

A New Partisan Voter

Joseph Bafumi and Robert Y. Shapiro

The United States electorate behaves differently today than in past eras. Over the era of ideologically innocent party voting in the 1950's or the era of partisan dealignment in the 1960's and 1970's. Partisan voting is back but compared to the strong parties of yesteryear, today's partisanship is more strongly based on liberal and conservative ideological concerns. These concerns continue to be economic in nature but are also informed by a new array of social, racial and religious values issues. This transformation has not only endured but has grown and reveals an important, and possibly continuing, trend. We present the evidence for this new American voter.

1 Introduction

Is this a new age for the American voter? The evidence suggests that a transformation has occurred which has had broad implications for American politics. The partisan polarization that has occurred at the elite level (Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1996; McCarty and Rosenthal 1997) has been becoming increasingly evident in the mass electorate (Bartels 2000). The strength of party identification in predicting the vote has grown comparable to, if not exceeded, what it was in the era of party voting - the 1950's (Campbell et al. 1960). Although its predictive strength is reminiscent of another day, political partisanship today is of a different sort.

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

In this paper, we examine systematically what has occurred. We first present evidence for a level of partisan voting that is unparalleled since the 1950's. We then examine to what extent this is a new sort of partisanship—one that is substantively different from partisanship of the past. We find that this partisanship has voters more strongly anchored than ever before by left/right ideological thinking. This ideology is economic and increasingly social and rooted in religious values. It also, more so than ever, delineates thinking on racial issues in the United States.¹

¹It may extend to what used to be thought of as non-partisan foreign policy, but this is beyond the

2 Resurgent Partisanship

The evidence that partisan and ideological polarization has increased in the United States since the 1970s can be found in measures of interparty divergence and intraparty convergence in legislative behavior that have reached levels unseen in sixty years (Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1996; McCarty and Rosenthal 1997). The relationship between elites and mass public opinion is a dynamic one in which we would conjecture that elite level polarization might either lead to, or result from, changes among the mass public.² Either way, we would expect to see evidence of public opinion polarizing along partisan and ideological lines. Where elite level polarization leads, we would expect more clearly defined platforms and diverging issue stances between the Democratic and Republican parties over time to contribute to polarization among partisans in the public at large. To what extent, then, has the American electorate polarized along party lines and in ideologically definable ways? The evidence that this has occurred is striking, beginning with what is suggested by trends in partisanship and voting in presidential elections.

First, a simple graph of the standard deviation in seven-point partisan identification taken from the National Election Studies (NES) data is telling. Figure 1 plots the standard deviation, as a proxy for polarization of party identification in the mass public, over all years in which NES asked the question from 1952 to 2004.³ As the figure shows, partisan polarization has made a noticeable comeback in recent years. In the beginning of the series, polarization is quite high, and then, in the mid-1960's, it begins to drop off substantially. By the 1980's the trend reverses and the standard deviation increases. As of 2004, the level of partisan polarization has not reached its heights of the 1950's but it

scope of this paper; see (Bloch-Elkon and Shapiro 2005; Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2006).

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

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

has risen to well-beyond what one would expect if partisan dealignment had endured. It may be that this polarization is driven by a small segment of the public while the rest remain as more neutral independents. The evidence suggests this is not the case. For example, according to the NES, the number of pure independents among voters in the 2004 presidential election was approximately the same as in the 1952 election (around 5%), whereas during the intervening period this share of the electorate tended to be higher (as high as 10% in 1976).⁴

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

The authors of *The American Voter* first emphasized in sweeping terms the mighty importance of partisanship in explaining and predicting the vote and affecting how people perceive and react to politics (Campbell et al. 1960). This potent influence of partisanship seemed less relevant as evidence of partisan dealignment could be found in the 1960's and

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

1970's (Wattenberg 1994). This raised questions for political scientists who thought party allegiances served many important galvanizing, and mobilizing functions, and helped foster processes of political representation in a republican democracy (Aldrich 1996). The evidence indicates that partisanship has grown substantially as a predictor of the vote since the dealignment period of the late 1960's and 1970's (Miller and Shanks 1996). Figure 3 presents a series of logistic regression coefficients (and their standard errors) for predictions of the vote for the Republican presidential candidate in each presidential election from 1952 to 2004.⁵ The control variables in this multivariate analysis include sex, age, education, religion, income, region (south), and a statistical interaction term to allow for a differing effect of partisanship for white southerners, who have undergone a major shift in partisan allegiance from the Democratic to the Republican party.⁶ The effects of most predictors in this multivariate analysis are dampened by the inclusion of party identification. The effect of partisanship itself was strong in the early post-World War II period but it then declined somewhat as the dealigning period occurred until about the end of the 1970's. Beginning in the 1980's, the effect of partisanship began to grow substantially as a predictor of the vote. By the 2004 presidential election its effect was on par with or exceeded its impact in the 1950's. At the mean of the probability curve, a one unit change in partisanship resulted in about a 30 percentage point shift in the vote from Democratic to Republican candidate in the first two (1952, 1956) and last two (2000, 2004) elections studied, holding other variables constant. This contrasts with an analogous shift of about 20 percentage points in 1976.⁷ Partisan voting has grown significantly since the period that was thought to be part of a long-term dealignment.

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

⁵Each year represents a separate regression equation.

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

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

with the importance of partisanship as a predictor of the vote.⁸ Even casual observers of electoral politics readily note the near unanimous support that strong partisans give to their party's presidential candidate. The extent to which partisanship matters may nonetheless be surprising when compared to other characteristics of voters. Figure 4 shows the explanatory power of a multivariate versus bivariate vote choice equation predicting the vote.⁹ The full vote choice equation includes all the predictors listed above. The bivariate equation includes only party identification. What we see is that the equation that includes all predictors rarely has a much better fit than the equation with party identification alone. Even in the ostensibly bad days of party voting (1972), the full vote choice equation explains only about 13 percent more of the variability in the vote than the equation with just party identification. Clearly, party identification is the workhorse in the series of regressions viewed here. Interestingly, in terms of explanatory power, party identification reaches its highest level in 1996 and 2004, not in the early periods of the series.

3 A New Partisanship

How do we explain the apparent fluctuation in the power of party identification as a predictor of the vote? What is the political history that provides an answer? In the mid-20th century, the country had just survived years of severe economic depression followed by a world war. The depression era spurred a major realignment in the group bases of party support (involving immigrants, urban residents, black Americans, southerners, blue collar workers, and others) that weighed heavily in favor of the Democrats (Key 1955).¹⁰ After the depression and World War II, the 1950's were a period of relative calm

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

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

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

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

Figure 5 plots the coefficients for a series of linear regressions predicting a respondent's partisan identification from their parent's party identification and the controls listed earlier.¹² Parental party was asked with the same question wording in NES during four years from the 1950's to the dealignment period. Although this does not constitute a long series, the effects of the demographics trend as we might have expected. For example, females became more likely to identify with the Democratic party over time, whereas white southerners became much more likely to self-identify as Republicans. Thus, even with a short series, shifts in the power of parental party to predict partisanship can be informative. In 1958, during the period in which the impact of socialization on partisanship was expected to be clear, the party of the respondent's parents was a stronger predictor of the vote compared to a decade or more later. A difference of one category in a parents' party affiliation (on a five point scale) in 1958 was associated with a change of greater than .7 on the seven-point partisan self-placement scale. This effect declined to about .5 in 1970. Parental socialization had its greatest impact on party identification early in the series absent new realigning issues. The political calm

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

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

also resulted in the importance of party identification in predicting the vote as we saw in Figure 3. Partisanship acquired from parents helped indirectly to anchor vote choice decisions during this first period for which we have NES data.

Whatever equilibrium there was in partisanship and voting did not last. What followed was a period of greater political turbulence through the 1960's and into the 1970's. The civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, social unrest, political assassination and more led to increased conflict and political antagonism.¹³ Ideology began to take on new meanings in this period (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979), and whether the old ideological innocence persisted became an open question. New issues and the persistent salience of racial and civil right issues that came further to the fore became part of a revised left-right ideological spectrum in American politics; a spectrum which expanded from the somewhat more limited economic/big government aspects of New Deal liberalism. This affected how Americans related to the political parties and the degree of their partisan allegiances (Carmines, McIver and Stimson 1987). Perhaps most visibly and important, white southerners grew increasingly uncomfortable with the national Democratic party as that party fully accepted the mantle of civil rights and racial equality throughout the nation. This period first gave way to a partisan dealignment in which, as we saw above, party became a less important predictor of the presidential vote as new generations came on to scene and old partisan loyalties were being reconsidered. With the election of an unabashed ideological conservative, President Ronald Reagan, in the 1980's, and the realignment that had occurred in Congress (conservative southern Democrats declined in number in Congress and liberal northern Republicanism was on the wane as well), the resurgence of partisanship began. The issues that emerged from the 1960's and 1970's increasingly divided the two major parties as voters sorted themselves anew (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998).¹⁴ The issues that would further divide the two parties included abortion, womens rights, the availability of guns, religious values in politics and government,

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

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

gay rights, capital punishment, environmental protection and other related matters. Being liberal or conservative began to take on a more visible and at least somewhat new meaning, and it became more closely associated with partisanship at the elite level and, as we will examine further, the level of the mass public.

