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Disconnected: The Political Class versus the People

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During the last decade of the twentieth century, the belief that American political life had become highly polarized attained the status of conventional wisdom. At the 1992 Republican National Convention, candidate Pat Buchanan declared the outbreak of a culture war, “a war for the soul of America.” And in the midterm elections of 1994, the story line held that “angry white males”—upset with gays, gun control, immigration, affirmative action, and Hillary Clinton—put an end to more than forty years of Democratic Party dominance of the House of Representatives. Although the angry talk subsided a little in the following years, the firestorm erupted again in 1998 with the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the subsequent impeachment of President Bill Clinton.

So far, the 2000s have brought no respite. The decade began with the contested presidential vote in the state of Florida and the razor-thin victory of Republican candidate George W. Bush, sealed by the decisions of a Republican secretary of state and a conservative-controlled Supreme Court. The episode left many Democrats bitter, unwilling even to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Bush presidency. Following an interlude of muted partisanship after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush reversed his campaign pledge and chose to govern as a divider not a uniter, implementing political adviser Karl Rove’s strategy of winning reelection by maximizing support among core Republican groups.

More recently, the president and vice president have argued vigorously for exceptional interpretations of executive power, while their Democratic adversaries in Congress strongly contest such interpretations.

Thus, at some levels the contention that political life has become more polarized is not in dispute. Nor is Pat Buchanan alone among public intellectuals in seeing an ongoing cultural conflict in America.¹ Other conservatives have characterized the conflict in similarly bellicose terms:

The competition is not a battle of interests but, as in late antiquity, a battle of worldviews. . . . What is at stake is not simply how much wealth is to be redistributed . . . but all of the values and beliefs of a culture. With the answers to such basic questions as "what is just?" "what is good?" and "what is evil?" now a matter of debate, the term "culture wars" has appropriately been used to describe the scene in contemporary American politics. And just as pagan Rome died and gave way to the new culture of Augustinian Christianity, so is Tocqueville's America dying and giving way to the new culture of expressive individualism.²

There is no "after the Cold War" for me. So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos. It is an ethos that aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other.³

Of course, intellectuals are by definition a small and unrepresentative slice of American life, so few would take such pronouncements as an accurate reflection of what is happening in the country at large. More convincing evidence of polarization comes from studies of the political class—public officials, party and interest group leaders, activists, financial contributors, and members of the political infotainment community. This evidence documents a dramatic rise in congressional polarization since the mid-twentieth century, as well as the existence of significant differences in the political views held by the various segments of the political class.⁴

1. Sociologist James Davison Hunter is generally credited with inspiring Buchanan's call to arms. See Hunter (1991).

2. Dworkin (1996, p. xi).

3. Kristol (1995, p. 486).

4. For references to this literature, see the citations in the essay by David W. Brady and Hahrie C. Han in chapter 3 of this volume.

Yet there remains a critical missing piece in the prevailing portrait of a polarized American political order—the American people. Until very recently, polarization of the electorate was assumed to be one of the most important factors in explaining the polarization of the political class. As Bush reelection strategist Matthew Dowd stated in 2003, the president had not tried to expand his electoral base because "you've got 80 percent to 90 percent of the country that look at each other like they are on separate planets."⁵ Why should a candidate bother trying to appeal to the middle if there are no voters left there? Thus the campaign strategy of "mobilizing the base" would seem to have supplanted the traditional strategy of "moving to the center" with good reason: in today's political climate there are no more "swing voters" that a move to the center might appeal to.

The only problem, however, is that recent academic research contradicts the belief that there is no longer a middle ground in American politics. In the late 1990s, both qualitative and quantitative studies found little evidence that Americans were highly polarized, or that they were becoming more so.⁶ On the contrary, Princeton University sociologist Paul DiMaggio, with coauthors John H. Evans and Bethany Bryson, conducted an exhaustive analysis of General Social Survey and National Election Studies data from the years 1972 to 1994 and found that the political views of Americans had become more *similar*, not more different. (This conclusion also held when the study was updated through 2000 by Evans.)⁷ A study by University of Michigan sociologist Wayne Baker, who examined twenty years of World Values Survey data, found not only little evidence of a culture war in the United States, but also that most Americans held a mix of the traditional and modern views that were supposedly at war.⁸ More recently, Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope found that attitudinal differences between residents of the so-called red and blue states were greatly exaggerated in 2000—a conclusion that was reaffirmed when the analysis was updated through 2004.⁹

In other words, while systematic evidence indicates that American politics as conducted by the political class is increasingly polarized, the evidence also suggests that this development is not simply a reflection of an increasingly polarized electorate. The result is a disconnect between the American people and those

5. Quoted in Ron Brownstein, "Bush Falls to Pre-9/11 Approval Rating," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 2003.

6. The most notable qualitative study is by Wolfe (1998). The most notable quantitative study is by DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996).

7. DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996); Evans (2003).

8. Baker (2005a).

9. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006).

who purport to represent them—a disconnect that political scientist Keith T. Poole has called “the central puzzle of modern American politics.”¹⁰ Contrary to a half-century of theory and research on the centrist tendencies of two-party politics, American politics today finds a polarized political class competing for the support of a much less polarized electorate.¹¹

So why, then, has the idea of a polarized electorate attained the status of conventional wisdom? As it turns out, the exaggerated picture of popular polarization is easier to explain than the disconnect between representatives and the represented. Many in the journalistic community forgot, never learned, or have chosen to ignore a half-century of research contrasting the mass public and political elites.¹² The result has been that the media have lost sight of critical differences between the two groups. People who are active in politics know a lot and care a lot about politics and public policy, and their views are organized according to ideological frameworks. In contrast, most ordinary voters have less knowledge about politics, care less about it, and are largely nonideological. Moreover, people who are active in politics tend to have more extreme views than ordinary voters. Yet because political elites constitute the public face of politics, the media naturally portray this unrepresentative slice of America as the norm rather than the exception—a tendency that is undoubtedly exacerbated by the media’s preference for stories that stress conflict over agreement.

Nevertheless, it does a journalist no great harm to believe that the country is polarized when it is not. But candidates running for office—as well as the people who work for and bankroll them—have a great personal interest in getting things right. They run too great a risk of wasting their investments by operating on the basis of false information—such as the idea that “80 to 90 percent of the country look at each other like they are on separate planets.” So what, then, would prompt members of the political class to act on the erroneous presumption that the mass public is as polarized as the political class?

Party Sorting vs. Polarization

We do not think there is a simple answer to this question, so we will focus instead on a development that many believe is a major factor in a more complicated answer.¹³ Commentators and pundits look at the electorate today and see

10. Remarks by Keith T. Poole at the History of Congress Conference, Stanford University, Spring 2004.

11. See Downs (1957).

12. See McCloskey, Hoffman, and O’Hara (1960); Converse (1964).

13. See, for example, Jacobson (forthcoming 2007).

Table 2-1. *Party Sorting without Increasing Aggregate Polarization in a Hypothetical Electorate*

<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Period 1</i>	<i>Period 2</i>
Liberals	60 Democrats, 40 Republicans	90 Democrats, 10 Republicans
Moderates	100 Independents	100 Independents
Conservatives	40 Democrats, 60 Republicans	10 Democrats, 90 Republicans

Source: Compiled by the authors.

two ideologically distinct camps, and they label that polarization. But polarization implies that the political opinions and attitudes of the public—in the aggregate—have been pushed away from moderate, centrist positions to the liberal or conservative extreme. When the electorate is highly polarized, the middle ground literally vanishes—but that is not the case today.

Instead, over the past generation, party sorting—the process by which a tighter fit is brought about between political ideology and party affiliation—has occurred in American politics. As recently as the 1970s, liberals and conservatives could each find a comfortable home in either the Democratic or the Republican Party. But nowadays the Republican Party is much more likely to be the home of ideologically conservative voters, while the Democratic Party is home to most liberals. The relative numbers of conservatives and liberals may not have changed all that much, but their party affiliation certainly has.¹⁴

The distinction between party sorting and polarization is fairly easy to see with an example. Consider the hypothetical electorate depicted in table 2-1. At any point in time, the electorate consists of 100 liberals, whose party affiliation can be either Democratic or Republican; 100 moderates, who are political independents; and 100 conservatives, whose party affiliation, like the liberals’, can be either Republican or Democratic. In Period 1, liberals are slightly more likely to be Democrats and conservatives are slightly more likely to be Republicans, but both parties contain significant numbers of liberals and conservatives. Knowing a voter’s party affiliation in Period 1, then, provides relatively little information about her political ideology.

Between Period 1 and Period 2, the parties sort themselves along ideological lines. The great preponderance of liberals are now affiliated with the Democratic

14. While scholarly awareness of party sorting has been evident for some years, and a number of excellent focused studies have appeared, there has been relatively little work tracing the issues that are most closely associated with sorting, the groups in which sorting has most clearly occurred, and other specific features of the sorting process. For a review of the evidence for party sorting on abortion, see Adams (1997). For sorting on women’s issues, see Sanbonmatsu (2002).

Party, and a similarly large proportion of conservatives are now Republicans. The result of this party sorting is that, in Period 2, the parties are far more ideologically homogeneous. Knowing a voter's party affiliation now provides a great deal of information about her ideology.

The most important point of this example, however, is that between the two periods the aggregate ideological distribution remains unchanged. At all times there are exactly 100 liberals and 100 conservatives (along with the 100 moderates). Despite changes in the numbers of conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans, the aggregate level of polarization in the electorate is unchanged.

Some analysts prefer to refer to the developments shown in table 2-1 as "partisan polarization." But we think this term only confuses the discussion. We prefer the term "party sorting," reserving the term polarization for bimodal distributions of opinion, or movements toward a bimodal distribution of opinion: voters are polarized on an issue if more of them cluster at the extremes than locate themselves in the center, or if they are moving from centrist positions toward the extremes. As we show in the body of this chapter, the party sorting that has occurred over the past generation has moved the parties further apart from one another, but has not produced bimodal distributions of aggregate opinion. Sorting, rather than polarization, is a more accurate label for the changes we have seen over the past quarter-century.

Given the political changes that have occurred in the United States since the mid-twentieth century, it would be extremely surprising if there had *not* been some party sorting. Consider the political realignment of the South. Forty years ago, the Democratic Party had a much larger proportion of identifiers in the South—many of whose racial and social attitudes and views on national defense were more conservative than those of the national Democratic Party. Later, as Democratic identification fell in the South (particularly among white males), one would logically expect the Democratic Party as a whole to become more homogeneously liberal.

Surprisingly, however, survey data do not register major effects from these political changes. For example, between 1987 and 2003, according to a 2003 survey by the Pew Research Center, the average difference between Republicans and Democrats on twenty-four political and policy items increased by only 5 percentage points (from 12 percent to 17 percent), and the average difference on seventeen social and personal attitudes increased by only 4 percentage points (from 7 percent to 11 percent).¹⁵ These seem like rather small increases,

15. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "The 2004 Political Landscape: Evenly Divided and Increasingly Polarized," November 5, 2003 (people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=196).

especially because on some issues—such as capital punishment—the official positions of the parties are significantly different, but majorities of both parties are in favor. In light of this, the amount of sorting at the level of ordinary voters hardly seems commensurate with the sorting of Democrats and Republicans at the elite level.

Sorting and Ideology

Party identification and ideology are more closely related today than they were in the recent past, and there is general agreement that this closer relationship reflects the relatively greater differentiation of the two parties at the elite level.¹⁶ Some observers have suggested that the election of Ronald Reagan began a period of increasingly sharp differentiation between the two parties at the elite level. Since that time, the positions of the Democratic and Republican parties on key issues such as taxes, abortion, and national defense have become more clearly defined. Furthermore, the strategies used by both parties in Congress to control the legislative agenda have pushed the parties further apart in their public positions.¹⁷ With the parties' elites becoming more differentiated during the 1980s, it would be reasonable to expect to find that ordinary voters cued off these changes (to some degree) and aligned themselves with the party that more closely represented their ideological positions. In other words, when confronted with a clear choice between two increasingly polarized parties, we might expect to see an increasingly strong correlation between the public's ideology and party identification.

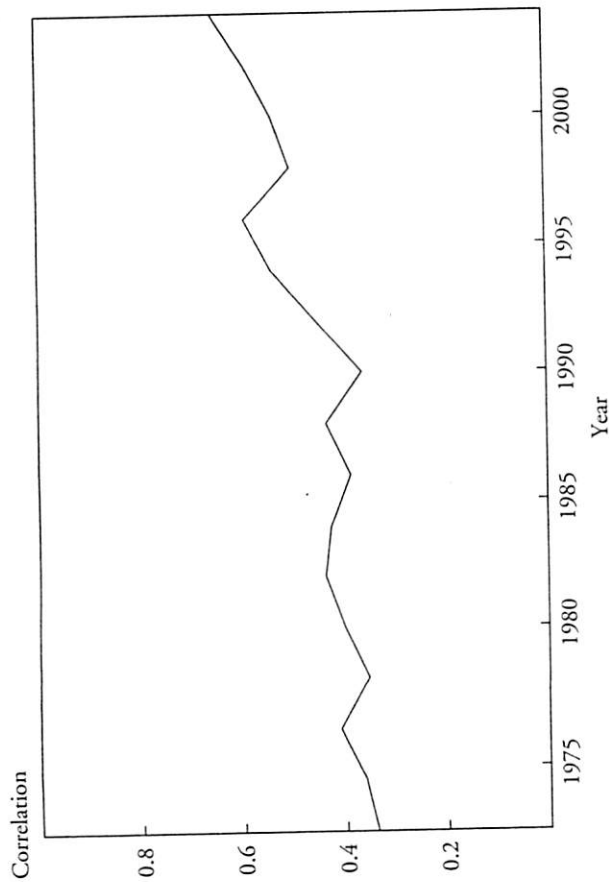
Since the early 1970s, the National Election Studies (NES) surveys have asked a nationwide sampling of Americans to classify their political views on a seven-point scale from extremely liberal to extremely conservative and to classify their party identification, also along a seven-point scale, from strong Democrat to strong Republican. Figure 2-1 plots the correlation of these responses for the period 1972 to 2004. Interestingly, the correlation between party and ideology increases almost linearly over this entire period, with sharp increases from the early 1990s to 1996 and again in 2000. But the Reagan years (1981–89) do not particularly stand out.

Yet if party sorting has been taking place in response to elite polarization, we would expect to see an even tighter relationship between partisanship and ideology among voters who are more aware of the differences between the parties'

16. See, for instance, Adams (1997); Abramowitz and Saunders (1998).

17. Roberts and Smith (2003).

Figure 2-1. *Party Identification and Ideology Correlations, 1972-2004.*



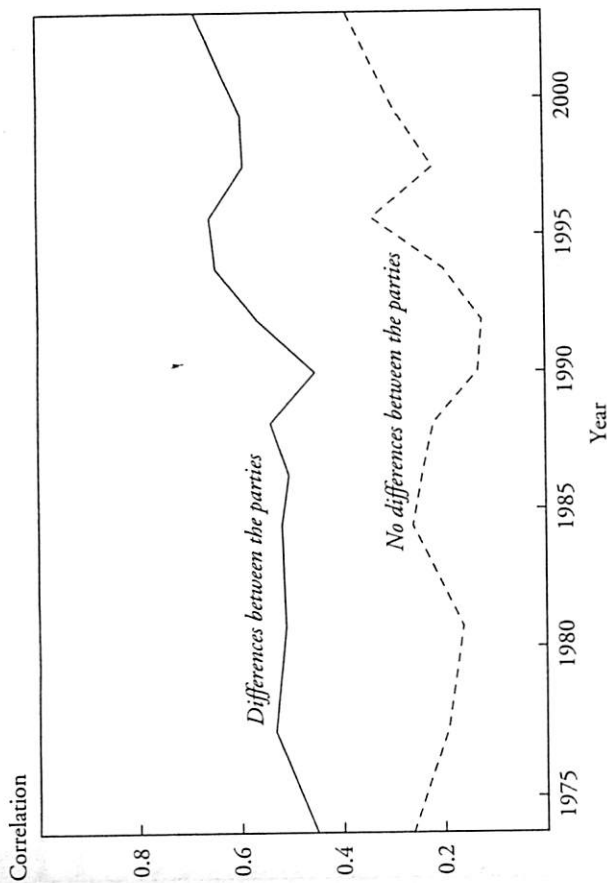
Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

elites. To check this proposition, we extended the comparison to two groups of survey respondents in the National Election Studies: those who claimed to see important differences between the Democratic and Republican parties, and those who did not.¹⁸ Figure 2-2 compares the two groups.

Both groups exhibited similar trends of an increasingly strong relationship between partisanship and ideology over the thirty-two-year period. But in every election, respondents who saw important differences between the parties displayed a much stronger relationship between party identification and ideology than those who did not. It may seem odd that the subgroup trends in figure 2-2 are somewhat weaker than the overall pattern in figure 2-1. The explanation is that people have been shifting out of the “see no difference” category into the “see important differences” category. As shown in figure 2-3, the percentage of respondents who claimed to see important differences between

18. The text of the NES question reads, “Do you think there are any important differences in what the Republicans and Democrats stand for?”

Figure 2-2. *Party Identification and Ideology Correlations by Awareness of Elite Polarization, 1972-2004.*



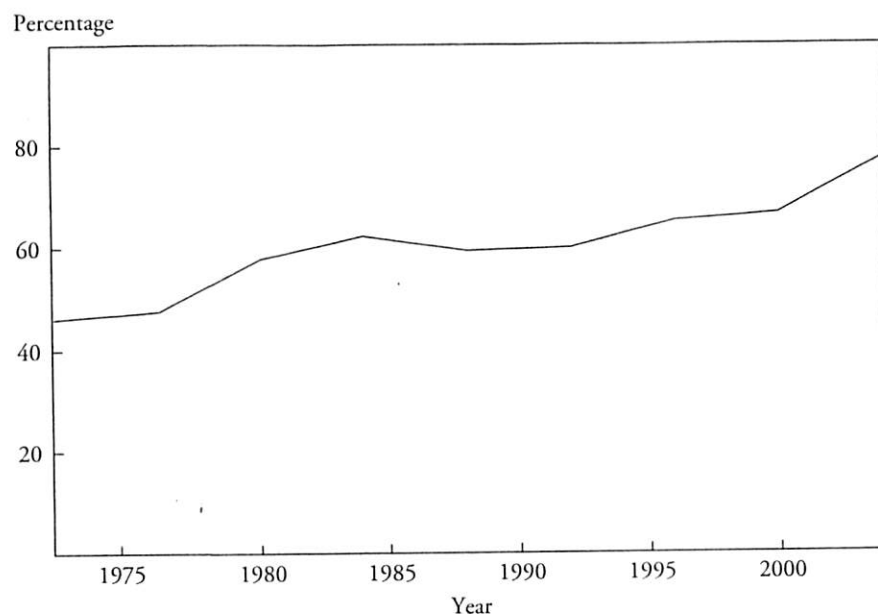
Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

the parties has increased steadily over the years—peaking at a stunning 76 percent in 2004.

This much of the story thus sits on solid evidence: as elites became more ideologically distinctive over the past quarter-century, ordinary voters recognized this development and then changed their positions, bringing their party identification and ideology more into alignment with each other.¹⁹ Importantly, however, the pattern among ordinary voters is much weaker than among political elites: while there is almost a total separation between Democratic and Republican members of Congress, the pattern among ordinary voters is somewhat weaker. There has been some party sorting in the mass public in response to elite polarization, but the mass public is not nearly as ideologically divided as party elites.

