations	1.751	1.206	1	4	27068
Blacks-Improve Cond.	1.95	0.739	1	3	13757
Gov't Aid Blacks	3.526	1.283	1	5	22024
Confid. Religion	1.904	0.699	1	3	31492
Bible Prayer	0.606	0.489	0	1	23074
Gov't-Reduce Income Diff	3.725	1.956	1	7	22612
Gov't-Improve Stand. Liv.	2.888	1.18	1	5	21645
Spending Cities	2.11	0.757	1	3	13208
Spending Welfare	1.458	0.678	1	3	15046
Spending Nation's Health	1.391	0.632	1	3	15024

Manuscript submitted 15 February 2007

Manuscript accepted for publication 2 March 2008

References

- Abramowitz, Alan I. and Kyle L. Saunders. 1998. "Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate." *Journal of Politics* 60: 634–652.
- Adams, Greg D. 1997. "Abortion: Evidence of Issue Evolution." *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 718–737.
- Aldrich, John. 1996. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ansolahehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden and James M. Snyder. 2006. "Purple America." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20: 97–118.
- Bafumi, Joseph. 2003. "The Regress of Ideological Sophisticates." Presented at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA.
- Bafumi, Joseph. 2004. "The Stubborn American Voter." Presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL.
- Baldassarri, Delia and Andrew Gelman. 2007. "Partisans Without Constraint: Political Polarization and Trends in American Public Opinion." Unpublished Manuscript.
- Bartels, Larry. 2000. "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952–1996." *American Journal of Political Science* 44: 35–50.
- Bartels, Larry. 2006. "What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1: 201–226.
- Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld and William N. McPhee. 1954. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bloch-Elkon, Yaeli and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2005. "Deep Suspicion: Iraq, Misperception and Partisanship." Public Opinion Pros, www.PublicOpinionPros.com.
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.
- Carmines, Edward G. and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Carmines, Edward G., John McIver and James A. Stimson. 1987. "Unrealized Partisanship: A Theory of Dealignment." *Journal of Politics* 49: 376–400.
- Carsey, Thomas M. and Geoffrey C. Layman. 2006. "Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* 50: 464–477.
- Converse, Philip E. 1964. The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. In *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter. New York: Free Press, pp. 206–261.
- Converse, Philip E. and Gregory B. Markus. 1979. "Plus ça Change. The NewCPS Election Study Panel." *American Political Science Review* 73: 32–49.
- Erikson, Robert S. 2004. "Economic Voting: Micro vs. Macro Perspectives." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Political Methodology, Stanford University.
- Erikson, Robert S., Gerald C. Wright and John P. McIver. 2006. Public Opinion in the States: A Quarter Century of Change and Stability. In *Public Opinion in State Politics*, ed. Jeffrey E. Cohen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 229–253.
- Erikson, Robert S., Michael B. MacKuen and James A. Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 1981. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 2003. *Divided Government*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Fiorina, Morris P. and Samuel J. Abrams. 2008. "Political Polarization in the American Public." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11: 563–588.
- Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2006. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Franklin, Charles H. and John E. Jackson. 1983. "The Dynamics of Party Identification." *American Political Science Review* 77: 957–973.
- Gelman, Andrew, Boris Shor, Joseph Bafumi and David K. Park. 2007. "Rich State, Poor State, Red State, Blue State: What's the Matter with Connecticut?" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2: 345–367.
- Green, Donald Philip, Bradley Palmquist and Eric Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 2001. "Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization." *American Political Science Review* 95: 619–631.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2000. *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2007a. *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Jacobson, Gary C. 2007b. "Referendum: The 2006 Midterm Congressional Elections." *Political Science Quarterly* 122: 1–24.
- Jewell, Malcolm E. and Sarah M. Morehouse. 2001. *Political Parties and Elections in American States*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly.
- Key, V. O. Jr. 1955. "A Theory of Critical Elections." *Journal of Politics* 17: 3–18.
- Knight, Kathleen and Robert S. Erikson. 1997. Ideology in the 1990s. In *Understanding Public Opinion*, ed. Barbara Norrander and Clyde Wilcox. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, pp. 91–110.
- Langer, Gary and Jon Cohen. 2005. "Voters and Values in the 2004 Election." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69: 744–759.
- Layman, Geoffrey. 2001. *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lazarfeld, Paul F., Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet. 1944. *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lord, C. G., L. Ross and M. R. Lepper. 1979. "Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37: 2098–2109.