Figure 6 shows evidence of the increasing importance of ideology in predicting partisanship.¹⁵ Again, a series of linear regression coefficients are plotted over time. Ideological self-placement on a seven-point scale is included as a predictor. While the coefficients for the various controls tend to work as before, the effect of ideological self-placement appears to have increased from its earliest measurement in 1972. As new and old issues sorted partisan attachments anew, the public increasingly linked how they saw themselves ideologically with their partisan identification (Luskin, McIver and Carmines 1989). Unfortunately, the ideological self-placement question was not asked in the NES surveys before 1972. There is, however, a useful and longer longitudinal series in the form of a composite liberal/conservative feeling thermometer measure. The thermometer score is based on two questions in which respondents were asked to place liberals and conservatives on a 100 point scale depending on their degree of hot or cold affect toward each group.¹⁶ This measure can serve as a reasonable proxy for left/right ideological orientations. Figure 7 shows that this left/right thermometer measure is an increasingly strong predictor of partisan identification beginning in the 1960's. Early in the series, a ten point change in the score results in about a .4 shift in partisan self-placement. In the 1990's, such a change is associated with as much as twice the shift.

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

¹⁵There is the potential for endogeneity here. One could argue that party predicts ideology. At the individual level, party has been shown to be the most stable of political behavior variables. While party may predict ideology to some extent, much literature shows that the relationship runs more strongly in the other direction. See footnote 7 for some of that research.

¹⁶The composite thermometer score is calculated by NES as follows: First, the value for liberals is subtracted from 97 and that difference is added to the value for conservatives; this sum is then divided by 2, and .5 is added to the result; finally, the solution is truncated to obtain an integer value. The composite score correlates with seven-point ideological self-placement at about .6 from 1972 to 2002.

is in itself not very informative. We need to know what the issues are that give these ideological labels meaning to political elites and voters alike. These issues include those associated with the New Deal and the Great Society of the 1960's, as well as values-based concerns that are racial, social and religious in nature. To the extent that these issues areas are represented through ideology and, ultimately, partisanship, they are increasingly strong predictors of voting behavior. To what extent, then, has opinion on these issues at the individual level become increasingly related to ideology and partisanship? That is, to what extent has the public become polarized on these issues in ideological and partisan terms?

To examine this further we use the available longitudinal data from the NES as well as NORC General Social Surveys from 1972 to 2004. If liberal and conservative ideological thinking as well as Democratic and Republican partisan attachments have been increasingly defined by social, racial and religious issues, then we should see these group's stances diverging over time on these issues. We find that such differences have indeed increased. This throws us into the middle of a debate in the current political behavior research. For example, top political scientists have spent a good deal of time refuting journalists who overstate such divergence when examining the politics of "red versus blue" states (Gelman et al. 2005; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2005; Fiorina 2006). Fiorina (2006) goes further and shows that most Americans take positions in the ideological center to this day. However, what all this ignores is that there are real changes among a portion of the electorate that have liberals and conservatives as well as Democrats and Republicans sorting themselves anew over social, racial and religious issues.¹⁷ The trend is real and it may be growing. The data warrant systematic attention.

¹⁷It is interesting to consider that some of the apparent sorting may be due to partisans changing positions on an issue given their party leaders' evolving issue stances rather than voters' changing parties given issue stances. Some evidence of this has been found in Carsey and Layman (2006).

4 The Issues

We begin by showing the mean position of the public on economic welfare issues according to partisan and ideological identification. These issues have long been a part of the American political landscape and have divided Republicans and Democrats as well as conservatives and liberals. They serve as a benchmark to study racial issues and the newer social and religious values issues. They also show a bit of polarization themselves in very recent elections. It looks like even on issues that have been around a while, partisans and ideologues may, at times, be moving further apart. Next, we turn to values-laden issues. Partisans, and to a lesser extent, ideologues, are increasingly divided over abortion, homosexuality and the role of religion in society. This is particularly clear since the earlier 1990's but can be seen in the early 1980's across some issues. What we find for issues of race and civil rights is perhaps most surprising. While these issues became centrally important in dividing the parties in the 1980's, if not fully earlier, they have not been high on the radar screen in the recent debate about culture wars and partisan polarization until, to some extent, Hurricane Katrina resurrected them. But the role of race in ideological and partisan polarization are readily apparent in our data long after the height of the American civil rights movement.

4.1 Economic Welfare

In this first section, we focus on ideological and partisan polarization for economic welfare issues. Since the New Deal, they have been longstanding party cleavage issues in American politics (Page 1978; Stimson 1999; Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002). They serve as a benchmark for the emerging cleavages that follow. We do find some evidence for increasing party and ideological divisions on a few of these issues although the predominant story is one of consistency. The NES and GSS data are plotted in Figures 8 – 11. With respect to ideology, the NES items show fairly stable differences across the economic welfare issues. An argument might be made for slight increases in the mean differences in 2004

for some of the items including spending on welfare, spending on assistance for the poor and spending on homelessness. We also find slight evidence of a growing division among Republicans and Democrats on their attitudes towards government's role in guaranteeing jobs and spending on the homeless over the long term (Figure 9). However, the gap between the two partisan groups on other items tends to remain fairly consistent through time.

The GSS data in Figure 10 also show that 2004 was a polarizing election year as conservatives and liberals separated somewhat on attitudes toward the government reducing income differences, improving peoples standard of living, spending on cities, spending on welfare and spending on the nation's health. We find the same pattern but more dramatically and beginning earlier than 2004 for Republicans and Democrats (Figure 11). Overall, there is evidence of modest polarization on these set of old, longstanding issues. These findings are important since this continuing and even growing source of partisan conflict has been under-appreciated in the polarization debate. However, the story of polarization cannot end here. The substantial transformations we have seen in ideology and partisanship must be explained by other, perhaps more recently emerging, issues. Next, we turn to how religious, social and racial issues compare in their capacity of divide ideologues and partisans.

4.2 Abortion

In assessing the ideological divide in the United States in recent year, the most attention has been devoted to issues related to what have been called family values or religious values or moral cultural issues. Fiorina (2006) has challenged claims that Americans are polarized on these issues across red and blue states in the U.S., but he has not fully examined the extent to which there has been polarization across partisan and ideological lines, though some of his data are suggestive on this point.¹⁸ We will show that real

¹⁸For example, figure (5.6) plotting abortion stances by partisanship in Fiorina (2006) shows growing polarization on the issue over time.

change has taken place on these issues, beginning with one of the most contentious and emotional of them, abortion. Based on NES data, figure 12 shows the growing division between conservatives and liberals on attitudes toward the legality of abortion (in the first plot) and an even more striking polarization for Republicans and Democrats (in the second plot). Where once Republicans and Democrats could not be differentiated on abortion stances, today there are very clear differences. Additional data going back further in time and involving more conditional questions related to abortion were asked in the GSS beginning in the early 1970's. Figures 13 and 14 plot these data. The plots track responses to the GSS battery of questions on whether it should be possible to obtain a legal abortion in a variety of circumstances. They show the striking growth in the differences between the opinions of Republicans and Democrats as well as liberals and conservatives. Across all these questions, ideological and partisan polarization is evident.

4.3 Homosexuality

We find the same divergence, though somewhat less striking, for opinions toward homosexuality and gay rights. The first set of data from NES (Figures 15 and 16) show slight ideological divergence but more substantial growth in the partisan gap. The time series is very short. It begins in the early 1990's and likely misses earlier signs of sorting. The GSS provides additional data over more years for analysis on this issue. Figure 17 shows a relatively steady mean difference between ideological groups toward support for allowing homosexuals to teach in schools although there has been divergence following a short period of convergence in the 1980's. Generally, both groups have grown more accepting toward homosexual teachers. From 1985 to 2004, differences between conservatives and liberals grew substantially in their feelings regarding the moral acceptability of homosexual relations (rightmost plot). Liberals have been much more accepting than conservatives over time of such relations. Partisan differences and polarization are, again, even more clear on opinions toward homosexuals. Figure 18 shows that Republicans and Democrats have become more widely differentiable since the late 1980's in their opinions

toward allowing homosexuals to teach. Most striking is the finding that the mean positions of Republicans and Democrats on the acceptability of homosexual relations diverged sharply during the twenty year period from the mid-1980's to 2004.

4.4 Moral/Family Values

Similarly other opinions related to religious, moral or family values issues have become more strongly related to ideology and partisanship. Based on the NES data, Figures 19 and 20 show how conservative versus liberal as well as Republican versus Democratic views on family values, moral standards and prayer in schools have become increasingly disparate since the 1980's. In fact, the school prayer stances of Republicans and Democrats reversed before they grew apart in the late 1980's. The GSS data, shown in figure 21, shows a clear increase in the difference between conservatives and liberals on their confidence in organized religion. Somewhat more complicated (due to some earlier convergence and then wider separation), but still evident, is the growing difference in conservatives' versus liberals' support for prayer in public schools. The growing differences on this issue are clearer for Democrats versus Republicans as shown in the second plot of Figure 22. These partisans have also become less alike in their confidence toward organized religion (first plot).