19. Of course, one cannot draw conclusions about individual voters from aggregate analyses. Levendusky (2006) confirms this inference with an analysis of individual-level panel data, and also finds that conversion (rather than partisan replacement) is most consistent with the observed changes.

Figure 2-3. *Percentage of Respondents Who Saw Important Differences between the Political Parties, 1972–2004.*



Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Sorting and Policy Areas

What if we look for evidence of party sorting below the level of ideology?²⁰ After all, political scientists have long known that voters are not very ideological.²¹ In the typical National Election Studies survey, for instance, one-quarter to one-third of respondents decline even to position themselves ideologically. And when analysts measure ideology alternatively as a statistical constraint among specific issue positions, the usual finding is that the electorate is not very constrained—the simple fact is that people exhibit liberal positions on some issues and conservative positions on others. Perhaps, then, more sorting could be found below the level of broad ideology.

Each election year, the NES surveys Americans' attitudes and views in several policy areas. Policy areas are clusters of related issues, such as social welfare

20. This is similar to earlier works that looked for issue consistency across a variety of different issues. See, for example, Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1979).

21. The locus classicus is Converse (1964).

issues, race-related issues, foreign policy and defense issues, and so forth. Previous studies have indicated that more people take consistent positions *within* a specific policy area than *across* areas.²² Here we look at four of the most prominent policy areas discussed in the literature: New Deal social welfare issues, social and cultural issues, racial issues, and defense and military policy issues.²³

What should we expect to find? First, we might expect the correlation between New Deal issue positions and party identification to show little change over time—or even show change in the direction of less party sorting. The basic “role of government in the economy” questions that make up the New Deal issue area have been around since the 1930s, and the relationship to party sorting may have become muted by the time our data begin in 1972. Indeed, the relationship to partisanship may have even declined as racial and social issues increased in prominence.²⁴

Second, we would expect that Democratic and Republican voters have become better sorted on race issues. Carmines and Stimson have shown that party elites became increasingly differentiated on these issues after the 1958 elections, and they suggest that the sorting of ordinary voters followed.²⁵ However, they also suggest that the change among ordinary voters would occur only with a significant lag, as new generations of voters take the place of older generations. We therefore might expect to see some increased sorting in the thirty-year period we examine, but nothing very dramatic.

22. Carmines and Layman (1997); Layman and Carsey (2002).

23. We constructed indexes by taking several items relating to an issue area and calculating each respondent's average position across those issues. For New Deal issues, we used the following NES items: government provision of health insurance (VCF0806); government's role in securing everyone a good job and a standard of living (VCF0809); the government spending/services tradeoff (VCF0839); the amount of government spending on the poor (VCF0886); and government spending on welfare (VCF0894). For racial items, we used whether or not the civil rights movement pushes too fast (VCF0814); whether or not the government should ensure school integration (VCF0816); whether students should be bused to promote school integration (VCF0817); support for Affirmative Action in hiring or promotion (VCF0867A); whether or not the government should ensure that African Americans receive fair treatment in jobs (VCF0937); and how much the government should help minorities (VCF0830). For cultural issues, we used abortion attitudes (VCF0837/VCF0838); school prayer attitudes (VCF09043); attitudes regarding whether or not women and men deserve an equal role (VCF0834); attitudes toward laws protecting homosexuals from discrimination (VCF0876A); attitudes toward homosexuals in the military (VCF0877A); and attitudes toward adoption by homosexual couples (VCF0878). For defense-related items, we used attitudes toward cooperation with the Soviet Union (VCF0841) and attitudes toward defense spending (VCF0843). All two- and four-point items were made into seven-point-scales, and only white respondents were used to construct the racial policy items.

24. Edsall and Edsall (1991); Frank (2004).

25. Carmines and Stimson (1989).

Third, social issues such as equal rights for women, abortion, and school prayer, which were orthogonal to partisan debate a generation ago, have moved to the center of the debate between party elites.²⁶ Thus we might expect these issues to move from being largely unrelated to partisanship in the early years of our data to being more strongly related to party identification today.

Finally, ever since the Vietnam War, Republicans on balance have been the more hawkish party on matters relating to defense and military policy. We would therefore expect to see a strong correlation between defense-related issue positions and party identification over the entire three-decade period. By 2004, however, foreign policy and defense issues had cast the parties' elites into particularly sharp relief, so we may also expect to see a jump between 2000 and 2004.²⁷

Figure 2-4 displays the relationship between partisanship and voter positions in the four policy areas. In each area, there is evidence of a strengthening relationship between the electorate's issue positions and party identification. Given our expectations, it is perhaps surprising to find that over the entire thirty-year period the trend is even more pronounced on New Deal economic issues (as shown by the higher correlation values across the board) than on issues of culture or race. That New Deal issues are increasingly correlated with party identification is strong evidence that popular commentators have overstated the diminished importance of these issues to the electorate.²⁸ For defense-related items, there is little change in the relationship until 2004, suggesting a sharp change in response to the contentious debate over the Iraq war, Afghanistan, and the war on terror.

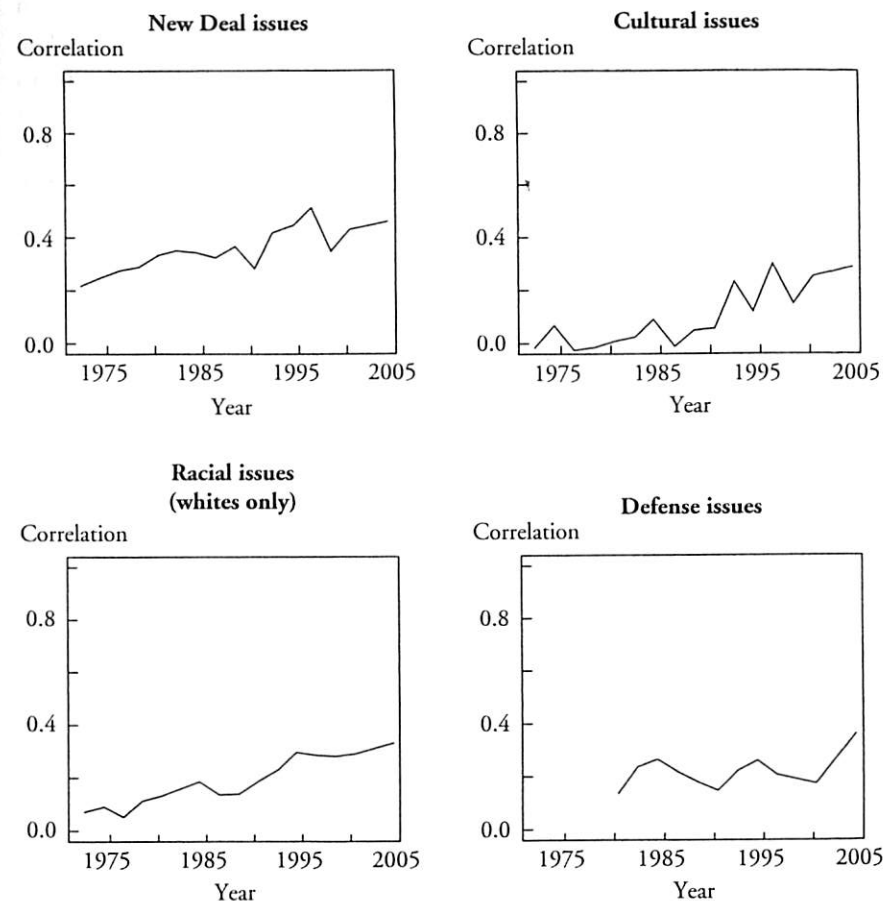
But while there has been some sorting on the various issue areas, it is (again) important not to exaggerate the change that has occurred. Even in 2004,

26. Layman (2001).

27. For example, in the 2004 NES cross section, respondents were asked to rank themselves on a seven-point scale on the issue of whether the United States should attempt to deal with foreign crises via diplomacy or military action. The correlation between self-placement and party ID was 0.43, suggesting a fairly strong relationship between attitudes toward foreign policy and party ID in the most recent election.

28. While the stronger relationship between partisanship and New Deal positions is contrary to the claims of commentators such as Frank (2004), it is consistent with recent research indicating that economic issues have shown no decline as an important cleavage in U.S. elections. See Gelman and others (2005); Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2006); Bartels (2006). The lack of sorting on the racial dimension is consistent with Abramowitz's critique of Carmines and Stimson's issue evolution thesis. See Abramowitz (1994).

Figure 2-4. *Party Identification and Voter Positions in Four Policy Areas, 1972–2004.*



Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file. (For details on how these scales were constructed, see note 23 in the text.)

the correlations between partisanship and the racial, social, and defense policy areas were still much closer to zero than to one—numbers that seem a bit shy of “the great sorting-out” discerned by Democratic Party activists William A. Galston and Elaine C. Kamarck.²⁹ The simple fact is that on a variety

29. Galston and Kamarck (2005).

of issues many partisans take positions that are at odds with their party's national stance.³⁰

However, it would be possible for even relatively small increases in sorting on specific policy areas to cumulate into more significant sorting if the individual dimensions somehow became more closely related to one another. To check this possibility, we correlated respondents' positions on the four policy areas with one another. (These patterns are displayed in figure 2-5.) While New Deal attitudes are more strongly related to both racial and cultural attitudes today than they were a generation ago, cultural and racial issues show no sign of a closer relationship.³¹ Again, the evidence tends to support the sorting thesis, but the patterns are not especially strong.

Sorting and Specific Issues

Even if there is not strong evidence of sorting on the level of general ideology or in broad issue areas, it is possible that voters have sorted on one or two important issues. For example, Democrats and Republicans could be quite far apart on abortion yet have very muted differences over women's equality.³² Sorting could be occurring on different issues, at different times, and among different groups, and averaging everything together may obscure significant trends and differences.

To get a sense of whether specific issues might be driving party sorting, we examined six issues in the NES surveys—three New Deal economic issues (whether government should provide health insurance, whether it should ensure jobs and a good standard of living, and how government should balance spending and services), two social issues (abortion and school prayer), and a race issue (whether the government should provide economic assistance to blacks and minorities). Given the trends observed for each of the broad policy areas, we would expect that positions on some of these issues must be more strongly related to partisanship today than a generation ago.

But how should we measure sorting on these specific issues? Because the individual items vary in question format (and therefore reliability), comparing correlations across items is inappropriate here.³³ Therefore, to measure sorting

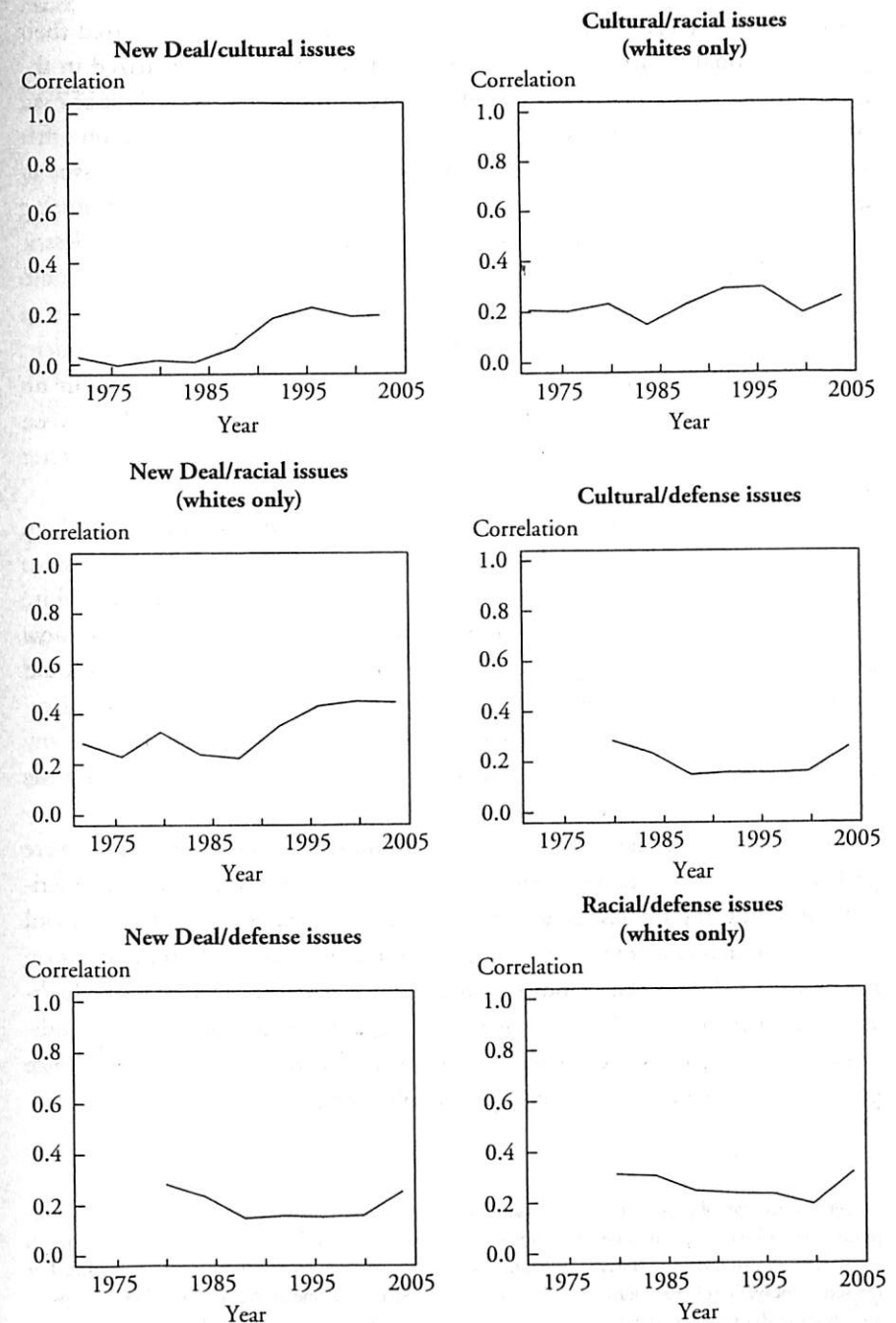
30. See Hillygus and Shields (2005). One other point worth noting here is that the sorting evident in specific policy areas is not as linear as that shown by the more general ideology measure. In particular, figure 2-4 suggests that the spike in those seeing no difference between the major political parties in 1996 (in figure 2-2) may owe a lot to the volatility in the relationship between partisanship and the New Deal and cultural issue positions.

31. Comparisons on racial items are based on analysis of white respondents only.

32. See Sanbonmatsu (2002).

33. Krosnick and Berent (1993).

Figure 2-5. *Correlations between Voter Positions in Four Policy Areas, 1972–2004.*



Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

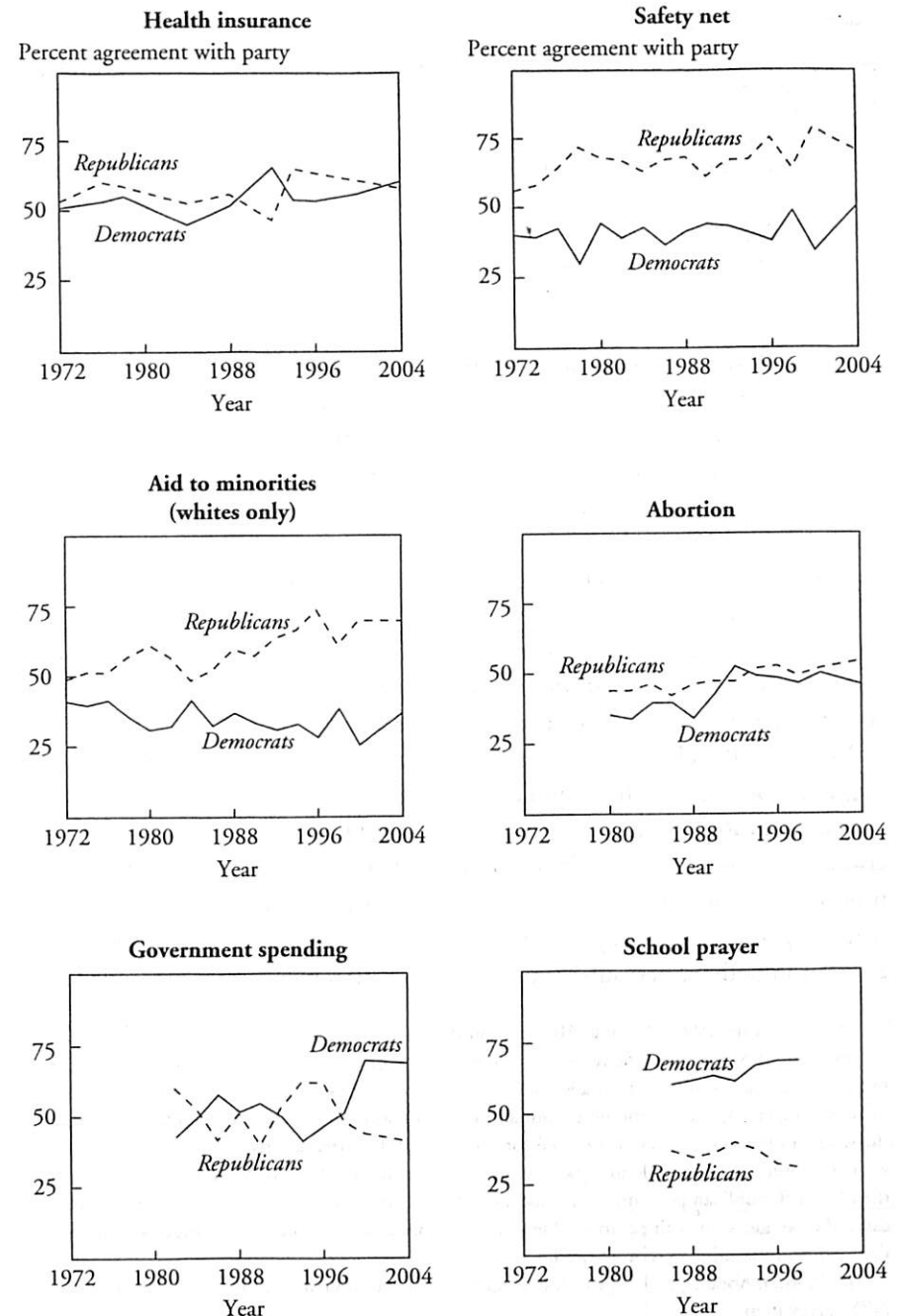
across issues, we calculated the percentage of respondents who shared their party's national position on each issue.³⁴ The results are summarized in the graphs in figure 2-6. The most notable feature of the graphs is the lack of clear patterns. On some issues there appears to have been little sorting, and on other issues the sorting appears to be limited mostly to one party. On the issue of government-provided health insurance, for instance, there is not much sorting going on in either party—in the aggregate, the mass parties look more or less as they did thirty years ago. But on the issue of whether the government should ensure jobs for its citizens and provide a social safety net, Republicans have become somewhat more inclined to share their party's view that government should let each person get ahead on his or her own. Democrats exhibit no trend (unless the uptick in 2004 is the start of one). The tradeoff between more government services and lower taxes shows Democrats becoming better sorted and Republicans becoming somewhat less well sorted.