- Luskin, Robert C., John P. McIver and Edward G. Carmines. 1989. "Issues and the Transmission of Partisanship." *American Journal of Political Science* 33: 440–458.
- MacKuen, Michael B., Robert S. Erikson and James A. Stimson. 1989. "Macropartisanship." *American Political Science Review* 83: 1125–1142.
- Marcus, George E. 1988. "Democratic Theories and the Study of Public Opinion." *Polity* 21: 25–44.
- Mayer, William G. 1992. *The Changing American Mind: How and Why Public Opinion Changed between 1960 and 1988*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- McCarty, Nolan, Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal. 2006. *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Miller, Warren E. and Merrill Shanks. 1996. *The New American Voter*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mutz, Diana C. 2006. How the Mass Media Divide Us. In *Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics*, ed. Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, pp. 223–248.
- Nie, Norman H., Sidney Verba and John R. Petrocik. 1979. *The Changing American Voter: Enlarged Edition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Niemi, Richard G. and M. Kent Jennings. 1991. "Issues and Inheritance in the Formation of Party Identification." *American Journal of Political Science* 35: 970–988.
- Nivola, Pietro S. and David W. Brady. 2006. *Red And Blue Nation?: Characteristics And Causes of America's Polarized Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Nivola, Pietro S. and David W. Brady. 2007. *Red and Blue Nation?: Consequences and Correction of America's Polarized Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Page, Benjamin I. 1978. *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections: Rational Man and Electoral Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Page, Benjamin I. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Parent, Joseph M. and Joseph Bafumi. 2008. "International Polarity and Domestic Polarization: Explaining American Disunity." Working Paper.
- Pomper, Gerald. 1972. "From Confusion to Clarity: Issues and American Voters, 1956–1968." *American Political Science Review* 66: 28–45.
- Pomper, Gerald. 1975. *Voters' Choice: Varieties of American Electoral Behavior*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company.
- Prior, Markus. 2007. *Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increase Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarize Elections*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rohde, David W. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shapiro, Robert Y. and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon. 2006. "Political Polarization and the Rational Public." Presented at the Conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Shapiro, Robert Y. and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon. 2007. Ideological Partisanship and American Public Opinion toward Foreign Policy. In *Power and Superpower: Global Leadership and Exceptionalism in the 21st Century*, ed. Peter Rundlet, Morton H. Halperin, Jeffrey Laurenti and Spencer P. Boyer. New York: Century Foundation Press, pp. 49–68.
- Smith, Eric R. A. N. 1989. *The Unchanging American Voter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Snyder, Jack, Robert Y. Shapiro and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon. 2007. "Free Hand Abroad, Divide and Rule at Home: The Domestic Politics of Unipolarity." Presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL.
- Stimson, James A. 1991. *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Stimson, James A. 1999. *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings*. 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Stimson, James A. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Opinion Movements Shape American Politics*. New York and London: Cambridge University Press.
- Sundquist, James L. 1983. *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- Taber, Charles and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated Skepticism in Political Information Processing." *American Journal of Political Science* 50: 755–69.
- Uslaner, Eric M. 2000. Is the Senate More Civil than the House. In *Esteemed Colleagues*, ed. Burdette A. Loomis. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, pp. 32–56.
- Veghte, Benjamin, Greg M. Shaw and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2007. Social Policy Preferences, National Defense and Political Polarization in the United States. In *Social Justice, Legitimacy and the Welfare State*, ed. S. Mau and B. Veghte. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., pp. 145–168.
- Wattenberg, Martin P. 1994. *The Decline of American Political Parties*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wawro, Greg. 2006. "The Rationalizing Public?" *Critical Review* 18: 279–330.
- Wolbrecht, Christina. 2000. *The Politics of Women's Rights: Parties, Positions, and Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Joseph Bafumi is an assistant professor of government, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH 03755. Robert Y. Shapiro is a professor of political science, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.