4.5 Race and Equality

We end our analysis with the issue of race and equality. Racial issues became increasingly central in 20th century American partisan politics after it was clear that the Democratic party, minus its old Southern wing, had become *the* civil rights party. Racial issues have been given scant attention in the partisan polarization debate. These issues did return to the fore somewhat after the government's mishandling of assistance to the large African-American community in Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina, but they have been largely ignored in the polarization debate. Like social and religious values issues, racial

issues have helped drive increases in ideological polarization and, especially, partisan polarization.

Figure 23, tracking NES data, shows clear evidence of increasing divergence between conservatives and liberals on attitudes toward the conditions for blacks in America, whether blacks should have special favors, whether blacks should try harder, and how much we should worry about equality in this country. The evidence for divergence is less clear for other items. It is not surprising, however, that we find cases with large, persistent ideological differences without further divergence, since ideology early on differentiated people on racial issues while partisanship came to line up later with ideology as the parties transformed regarding these issues (e.g., think of the transformation in the once solidly Democratic south). We would expect then that the racial attitudes of Republicans versus Democrats would become more consistently and sharply different. For each survey measure shown in 24, the mean position of Republicans and Democrats have consistently diverged, with the caveat that in a couple instances there was some intermittent convergence, as in the case of affirmative action in the mid-1980's.

The NORC General Social Survey data in figures 25 and 26 tell the same basic story: the mean positions of ideological and partisan groups have tended to trend in opposite directions on support for spending more money to improve the conditions of blacks and offering more government aid to blacks.¹⁹ What this analysis of racial issues suggests most is that lost in the debate about moral and religious values issues polarizing American politics has been (not only the centrality of party divisions on economic welfare issues but also) the continuing underlying role of racial issues as continuing sources of political conflict—that can resurface suddenly.

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

5 Conclusion

Throughout the American political behavior literature, scholars have found the need to re-evaluate the characteristic American voter. At times, this reflection occurred because past research was thought to be incomplete. Other times, the American voter was believed to have changed in ways that warranted new analysis. According to our study, American voters today are different from voters of the past fifty years.

Socialization based partisanship of the 1950s gave way as new issues forced voters to reconsider their largely inherited partisan loyalties. This began a sorting out process in which some voters felt unrepresented by their party leadership. They moved from allegiance to one party to what looked more like a state of ambivalence. In turn, partisanship, started to decline. The sorting out process would continue, however, and lead to a partisan resurgence.

An array of new social, racial and religious values issues would help inform voters' belief systems, and, as parties aligned themselves on those issues, foster an ideologically based partisan alignment. Today partisanship is as strong or possibly stronger than in the 1950's (the era of party voting). It is informed by ideological beliefs which are more heavily defined by a range of issues that go beyond economics. Economic issues remain very important (probably most important for most voters) but a trend toward ideologically based partisanship that is closely connected with other salient issues cannot be ignored.

"Polarization" is occurring if one takes polarization to mean groups in the electorate (ideologues or partisans) moving further apart in their attitudes. It need not be the case that individuals are taking more extreme positions, but the individuals who comprise each group are becoming more alike while individuals across groups are becoming more disparate in their positions (both on old, and, mostly, on new issues).

The behavior of this new electorate remains to be understood. Research is continuing and we will learn more from future elections. For example, might voters be less likely to

split their tickets or engage in retrospective voting as they become more strongly anchored by their parties based on social, racial, and religious values issues (e.g., Bafumi (2004))? Will polarized voters engage in greater degrees of cognitive dissonance or rationalization as they are exposed to new political information that challenges their attitudes and preferences (e.g., Bafumi (2004); Erikson (2004); Bloch-Elkon and Shapiro (2005)). The new partisan voter poses important new questions for political behavior research.

6 Figures

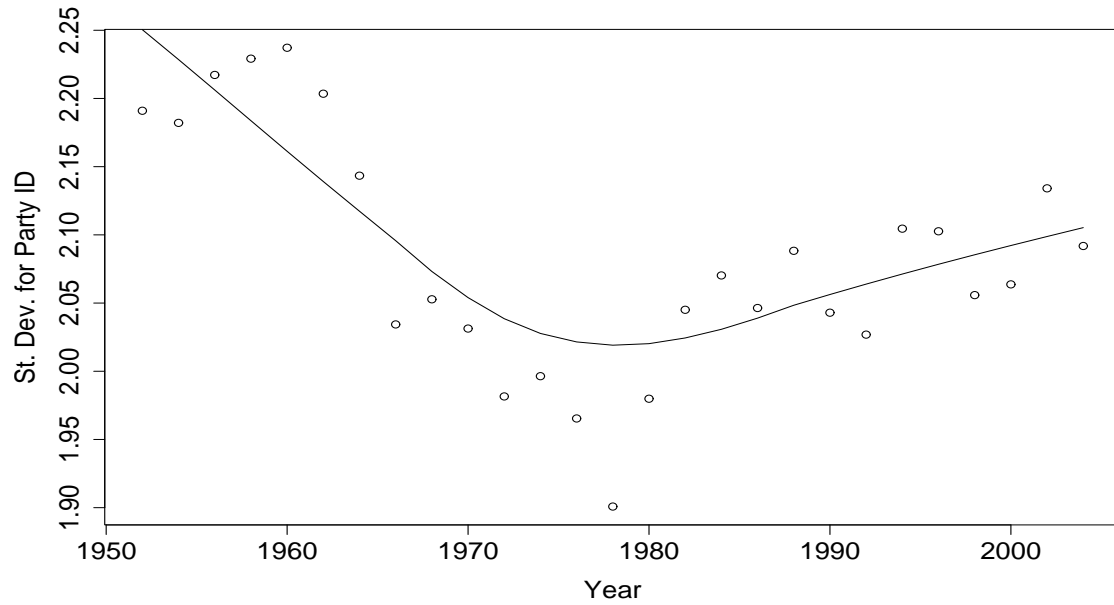


Figure 1: *Standard deviation of the seven-point partisan identification self-placement item from 1952 to 2002. The variability in partisanship begins very high but takes a downward turn beginning in the mid-1960's to the 1970's. Polarization then reemerges beginning in the 1980's.*

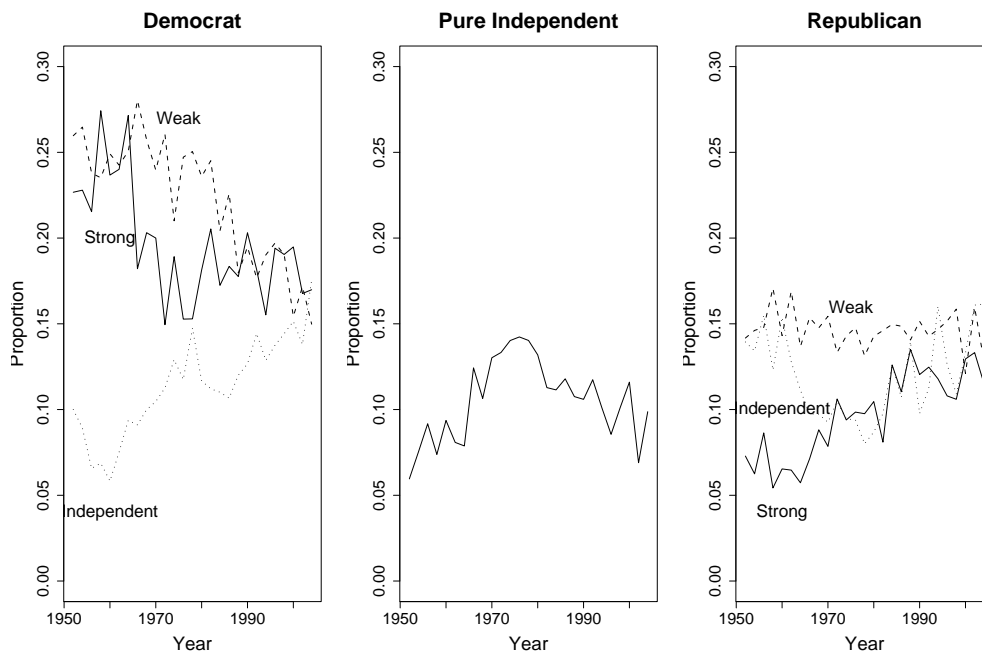


Figure 2: *Plot of responses to the seven-point NES partisanship item.*

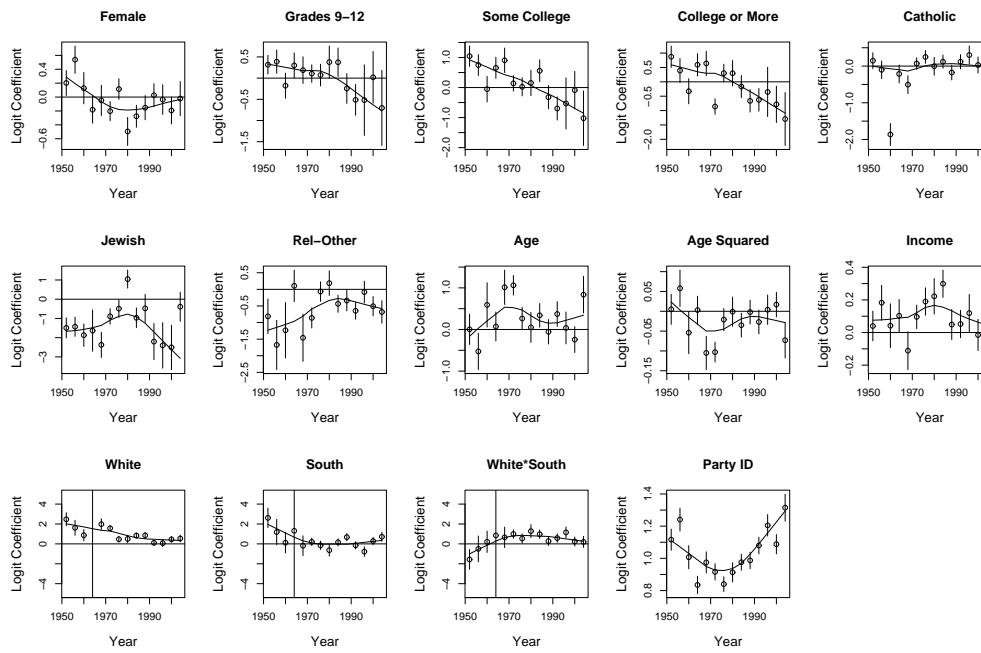


Figure 3: Logistic regression predicting presidential vote choice from 1952 to 2004. Each year represents a separate regression equation. The bizarre parameter estimate for whites, southerners and their interaction in 1964 can be explained by a collinearity problem stemming from all blacks in the NES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