On the long-standing issue of whether or not the government should help minorities, we limited our analysis to the responses of white respondents, since that is where we would expect partisan sorting to occur. Over time, white Republicans have become better sorted on the issue, with a large majority now in agreement with the party position that blacks and other minorities should help themselves. But Democrats' views are almost unchanged over the thirty-year period. Even as the South realigned, white Democrats did not become any more liberal—and a majority of Democrats, in fact, remain out of step with the party position that government should provide assistance.

Of the issues we examined, the results for abortion and school prayer were perhaps the most interesting. Arguably, there has been no single issue in American politics during the last generation that has attracted as much attention and created as much controversy among party elites as abortion. Indeed, abortion has become a "litmus test" candidates must pass in order to advance to the highest ranks of their party. Not surprisingly, the graph for the abortion issue indicates that as the parties became more clearly identified with pro-life or pro-choice positions at the elite level, the mass public followed suit.

34. All but two of these items are measured using seven-point scales. For simplicity, on the seven-point scales a Democrat takes her party's position if she takes a position to the left of the midpoint, and a Republican takes her party's position if she takes a position to the right of the midpoint. For the school prayer item, we assume that the Democratic position is one of the two more liberal answers and that the Republican position is one of the two more conservative answers. For the coding of the abortion item, see note 36.

Figure 2-6. *Percentage of Respondents Who Took Their Party's Position on Various Issues, 1972–2004.*



Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Table 2-2. *Responses to the Question, When Should Abortion Be Permitted?*

Response	Strong Democrats	Strong Republicans
Never permitted	10	22
Only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger	23	37
For a clear need	13	18
Always as a personal choice	54	23

Source: 2004 National Election Study.

But here, too, we encounter the limits of the sorting thesis. As previous studies have shown, the abortion issue shows evidence of sorting for both parties.³⁵ Yet sorting at the mass level still falls far short of that among party elites. In the 2004 NES surveys, more than 40 percent of self-described “strong Republicans” and “strong Democrats” did not support the stated positions of their party’s elites on abortion—and just about the same percentage of strong Republicans say abortion should always be a legal, personal choice as the percentage who said it should never be legal.³⁶ Thus, even for citizens who claimed the strongest attachments to their political parties (and who were therefore most likely to be aware of their party’s position), there was considerable heterogeneity on this issue of abortion. This can be seen in the data in table 2-2.

While the Republican Party platform is staunchly pro-life, Republicans in the larger electorate are far from unified on the issue. And while Democrats are less divided than Republicans (a majority of strong Democrats say abortion should always be legal), it seems fair to conclude that more than one-third of them believe that abortion laws should be more restrictive than those favored by the national party. Even though abortion has caused a significant amount of sorting to occur in both parties, adherents of the two parties remain internally divided.³⁷

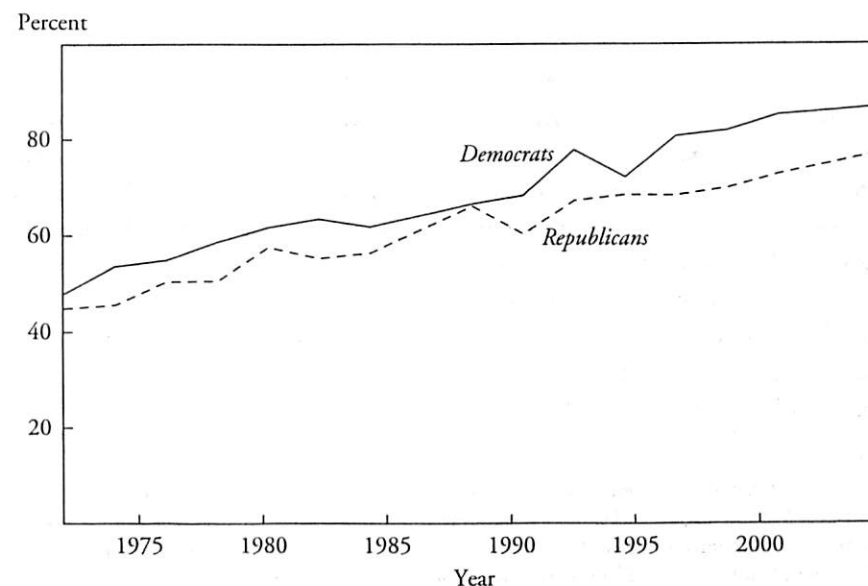
35. See Adams (1997); Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006, chap. 5).

36. The NES item gives the respondent four options: (1) by law, abortion should never be permitted; (2) the law should permit abortion only in the case of rape or incest, or when the woman’s life is in danger; (3) the law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman’s life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established; (4) by law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice. We assume that the official Republican position is that abortion should never be permitted or be permitted only in cases of rape, incest, or a threat to the life of the woman, and we assume the Democratic position is that abortion should always be allowed.

37. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006, chap. 5) show that this conclusion does not depend on the NES survey item.

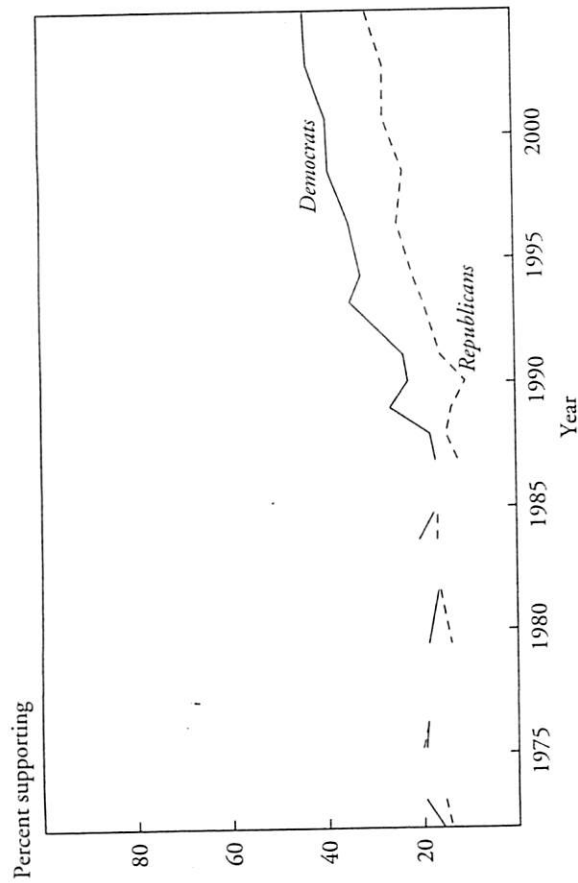
The issue of school prayer is interesting because, here, we encounter a surprising countertrend. Over time, Democrats became more accepting of their party’s position (opposition to mandatory school prayer), while Republicans became less accepting of their party’s position (support for school prayer). In each election year survey, a majority of respondents—including a majority of Republicans and a near-majority of Democrats—supported a moderate position: “The law should allow public schools to schedule time when children can pray silently if they want to.” Even if party elites remained sharply divided over school prayer, the mass public did not.

The issue of equal rights for women exhibits a pattern similar to that for school prayer. Figure 2-7 shows the percentage of self-identified Republicans and Democrats who stated a position on the liberal end of the scale (“women and men should have an equal role” as contrasted with “women’s place is in the home”). By 2004, support for equality for women had become the clear position in both parties—by huge majorities. In other words, over the past twenty-five years or so, Americans have moved toward a consensus on this once-contentious issue.

Figure 2-7. *Percentage of Respondents Who Took a Liberal Position on the Issue of Women’s Equality, 1972–2004.*

Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Figure 2-8. *Percentage of Respondents Who Express Support for Same-Sex Relations, 1972-2004.*



Source: Calculated from the General Social Surveys.

Finally, consider the issue of gay rights. In 2004, same-sex marriage in Massachusetts and San Francisco was a hot-button issue on the campaign trail. While survey organizations have begun to ask people about gay marriage only recently, the General Social Surveys include a long-time series on the public's attitudes on same-sex relations. Figure 2-8 plots the percentages of Democrats and Republicans who stated that same-sex relations are "only wrong sometimes" or "not at all wrong." Among adherents of both parties there is a noticeable trend toward acceptance of the morality of homosexual relationships. Even if Americans are still divided on the issue of gay marriage, there seems to be growing agreement that gays and lesbians deserve equal treatment.³⁸

38. The GSS also asks about support for homosexual civil liberties (whether or not the respondent would allow a homosexual to teach in a college or university, allow a homosexual to give a speech in the local community, or allow a book written by a homosexual in favor of homosexuality to remain in a public library). Analyses of these items not reported here find the same patterns. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006, chap. 6) document a similar pattern of growing tolerance for homosexuals in various spheres of American life.

In sum, abortion is the only social issue we examined that still exerts a strong push on party sorting. The other cultural issues—school prayer, women's rights, and gay rights—are ones on which the partisan attitudes of ordinary citizens seem to be converging rather than diverging. Far from party sorting contributing to a culture war organized around these issues, an increasing number of ordinary Americans appear to be walking away from the conflicts that characterize the party elites.³⁹

Conclusion

Survey data reveal some evidence of party sorting over the past generation in U.S. politics. The party attachments of ordinary Americans have become more closely associated with their ideological self-classifications and with their positions on some issues. Moreover, several broad policy areas have become more closely related to one another. But the same data also show that the increase in sorting over the three decades has been modest, contrary to what is often asserted. This extended consideration of sorting in the mass electorate does not ultimately take us very far toward an explanation of the polarization among political elites.

Our findings contradict any simple assumption that the polarization of America's political class is a direct reflection of a similarly polarized mass electorate, even considering that the electorate is now better sorted than it was a generation ago. While superficially puzzling, common expectations about a tight relationship between constituents and their representatives overlook the intervening role of institutions in the American electoral process. Public officials are not elected by a direct popular vote of the country at large, as our national fixation with polling implicitly suggests. Public officials are instead elected by the electorates of fifty states, 435 congressional districts, and thousands of other local jurisdictions. Within jurisdictions, candidates must win

39. There is always the possibility that sorting may only have occurred for some demographic subgroups. To double-check the patterns (and non-patterns) reported on the six issues, we examined the percentage of respondents in various subgroups who supported their party's positions. We considered three obvious comparisons: men vs. women, Southerners vs. non-Southerners, and whites vs. African-Americans. While subgroups differ in expected ways (women tended to be more liberal than men, whites more conservative than blacks, etc.), the differences are small and the general findings are the same, so in the interest of space we do not include those figures here. The important point is simply that sorting does not seem to differ much by demographic subgroups.

primary elections, where turnout is often extremely low and less representative than in general elections. And in both primary and general elections, candidates sorely need both money and organizational backing in order to appeal to their electorates.⁴⁰ We think that research on popular political preferences points inexorably to the conclusion that the impact of a higher degree of internal party homogeneity is magnified by electoral arrangements. Once again, institutions matter.

The boundaries of political jurisdictions are subject to change and political manipulation (except those for statewide offices). Both academic and popular commentators have pointed an accusing finger at partisan redistricting as a source of elite polarization. The logic of the accusation seems plausible enough: Creating districts that are safe for one party or the other reduces the incentive for candidates to take moderate positions. But as Thomas E. Mann of the Brookings Institution discusses in his essay in this volume, the evidence (however plausible) that partisan gerrymandering is the major culprit in the polarization of the political class seems quite weak.

Our (tentative) view is that primaries are a more likely arena in which to find explanations of political polarization. As noted previously, turnout in primary elections is usually very low, so a few score committed supporters (at least on the lower rungs of the electoral ladder) can be a critically important foundation for a campaign. And, as Matthew S. Levendusky has demonstrated, committed supporters—those who will give money to a candidate or a party, attend a meeting or a rally, or get involved in other ways—are more likely to be found in the ranks of the politically sorted.⁴¹ In the 2004 elections, for example, more than 80 percent of those who engaged in three or more campaign activities (a standard definition of “campaign activist”) were sorted. The structure of American electoral institutions amplifies the influence of such voters—and their impact is felt most in primary elections.

Even though few incumbents face serious primary challenges, it would be a mistake to conclude that primary elections are unimportant. In all likelihood, incumbents act strategically to preclude primary challenges. Even if they are unlikely to face a challenge, candidates take special pains to maintain the support of their party’s hard-core voters. One of us has offered this phenomenon as a possible explanation for the Clinton impeachment vote:

40. The primary election loss of Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (D-Conn.) to a political neophyte in August 2006 comes to mind.

41. Levendusky (2006).

When moderate House Republicans announced that they would vote to impeach President Clinton in the winter of 1998, it was widely interpreted as party pressure, since most such incumbents had indicated they personally favored censure rather than impeachment. The media clearly favored this interpretation, and certainly there was enough bluster within Congress to suggest that it was operating. But it is also very plausible, and consistent with my observation of a few of these members, that they were making a calculation of the following sort: “If I do not vote for impeachment, I will antagonize the hard-core partisans in my district. That certainly may hurt me in the primary, and even if I get by that, it will hurt me in the general election.”⁴²

If members anticipate potential challenges from the ideological poles, they will act preemptively to diminish the chances of that occurring. As sorting occurs, more and more candidates find themselves in such circumstances. Because sorting produces a more homogeneous and a more extreme primary electorate, the pressure increases for candidates to take consistently liberal or conservative positions on most issues, even when moderation would be more helpful in the general election. Thus sorted partisans move candidates toward noncentrist positions.⁴³ And it is not a large leap to presume that these same voters pressure members to support noncentrist policies after being elected.⁴⁴

The interaction between party sorting and primary elections may go some way toward explaining the disconnect between voters and candidates in contemporary American politics. At first glance, it is puzzling that masses and elites look so fundamentally different—a disconnect that contradicts basic assumptions political theorists make about representation. But even if the majority of Americans remain largely centrist, an increasing number of citizens line up on the same end of the spectrum as their party, and these sorted citizens play a critical role in campaigns and elections. Candidates must respond accordingly.⁴⁵

42. Fiorina (2001, p. 157).

43. Aldrich (1995).

44. Brady, Han, and Pope (forthcoming 2007) show that members of Congress whose positions diverge from those of their primary electorates are more likely to attract primary challengers, even if they are more attuned to the sentiments of their districts as a whole.

45. We also believe that candidates today are more personally extreme than they were in previous eras of American politics, perhaps because they emerge from the many cause groups that have joined more traditional groups and organizations on the political scene. Candidates more personally committed to policy positions may be willing to take greater electoral risks than others who value holding office relatively more highly than making policy. Although we think this a very important subject for further research, there is no denying that systematic research in the area is difficult.

Disconnected, or Joined at the Hip?

COMMENT

Alan I. Abramowitz

According to Morris Fiorina and Matthew Levendusky, American politics in the twenty-first century is characterized by “a disconnect between the American people and those who purport to represent them.” A narrow “political class” made up of public officials, party and interest group leaders, activists, financial contributors, and media commentators is deeply divided in its political views. However, contrary to what they claim is the conventional wisdom among pundits and political commentators, the American public is not deeply divided.¹ Using language that could have been taken directly from Philip E. Converse’s seminal study of American public opinion in the 1950s, Fiorina and Levendusky argue that ordinary voters in the United States remain “largely nonideological.”²

But if the public is not deeply divided, what explains the increasing polarization of the political class? This is the major puzzle that Fiorina and Levendusky address. The solution they propose is “sorting,” by which they mean a growing alignment between partisanship and issue positions among the public. This alignment can result from citizens choosing a party based on their issue positions, or from citizens changing their issue positions to bring them more into line with those of their preferred party. Nevertheless, Fiorina and Levendusky insist that sorting is not the same as polarization. Moreover, they argue that this process of

1. This idea was developed in Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006). In fact, Fiorina’s claim that only the “political class” is polarized has been widely—and favorably—cited by pundits and political commentators since the publication of the first edition of *Culture War*. For instance, see Elizabeth Auster, “U.S. Divided, but Analysts Don’t Expect Culture War,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 14, 2004; Eric Mink, “Exploding the Myth of Deep Divisions,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 20, 2004; Jane Eisner, “Americans Staying on the Sidelines of Political Showdown,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 29, 2005; David Brooks, “The More Things Change . . .,” *New York Times*, October 23, 2004; John Tierney, “A Nation Divided? Who Says?” *New York Times*, June 13, 2004; Robert J. Samuelson, “The Politics of Self-Esteem,” *Washington Post*, November 10, 2004; Susan Page, “What’s a Governor Like You Doing in a State Like This?” *USA Today*, May 23, 2005. The recent publication of a very positive article in *The Reader’s Digest* by William Beaman (“A Fractured America?” November 2005) suggests that Fiorina’s thesis has now become the conventional wisdom. For an analysis of media reaction to the first edition of *Culture War* see Baker (2005b).

2. See Converse (1964).

sorting has actually been very limited and that differences between rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans on most issues remain fairly small.³

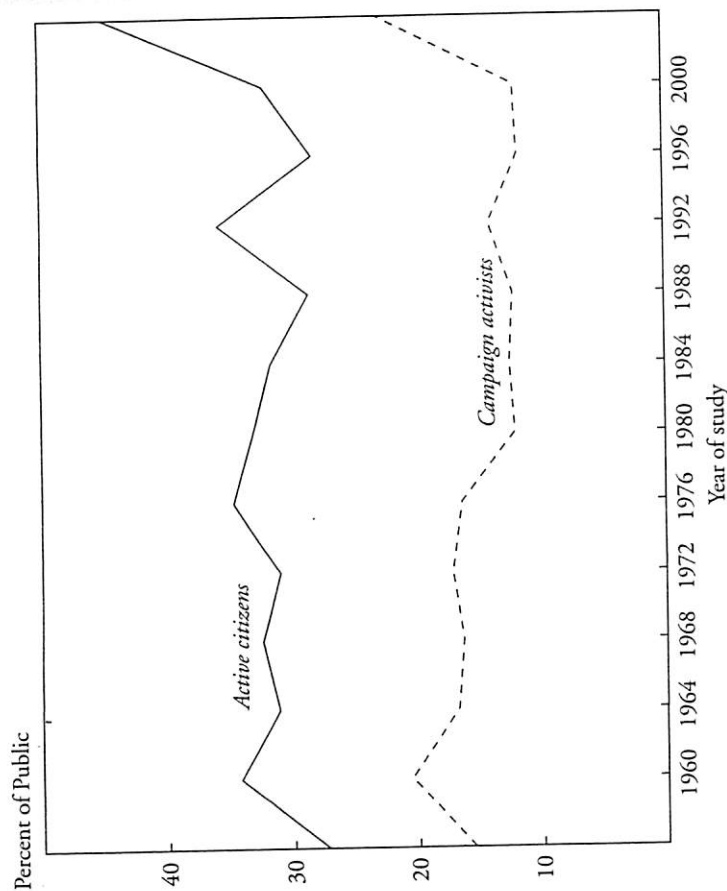
But if sorting has been as limited as Fiorina and Levendusky claim, how can it explain the intense polarization that characterizes the political class in the United States? This kind of limited sorting cannot by itself explain why members of Congress and other elected officials—whose positions depend on maintaining the support of their constituents—are so deeply divided. Some additional explanation is required and, at the end of their chapter, Fiorina and Levendusky argue that “the impact of an increased degree of internal party homogeneity is magnified by electoral arrangements.” Specifically, Fiorina and Levendusky point to primary elections as the culprit: “even if the majority of Americans remain largely centrist, an increasing number of citizens line up on the same end of the spectrum as their party, and these sorted citizens play a critical role in campaigns and elections. Candidates must respond accordingly.”