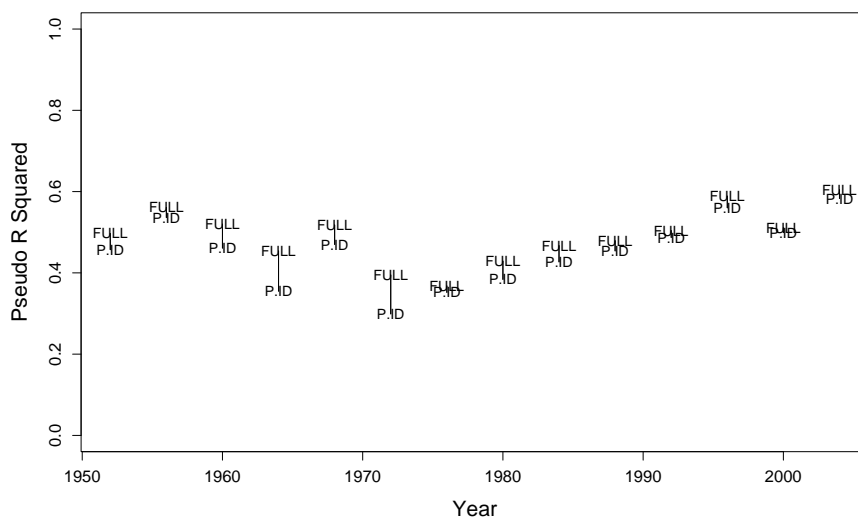


Figure 4: Variance explained in presidential vote choice equations from 1952 to 2004. The points labeled “FULL” show the variance explained after accounting for race, gender, education, age, income, party identification and region while the points labeled “P.ID” show the variance explained with only party identification. It is clear that party identification is the workhorse in the first equation but is weakest during the period of partisan dealignment. The variance explained for the series of logistic regression models is defined as $1 - (\text{deviance} / \text{null deviance})$ and is labeled “Pseudo R Squared”

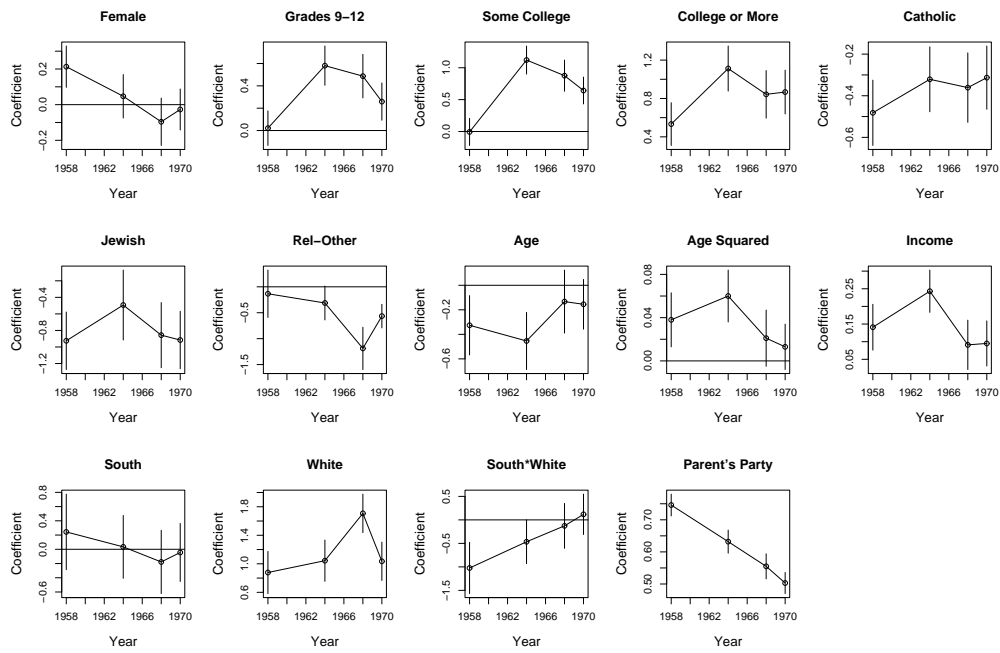


Figure 5: *Linear regression predicting party identification. The standard controls work as expected. Females have become significantly more Democratic over time while southern whites become more Republican. Most importantly, here, parental socialization has weakened as a predictor of partisan identification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

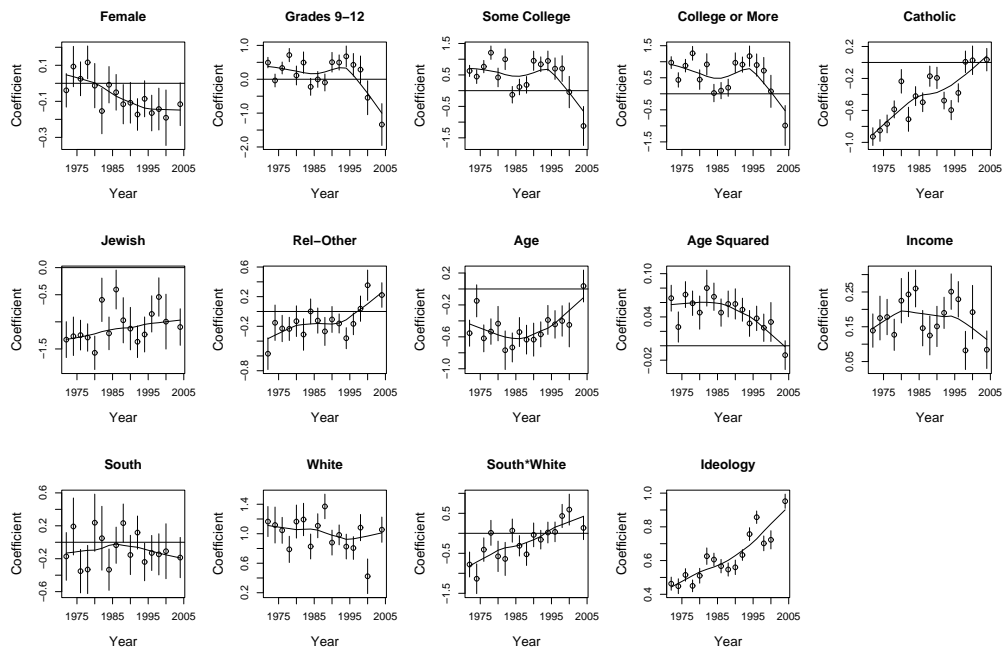


Figure 6: *Linear regression predicting party identification. Ideology has grown as a predictor from the 1970's to present times.*

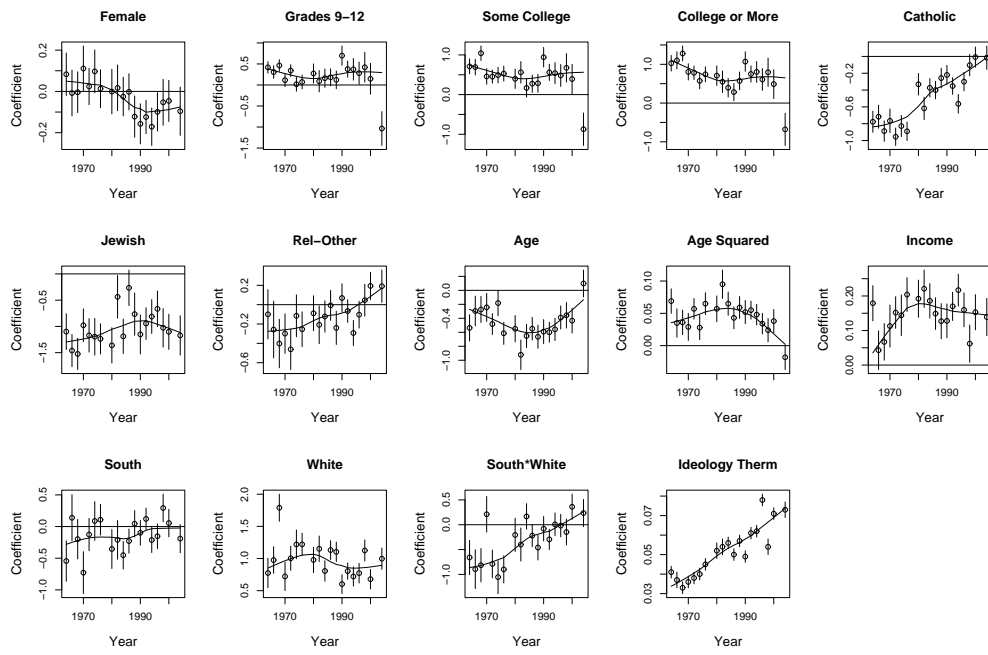


Figure 7: *Linear regression predicting party identification with liberal/conservative composite thermometer score.*