I believe that while Fiorina and Levendusky are on the right track, they do not go far enough. There is evidence that the American public has become more polarized in its political views over the past twenty years. And while polarization is indeed greatest among the most politically engaged citizens, these engaged citizens are not, as Fiorina and Levendusky claim, a small and unrepresentative fringe group. Politically engaged citizens constitute a substantial portion of the American electorate. Moreover, sorting is not a process separate from polarization—it is a major contributor to polarization. On a wide range of issues, rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans are much more divided today than in the past—and the sharpest divisions are found among the politically engaged partisans who constitute the electoral bases of the two parties.

Political Engagement in the American Public

According to Fiorina and Levendusky, American society is made up of two distinct groups: a tiny political class that is deeply polarized and a mass public that is largely uninterested in politics and nonideological. In reality, the American public is far from homogeneous when it comes to political interest, knowledge, and activity. There are many gradations of political interest and involvement among the public. Some Americans have little or no interest in politics, while

3. A lengthier explanation of the distinction between polarization and sorting can be found in Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006, chap. 4).

Figure 2-9. *The Politically Engaged Public, 1956–2004*

Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Note: Active citizens engaged in at least one activity beyond voting; campaign activists engaged in at least two activities beyond voting.

others care deeply about political issues. Some Americans seldom or never go to the polls, while others not only vote but also try to influence how their friends and neighbors vote, contribute money to candidates, and work in political campaigns. And while the number of Americans who engage in specific political activities varies over time, active citizens usually constitute a substantial share of the public.

Figure 2-9 displays the trend between 1956 and 2004 in the proportion of Americans who engaged in political activities beyond voting according to data from the National Election Studies (NES). Active citizens are defined as those who engaged in at least one activity beyond voting while campaign activists are defined as those who engaged in at least two activities beyond voting. The data

show that the proportion of Americans who engaged in at least one activity beyond voting varied between 25 percent and 35 percent, while the proportion who engaged in at least two activities beyond voting varied between 12 percent and 20 percent. In 2004, however, the proportion of active citizens reached 45 percent, and the proportion of campaign activists reached 23 percent. Both of these figures were all-time highs.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the intense polarization of the American electorate over President George W. Bush and his policies, the 2004 presidential campaign produced a dramatic increase not just in voter turnout, but also in the number of people who engaged in political activities beyond voting. Various measures of political interest and involvement indicated that the American public was more engaged in the 2004 campaign than in any presidential campaign in the past half-century. A record 78 percent of respondents in the 2004 NES survey said that they perceived important differences between the two major parties—and a record 85 percent said that they cared “a good deal” about who won the presidential election. These figures appear to undermine Fiorina and Levendusky’s assumption that ordinary Americans do not generally care much about politics. Ordinary Americans cared a great deal about the outcome of the 2004 presidential election.

The Growth of Polarization in the American Public

Fiorina and Levendusky argue that polarization and sorting are two distinct processes. They define polarization as a shift in the underlying distribution of policy preferences within the public and sorting as an increase in the association between policy preferences and partisanship. As noted earlier in this comment, I view sorting as an important component of polarization. But even by Fiorina and Levendusky’s restrictive definition of polarization, the American public has become more polarized over the past twenty years.

It is difficult to find comparable measures of polarization for the American public over an extended period of time. For example, the seven-point issue scales currently used in the NES surveys were first introduced during the 1970s and 1980s. However, seven questions dealing with policy issues were included in every NES presidential election survey between 1984 and 2004. These questions asked about liberal vs. conservative identification, abortion policy, government aid to blacks, defense spending, government vs. personal responsibility for jobs and living standards, government vs. private responsibility for health insurance, and the tradeoff between government services and spending. I coded

Table 2-3. *Polarization on Seven-Item Policy Scale by Political Engagement, 1984-2004*

Standard deviations

	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	Percentage change (1984-2004)
Nonvoters	2.52	2.52	2.44	2.60	2.68	2.67	+6
Voters	2.89	3.13	3.15	3.39	3.31	3.60	+25
Active citizens	3.15	3.50	3.48	3.70	3.59	3.89	+23
Campaign activists	3.74	3.50	3.50	4.10	3.71	4.27	+14

Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Note: Entries are standard deviations of scores on a seven-item policy scale. Items included in the scale are liberal-conservative identification, defense spending, abortion, government aid to blacks, jobs and living standards, health insurance, and government spending vs. services. Scores on the scale range from -7 (consistently liberal) to +7 (consistently conservative). Active citizens engaged in at least one activity beyond voting. Campaign activists engaged in at least two activities beyond voting.

responses to each of these questions according to whether a respondent was on the liberal side, the conservative side, or neither side (which included those in the middle and those with no opinion) and combined them into a fifteen-point liberal-conservative policy scale with scores ranging from -7 for respondents who took the liberal side on all seven issues to +7 for respondents who took the conservative side on all seven issues.

The standard deviation of the scores on the liberal-conservative policy scale can be used to measure the extent of ideological polarization within a group—the larger the standard deviation, the greater the dispersion of scores around the mean and, therefore, the greater the degree of polarization. Table 2-3 displays the standard deviation of scores on the liberal-conservative policy scale in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 among four groups with varying levels of political engagement: nonvoters, voters, active citizens, and campaign activists.

The data in table 2-3 show that in all six election years campaign activists were the most polarized group, followed by active citizens, voters, and nonvoters. In addition, between 1984 and 2004, all four groups showed some increase in polarization. However, the increase in polarization among nonvoters was very slight, while the increases among voters and active citizens were much larger. According to these results, voters and active citizens were considerably more polarized in 2004 than they were in 1984.

To get an idea of the significance of the increase in polarization between 1984 and 2004, figure 2-10 displays the distribution of scores on the liberal-conservative policy scale among voters in each year. The two distributions look quite different. In 1984, 41 percent of voters were located within one unit of the center of the scale and only 10 percent were located near the left (-7 through -5) and right (5 through 7) extremes. In 2004 only 28 percent of voters were located within one unit of the center and 23 percent were located near the left and right extremes. These results indicate that even by the restrictive definition of polarization proposed by Fiorina and Levendusky, the 2004 electorate was considerably more polarized than the 1984 electorate.

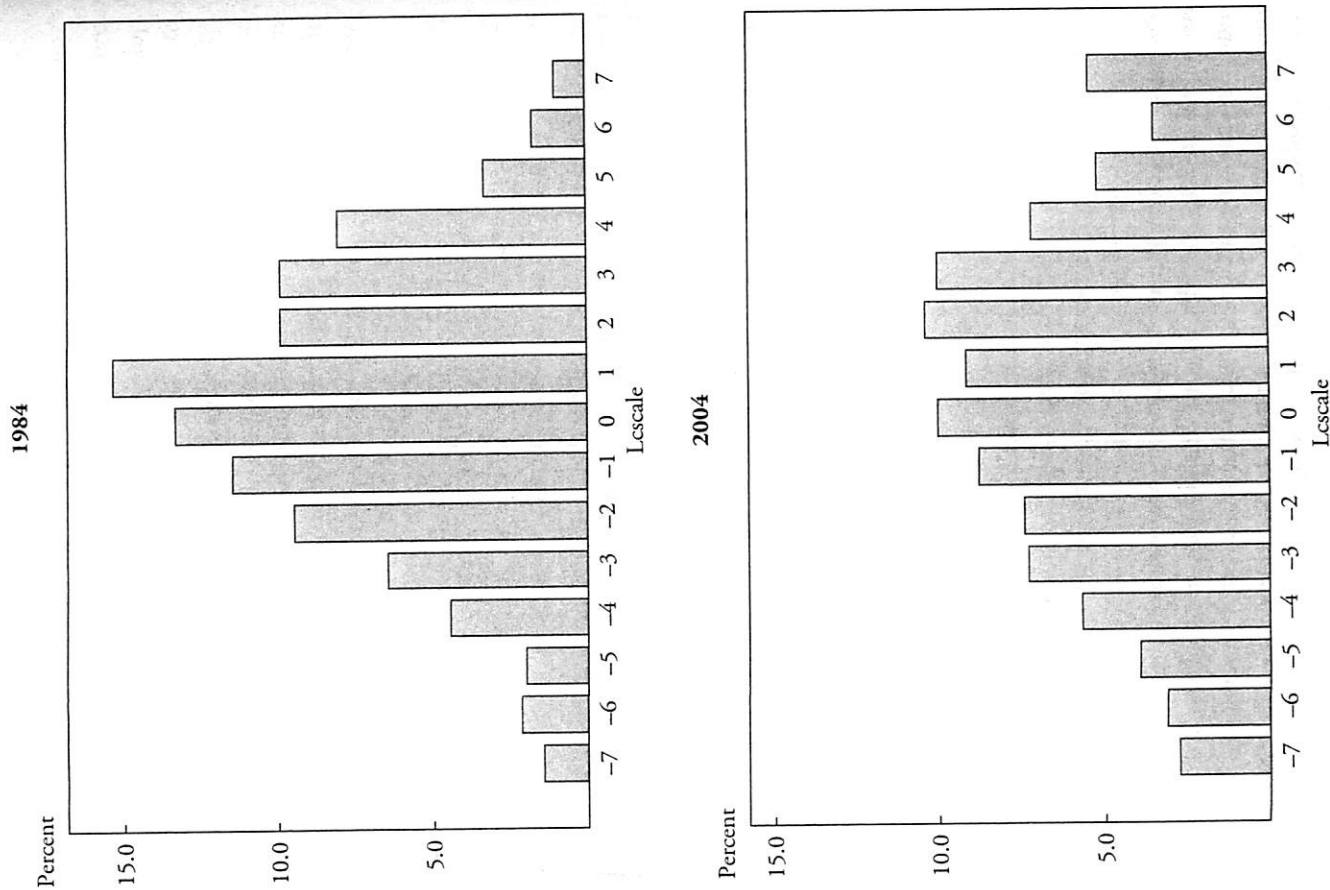
Political Engagement and Ideological Polarization in 2004

While the 2004 electorate was considerably more polarized than the 1984 electorate, ideological divisions were much greater among some types of voters than others. Figure 2-11 shows the distribution of four groups of respondents—nonvoters, voters, active citizens, and campaign activists—on the seven-item liberal-conservative policy scale. For the purpose of clarity, in this figure the original fifteen-point liberal-conservative scale has been collapsed into a five-point scale: the five groupings are consistent liberals (those scoring -7 through -5 on the original scale), moderate liberals (-4 through -2), inconsistent (-1 through +1), moderate conservatives (2 through 4), and consistent conservatives (5 through 7).

The percentage of respondents located at the center of the liberal-conservative scale ranged from 47 percent among nonvoters to 31 percent among voters, 26 percent among active citizens, and 19 percent among campaign activists, while the percentage of respondents located at the left or right extremes of the scale ranged from 8 percent among nonvoters to 18 percent among voters, 29 percent among active citizens, and 35 percent among campaign activists. Thus, as Figure 2-11 shows, ideological polarization was greatest among the most politically engaged members of the public in 2004.

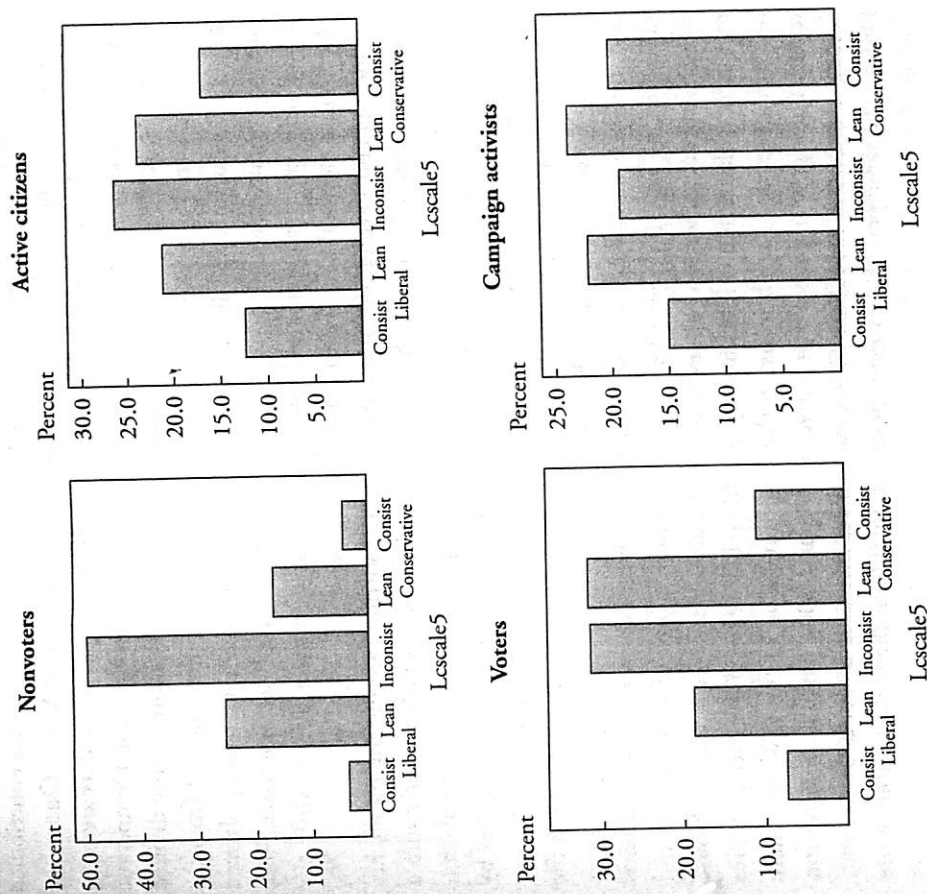
Fiorina and Levendusky's characterization of the American public as non-ideological actually appears to apply to only one of these four groups—nonvoters. Among the minority of Americans who did not vote in 2004, centrists outnumbered consistent liberals and conservatives by a four-to-one ratio. However, among the much larger group of active citizens, consistent liberals and conservatives outnumbered centrists. Among campaign activists—a group that comprised almost one-fourth of the public in 2004—consistent liberals and conservatives outnumbered centrists by a ratio of almost two to one.

Figure 2-10. Polarization of Voters on a Seven-Item Policy Scale, 1984 and 2004



Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Figure 2-11. Polarization on a Seven-Item Policy Scale by Level of Political Engagement, 2004



Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Sorting and Partisan Polarization Among the American Public

Fiorina and Levendusky's attempt to distinguish sorting from polarization is based on a misunderstanding of the role played by political parties in a democratic political system. In a representative democracy, political parties set the policy agenda and organize the policymaking process. Polarization therefore depends not just on the intensity of ideological and cultural conflict in society, but also on the extent to which these conflicts are expressed through political

parties. Partisan polarization makes it much more likely that ideological and cultural conflicts in society will be expressed politically.

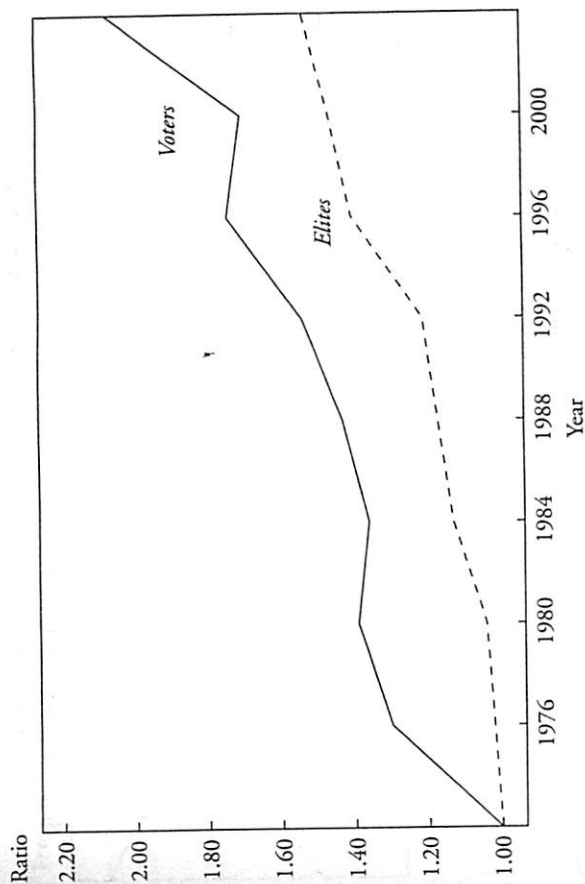
The process that Fiorina and Levendusky refer to as sorting has contributed to a dramatic increase in partisan polarization in the United States. One of the main reasons Democratic and Republican candidates and officeholders are more deeply divided than they were thirty or forty years ago is because Democratic and Republican voters, opinion leaders, and activists are more deeply divided than they were thirty or forty years ago. Far from being disconnected from the public, Democratic and Republican candidates and officeholders are polarized precisely because they are highly responsive to their parties' electoral bases. And, as we will see, the Democratic electoral base is decidedly liberal while the Republican electoral base is decidedly conservative.

Fiorina and Levendusky argue that partisan "sorting" among the public has been quite limited and that the American public remains rather poorly sorted (when compared with political elites). It is indisputable that partisan polarization is greater among political elites than among the American public. Yet by some measures, partisan polarization has increased more rapidly among the voting public than among political elites in recent years. Figure 2-12 compares the trends in partisan polarization between 1972 and 2004 in two groups: voters and members of the U.S. House of Representatives. For voters, polarization is measured by the difference between the average scores of Democratic and Republican identifiers on the seven-point liberal-conservative scale. For House members, polarization is measured by the difference between the average scores of Democrats and Republicans on the first dimension of the DW-nominate scale.⁴ The figure indicates that between 1972 and 2004 partisan polarization among members of the House of Representatives increased by about 50 percent. During the same period, however, polarization among the voting public more than doubled.