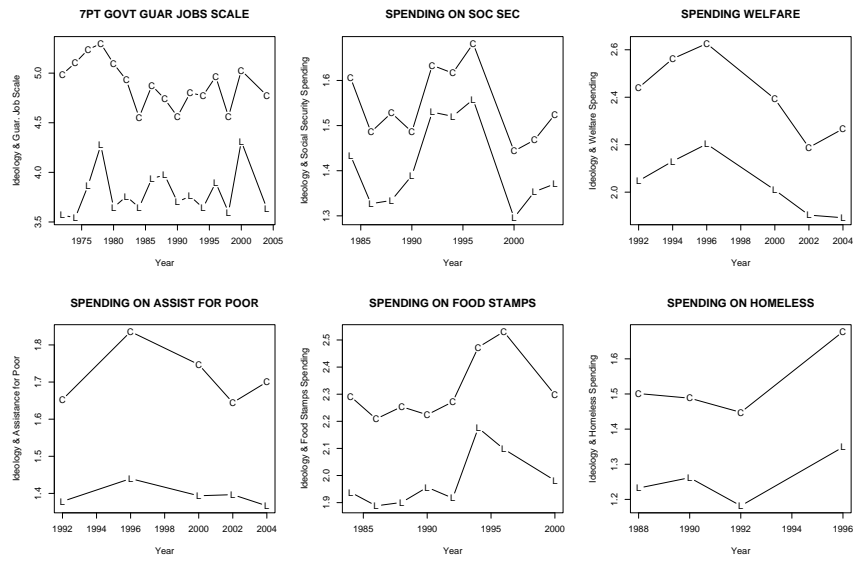


Figure 8: Mean position of conservatives and liberals on economic welfare items. Points labeled C indicate the conservatives' position. Points labeled L indicate the liberals' position. Source: NES Cumulative File.

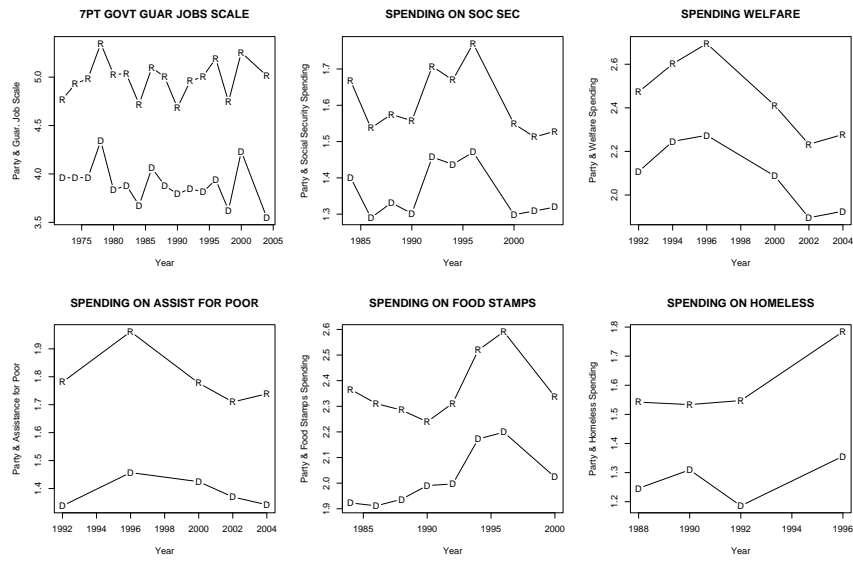


Figure 9: Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on economic welfare items. Points labeled R indicate the Republicans' position. Points labeled D indicate the Democrats' position. Source: NES Cumulative File.

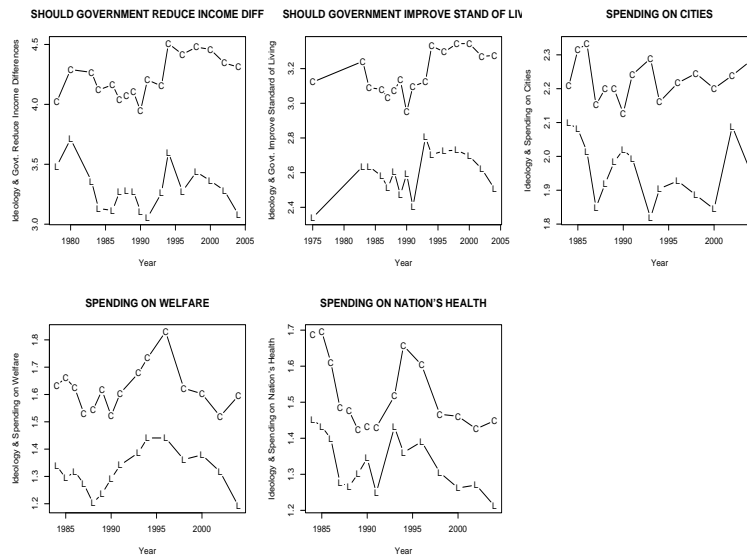


Figure 10: Mean position of conservatives and liberals on economic welfare items. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

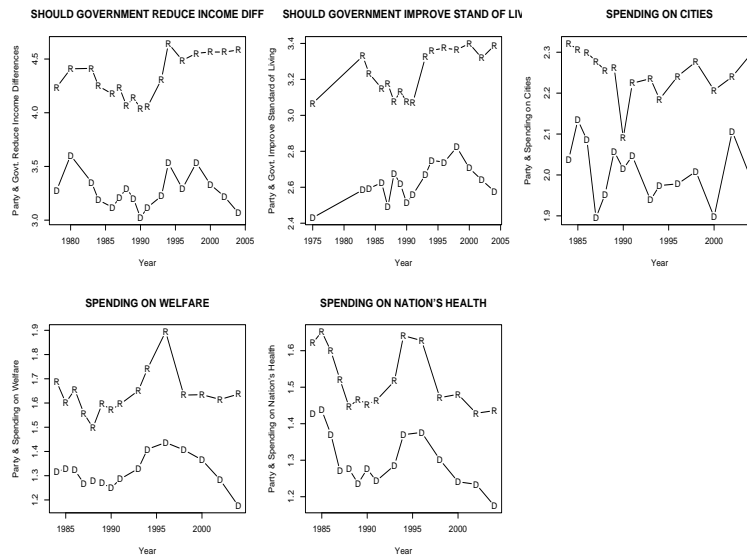


Figure 11: Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on economic welfare items. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

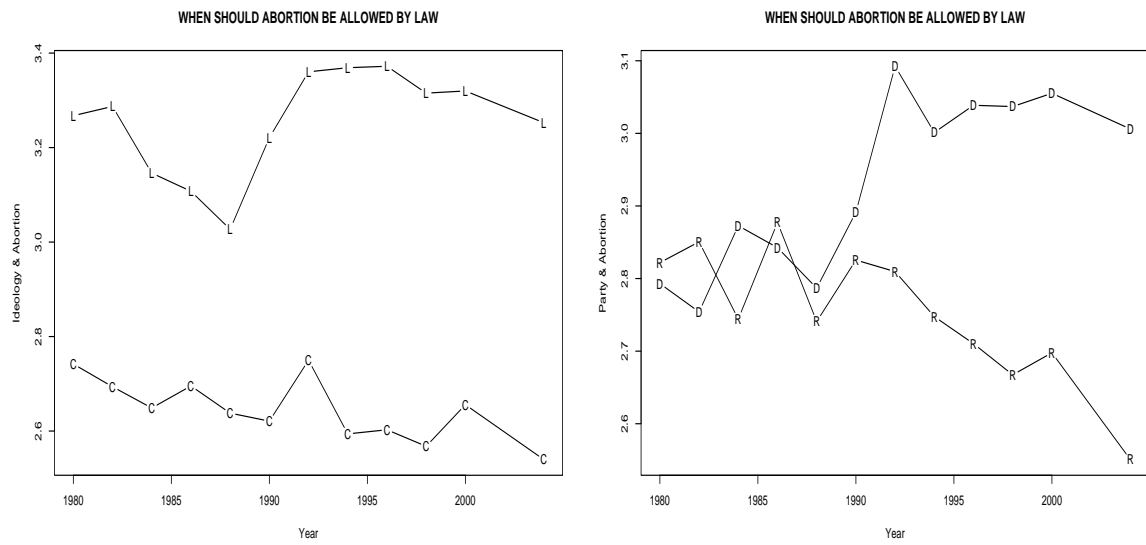


Figure 12: Mean position of conservatives/liberals and Republicans/Democrats on whether abortion should be legal. Source: NES Cumulative File.