Moreover, differences between rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans have increased dramatically over the past thirty years on a wide variety of specific issues. Figure 2-13 displays the trends on four questions that have been included in NES surveys since 1980 or earlier: liberal-conservative identification, government aid to blacks, defense spending, and abortion. On all four of these questions, there has been a substantial increase in partisan polarization over time. On the ideology question, the difference in conservative identification between

4. Polarization scores in 1972 are used as a baseline for both groups.

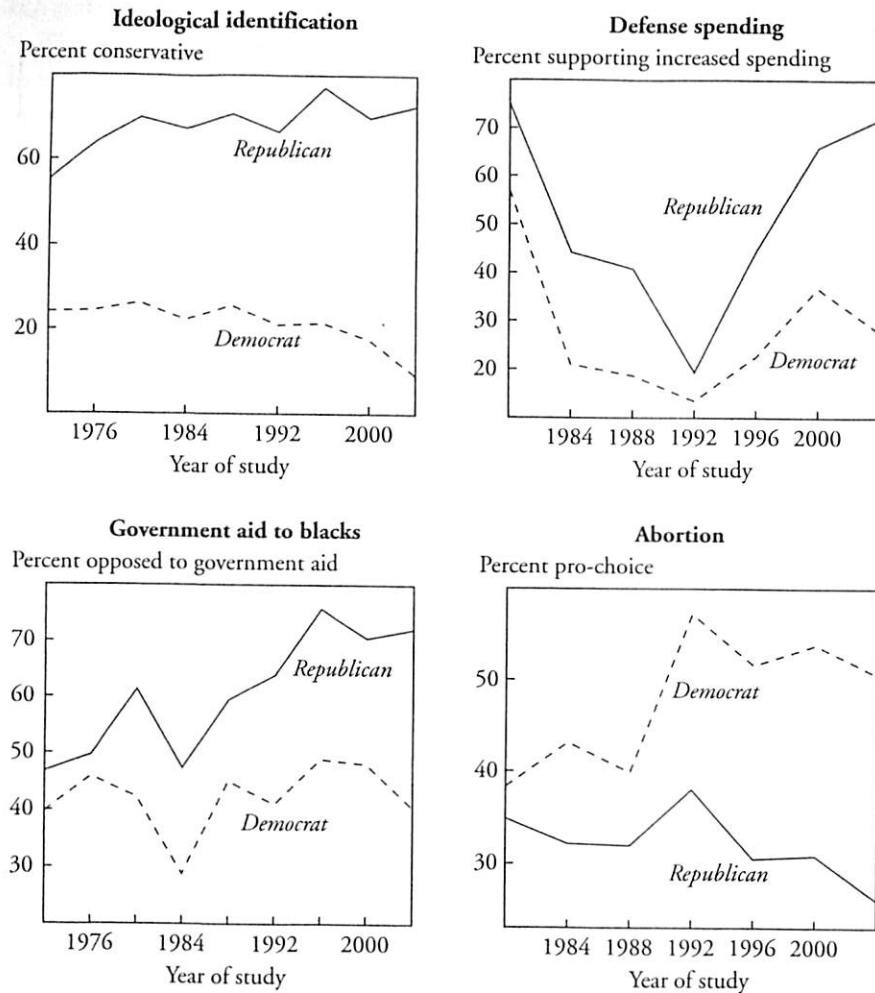
Figure 2-12. Trends in Partisan Polarization among Elites and Voters, 1972–2004^a



Sources: National Election Studies cumulative data file; DW-nominate scores compiled by Keith T. Poole (voteview.com/dwnomin.htm).

a. The trend in polarization among voters is based on the difference between mean scores of Democratic and Republican identifiers and leaners on the seven-point liberal-conservative scale. The trend in polarization among elites is based on the difference between mean scores of Democratic and Republican members of the U.S. House of Representatives on the first dimension DW-nominate scale. Polarization scores from 1972 are used as a baseline for both series.

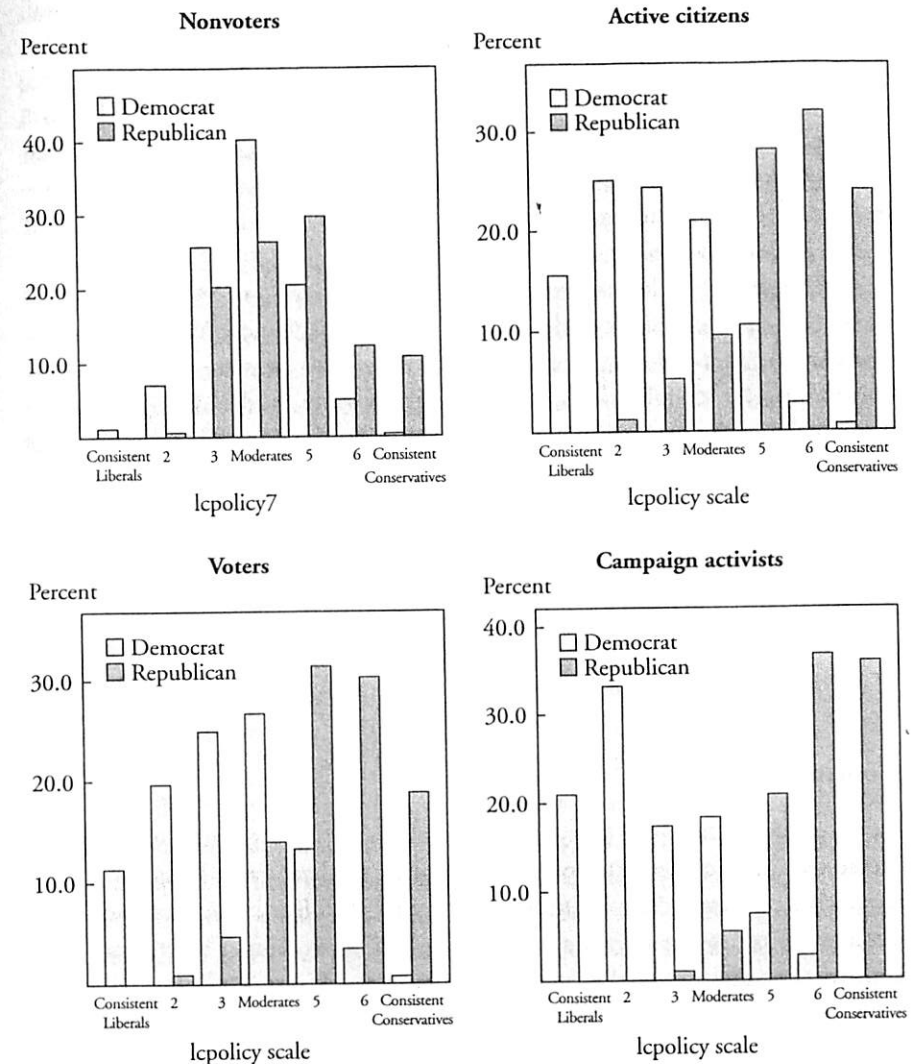
Democratic and Republican voters increased from 31 percentage points in 1972 to 64 percentage points in 2004. On the question of government aid to blacks, the difference in opposition to government aid between Democratic and Republican voters increased from only 11 percentage points in 1972 to 38 percentage points in 2004. On the issue of defense spending, the difference in support for increased defense spending between Democratic and Republican voters increased from only 6 percentage points in 1992 to 45 percentage points in 2004. Finally, on the issue of abortion, the difference in support for the pro-choice position between voters of the two parties increased from only 3 percentage points in 1980 to 25 percentage points in 2004. This evidence indicates that partisan polarization has increased on a wide range of issues over the past few decades. On all four issues, in fact, the differences between Democratic and Republican voters in 2004 were the largest ever recorded.

Figure 2-13. Trends in Partisan Polarization on Various Issues^a

Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

a. Based on all voters identifying with or leaning toward a party.

Within the 2004 electorate, moreover, polarization was greatest among the most politically engaged partisans. Figure 2-14 illustrates the degree of partisan polarization on a ten-item liberal-conservative policy scale in the 2004 NES survey among nonvoters, voters, active citizens, and campaign activists. The ten items included in the scale were ideological identification, abortion, government aid to blacks, defense spending, health insurance, jobs and living standards, gay

Figure 2-14. Partisan Polarization by Level of Political Engagement, 2004^a

Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

a. The scale is based on ideological self-identification, abortion, government aid to blacks, jobs and living standards, health insurance, gay marriage, death penalty, government spending vs. services, defense spending, and diplomacy vs. military force.

marriage, diplomacy vs. military force, government spending vs. services, and the death penalty. On each item, respondents' answers were coded as liberal, moderate/undecided, or conservative. The scores were then summed to create a twenty-one-point scale ranging from -10 (consistently liberal) to +10 (consistently conservative). This twenty-one-point scale was then collapsed into a seven-point liberal-conservative scale to simplify the presentation of results. Each set of graphs in Figure 2-14 displays the distribution of Democratic and Republican identifiers, including leaning independents, on the collapsed seven-point liberal-conservative policy scale.

Once again, only the least engaged of the four groups—nonvoters—seems to fit Fiorina and Levendusky's description of a nonideological American public. Only among nonvoters do we find substantial overlap between the Democratic and Republican distributions. Voters, active citizens, and campaign activists were much more polarized. Ideologically consistent partisans (liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans) made up only 41 percent of nonvoters compared with 68 percent of voters, 74 percent of active citizens, and 82 percent of campaign activists. Moderate partisans made up 35 percent of nonvoters, 20 percent of voters, 15 percent of active citizens, and 12 percent of campaign activists. Finally, ideologically inconsistent partisans (conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans) made up 24 percent of nonvoters but only 12 percent of voters, 11 percent of active citizens, and 6 percent of campaign activists.

Conclusions

Fiorina and Levendusky's characterization of the typical American voter as disinterested, uninformed, and nonideological might have been accurate during the 1950s era studied by Philip Converse in 1964. But it is not an accurate description of the American electorate in the first decade of the twenty-first century. For one thing, the American electorate today is far better educated than the public of the 1950s. In 1952, 62 percent of American adults had not finished high school and only 15 percent had received any college education. In 2004 only 9 percent of American adults had not finished high school and 62 percent had received at least some college education. As a result of this dramatic rise in education levels, a much larger proportion of today's electorate is capable of understanding and using ideological concepts. In addition, the ideological cues provided by party leaders are much clearer now than in the 1950s. Today, only the most politically inert segment of the public—nonvoters—can accurately be described as disinterested, uninformed, and nonideological. This

description clearly does not apply to voters, much less to active citizens or campaign activists.

The evidence presented here indicates that the ideological orientations of politically engaged partisans are very similar to the ideological orientations of Democratic and Republican candidates and officeholders. Among active citizens and campaign activists, very few Democrats are found to the right of center and very few Republicans are found either in the center or to the left of center. There is almost no overlap between the two distributions.

Nor are these politically engaged partisans a small and unrepresentative fringe group—they constitute a substantial proportion of the American electorate. In 2004, active citizens made up 46 percent of all Democratic identifiers and 49 percent of all Republican identifiers. Campaign activists made up 25 percent of all Democratic identifiers and 24 percent of all Republican identifiers. They are the citizens who vote in primaries, contribute money to parties and candidates, work on campaigns, and pay attention to the actions of their elected representatives. While their support may not be enough to win an election, no candidate or elected official can afford to ignore them.

COMMENT

Gary C. Jacobson

In *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, Morris P. Fiorina (with coauthors Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope) argued that the increasing polarization observed in American political life over the past several decades is almost entirely confined to a narrow political class—politicians, activists, commentators, journalists, and other political junkies. In his view, popular polarization—or at least the aspect of it characterized as a “culture war”—is a myth. He reads the survey evidence to show that the distribution of Americans' opinions on cultural issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and gun control has not become measurably more polarized, except among the minority of citizens most visible in politics as candidates, activists, and professional observers. Ordinary citizens, according to this argument, do not share the passion or extremism of the active stratum but are forced into what appear to be polar camps because the alternatives offered by political elites exclude centrist options.⁵

5. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006, chaps. 4–7).

Fiorina recognized one important exception to his analysis—that on some issues Americans had become modestly more polarized along party lines. This was not taken to undermine his main point, however, as he demonstrated that shifts in policy positions taken by the parties or the emergence of a new issue dimension could divide the electorate even if individuals' opinions did not change at all.⁶ But this important distinction between polarization in general and *partisan* polarization raised the possibility that, even with no change in the distribution of mass opinion (or even increasing signs of consensus on some formerly divisive issues), opinion cleavages might be occurring increasingly along party lines, fueling a more polarized national politics.⁷

In this volume, Fiorina and Matthew S. Levendusky consider whether ordinary Americans have in fact responded to elite polarization by sorting themselves more consistently into the appropriate party, given their ideological stances and positions on enduring national issues. They find that such sorting has occurred but conclude that “the increase in sorting over the three decades has been modest” and that “extended consideration of sorting in the mass electorate does not ultimately take us very far toward an explanation of elite polarization” and thus cannot solve what Keith Poole has called the “central puzzle of modern American politics,” which is the “disconnect between the American people and those who purport to represent them.”

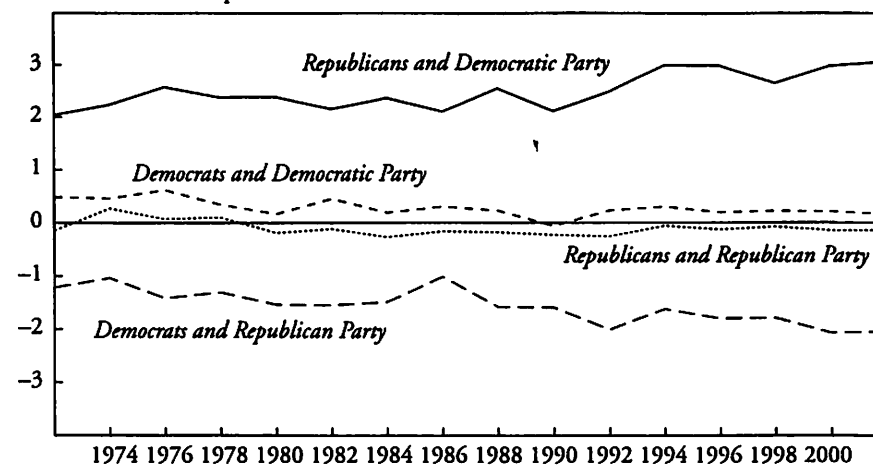
In reaching this conclusion, I think the authors downplay their own evidence of popular polarization. For example, in discussing the issue of same-sex relations, they seem to regard the increase in its acceptance among identifiers of both political parties as evidence that “partisan attitudes . . . seem to be converging rather than diverging” despite the emergence (visible in their figure 2-8) of a substantial partisan gap on this question since the late 1980s. Of course, this may mean only that people with different priors can read this kind of visual evidence differently. But less amenable to suggestion is the evidence presented in Alan I. Abramowitz's critique, which shows that respondents vary widely in political interest, sophistication, and activity, and that the higher their scores on these dimensions the more they have sorted themselves into the appropriate party. Moreover, the proportion of active and sophisticated voters is substantial, so sorting (and thereby partisan polarization) has extended to a much larger share of the electorate than implied by Fiorina and Levendusky's analysis. I would offer similar evidence and arguments

6. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006, chap. 9).

7. See Evans (2003).

Figure 2-15. *Ideological Differences between Partisan Voters and Their Parties, 1972–2004*

Mean difference on 7-point liberal-conservative scale



Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

had Abramowitz not saved me the trouble.⁸ Because he has, I can proceed to three additional points:

1. *A first-order solution to Fiorina and Levendusky's puzzle is easy. National politicians, while growing increasingly divided along partisan and ideological lines, have not grown more distant from their supporters. At least as measured by the subjective estimates of ordinary partisans, there is no "disconnect" to explain.*

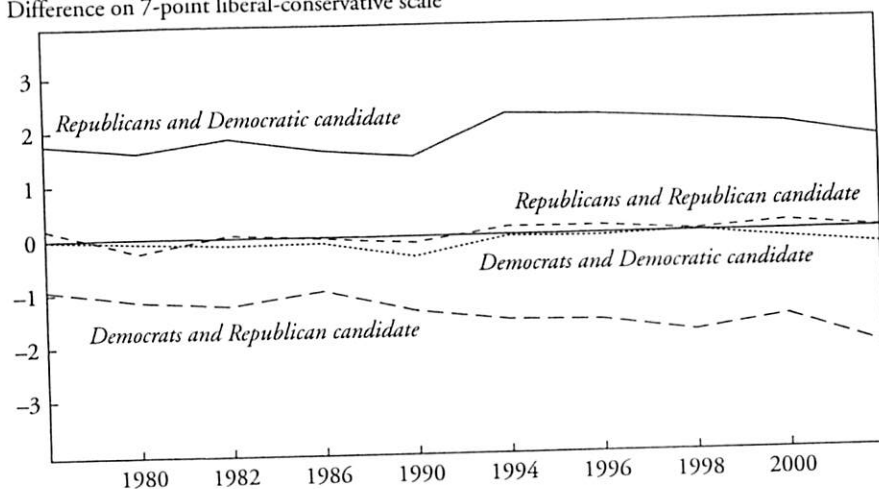
If elite polarization were separating representatives from the more moderate citizens who elect them, we would expect the distance between respondents' self-described ideological locations and those they estimate for their party and its candidates to grow over time. But this has not happened. Figure 2-15 displays the difference between the self-placement of partisan voters and their placement of the parties on the seven-point liberal-conservative scale in National Election Studies (NES) surveys from 1972 through 2004.⁹ Democrats have tended to place themselves slightly to the right of their party, and Republicans slightly to the left of theirs—but the distance between partisans and their

8. Indeed, I have offered similar evidence and arguments in the past. See, for example, Jacobson (2000).

9. The scale ranges from 1 (most liberal) to 7 (most conservative), with 4 as the middle point.

Figure 2-16. *Ideological Differences between Partisans and House Candidates, 1978–2004*

Difference on 7-point liberal-conservative scale



Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

own parties is small and, more important, did not increase at all over this period. In fact, among Democrats the distance has narrowed a bit. What has changed is the gap between partisans' self-placements and the perceived locations of the rival party, which has grown by a full point on the scale for both Republican and Democratic voters.¹⁰

Similarly, the mean distance between perceived ideological locations of partisans and their own party's House candidates has been modest all along and does not increase over time (figure 2-16). Moreover, Republicans place themselves on average slightly to the *right* of their candidates, and Democrats place themselves slightly to the *left* of theirs. Again, the ideological gap widens only between partisan voters (especially Democrats) and the other party's candidates (although it is not as wide for candidates as for parties). Elite polarization has not, by this evidence, separated representatives from their own supporters, but leaders and parties have come to be viewed as notably more distant ideologically by those on the other side. Thus the only voters who might have reason to be alienated by the

10. Both trends are significant at .001. The same results hold even if nonvoters are included in the analysis, although the degree of change in perceived distance from the rival party is slightly smaller.

Table 2-4. *Ideological Extremism and Approval of Senators' Performance*

	Republicans		Democrats		Independents	
	Coefficient	Standard error	Coefficient	Standard error	Coefficient	Standard error
Republican senators						
Ideological extremity ^a	4.97**	1.77	-12.74***	3.35	-6.50***	1.78
Constant	75.88***	2.25	29.07***	2.78	43.03***	2.26
Adjusted R ²	.13		.41		.21	
Number of cases	48		48		48	
Democratic senators						
Ideological extremity ^a	-12.63***	3.26	-1.34	2.94	-4.45	2.67
Constant	30.16***	3.45	71.41***	3.14	51.55***	2.86
Adjusted R ²	.25		-.02		.04	
Number of cases	43		43		43	

Source: The dependent variable (percent approving of the senators' performance) is from the average of nine monthly polls taken between May 2005 and January 2006 by SurveyUSA (www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html).

a. Log of absolute DW-nominate score.

**p < .01.

***p < .001.

growing extremism of their representatives are those who did not support them in the first place.

Additional evidence on this point is supplied by a new set of statewide polls, which ask, among other things, whether respondents approve of the job performance of each of their state's senators.¹¹ Table 2-4 lists the results of regressing partisans' approval ratings on the senators' ideological extremity (measured as the log of their absolute DW-nominate scores).¹² Ideological extremism had a large negative effect on approval ratings offered by people who identified with the party opposite a given senator. The coefficients indicate that approval was about 35 percentage points lower for the most ideologically

11. In May 2005, SurveyUSA, a polling firm whose main clients for its political surveys are local news media, began conducting monthly statewide automated telephone surveys of approximately 600 respondents in all fifty states. Among the questions asked are party identification and job performance approval of each state's senators. For a description and assessment of these data, see Jacobson (2006).