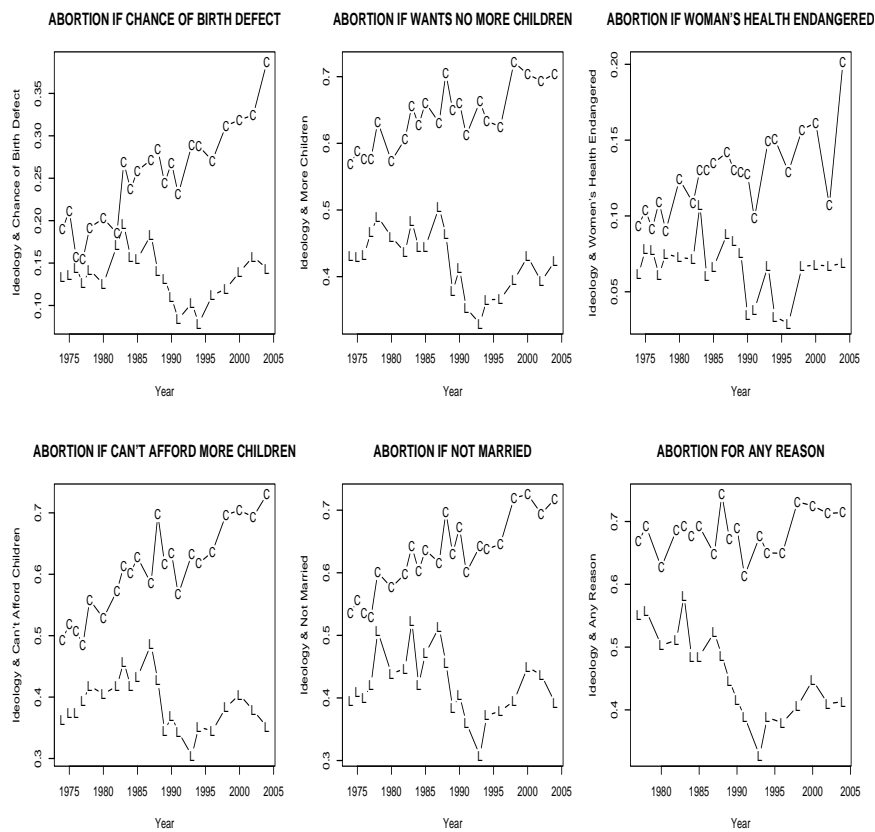


Figure 13: *Mean position of conservatives and liberals on abortion. Source: GSS Cumulative File.*

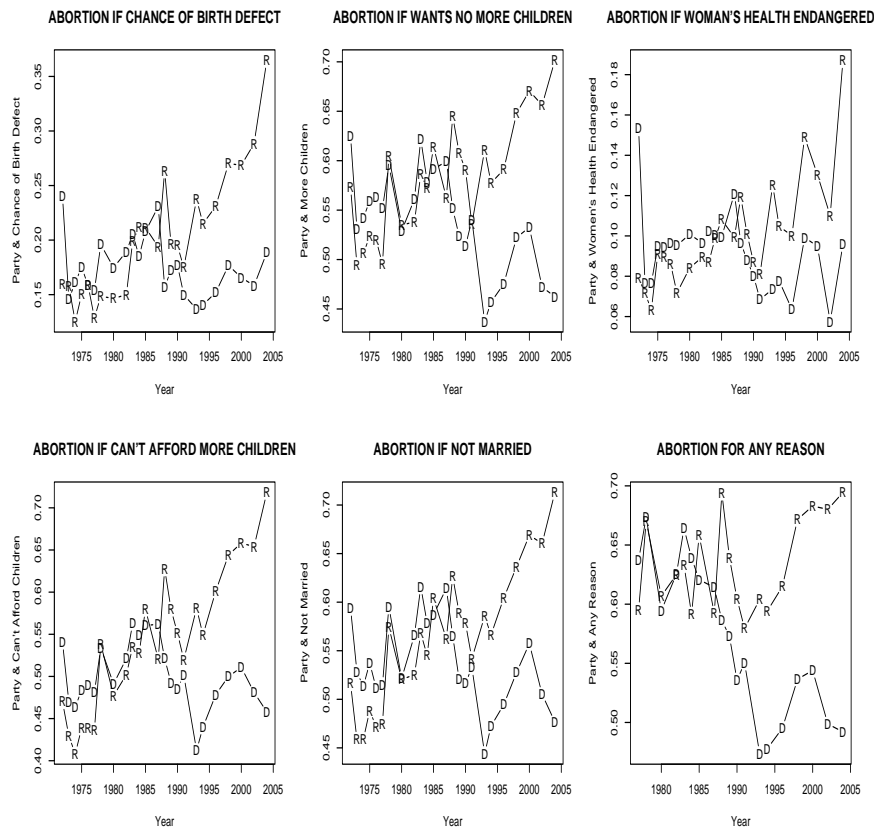


Figure 14: Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on abortion. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

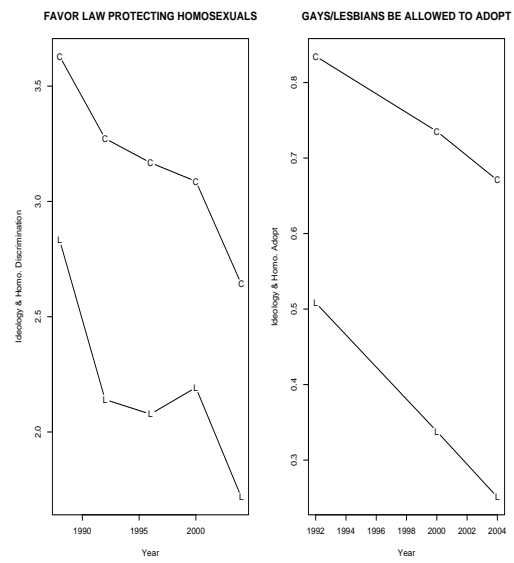


Figure 15: *Mean position of conservatives and liberals on homosexual relations. Source: NES Cumulative File.*

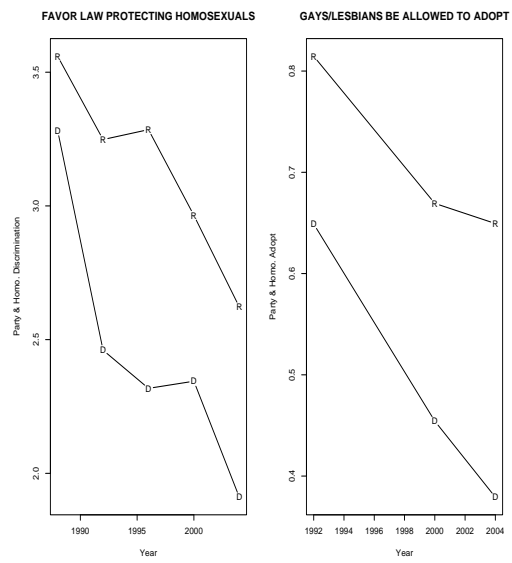


Figure 16: *Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on homosexual relations. Source: NES Cumulative File.*

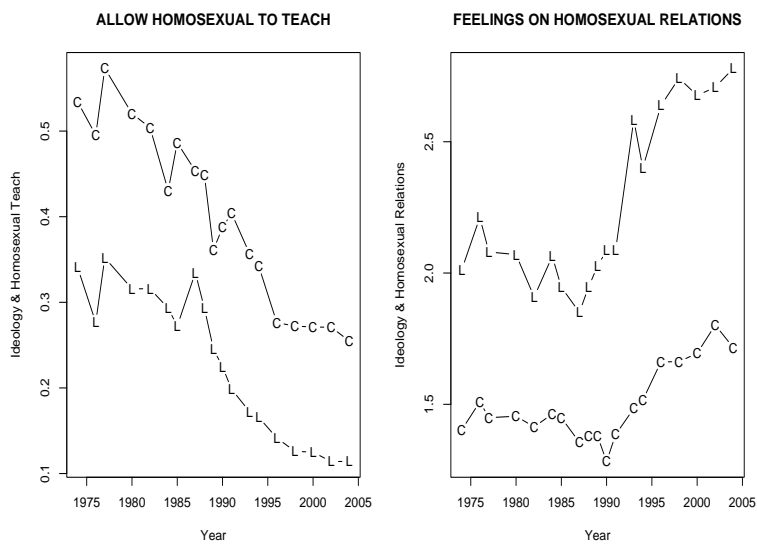


Figure 17: Mean position of conservatives and liberals on homosexual relations. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

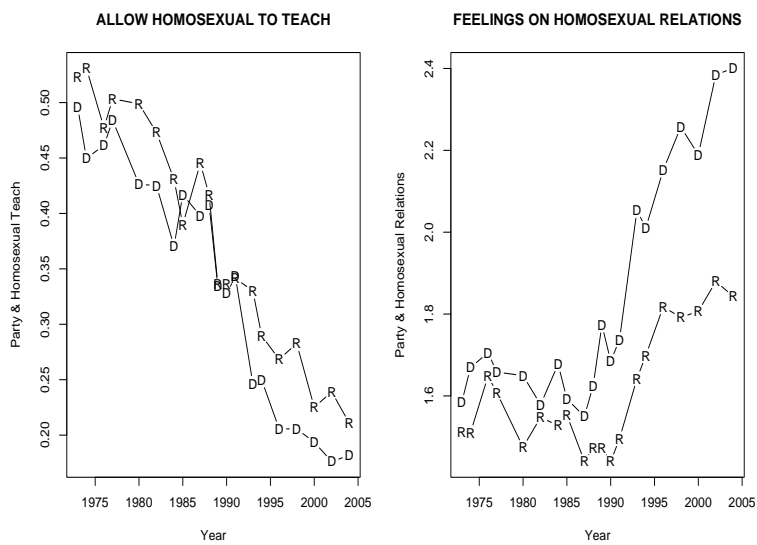


Figure 18: Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on homosexual relations. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

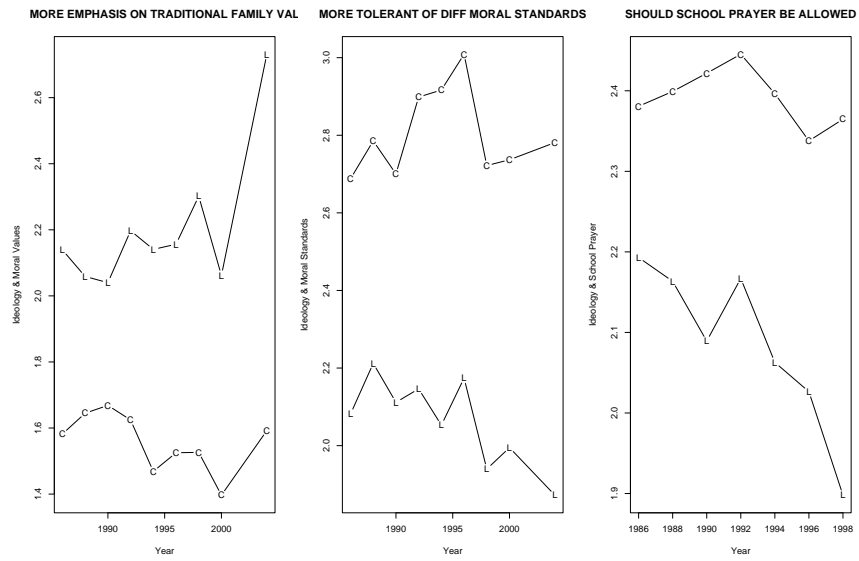


Figure 19: Mean position of conservatives and liberals on family/moral values issues.
Source: NES Cumulative File.

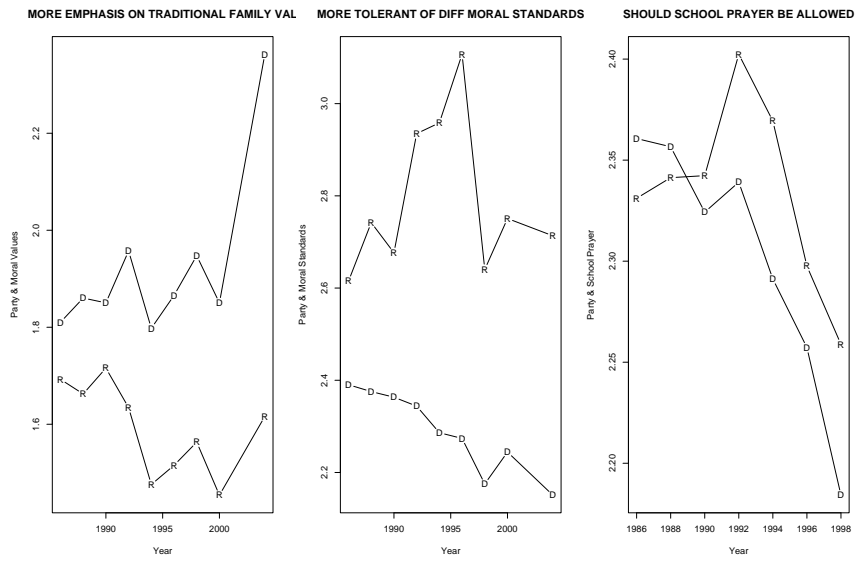


Figure 20: Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on family/moral values issues.
Source: NES Cumulative File.

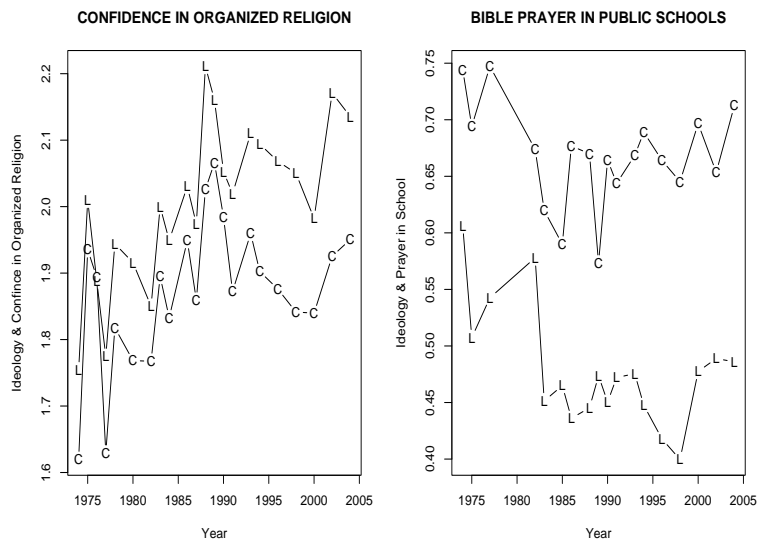


Figure 21: *Mean position of conservatives and liberals on religious attitudes. Source: GSS Cumulative File.*

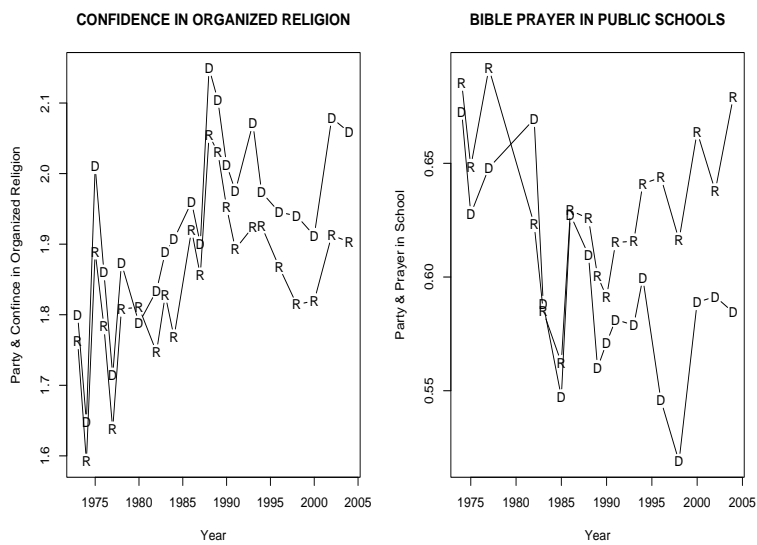


Figure 22: Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on religious attitudes. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