12. DW-nominate scores range from -1 (most liberal) to +1 (most conservative). Extremity is measured as the distance from the center, or 0. I use a log transformation because it provides a better fit to the data; linear results support the same substantive argument. Data are not available for the nine senators first elected in 2004, so they are omitted from the analyses reported in the table.

extreme senator than for the least extreme senator in either party. In contrast, ideological extremism had a significant *positive* effect on Republicans' approval of Republican senators (approval of the most conservative Republican is estimated to be 14 points higher than of the most moderate) and no effect at all on how Democratic respondents rated Democratic senators. More extreme senators received lower marks from independents, but in the case of Republicans the loss was almost completely offset by the gain among their own partisans. For Democrats, the effect fell short of statistical significance. Again, ideologues in office may alienate rival partisans, but they do not appear to displease their own partisans in the least.

2. Fiorina and Levendusky's analysis also ignores how sorting may have strengthened partisan sentiments, for either that or some other process is required to explain increasingly divergent partisan responses to national politicians and issues.

Fiorina and Levendusky refer to events such as the Clinton impeachment and the Florida election debacle as sources of the "conventional wisdom" that "American political life had become highly polarized" during the 1990s without acknowledging that partisan polarization on these issues was by no means limited to elites. Ordinary citizens were also fundamentally divided by party in their responses to these events.¹³ They mention Karl Rove's strategy of mobilizing the Republican base to ensure the reelection of President George W. Bush without noticing that its very success demonstrates the widespread susceptibility of ordinary voters to partisan and ideological appeals. Partisan sorting has not only produced more ideologically coherent rival electoral coalitions; it has evidently left a large proportion of ordinary citizens primed to respond in partisan terms at the slightest provocation.

Partisan priming is of course most visible in the public's responses to President Bush and virtually anything connected to him. In the eighty-nine Gallup Polls taken between January 2004 and April 2006, his approval rating among Republicans has averaged 88 percent, among Democrats 14 percent. This 74 percentage point difference makes Bush the most polarizing president on record by a wide margin.¹⁴ Partisan divisions extend to (and have been reinforced by) the president's policies. Between World War II and the March 2003 invasion of

Iraq, partisan differences in support of U.S. military actions were relatively small. The partisan gap averaged about 5 percentage points for Vietnam, between 11 and 12 points for Korea, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, and about 20 points for the Gulf War in 1991. Partisan differences in support of the Iraq war, in contrast, have averaged 58 points since the beginning of 2004, with an average of 79 percent of Republicans but only 21 percent of Democrats supporting the venture. Virtually every question concerning the Iraq war, its premises and its consequences, now produces widely divergent partisan responses.¹⁵

On a host of domestic issues—taxes, Social Security reform, energy development—surveys also find substantial partisan divisions that grow even wider when Bush's name is attached to any of the policy alternatives. For instance, one poll taken in March 2005 found that 42 percent of Democrats supported "a plan in which people who chose to could invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market," but only 11 percent said they supported "George W. Bush's proposals on Social Security." Seventy-seven percent of Republicans backed the stock market option and 74 percent supported "Bush's proposals," so the mention of Bush increased the already notable partisan gap from 35 to 63 percentage points in the survey.¹⁶ More recent examples come from public responses to questions about the administration's warrantless wiretaps, with partisan gaps exceeding 50 points on some questions.¹⁷

There are, of course, some issues that produce only small partisan divisions. For instance, large majorities in both parties panned Congress and the president's intervention in the Terry Schiavo case, supported Bush's education reforms, and favored spending billions of dollars to rebuild New Orleans. But large party differences have become so common that it now makes little sense to analyze survey data on political questions *without* paying attention to the partisan breakdowns.

The influence of popular partisanship is not confined to opinions about politicians and issues. In line with the classic psychological conception of party identification, political perceptions and beliefs are also now strongly shaped by

13. Jacobson (2007, pp. 19–20, 61–65).

14. Before Bush, party differences in presidential approval ratings never exceeded 70 percentage points in any single Gallup Poll and never averaged more than 63 points for any one quarter. The gap for Bush exceeded 70 points in sixty-four of the eighty-two Gallup surveys taken between January 2004 and February 2006, surpassing 80 points in six of them, with quarterly averages ranging from 71 to 79 points and an overall average of 72 points. See Jacobson (2007, pp. 5–8).

15. Jacobson (2007, pp. 131–38, 223–32).

16. Jacobson (2007, pp. 214–16).

17. A CBS News/*New York Times* poll, conducted February 22–26, 2006, asked two forms of a question on whether respondents approved of the wiretaps. In the version that mentioned the threat of terrorism as a reason, 83 percent of Republicans but only 33 percent of Democrats approved. When terrorism was not specifically mentioned, 76 percent of Republicans but only 22 percent of Democrats approved. CBS News, "President Bush, the Ports, and Iraq," February 27, 2006 (www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/poll_bush_022706.pdf).

partisanship. Between mid-2004 and mid-2006, for example, an average of 76 percent of Republicans—but only 27 percent of Democrats—viewed the Iraq war as going somewhat or very well. Similarly, an average of 76 percent of Republicans but only 29 percent of Democrats believed the war has made the United States safer from terrorism.¹⁸ As late as March 2005, long after unchallenged official reports had concluded otherwise, 79 percent of Republicans still believed that Saddam Hussein's Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction just before the U.S. invasion, while only 37 percent of Democrats held this view. Republicans were also much more likely to believe—again, contrary to the highly publicized findings of official investigations—that Saddam was complicit in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (an average of 46 percent among Republicans and 27 percent among Democrats).¹⁹

The Iraq war, like its initiator, has provoked unusually strong partisan responses, to be sure, but the same divergence in perceptions of reality applies to other domains as well. For example, partisan differences in perceptions of how the economy is performing have become just as wide as those regarding the Iraq war (see figure 2-17). From the beginning of 2004 through April 2006, the gap between those who rated the economy as “good” or “very good” has averaged 48 points higher among Republicans than Democrats. Class differences in the party coalitions may have something to do with this gap (economic circumstances improved more for upper-income than lower-income groups), but not enough to account for such sharply divergent readings of economic conditions by ordinary Democrats and Republicans.

It is these regular manifestations of partisan division—along with record-high levels of party-line voting in recent elections—that make it hard to believe that mass partisan polarization is illusory or that partisan polarization is limited to a narrow segment of the electorate. To be sure, the degree of polarization varies across voters, as Abramowitz demonstrates, as well as across political leaders and issues. (However, no senator or governor is as polarizing as Bush—and a few even receive higher marks from rival partisans than from their own.)²⁰ Nonetheless, that ordinary citizens are now so ready to respond in sharply divergent partisan terms to such a variety of political stimuli is, I think, strong evidence that underlying partisan divisions are strong, genuine, and widespread.

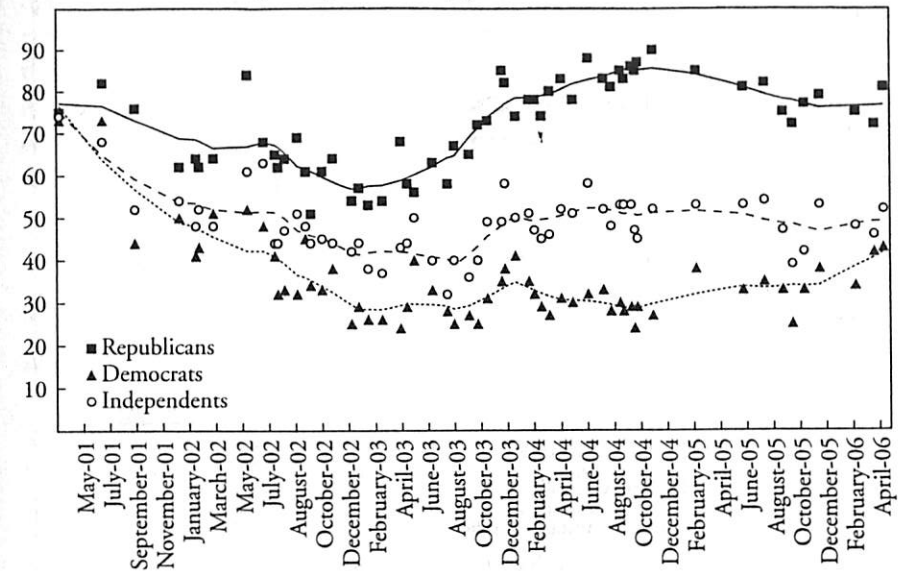
18. Jacobson (2007, pp. 224, 232).

19. Jacobson (2007, pp. 140–41).

20. Jacobson (2006).

Figure 2-17. *Rating the Performance of the Economy, by Party Identification, 2001–05*

Percent who said economy was “good” or “very good”

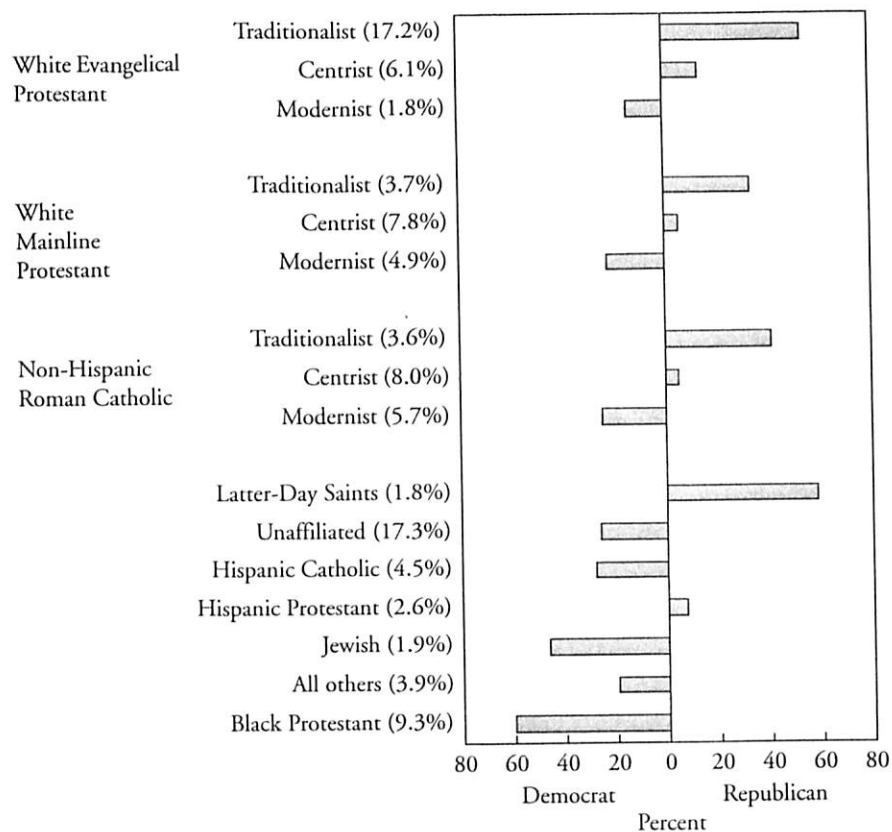


Source: CBS News/New York Times polls.

3. *These underlying partisan divisions have a substantial cultural component; if they are not necessarily indicative of a “culture war,” they do provide a popular basis for plenty of partisan conflict on cultural issues.*

Consider the results shown in figure 2-18 of a study of religion and political behavior in 2004 reported by James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, Corwin E. Smidt, and John C. Green.²¹ Regardless of denomination, religious traditionalists—defined by orthodox or fundamentalist beliefs, regular participation, and identification with religious movements—are overwhelmingly Republican. Of the 26 percent of respondents Guth and his associates classified as religious traditionalists or Latter Day Saints (LDS/Mormons), 69 percent identified themselves as Republicans, but only 20 percent as Democrats. Of the 36 percent who were classified as modernist in religion, unaffiliated, Jewish, or “other,” 50 percent

21. Guth and others (2005).

Figure 2-18. *Religion and Party Identification, 2004*^a

Source: Guth and others (2005, table 3).

a. Percentages given after each group indicate the proportion of those who self-identify as traditionalist, centrist, or modernist within the overall religious affiliation noted.

identified themselves as Democrats, but only 25 percent as Republicans. Democrats also held a wide lead among minorities (except Hispanic Protestants), while religious centrists (22 percent of respondents) gave Republicans an edge, 45 percent to 38 percent.

Restated in terms of party coalitions, 45 percent of Republicans were religious traditionalists or LDS, and only 22 percent were from the modernist/unaffiliated/Jewish/other categories. Twenty-five percent of Republicans were religious centrists, and only 8 percent were minorities of any kind. In contrast, 44 percent

of Democrats were from the modernist category, 24 percent were minorities, 20 percent were religious centrists, and only 13 percent were religious traditionalists or LDS.²² Thus the largest factions in each party were at polar opposites on the religious-cultural divide, and the parties also had very different ethnic compositions. It would be surprising, then, if issues touching on these divisions—abortion, same-sex marriage, stem-cell research, “intelligent design” in science classes, assisted suicide, sex education, faith-based delivery of social services, affirmative action, immigration—did *not* provoke clear partisan differences.

REJOINDER

Morris P. Fiorina and Matthew S. Levendusky

We appreciate the attention given to our analysis by Alan I. Abramowitz and Gary C. Jacobson. In this rejoinder we will address a number of points of disagreement, as well as some questions that remain open for further research.

Response to Abramowitz's Comments

Alan Abramowitz's critique seems aimed at both *Culture War?* and our chapter in this volume. He makes two arguments: First, the extent of popular polarization is much larger than argued in *Culture War?* and the extent of party sorting is much greater than we argue in our paper. Second, the highly engaged portion of the electorate (which we all agree is more polarized than the larger mass of unengaged citizens) is much larger than we assume. In this rejoinder we show that the first claim is incorrect, and the second is highly contestable.

Before addressing his arguments, we offer one preliminary observation: Even if one were to accept Abramowitz's procedures and analyses uncritically (which we do not), much of the temporal change that he finds is due to sudden changes in many of the variables that occurred in 2004. Consider a modified version of Abramowitz's table 2-3 (see table 2-5). As shown in the last two columns, the change from 2000 to 2004 accounts for 40 percent of the total change among voters since 1984, 40 percent of the total change among “active citizens,” and

22. Percentages total 101 because of rounding.

Table 2-5. *Polarization on the Abramowitz Scale: The Importance of 2004*
Standard deviations

	1984	2000	2004	Change 1984–2004 (percent)	Change 1984–2000 (percent)
Nonvoters	2.52	2.68	2.67	6	6
Voters	2.89	3.31	3.60	25	15
Active citizens	3.15	3.59	3.89	23	14
Campaign activists	3.74	3.71	4.27	14	–1

Source: Drawn from Abramowitz, table 2-3 in this volume.

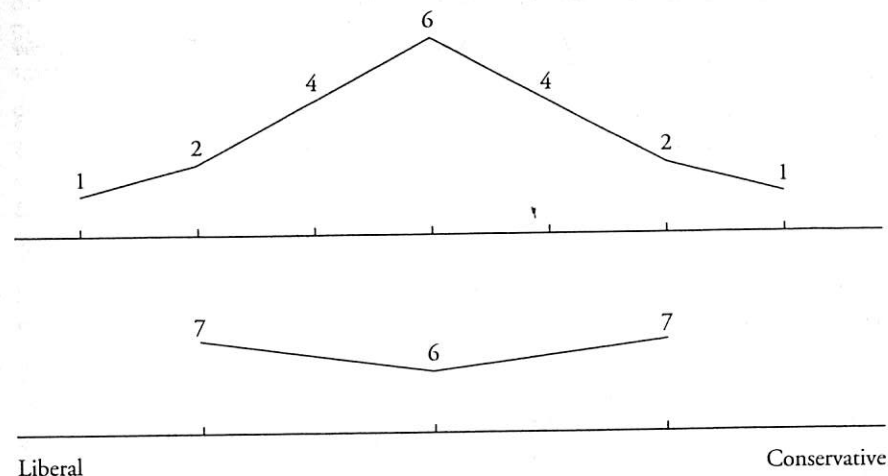
all of the change among “campaign activists,” who show virtually no change at all between 1984 and 2000. If Abramowitz had penned this critique before the 2004 election, when the first edition of *Culture War?* was written, he would have a much weaker case. Perhaps 2004 will prove to be a representative election from a new era—and perhaps it was just a blip. But let us take a closer look at Abramowitz’s analysis.

How Much Polarization?

Abramowitz tracks responses on seven issue scales included in the National Election Studies (NES) since 1984. Each question asks respondents to place themselves at one of seven positions running from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Abramowitz’s procedures—which involve categorizing, aggregating, and categorizing again—systematically exaggerate differences and changes in the response patterns. First, he converts fine-grained measures to categorical measures by recoding everyone to the left of the scale’s midpoint as a liberal and everyone to the right as a conservative, thereby equating “slightly liberal” (or “slightly conservative”) responses with “extremely liberal” (or “extremely conservative”) responses. As figure 2-19 shows, this recoding makes public opinion on a given issue look more polarized than before the recoding.

Next Abramowitz aggregates the seven scales and recategorizes the sum into a five-category measure that runs from “consistent liberal” to “consistent conservative.” Consider a respondent with the following vector of responses on the seven-point scales that underlie the data in his tables and figures: (4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5). That looks like a quite moderate response pattern to us—five “middle-of-the-road” responses plus two “slightly conservative” responses. But Abramowitz’s procedures (number of conservative positions minus number of liberal positions)

Figure 2-19. *The Abramowitz Recoding Exaggerates Polarization*



Source: Drawn by the authors.

assign this person a 2, which puts her in his “moderately conservative” category.²³ Similarly, (3, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4) becomes –2, a “moderate liberal.” Differences of a single scale position on different issues suffice to separate these respondents by half the maximum possible distance on Abramowitz’s five-category scale.

Now, looking at change over time, if the first respondent becomes slightly more conservative on three issues, resulting in (4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 5), she would now score 5 on Abramowitz’ aggregate issue index, which makes this moderate conservative a “consistent conservative,” the same as a person who puts himself at position 7 on all seven scales. Similarly, with a slight leftward movement on three issues, resulting in (3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4), the formerly moderate liberal respondent becomes a “consistent liberal,” the same as someone who puts herself at position 1 on all seven scales. In sum, we believe that recoding the data, adding it up, and recoding it again exaggerates both the amount of division and the increase in division.²⁴

23. Also note that a response vector like (1, 1, 1, 4, 7, 7, 7) gets assigned the same score (0, or moderate), as the response vector (4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4), although the first vector would seem an unlikely response pattern.

24. Abramowitz has asserted that because he uses the same procedures at all times, the changes he identifies are real. Our point is that the changes are exaggerated because marginal changes in the underlying scale positions can push respondents across the boundaries between his larger categories.

Table 2-6. *Changes in Policy Views, 1984–2004*

Percentage point change on scale from liberal to conservative

	<i>Extremely liberal -----→ Extremely conservative</i>						
<i>Polarization</i>							
Jobs/standard-of-living scale	2	1	0	-2 (-7) ^a	0	1	3
Liberal-conservative scale	0	2	3	3 (-7)	-1	3	1
<i>Left shift</i>							
Health insurance	6	2	3	0 (-9)	0	-2	-2
Spending/services	5	4	5	-3 (-5)	-3	-3	-2
<i>Right shift</i>							
Aid to blacks	0	-2	-5	-5 (-7)	-1	6	8
Defense spending	-5	-4	-3	-5 (-4)	8	4	2
<i>No change</i>							
Abortion	1	-1			3		-1

Source: Calculated from the National Election Studies cumulative data file.

a. Numbers in parentheses are percentage point changes when "don't knows" are treated as middle-of-the-road.