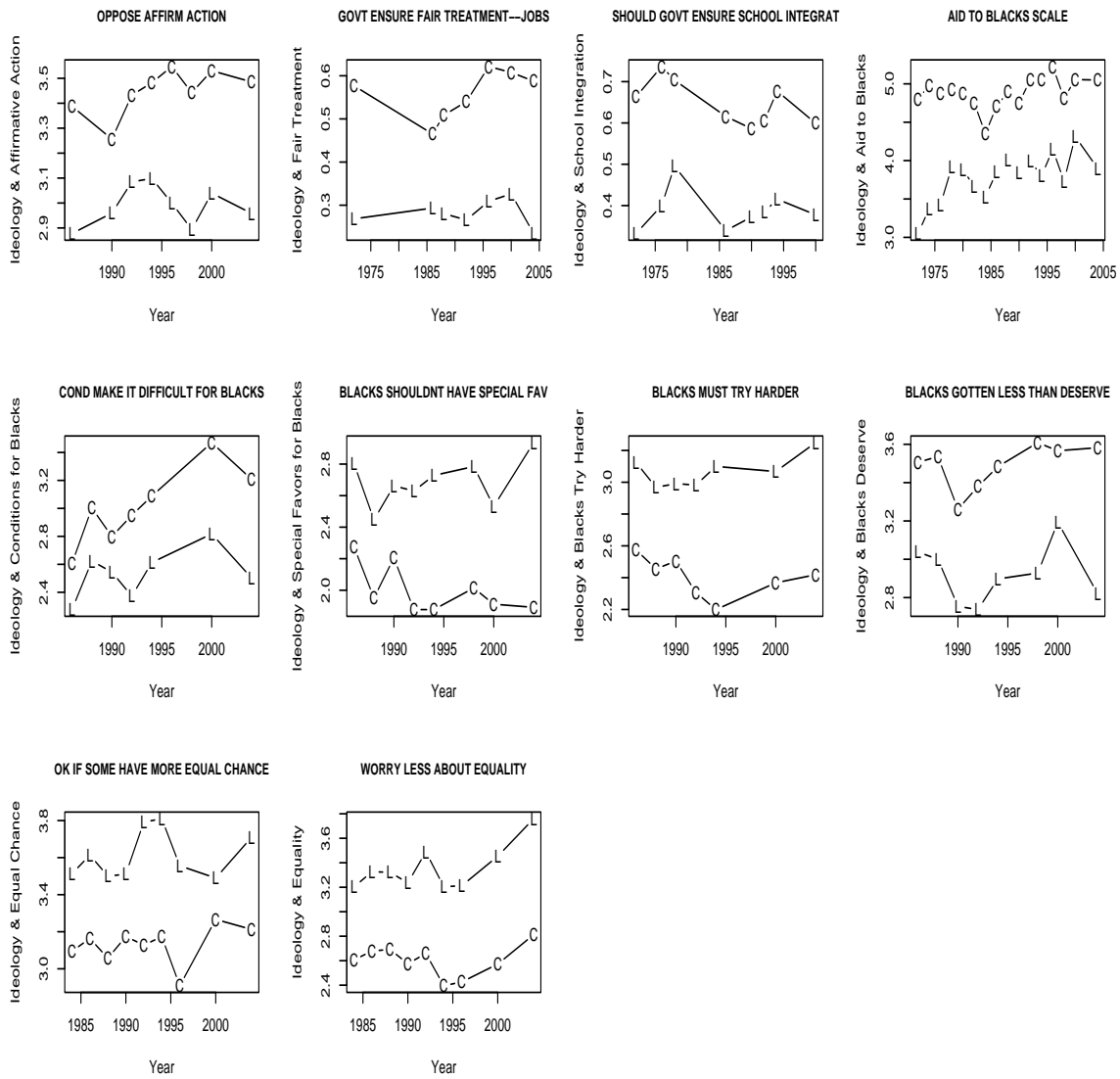


Figure 23: Mean position of conservatives and liberals on racial issues. Source: NES Cumulative File.

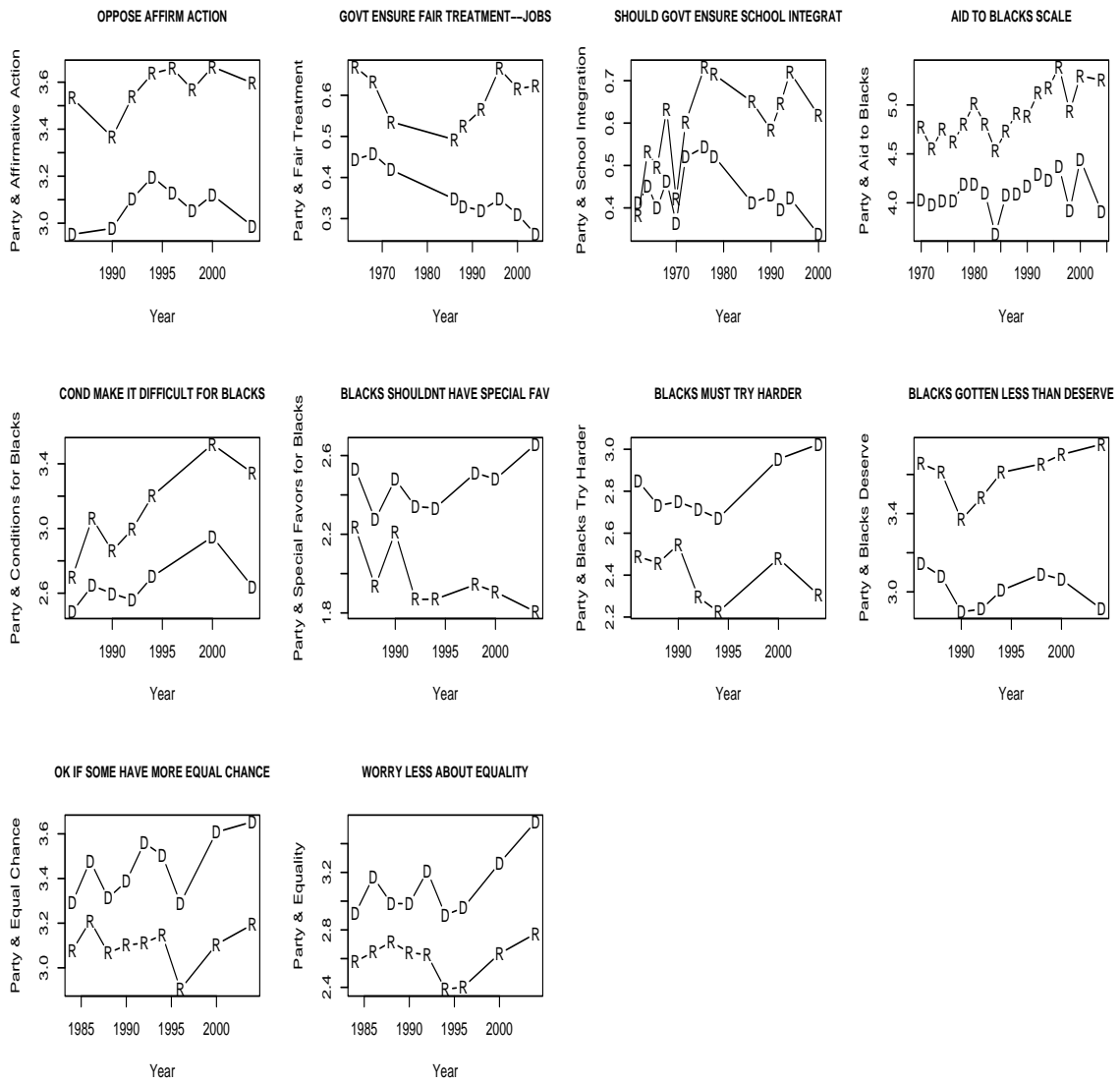


Figure 24: Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on racial issues. Source: NES Cumulative File.

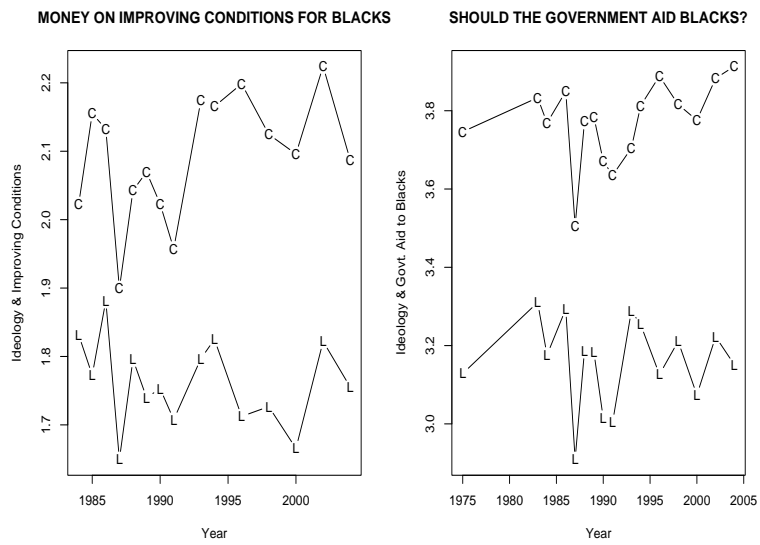


Figure 25: Mean position of conservatives and liberals on racial opinions. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

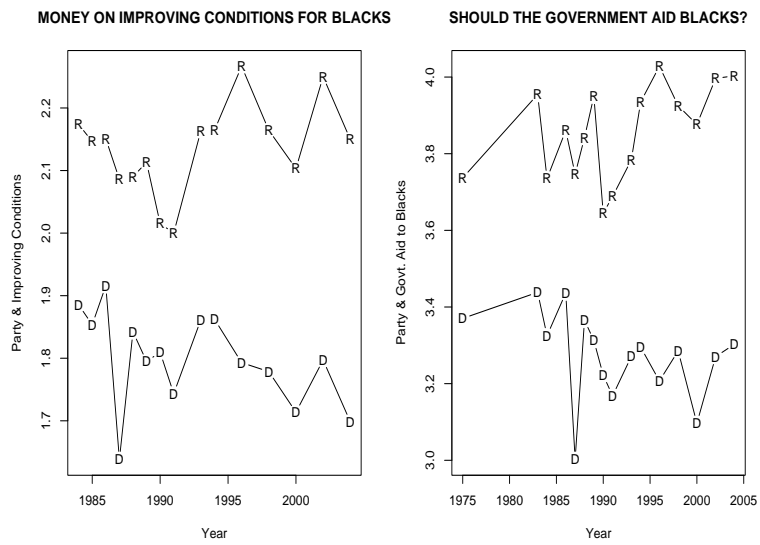


Figure 26: Mean position of Republicans and Democrats on racial opinions. Source: GSS Cumulative File.

7 Appendix A

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

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics for all individual-level variables used for regression analysis in this study. Each variable's statistics are reported with their maximal sample size. For a variety of reasons, the actual sample sizes vary throughout the analysis.*

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

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics for NES issue variables.*

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

Table 3: *Descriptive statistics for GSS issue variables.*

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