How much do Abramowitz's manipulations exaggerate polarization? Consider the raw data. Table 2-6 shows the percentage point differences between the responses on the seven issue items asked in 1984 and 2004 (the rows do not sum to zero because of rounding). Ignore sampling error, declining response rates, and other complicating factors—assume these numbers are exact. On two scales—liberal-conservative and government responsibility for jobs and standard of living—there is a slight polarization pattern: between 1984 and 2004 there is a single-digit decline in the number of people placing themselves in the exact center of the scale and a marginal increase in the number placing themselves on the left and right. (On the liberal-conservative scale, the number of self-identified moderates is actually 3 percentage points *higher* in 2004 than in 1984, but the number of people who declined to classify themselves at all is 10 percentage points lower in 2004 than in 1984. Abramowitz treats these "decline to classify" respondents as moderates, so we do too. But others may wish to distinguish between moderation and ignorance or uncertainty.)

Four other scales do not show increasing polarization. On each scale the number of respondents in the exact middle declines by single digits, but on the issues of government vs. private health insurance and lower public spending vs. more public services, there is also a decline in the number of conservatives—the population shifts to the left, increasing its support for active government. Conversely, on defense spending and aid to African Americans, there is a decline in

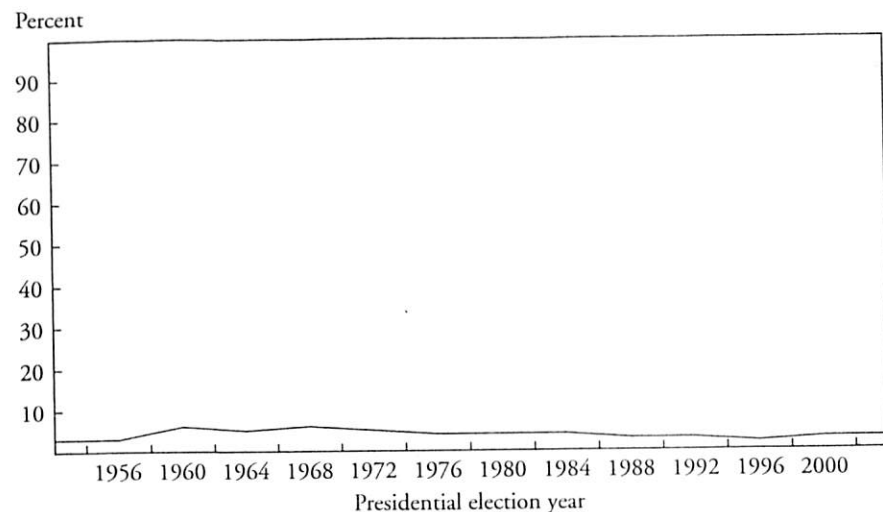
the number of liberals—the population shifts to the right, in favor of more defense spending and less aid to African Americans. (As was the case with the liberal-conservative scale, all of the decline in moderates on the health insurance scale and five-sevenths of the decline on the jobs scale reflect a decline in respondents who do not classify themselves rather than a decline in self-placed moderates). On the four-point abortion item the middle is ambiguous, but there is essentially no change.

Now, when each of these scales is reduced to three categories (as in figure 2-19) and they are added up and recategorized, Abramowitz finds somewhat more people in the liberal and conservative categories and somewhat fewer people in the exact middle in 2004 than was the case in 1984. But as table 2-6 shows, only a minor share of this marginal movement reflects true polarization—the extremes gaining respondents at the expense of the middle. Rather, the population has gotten more liberal and less conservative on some issues, but more conservative and less liberal on others. No matter how much one slices, dices, and stews these data, we cannot see how it can support a case for a significant increase in polarization.

In light of the preceding discussion, we stand by our argument that the American electorate is not highly polarized now, and that it has not become appreciably more so in the period for which we have data. Our data show that the extent of partisan sorting varies across issues and parties. Some issues show greater sorting than others, and on some issues one party has become more homogeneous while the other remains unchanged or has become less homogeneous. In particular, contrary to a great deal of contemporary political commentary, party identifiers remain better sorted on New Deal economic issues than on social-cultural issues. To understand these patterns more fully, future work will need to examine the patterns of elite conflict on these issues more carefully; such work is beyond the scope of this essay. The more general point remains, however, that Abramowitz's analyses reflect artifactual exaggerations of differences, as explained above.

A Dramatically More Engaged Electorate?

Abramowitz believes that Philip E. Converse's 1964 portrait of a politically disengaged public is seriously outdated: in 2004, he writes, "the proportion of active citizens reached 45 percent, and the proportion of campaign activists reached 23 percent. Both of these figures were all-time highs." In addition, he cites record numbers of voters who perceived party differences in 2004 (as we note in our essay), and who cared a good deal about the outcome: "These figures appear to undermine Fiorina and Levendusky's assumption that ordinary

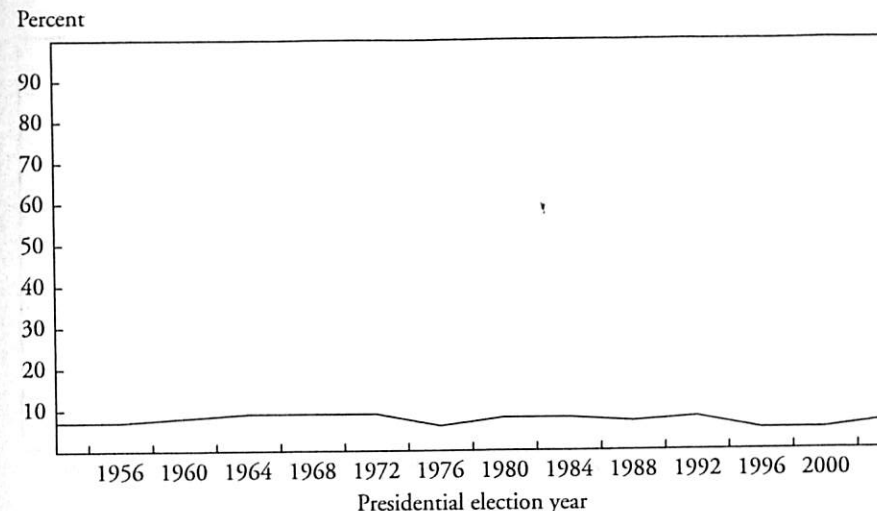
Figure 2-20. *Voters Who Worked for a Party or Candidate, 1952–2004*

Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

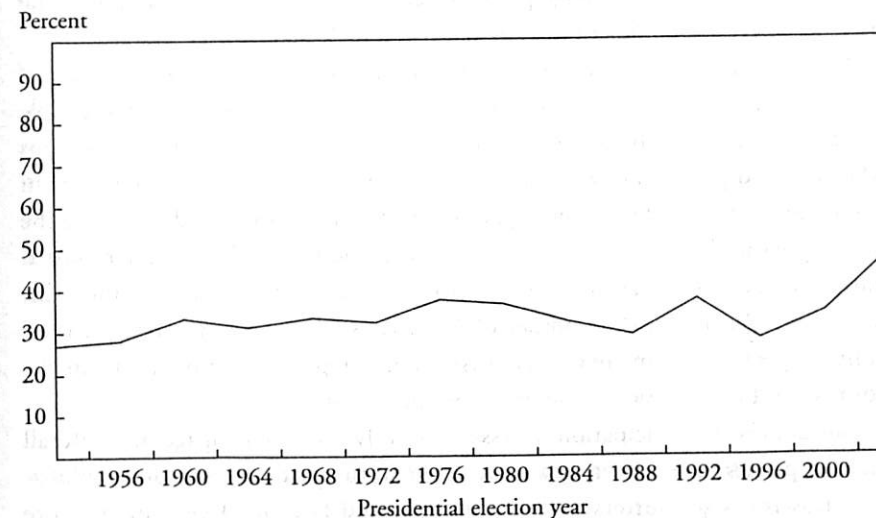
Americans do not generally care about politics. Ordinary Americans cared a great deal about the outcome of the 2004 presidential election.”

In fact, the case is much less clear than Abramowitz asserts. Consider his figure 2-9, which illustrates his claim that the proportion of active citizens and campaign activists reached all-time highs in 2004. Then recall our earlier point about the special nature of the 2004 election. Without the 2004 data, there is no increase in activity levels. In fact, there appears to be a decrease in campaign activism until 2000. But, for purposes of argument, we will set that point aside.

How does one rise from the category of mere voter to “active citizen” in Abramowitz’s analysis? By engaging in one campaign activity beyond voting. So, what precisely did Americans do to set an all-time record for political engagement in 2004? Did they go out and ring doorbells, distribute leaflets, and in other ways work for a party or a candidate? No. As figure 2-20 shows, the number of people who engaged in such acts in 2004 was in the same low single-digit range that it has been for the half-century history of the NES. Did these suddenly newly engaged citizens give up an evening or Saturday afternoon to attend a meeting or rally? No. As figure 2-21 shows, the number of Americans who did so fell in the same high single-digit range typical of the past half-century. Figure 2-22 shows that the record increase in the active public arose nearly

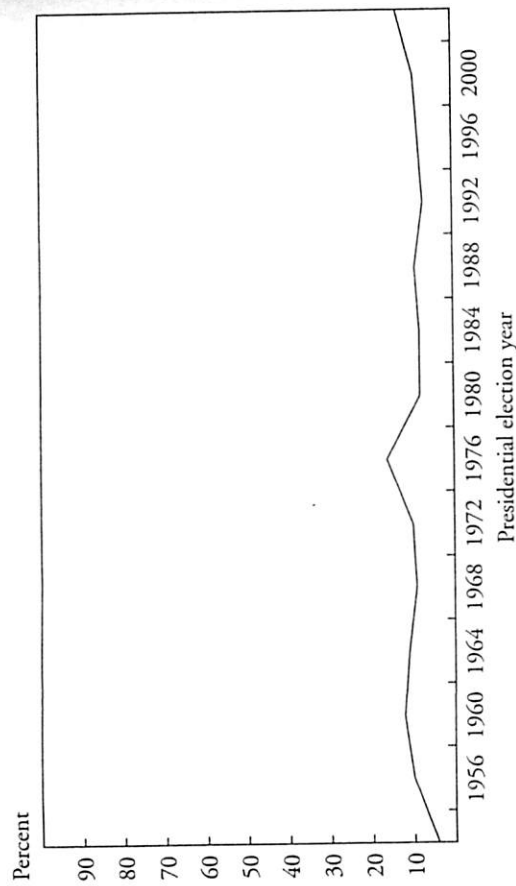
Figure 2-21. *Voters Who Attended a Political Meeting, 1952–2004*

Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Figure 2-22. *Voters Who Tried to Influence How Others Voted, 1952–2004*

Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Figure 2-23. *Voters Who Gave Money to Help a Campaign, 1952-2004*



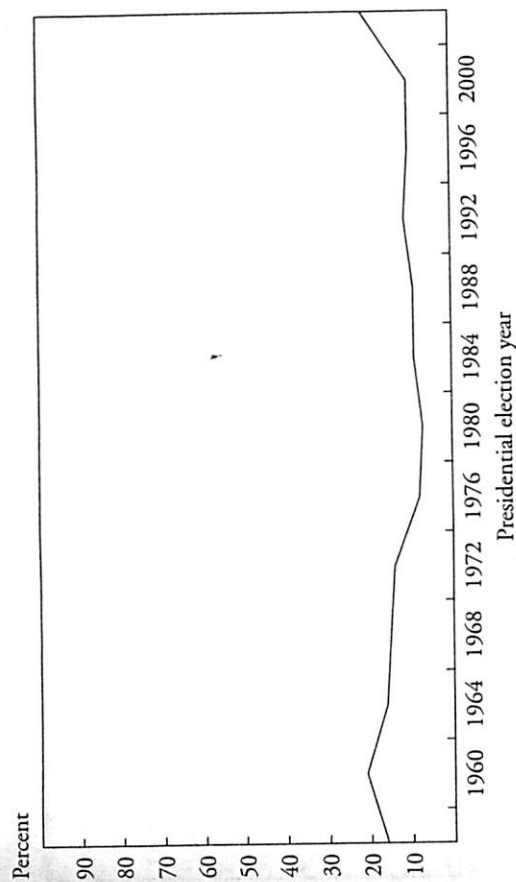
Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

entirely from talk—the number of people who reported trying to convince others how to vote rose 14 percentage points in 2004. A husband and wife discussing Bush vs. Kerry was sufficient to gain admission to “active citizen” status.

Now consider how such “active citizens” ascend to the higher category of “campaign activist.” This ascension required one more activity. For a few people this meant writing a check. As shown in figure 2-23, the number of Americans who reported giving money to a campaign rose about 4 percentage points in 2004, the first time the percentage of contributors hit double-digits since the not-so-polarized 1976 election. Most campaign activists achieved their exalted status, however, by wearing a button or putting a bumper sticker on their car. As figure 2-24 shows, the number of Americans who publicly expressed their political preferences in these ways rose about 11 percentage points from the norm since 1984 to reach a level not seen since 1960.

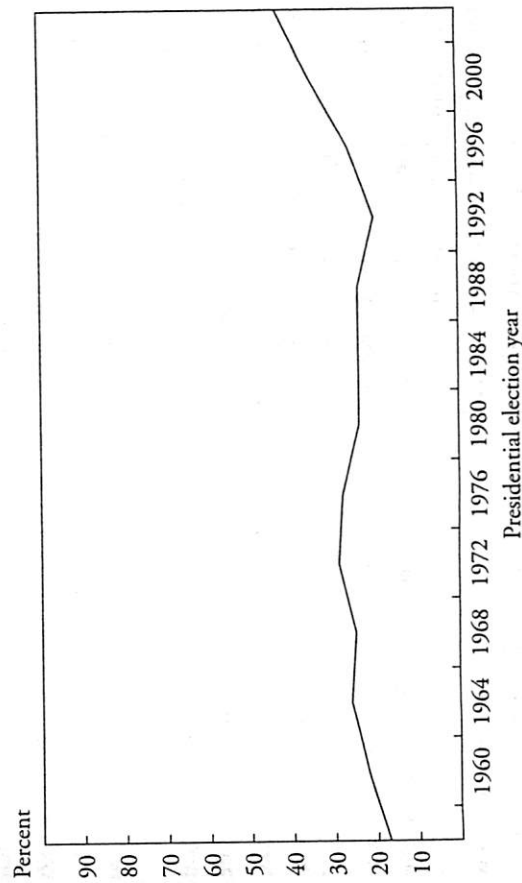
But does such participation necessarily signify increased engagement? Recall that the parties have been much more active in the past two elections, mobilizing grass-roots supporters and returning to old-fashioned get-out-the-vote activities. Such increased party activity shows up clearly in the party contact reports among NES respondents. As figure 2-25 shows, there has been a steady increase in reported party contact since 1992, with an 8 percentage point jump

Figure 2-24. *Voters Who Wore a Button or Put a Sticker on a Car, 1956-2004*

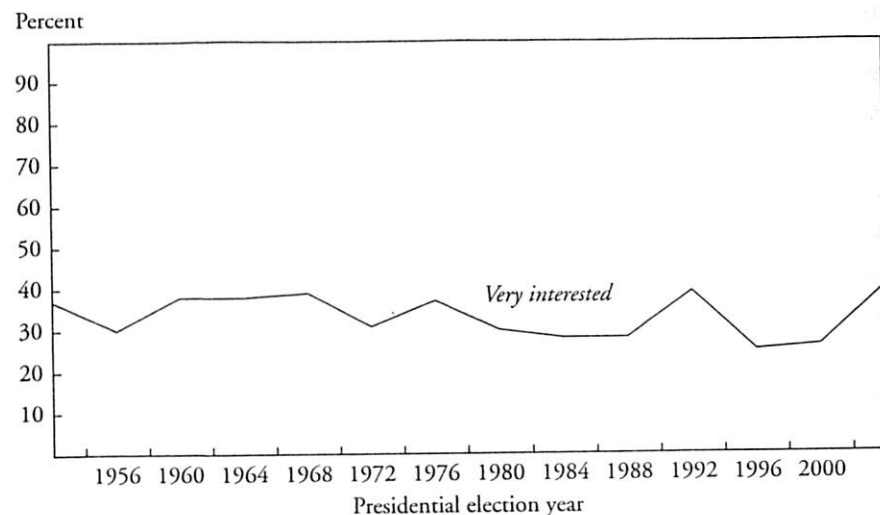


Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Figure 2-25. *Voters Who Were Contacted by Either Major Party, 1956-2004*



Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

Figure 2-26. *Voters' Interest in Current Campaign, 1952–2004*

Source: National Election Studies cumulative data file.

in 2004. The parties may simply have passed out more buttons and stickers in 2004. Similarly, the 5 percentage point increase in presidential turnout that occurred between 2000 and 2004 does not necessarily indicate increased psychological engagement among citizens; it may only reflect increased mobilization activities by the parties. Abramowitz simply ignores this alternative explanation.

This is not the place to make an extensive argument about psychological engagement vs. party mobilization in 2004, but additional data bear even more directly on the question than the preceding figures. According to the NES, although a record number of Americans reported that they cared about the outcome, reading about the campaign in the newspapers and following it on TV were down in 2004. As shown in figure 2-26, interest in the campaign was about the same as in 1992, well within sampling error of 1976, and about the same as in 1960–68 (and it is a reasonable presumption that declining response rates yield a somewhat more politically interested sample today than in previous decades). Increased activity without increased interest or knowledge is consistent with a mobilization argument. Contrary to what Abramowitz asserts, a record numbers of Americans may not have jumped into the political arena in 2004—they may have been pushed.

Counter to Converse's portrait of a nonideological electorate, Abramowitz also contends that "the American electorate today is far better educated than the public of the 1950s. . . . As a result of this dramatic rise in education levels, a much larger proportion of today's electorate is capable of understanding and using ideological concepts." Despite "this dramatic rise in education levels," Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter report that Americans are no better informed than they were a generation ago.²⁵ And in a new book, *Is Voting for Young People?* Martin P. Wattenberg reports that younger, better-educated cohorts of Americans are in fact the least well informed.²⁶ The communications revolution has generated an explosive increase in the number of information sources, but at the same time has made it easier for people to avoid them.²⁷ The old adage about leading a horse to water comes to mind.

Of course, if people have become sorted into highly correlated partisan and ideological categories, they may not need to know any details about politics. Partisan and ideological heuristics may now encapsulate their latent issue preferences. But as we have argued, the sorting process is much less perfect than many assume. Recent research reinforces this point.

Christopher Ellis and James A. Stimson examine the economic and social issue preferences of liberals and conservatives with surprising findings.²⁸ As figure 2-27 illustrates, the minority (about 20 percent) of Americans who categorize themselves as liberals have a reasonable resemblance to people "capable of using and understanding ideological concepts." More than 60 percent of them are liberal on both economic welfare issues and the newer social-cultural issues. Another 20 percent of them are old-time New Deal liberals who are left of center on economic welfare issues, but not on social issues. Self-described conservatives are another matter entirely.

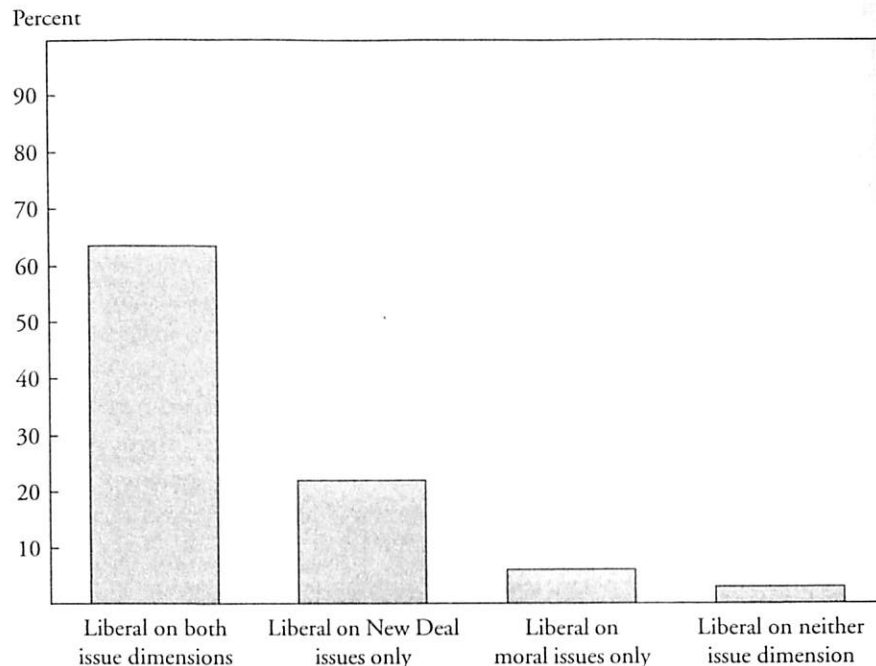
About one-third of Americans call themselves conservatives. But as figure 2-28 shows, only one in five of those who adopt the conservative label have issue stances that are right of center on both economic welfare and social-cultural issues. Somewhat more than a quarter of self-described conservatives are social conservatives only, about 15 percent are economic conservatives only, and, most surprisingly, a third of those who adopt the conservative label express conservative

25. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996).

26. Wattenberg (2006).

27. Prior (forthcoming 2007).

28. Ellis and Stimson (2005).

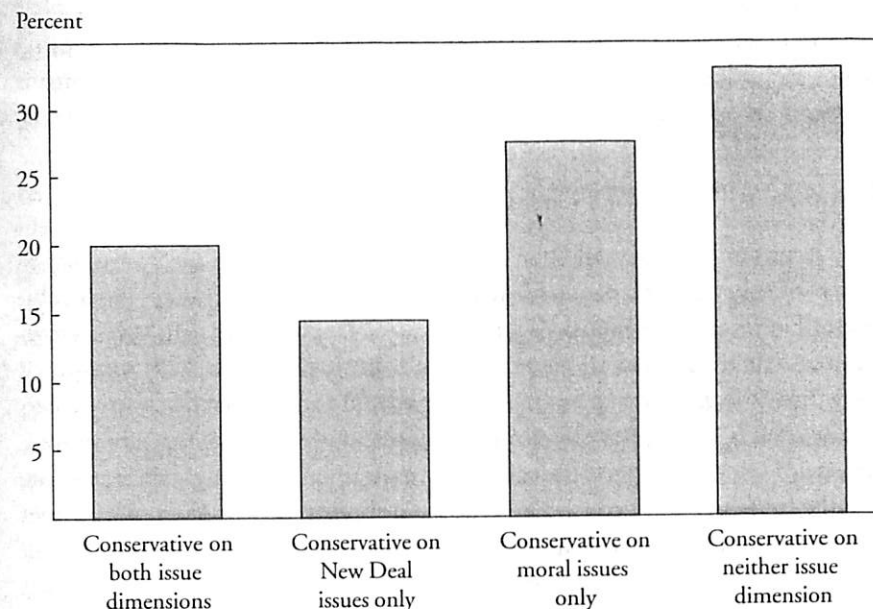
Figure 2-27. *Issue Liberalism of Self-Identified Liberals, 2004*

Source: Ellis and Stimson (2005).

views on *neither* economic nor social issues.²⁹ Such findings do not seem terribly consistent with an electorate that now understands and utilizes ideological concepts. In a related analysis, Edward G. Carmines reports that in contrast to members of Congress, whose roll-call votes on all manner of issues fall on a single left-right continuum, the positions of voters are spread across all four quadrants created by crossing economic and social issue positions (conservatives, liberals, populists, libertarians).³⁰ As we would expect from a generation of work dating back to Converse, American attitudes are multidimensional, and most

29. Together, the social conservatives and nonconservatives (Ellis and Stimson call them “conflicted conservatives”) comprise a clear majority of self-identified *conservatives*. In this light it is easy to understand why President Bush’s Social Security privatization proposal went nowhere.

30. Remarks by Edward Carmines at the 2006 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 20–23, summarizing an ongoing research project with Michael Ensley.

Figure 2-28. *Issue Conservatism of Self-Identified Conservatives, 2004*

Source: Ellis and Stimson (2005).

Americans cannot reasonably be called ideologues. Of course, we do not consider this a fault of the electorate; rather, the electorate does not oversimplify and distort a complex reality as political elites do.

Popular Polarization vs. Party Sorting

Abramowitz remains unpersuaded by our distinction between polarization and sorting. We all agree that the electorate has become better sorted into parties, but Abramowitz prefers to use the term partisan polarization to describe the increase in party distinctiveness. Why do we prefer to maintain a conceptual distinction between sorting and polarization? Social science proceeds best when concepts are clear. Confusing the distinction between changing marginals—the proportion of liberals, moderates, and conservatives (polarization)—and changing correlations within relatively constant marginals (sorting) contributed to the misconceived belief in a culture war. Similarly, conflating partisan and aggregate polarization confuses the matter here. Using the term “sorting”—and avoiding the term “partisan polarization”—promotes conceptual clarity.

Even more important, the sorting/polarization distinction matters because the processes have significantly different implications. If polarization has occurred, the middle has vanished, and society has split into two opposing camps. If sorting has occurred, two opposing camps exist, but a middle remains to referee or reject their conflict. This point brings us to Jacobson's comments.

Response to Jacobson's Comments

Gary Jacobson makes several observations that provide us with an opportunity to clarify some of our arguments. First, consider his remark that "a first-order solution to Fiorina and Levendusky's puzzle is easy. National politicians, while growing increasingly divided along partisan and ideological lines, have not grown more distant from their supporters." His figure 2-15 shows that own-party voters see themselves as about as close to their representatives as they have been for a generation, but other-party voters see themselves as increasingly distant. Note that the latter finding is consistent with the demonstration in *Culture War?* that as the parties move toward their bases they move away from every member of the other party, whereas they move away from some members of their own party while they move toward others.³¹

But we would emphasize Jacobson's own characterization as a "first-order solution." Candidates are no further from their supporters today than a generation ago, but who is, and who is not, a supporter is partly endogenous—it depends on the choices that are offered. People who feel increasingly distant from their party may exit—either join the other party or decline to vote—thus leaving the category of partisan supporters made up of those who continue to feel close to their party.

As one of us has previously pointed out, there has been a "hollowing out" of the electorate during the past generation. Strong partisans now make up a larger share of the active electorate and weak partisans and independents a smaller share. The result is an actual electorate (as opposed to an eligible electorate) that is considerably more ideological than the electorate of a generation ago.³² It is not surprising that this smaller, more ideological electorate is equally happy with its preferred candidate today as the larger, less ideological electorate of a generation ago. Thus, while we agree with Jacobson's observation that today's politicians can manage to get elected by today's smaller, more ideological electorates, we are

31. The net effect on own-party identifiers will depend on the shape of the party distribution and the positions the candidates move to. See Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006, pp. 28–29).

32. Fiorina (2002).

not willing to exclude from consideration the preferences of the two-fifths of the eligible electorate that does not vote in presidential elections and the three-fifths or more that does not vote in off-year or state and local elections.

When we refer to a "disconnect" between the American citizenry and the political class, we are referring to something more general than whether today's politicians are less liked by those who continue to vote for them than were yesterday's politicians. For a half-century both academic political science and popular political commentary accepted the notion that two-party competition generated centrist policies. Maurice Duverger pointed out in a classic study that, empirically, two-party systems were characterized by "catch-all" parties, broad coalitions of disparate interests, whereas multiparty systems were more likely to have ideologically pure parties.³³ Downs demonstrated the logic of centrist competition theoretically.³⁴ Many Americans who were active in politics did not like this situation, decrying "me-too" parties, but few denied that it characterized American politics in the mid-twentieth century. By the late 1990s, however, changes were apparent.³⁵ The question that concerns us is why, with relatively little change in the general shape of voter preferences, did the nature of party competition experience a much larger change? And we think that answering that question is far from "easy."

Jacobson makes a second observation that, if not sorting, some other process must be identified to explain "increasingly divergent partisan responses to national politicians and issues." We agree, and we consider this an important question for future research. However, we suspect that highly divergent partisan responses relate much more closely to politicians and performance than to voters' positions on issues. That is, diverging response patterns between Democrats and Republicans owe more to the positions *elites* take and the things *elites* do than to where *ordinary citizens* stand. As shown in our chapter, partisan differences on the issues are less than often assumed even if the differences in evaluations of Bush (or the Iraq war) diverge greatly. And as Jacobson points out, "no senator or governor is as polarizing as Bush—and a few even receive higher marks from rival partisans than from their own." This evidence highlights the role of Bush *qua* Bush as a polarizer. If polarized evaluations of Bush stemmed from deep polarization of attitudes, then evaluations of rival governors and senators should follow the same pattern of deep polarization. But this is not the pattern we

33. Duverger (1954).

34. Downs (1957).

35. Fiorina (1999).

observe. Faced with less divisive choices, voter choices and evaluations are less divided. Evidence that Bush is a polarizing figure does not imply that the electorate has become *more polarized*.³⁶

A recent study of the Iraq war issue in the 2004 voting nicely illustrates this argument. Philip A. Klinkner contrasts the views of Democrats and Republicans on U.S. foreign policy goals (for example, advance human rights, combat terrorism) and finds that the contrasts are significantly different in a statistical sense, but not large.³⁷ Contrasting the views of partisans on the means that the United States uses to carry out foreign policy (for example, military power, diplomacy), Klinkner again finds differences that are statistically different but not substantively large. The same is true for partisan attitudes on national defense issues like the importance of a strong military and partisan attitudes on patriotism and national affect. But when it comes to partisan attitudes toward President Bush, Klinkner reports the same huge partisan divide that Jacobson has so well described.³⁸ Bush is clearly a polarizer, even if Democrats' and Republicans' positions are not nearly as divided as their evaluations.

One could posit any number of idiosyncratic reasons for the strong reaction to Bush—visceral reaction to his Texas mannerisms, facial expressions, refusal to admit mistakes, and so forth, but the deeper question that requires an answer is how partisans can differ on seemingly factual matters, such as whether Saddam Hussein actually had weapons of mass destruction or was involved in the attacks on 9/11. But we should bear in mind that partisan differences in the perception of “objective” facts do not begin with Bush. As Larry M. Bartels has pointed out, partisans differed sharply on factual matters even in the 1980s (for example, on whether or not the budget deficit grew during the tenure of Ronald Reagan).³⁹ An explanation of partisan bias should not focus solely on Bush, but on patterns of elite politics more generally. In addition, part of the answer very likely has to do with the previously discussed decline in public attentiveness to political affairs, coupled with the perceived decline in the objectivity of the mainstream media, which together allow increasing numbers of Americans to choose their own facts. But we agree with Jacobson that this large and important question needs attention.

Finally, Jacobson notes the increased correlation between partisan divisions and religion. Here again, we think the key is the behavior of elites. Why

36. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2006, pp. 25–32).

37. Klinkner (2006).

38. Jacobson (2007).

39. Bartels (2002).

should religion have related to partisan attitudes when both parties nominated (apparently) happily married heterosexual candidates who professed belief in God, went to church on Sundays, and in other ways hewed to conventional morality? But when Republican economic elites ally with religious traditionalists, and Democratic elites grow more secular, religion becomes relevant to the voters who must choose.

REJOINDER

Alan I. Abramowitz

Fiorina and Levendusky make four major criticisms of my response to their essay on party sorting in the American electorate. They argue that (1) my finding that there was a significant increase in ideological polarization between 1984 and 2004 is an artifact of the way that I recoded the seven National Election Studies (NES) items used to create the liberal-conservative policy scale; (2) greater political activism among the public in 2004 was a result of greater mobilization by the parties, not any increase in the underlying level of political involvement among citizens; (3) there has been no significant increase in ideological thinking among the public; and (4) “sorting” is not the same as polarization—just because Americans are now better sorted into parties based on ideological labels doesn’t mean that they are more polarized.

I believe that all of these criticisms are mistaken or misleading. In fact, the American public is more polarized today than it was thirty years ago, Americans were more engaged in the 2004 presidential election than in any election since the end of World War II, the level of ideological thinking among the public is substantially greater today than in the past, and the process that Fiorina and Levendusky call “sorting” has been one of the most important sources of polarization in American politics.

Measuring Polarization

Fiorina and Levendusky claim that my finding of increased polarization among the public between 1984 and 2004 is an artifact of the way that I recoded the individual items used to construct the seven-issue liberal-conservative scale. This claim is clearly incorrect, however, since I recoded these items identically in both years. Therefore my recoding cannot possibly explain the change in the shape of the distribution of opinion on the seven-item scale between 1984 and 2004.

Fiorina and Levendusky go on to argue that because the distribution of opinion on the individual items used to construct the seven-item scale did not change between 1984 and 2004, one cannot conclude that the public became more polarized during this time period. But the increase in polarization between 1984 and 2004 was not due to increased polarization on the individual items but to increased consistency in responses across items. For example, the correlation between the jobs-and-living-standards scale and the health-insurance scale increased from .28 in 1984 to .49 in 2004. This means that these two items, which had only 8 percent of their variance in common in 1984, had 24 percent of their variance in common in 2004. As a result of increased consistency in responses to different issues, the proportions of consistent liberals and conservative in the electorate both increased between 1984 and 2004. Finally, while the NES data indicate that polarization peaked in 2004, these data also indicate that polarization has been increasing for three decades. With regard to polarization, the 2004 results were not a break with the past but a continuation of a long-term trend.

Political Activism and Engagement

The increased level of activism among the public in 2004 was not simply a result of increased mobilization by the parties, as Fiorina and Levendusky suggest. Among NES respondents who were not contacted by either political party, the proportion who tried to influence the vote of a friend, relative, or coworker increased from 28 percent in 2000 to 44 percent in 2004, and the proportion who displayed a button, bumper sticker, or yard sign increased from 6 percent in 2000 to 14 percent in 2004. Furthermore, increased mobilization by the parties also does not explain why the percentage of Americans who reported that they cared a great deal about who won the presidential election set an all-time record in 2004.

Fiorina and Levendusky note, correctly, that most of those who engaged in campaign-related activities in 2004 simply talked to a friend, relative, or coworker about the election or displayed a button, bumper sticker, or yard sign. Relatively few Americans took the time to engage in more difficult and time-consuming activities like attending a political rally or working on a campaign. But my point is not that vast numbers of Americans suddenly became hard-core political activists in 2004. My point is that the large group of Americans who engaged in these activities were quite polarized in their political views—active Democrats were quite liberal and active Republicans were quite conservative—and that

these were the sorts of voters to whom candidates and officeholders paid close attention.

Ideological Thinking in the American Public

I strongly agree with Fiorina and Levendusky on one point: very few Americans are liberal or conservative ideologues. However, I strongly disagree with their claim that ideological thinking in the public has not increased over time. One piece of evidence on this score is the fact that the proportion of Americans unable to place themselves on the NES liberal-conservative scale fell from 30 percent during the 1970s and 1980s to only 18 percent during 2002–04. At the same time, the correlations between the liberal-conservative identification scale and specific issue scales increased. For example, the correlation between the liberal-conservative scale and the health-insurance scale increased from .28 in 1972 to .41 in 2004, while the correlation between the liberal-conservative scale and the abortion scale increased from .12 in 1972 to .37 in 2004. The correlations among issue scales also increased. For example, the correlation between the health-insurance scale and the jobs-and-living-standards scale increased from .33 in 1972 to .50 in 2004. Both increased awareness of ideological concepts and increased constraint indicate that ideological thinking is more prevalent than in the past.

Fiorina and Levendusky claim that liberal-conservative identification is not a meaningful measure of ideology because even though self-identified liberals usually take liberal positions on specific policy issues, self-identified conservatives frequently do not take conservative positions on specific policy issues. However, data from the 2004 National Exit Poll indicate that, on average, self-identified conservatives were as likely to take conservative positions on specific issues as self-identified liberals were to take liberal positions.

For example, 71 percent of self-identified conservatives (vs. 17 percent of self-identified liberals) wanted abortion illegal in all or most cases; 61 percent of self-identified conservatives (vs. 17 percent of self-identified liberals) opposed any legal recognition for gay and lesbian couples; 71 percent of self-identified conservatives (vs. 29 percent of self-identified liberals) felt that the government was trying to do too many things; 76 percent of self-identified conservatives (vs. 15 percent of self-identified liberals) believed that the war with Iraq had improved the long-term security of the United States; and 84 percent of self-identified conservatives (vs. 26 percent of self-identified liberals) considered the war in Iraq part of the war on terrorism. On average, 73 percent of self-identified

conservatives took the conservative side and 74 percent of self-identified liberals took the liberal side on these five issues. These results, along with similar results from recent NES surveys, indicate that liberal-conservative identification is strongly related to positions on a wide range of specific policy issues.

Interestingly, in their response to Gary C. Jacobson, Fiorina and Levendusky acknowledge that the American electorate has become more ideological: "Strong partisans now make up a larger share of the active electorate and weak partisans and independents a smaller share. The result is an actual electorate (as opposed to an eligible electorate) that is considerably more ideological than a generation ago." Fiorina and Levendusky seem to be suggesting that the electorate has become more ideological because it has decreased in size, but this is not so. The rate of turnout of eligible voters in the 2004 presidential election was, in fact, comparable to the rate of turnout of eligible voters during the 1950s and 1960s.

Sorting vs. Polarization

Over the past three decades, differences between rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans have increased dramatically across a wide range of issues. According to NES data, between 1972 and 2004, the correlation (Pearson's r) of the party identification scale with the liberal-conservative scale increased from .32 to .63, the correlation with the abortion scale increased from -.06 to .20, the correlation with the jobs-and-living-standards scale increased from .20 to .41, and the correlation with the government-aid-to-blacks scale increased from .14 to .38.

The stronger correlations between the party-identification scale and a variety of issue scales indicate that the distance between Democratic and Republican voters on these issues has been growing. Democratic voters have been moving to the left while Republican voters have been moving to the right. By referring to this trend as "sorting," Fiorina and Levendusky appear to be downplaying its significance. However, the fact that the electoral base of the Democratic Party has become more liberal while the electoral base of the Republican Party has become more conservative is one of the most significant developments in American politics of the past thirty years. This trend has important implications for candidates and officeholders at every level in the United States. As a result of this ideological realignment, it has become more difficult for a conservative or a moderate to win a Democratic primary, and it has become more difficult for a liberal or a moderate to win a Republican primary. Increasing partisan polarization among elites reflects increasing partisan polarization in the electorate.

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